hall[s],' where the poet 'reveals the *loci* for various images and explains the significance which the images retain in the memory.'[92] But the ordered system of the memory palace rapidly degenerates into confusion, a failure forecast by the narrator's early warning that he would recount his adventures merely 'as I kan now remembre' (64): he says that the hall was as full of statues 'As ben on trees rokes nestes ... [H]it a ful confus matere / Were alle the gestes for to here' (1516–18). The narrator's attention is then drawn from this disordered 'syghte' (1520) to an approaching 'noyse' (1521), signifying his movement from the unsatisfactory realm of visible, figurative representation to a different realm of audible, mimetic representation.

The *House of Fame* contains a number of foreshadowings of the *Canterbury Tales*, most famously the 'ryght gret companye ... of sondry regiouns, / Of alleskynnes condiciouns' (1528–30), but also the notion of pilgrimage (116), the 'soune [which] ys noght but eyr ybroken' (765) that reappears in the *Summoner's Tale* (III.2233–4), and the 'fundament' of 'Seynt Thomas of Kent' (1131–2) echoed in the *Pardoner's Tale* (VI.948–50).[93] Most importantly, however, it prepares the way for the *Canterbury Tales* by showing the limitations of language. The totalizing system of the allegorical dream vision, with its omniscient narrator and guarantee of divine authority (through the oracular or prophetic dream), is plainly inadequate. Developments in the philosophy of language, especially terminist logic with its knotty insoluble, required that poets find a new way to illustrate the transmission of meaning. For Chaucer, that new way would be based on oral discourse and exchange. Having demonstrated that truth cannot be expressed directly through language, whether literally or figuratively, Chaucer chooses to pursue the next best thing: verisimilitude, fiction that resembles reality.

Chapter Eight

CHAUCER'S PERSONIFICATION AND VESTIGIAL ALLEGORY IN THE *CANTERBURY TALES*

Chaucer's changing use of personification reflects the gradual dissolution of the link between the abstraction and its embodiment, between universal concept and particular expression. This can be seen clearly in the changing status of the personified abstractions of Chaucer's dream visions, as well as in the portrayal of Prudence in the *Tale of Melibee* and the significantly named Januarie and May of the *Merchant's Tale*. While personification and allegory are not synonymous, they are interrelated: as Quilligan puts it, personification is 'one of the most trustworthy signals of allegory.'[1] This is true insofar as the impulse to create personifications from abstractions is allegorical; as Whitman notes, 'the whole history of the word ["personification"] demonstrates a close connection with the creative technique of saying something in fiction and meaning something else in fact.'[2] It is therefore unsurprising that modern readers have sought to interpret late medieval changes in both allegory and personification in terms of nominalist philosophy: in an influential article, Delany has argued that the analogical system fundamental to allegory was shaken by these new currents in philosophy, while Paxson suggests that personification in texts such as *Piers Plowman* 'works as a parody of or satire on ... philosophical Realism.'[3] The dream vision form and personification are both arguably manifestations of a mode of analogical thought that was called into question by late medieval scepticism. Yet, far from vitiating the power of analogy, nominalist philosophy (often loosely equated with scepticism) may have, as Stephen Penn has suggested, actually 'contributed positively to its development.'[4] Debates on what kind of existence universals might have (if any), and their relationship to the terms by which they are signified, undoubtedly had an impact on the practice of allegory and the use of personification. In the follow-

ing pages, I will analyse the use of personification in the dream visions before turning to its use in the *Canterbury Tales*. I will then show how, in the *Tale of Melibee* and the *Merchant's Tale*, Chaucer's understanding of at least some of the implications of terminist theories of language are manifested both in the use of personification and in the depiction of how knowledge is constituted and received. The waning effectiveness of vision, represented both in the wounded body which motivates the dialogue of the *Melibee* and in the unreliable sight of Januarie in the *Merchant's Tale*, is metonymic of man's imperfect apprehension of his world. Blurred vision is just a symptom of a more general intellectual malaise.

In the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer conspicuously avoids using traditional personifications, which appear only as allusions in the discourse between the narrator and the Man in Black and not as actors within the narrative. In the first lines of the poem, Chaucer names abstractions that, in a dream vision, we would normally expect to find as personifications. His narrator tells how he has 'so many an ydel thoght' (4), corresponding to Idelnesse or Oiseuse of the *Roman de la rose*, and refers to 'kynde' and 'nature' (16, 18), but only as unembodied cosmic principles, not personifications.[5] As a work of consolation, the *Book of the Duchess* follows the model of Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae*, a work it also relies upon for the Platonic extramission theory of vision espoused in the poem. But the imitation includes a comic inversion, for instead of the personified abstraction Philosophy, the rather obtuse narrator offers consolation. Instead of an allegorical personification who reflects the divine mind, we find a fictional persona who has to struggle for comprehension. Personifications appear in the *Book of the Duchess* only indirectly, as when the Man in Black refers to Love (766), Yowthe (797), Fortune (811), or Nature (871). These are not so much agents in the world as part of a common vocabulary derived from the literary heritage shared by the narrator and the Man in Black. The only personification who clearly is an embodiment of an abstract principle and whose presence permeates the poem is White (948). Her efficacy and validity as a personification are based on the newness of the term's coinage: 'White' has not been debased by being currency in the economy of literary and verbal exchange, an exchange which (as we learn in the *House of Fame*) always introduces error.

Kathryn Lynch has argued that White's status as a quasi-personification in the poem must be understood within the framework of nominalist discussions of knowledge: 'The quality white and its substantive form

"whiteness" were probably the most frequently invoked terms in late medieval Ockhamist discussion of the problem of how one knows, whether by cognition of singulars or of universals.' This leads her to conclude that, in Chaucer's dream visions, 'the form's epistemological argument becomes a nominalist rather than a realist one, an argument that values the singular over the universal.'[6] To couch the argument in terms of realism versus nominalism, however, is to lose sight of the variety of positions on the status of universals held by philosophers who can loosely be referred to as 'nominalist.' Dumbleton's position on universals is a case in point: in the description of his planned tenth book of his *Summa*, Dumbleton indicates that he will treat 'universals, which Plato calls ideas.' For Dumbleton, the realist and nominalist positions on universals are not to be chosen between, but reconciled. In the first book of his *Summa*, he breaks off a discussion of how terms are imposed, promising to continue the topic in connection with universals in the tenth book.[7] In the first, he confines himself to explaining how terms signify things through acts of memory, both with regard to the initial imposition of the term and with regard to the recognition of the thing by means of the term one knows. The example he uses concerns 'white': the knowledge of whiteness (that is, its 'intention') comes from seeing a white object, and the term 'white' comes from the experience of hearing or seeing the term applied to the white object we see. Thereafter, says Dumbleton, 'when a person who knows "white" either sees it written or hears it spoken, the true intention of white is called forth from the person's memory.' The linking of the term with the thing it signifies does not occur naturally, but arises from human actions: 'the term and the intention have the same name simply because each intention is called forth by a term by means of our own acts.'[8] Here, the universal quality signified by the term 'white' clearly exists; but it exists not in some nebulous realm of Platonic ideas, but in the mind of the person who thinks. It is in all these senses that the Man in Black remembers White.

In the *Parlement of Fowls*, personifications take on a more dynamic role in the narrative. Two goddesses, Nature and Venus, dominate the poem, though several other personifications are mentioned briefly in the narrator's description of Venus's temple.[9] Nature and Venus are frequently linked in allegorical literature, based on their common yet divergent interest in carnal love.[10] Nature promotes intercourse in order to ensure the perpetuation of the species, while Venus promotes intercourse as a manifestation of love. The binary opposition of the two goddesses is implicit in the inscription on the twofold sign above the gate

(120–47), a duality forecast by the narrator's dilemma caught between lacking what he 'wolde' and having what he 'nolde' (90–1).

The narrator finds Venus virtually naked, reclining on a bed with Richesse (260–73). Her domain is interior, within her temple; conversely, Nature's domain is outdoors, her traditional begemmed temple replaced by one made of branches.[11] Venus does not speak, but communicates her advocacy of carnal love by her appearance; Nature speaks openly, presiding over the debate of the birds. The opposition of the two is also articulated in how they are named: while the narrator always uses the same name to refer to Nature, he refers to Venus using several different names ('Cytherea' 113, 'Venus' 261, 'Cypride' 277). Venus is also present in other parts of the poem by proxy, in her allegorical son Cupid, and the 'sparwe, Venus sone' (351). Her reappearance under various names emphasizes the pervasiveness of love, whose importance the narrator avows in the poem's opening two stanzas. At the same time, Venus's different names, like the assembly of personifications who surround her temple,[12] place her opposite to Nature in the traditional dichotomy of art and nature. Her many names attest to the instability of a personification once it has entered into the economy of literary exchange, altered and renamed by each successive author. The abundance of personifications surrounding her attest to the author's power of literary creation, an embodiment which mimics God's creative power expressed through his agent, Nature.

The dichotomy of art and nature is not firmly fixed, for the lush greenery of the garden is described, paradoxically, in terms of art: 'overal ... / Were trees clad with leves that ay shal laste, / Ech in his kynde, of colour fresh and greene / As emeraude' (172–5). Ferster suggests that here Chaucer 'demonstrates that description of nature, no matter how realistic, is a product of art.'[13] Nature's opposition to art is further drawn into question by the discrepancy between her name and the name of the domain she embodies: the goddess is called 'Nature,' but her domain is called by the Germanic synonym 'Kynde' (672; cf. 311). The two names are used interchangably in the *Romaunt of the Rose* (1697–9), but here Chaucer uses two different names to distinguish between the personification and the abstraction she represents. This usage strikingly demonstrates the dissolution of the correspondence between personification and abstraction, between the particular and the universal. This dissolution is also manifested, here as in Jean de Meun's continuation of the *Roman de la rose*, by a tendency for personifications to take on characteristics of other personifications, something inconceivable within the bounds of traditional, vertical allegory. For example,

Ferster notes that 'Pleasaunce is in Cupid's part of the garden, but Nature tells the birds, "I prike yow with plesaunce."'[14] Even more notably, Nature tries to help the formel make a decision, suggesting 'If I were Resoun, thanne wolde I / Conseyle yow the royal tercel take' (632–3). But it is ridiculous to imagine that Nature could be Reason; only human beings (and their fictional counterparts) can imagine inhabiting another point of view. By giving individual perspective to personifications, Chaucer metamorphoses them from embodied abstractions into living persons.

The distinction between nature and art, already blurred in the *Parlement of Fowls*, is dissolved in the *House of Fame* as the narrator likens the poet Orpheus to the goddess Nature: 'smale harpers ... gunne on hem upward to gape, / And countrefete hem as an ape, / Or as craft countrefeteth kynde' (1209–13). He goes on to describe 'magiciens' who practice 'magik naturel' (1260, 1266), an oxymoron which breaks down the conventional opposition of art and nature. Neither Nature nor Venus appears bodily in the *House of Fame*: though the narrator enters Venus's temple, he sees her only 'in portreyture' (131). Other than Fame herself, personifications and gods appear only in invocations ('Cipris' 518, 'Thought' 523) or indirectly, as when the eagle mentions that Jove was the cause of his journey (661) or notes how badly Fortune had treated the narrator (2016).

Only one personification appears bodily in the poem: 'a femynyne creature' described at length and finally identified as the 'Goddesse of Renoun or of Fame' (1365, 1406). She is described in terms of multiplicity:

> [A]s feele eyen hadde she
> As fetheres upon foules be,
> ...
> ... also she
> Had also fele upstondyng eres
> And tonges, as on bestes heres. (1381–90)

Her 'feele eyen,' ears, and tongues embody the multiplicity promised by the eagle as he bore the narrator upward:[15]

> For truste wel that thou shalt here
> ...
> Mo wonder thynges, dar I leye,
> And of Loves folk moo tydynges,

Both sothe sawes and lesinges,
And moo loves news begonne,
And longe yserved loves wonne,
And moo loves casuelly
...
Mo discordes, moo jelousies,
Mo murmures and moo novelries,
And moo dissymulacions. (672–87)

Chaucer stresses the word 'moo' another five times in the next ten lines in a comic passage that lets the narrator 'here' (672) what he 'saugh' (127) earlier in Venus's temple:

ther were moo ymages
Of gold, stondynge in sondry stages,
And moo ryche tabernacles,
And with perre moo pynacles,
And moo curiouse portreytures,
And queynte maner of figures
Of olde werk, then I saugh ever. (121–7)

Fame's body expresses the plurality of sensory perception, whether of sight or of hearing. She attests to the unattainability of a singular meaning and to language's capacity to convey truth only approximately, through many mimetic representations of reality.

The *Tale of Melibee*, one of the two *Canterbury Tales* narrated by Chaucer *in propria persona*, is a translation of a Latin prose treatise by way of a French intermediary. It is largely a dialogue between Melibee and Prudence, who as one of the four cardinal virtues, is a personification with a richly elaborated literary and iconographic tradition behind her. She is the beautiful 'heroine,' as Trout puts it, of Alanus de Insulis's *Anticlaudianus*,[16] and stands out as well among her three sister virtues in the iconographic tradition. During the fifteenth century, symbols for the various virtues and vices proliferated, and at that time Prudence came to be represented with a sieve (to denote her ability to winnow out the truth) or a mirror (to illustrate her aspect of *praevidentia* or foresight).[17] Before that, however, Prudence was shown carrying a book in order to distinguish her from the other cardinal virtues, denoting her role as 'scientia scripturarum' ('knowledge of the scriptures'), as Isidore puts it.[18] By the twelfth century, Prudence was often shown with an additional

symbol, usually a snake or (less often) a dove, referring to the injunction to be prudent found in the gospel of Matthew: 'Estote ergo prudentes sicut serpentes et simplices sicut columbae' ['Be ye therefore wise {lit. 'prudent'} as serpents, and harmless as doves'; Matt. 10:16].[19] In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Prudence's aspect of foresight is emphasized when Criseyde laments her failure to have anticipated the future: 'Prudence, allas, oon of thyn eyen thre / Me lakked alwey!' (5.744–5).

Thus Prudence makes her appearance in the *Tale of Melibee* with a whole series of associations. Her bookishness is much in evidence, for Prudence's discourse is nothing so much as a series of learned extracts, often proverbs, applied more or less aptly to the subject at hand. David Wallace points out that Prudence resembles no other figure in the *Canterbury Tales* so much as the Wife of Bath: both wield the tools of rhetoric in order to carve out a 'specifically feminine discursive space.'[20] Both Alison and Prudence struggle against husbandly anger, and both do so in the context of textual interpretation: the clerical glossing which is Alison's nemesis, and the faulty understanding of Melibee which Prudence struggles to remedy. One might expect that Prudence in the *Tale of Melibee* would have all the awesome status typical of an allegorical personification, based both on the iconic status of Prudence as one of the cardinal virtues and on the allegorical model for Prudence found in Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae*.[21] Like Philosophy, Prudence attempts to restore the impaired faculties of a man by persuading him to fix his sight on the proper object. But Prudence does not display such majesty: she is, as a number of critics have observed, not so much an abstraction as 'a prudent wife.'[22]

Prudence's other iconographic attributes, the snake and the dove, will be discussed below in connection with the *Merchant's Tale*. I want first to turn to her quality of foresight, that threefold vision of past, present, and future to which Criseyde refers. Prudence's extraordinary power of vision would appear to be precisely what Melibee needs, for as we learn at the outset of the Tale, he has suffered (at least vicariously) a terrible blow. Because the *Tale of Melibee* is a translation (perhaps an early work revised for inclusion in the *Canterbury Tales*),[23] differences between the Middle English version and the French translation used by Chaucer along with the Latin original are bound to be revealing. The first of these alterations appears in connection with the wounds suffered by Melibee's daughter and thus, by extension, by Melibee himself. Three of Melibee's enemies entered his house, beat his wife, and 'wounded his doghter with fyve mortal woundes in fyve sondry places – / this is to seyn, in hir feet, in

hire handes, in hir erys, in hir nose, and in hire mouth' (VII.971–2). It has been suggested that Chaucer follows the erroneous reading found in a single manuscript that substitutes 'piez' for 'yeux.'[24] But this places Chaucer in the awkward position of not understanding the allegory he is translating, especially since Prudence goes on to helpfully interpret the wounds as afflicting the five senses (VII.1424).[25] I suggest instead that Chaucer retains the erroneous reading 'piez' in order to emphasize, not merely injury to, but the lack of one of the senses. Sophie's eyes, the embodiment of wisdom's capacity to perceive truth, are absent, figuratively representing Melibee's intellectual blindness.

Wallace points out the extent to which Melibee makes himself the focus of attention, so that the suffering of the females in his household is subordinated, even assimilated to the suffering of the male head of the household: 'Melibee's pain becomes the subject of the text.'[26] This is, I would argue, especially true of Melibee's daughter, because Prudence retains at least some autonomy, acting as Melibee's interlocutor throughout the text. The daughter, by contrast, exists only as the mutilated body through which Melibee suffers: her pain is his pain, and her loss is his loss. The nature of that loss is made clear by the alterations made by Chaucer in his Middle English translation. The five wounds, which in the original refer to the five senses, are modified to omit the eyes: the power of sight is not merely injured, but entirely absent. In addition, a simple change instituted by Chaucer in the Tale's opening lines skews the narrative in such a way as to make clear what it is that Melibee lacks: 'A yong man called Melibeus ... bigat upon his wyf, that called was Prudence, a doghter which that called was Sophie' (VII.967). Sophie; that is, philosophy. While his source, Reynaud de Louen's *Livre de Mellibee et Prudence*, refers simply to an anonymous 'fille,' Chaucer gives her a name. The nurse whose very milk Boethius thirstily drinks in is here transformed into a helpless, wounded child, an emblem not of redemption but of loss.

Melibee himself alludes to his impairment in terms of vision when he excuses his inability to comprehend Prudence's counsel by declaring that 'troubled eyen han no cleer sighte' (VII.1702). Prudence attempts to fill the gap left by Sophie's absence, offering him 'sapience' (VII.1071). But prudence and sapience are not synonymous, as Prudence herself acknowledges by distinguishing between the two: 'The book seith that in the olde men is the sapience and in longe tyme the prudence' (VII.1164).[27] Nonetheless, Prudence attempts to offer Melibee wisdom, declaring 'if ye governe yow by sapience put awey sorwe out of your

herte' (VII.994). But she can offer it only secondhand, quoting biblical and classical works describing wisdom; Prudentia cannot *be* Sapientia. Her words of counsel cause Melibee to lose his grasp of the distinction between wisdom and prudence, when he asserts that she has proven her 'grete sapience' (VII.1114). Here Prudence steps out of her proper role, much as Nature in the *Parlement of Fowls* does by remarking, 'If I were Resoun ...' (632). Once again, the personification is no longer firmly linked to the abstraction it embodies.

It takes a long time for Melibee to understand at last the teachings of Prudence. This is due to the impairment he has suffered (vicariously through Sophie); but Melibee imagines that the problem lies not in him but in Prudence. He initially discounts her counsel on the basis that 'alle wommen been wikke' (VII.1057). One can hardly imagine Boethius saying this to Philosophy. Like Boethius, however, Melibee needs to be healed and, like Boethius, the cure will be effected through a dialogue. But while Philosophy wields the rapier of logic, Prudence uses the blunt instrument of rhetoric. Her interpretive inadequacy is evident when Prudence attempts to explain Melibee's predicament allegorically:

> The three enemys of mankynde – that is to seyn, the flessh, the feend, and the world – / thou hast suffred hem entre in to thyn herte wilfully by the wyndowes of thy body, / and hast nat defended thyself suffisantly agayns hire assautes and hire temptaciouns, so that they han wounded thy soule in fyve places; / this is to seyn, the deedly synnes that been entred into thyn herte by thy fyve wittes. (VII.1421–4)

Prudence's interpretation is inconsistent with what we already know: the five injuries cannot be to Melibee's soul, for Sophie does not represent something within him, but an abstract principle existing outside him. Prudence's interpretation works only locally, not forming part of an allegorical system.[28]

A related inconsistency appears in Prudence's interpretation of the figurative significance of Melibee's name: 'Thy name is Melibee; this is to seyn, "a man that drynketh hony." / Thou hast ydronke so muchel hony of sweete temporeel richesses, and delices and honours of this world / that thou art dronken' (VII.1410–12). But Melibee has already offered another, implicit interpretation of his own name: he quotes Solomon's statement that 'wordes that been spoken discreetly by ordinaunce been honycombes, for they yeven swetnesse to the soule and hoolsomnesse to the body' (VII.1113). What Prudence offers Melibee throughout the

Tale is precisely these 'sweete wordes' of counsel (VII.1114). But there is a contradiction. It cannot be the case that both Melibee and Prudence are correct, for if the honey is 'sweete temporeel richesses,' it cannot be 'sweete wordes' of counsel. They are contraries, one a source of corruption, the other a source of regeneration.

One might resolve this by concluding that Melibee is simply a poor interpreter: as Patterson puts it, even though 'Prudence's task is to teach Melibee how to interpret ... as soon as Melibee is given the opportunity to make a decision on his own ... he reveals the failure of this effort.'[29] Prudence certainly fosters this impression by continually rebuking Melibee for his faulty interpretation of her 'sentence.' For example, she asks 'I wolde fayn knowe hou ye understonde this text and what is youre sentence' (VII.1278), and follows his reply by exclaiming that 'it sholde nat han been understonden in thys wise' (VII.1384). Yet, as we have seen, Prudence's interpretive ability is also weak, functional perhaps on a local level, but undeniably inconsistent. Logical coherency is clearly not Prudence's strong point. She is, nonetheless, persuasive, as is brought out in the tale's conclusion, where Chaucer once again departs significantly from his source. He amplifies Reynaud de Louens's simple statement that Prudence's words put Melibee in a state of 'grant paix,' adding a detailed description of Melibee's will: 'Whanne Melibee hadde herd the grete skiles and resouns of dame Prudence, and hire wise informaciouns and techynges, / his herte gan enclyne to the wil of his wif, considerynge hir trewe entente, / and conformed hym anon, and assented fully to werken after hire conseil' (VII.1870–2). This passage is striking in two respects: first, in its description of the persuasion of Melibee as a process; second, in its assignation of a passive role to the man who conforms his will not to the omnipotent rule of God, but to the ultra-mundane rule of his wife.

First, the process. Chaucer was clearly interested in the question of how the will operates, as Lynch has shown. The indecisive narrator of the *Parlement of Fowls* is engaged in the exercise of the will; the problem, of course, is that his will pulls him in two directions at once. The will is in a dynamic state, moving now toward greater 'hette,' now toward greater 'colde'; now toward a state of boldness, now toward 'fere' (143–5). The dynamics of motion had been quantified by several of the Oxford Calculators, but only John Dumbleton extended the system to include measurable degrees (or latitudes) of certainty and doubt. Chaucer illustrates how the operation of the will is not instantaneous but part of a process, both in the dynamic suspension (as it were) of the narrator's will in the

Parlement of Fowls and in the successful conforming of the will in the *Tale of Melibee*. Dumbleton does not explicitly extend his account of degrees of hesitation and belief to encompass the operation of the will, probably because this would require that he extend his argument to address the capacity of the human will relative to the omnipotence of God, whether as the *potentia Dei absoluta* or the *potentia Dei ordinata*, a central topic in the philosophy of Ockham and his followers.[30] (The scope of his *Summa* was already ambitious enough.) Yet implicit in Dumbleton's description of the latitudes of belief and hesitation is a notion of the human will which foregrounds its reliance upon the adjudicative faculty of reason. His exposition of the process of weighing evidence, now drawn toward belief, now drawn toward hesitation, is in effect an anatomy of interpretation.

Scholars have occasionally questioned the applicability of Dumbleton's psychology of latitudes, seeing it as rather eccentric and without any practical use;[31] yet surely it would be fascinating to anyone interested in the weighing of evidence, whether in the context of the law or of the letter. In his masterful survey of fourteenth-century English philosophy, Courtenay draws attention to the movement of scholars away from the faculty of theology and toward law near the end of the century.[32] Perhaps Dumbleton's effort to schematize and quantify the process of weighing evidence was a harbinger of this intellectual turn. It certainly was a development that attracted Ralph Strode, Oxford philosopher turned London lawyer; perhaps it appealed to his poetic friend as well.[33]

Having addressed Chaucer's depiction of Melibee's will in terms of process, I will now turn to the object towards which Melibee's will inclines: that is, his wife. In an allegorical sense, of course, it is desirable to turn one's will towards Prudence; that is, if Prudence represents a transcendent abstraction. The *Tale of Melibee*, however, relentlessly invites its reader to look first to the literal level, as Wallace emphasizes;[34] and, after all, what Melibee's will inclines toward is not his wife (that is, Prudence 'herself') but 'the wil of his wif' (VII.1871). The impotence of Melibee's will was earlier implied by his inviting Prudence to 'Seyeth shortly youre wyl' (VII.1712), her avowed intention to take into account the 'wil' of his enemies (VII.1723), and Melibee's concession 'Dame ... dooth youre wil' (VII.1724), which, of course, Prudence takes as evidence of 'the goode wil of hire housbonde' (VII.1726). Thus read as a individual work, separate from the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Tale of Melibee* concludes by questioning the autonomy of Melibee's will and, by extension, the freedom of human will. In adapting the *Tale of Melibee* for inclusion in the *Canterbury Tales*, however, Chaucer denies not the au-

tonomy of human will but the autonomy of husbands' will. When the tale ends, the Host declares that he wishes that 'Goodelief, my wyf, hadde herd this tale' (VII.1894) and compares her unfavourably to 'this Melibeus wyf Prudence' (VII.1896). This link affirms the primacy of the literal level of the tale, both by putting Prudence and Goodelief on the same level of reality and by making Melibee as much of a henpecked husband as the Host is. Patterson notes the importance of the connection: 'just as Melibee has learned nothing, neither has Harry ... [J]ust as Harry Bailly remains dominated by Goodelief ... so does Melibee.'[35] The link following the *Tale of Melibee* momentarily breaks the frame, blurring the distinction not only between characters within the tale and those within the frame, but between personifications and fictional personae.

In the *Merchant's Tale*, Chaucer reexplores the issues of interpretation and persuasion, doubt and certainty, that were so central to the *Tale of Melibee*. Like Melibee, Januarie succumbs to the will of his wife, moved not by the 'sweete wordes' of Prudence (VII.1114) but the 'suffisant answere' of the adulterous May (IV.2266). The 'sweete venym queynte' (IV.2061) that robs Januarie of his bodily sight is apparently that of Fortune; at the end of the Tale, however, Januarie's power of vision is clearly under the control of not divine Fortune, but human (that is, wifely) will. 'Household rhetoric,' in Wallace's phrase, works just as well in the parodic environment of the *Merchant's Tale* as in the didactic world of the *Melibee*. Other, less central themes persist as well:[36] first, the counsel offered to Melibee by Prudence and his advisors reappears as Januarie consults his brothers Placebo and Justinus for advice on whether to marry. Placebo, as his name suggests, wishes only to please; he assures Januarie that 'I holde youre owene conseil is the beste' (IV.1490). He elides the distinction between prudence and wisdom, telling Januarie 'ye been so ful of sapience / That yow ne liketh, for youre heighe prudence, / To weyven fro the word of Salomon' (IV.1481–3). Conversely, Justinus suggests reasonable caution, but Januarie rejects his counsel as emphatically as Melibee rejected Prudence's: 'Straw for thy Senek, and for thy proverbes! / ... Wyser men than thow / ... assenteden right now / To my purpos' (IV.1567–71). Januarie ends up taking no one's counsel but his own, convincing Placebo and Justinus to 'assen[t] fully that he sholde / Be wedded whanne hym liste and where he wolde' (IV.1575–6). This decision to rely upon only internal counsel immediately generates the 'heigh fantasye' (IV.1577) that dominates Januarie's mind throughout the tale.

The marriage of Melibee and Prudence is also echoed in the *Merchant's Tale*, for Januarie marries in order to procure 'the lusty lyf, the vertuous quyete, / That is in mariage hony-sweete' (IV.1395–6). But while Melibee drinks in Prudence's 'swete wordes' of counsel (VII.1114), Januarie drinks in the sweetness of May's body. He makes this explicit by declaring 'How fairer been thy brestes than is wyn! / The gardyn is enclosed al aboute' (IV.2142–3), echoing the corresponding passage in the Song of Songs: 'I come to the garden, my sister, my bride ... I eat my honeycomb with my honey' (Song of Solomon 5:1). Just as Melibee is 'dronken' with 'sweete temporeel richesses' (VII.1411–12), so Januarie is 'dronken in plesaunce / In mariage' (IV.1788–9). While the nubile May does not outwardly resemble the matronly Prudence, she is characterized in terms of the two symbols of Prudence found in medieval iconography, the dove and the serpent. May is both her husband's 'dowve sweete' (IV.2139; cf. Song of Solomon 2:14) and the venomous 'monstre' that renders Januarie blind (IV.2062). Both tales have as their basis the writings of Solomon, but where *Melibee* relies upon his Proverbs and Wisdom,[37] the *Merchant's Tale* follows his Song of Songs.

By invoking the Song of Songs, January likens May to the bride whose body is 'a garden locked, a fountain sealed' (Song of Solomon 4:12). Thus when January states 'The gardyn is enclosed al aboute' (IV.2143), he refers both to the literal garden they inhabit and to the figurative garden of May's body. Her body becomes the exclusive source of the 'paradys' that the Merchant avows can be found in 'wedlok' (1264–5): 'wyf is mannes helpe and his confort, / His paradys terrestre, and his disport' (IV.1331–2; cf. 1822). Januarie knows that, as an earthly paradise, May's body is a foretaste of the heavenly paradise, for he states that, in her, 'I shal have myn hevene in erthe heere' (IV.1647). Yet Januarie soon discovers that his garden is not paradise, but the inferno, for the engaging garden reminiscent of that presided over by Deduit or Myrthe in the *Roman de la rose* (*Romaunt* 601) is instead ruled by Pluto, god of the underworld.[38] The garden's paradoxical status as simultaneously heaven and hell is finally resolved in its assumption of a third, middle status, forecast by Justinus' warning that 'she may be youre purgatorie' (IV.1670). In this sense, the *Merchant's Tale* is not only a reworking of the theme of the two kinds of honey-sweetness in marriage found in the *Tale of Melibee*, but also a parodic reenactment of the three parts of the *Commedia*, Dante's grand cosmology played out instead on the landscape of the female body.

It is difficult to speak of the *Merchant's Tale* as being of a particular genre, for it incorporates fabliau and romance, biblical story and classi-

cal myth. By alluding in the tale to not just *Melibee* but also the *Roman de la rose* and Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*, Chaucer places the tale in the context of the genre of allegory.[39] Also, as Neuse remarks, the marriage of May and Januarie 'seems pregnant with allegorical possibilities,'[40] both because their names emblematize their difference in age and because they metonymically evoke the seasons of spring and winter, renewal and dormancy. May's name describes not her essential character but her status at the moment, her present youth and her appearance 'lyk the brighte morwe of May, / Fulfild of alle beautee' (IV.1748–9). January's name does not only refer to his age and hoary appearance; it also evokes the Roman god of the new year and of thresholds, Januarius who looks both backward and forward.

Neuse suggests that Chaucer's marriage of youth and age may be in part based on the *Roman de la rose*, where Elde is grouped with the vices on the wall paintings outside the garden while Yowthe frolics within.[41] Calabrese also stresses the relation of the two works, arguing that the *Merchant's Tale*, like the *Rose*, is 'allegorical,' for both 'contain figures named "Reason" and "Justinus."' I would hesitate, however, to call the *Merchant's Tale* an allegory simply because one could argue that personifications appear in it. More pertinent is Calabrese's comment that 'both works are about faulty judgment, fantasy, illusion, false seeming, and spiritual blindness. ... about false paradises, idolatry, and in many ways, mirrors.'[42] Vision is at the centre of the *Merchant's Tale*, from Januarie's imaginary vision of various women to his blinding and ultimate regaining of something less than 'parfit sighte' (IV.2383).

Patterson rightly states that 'the *Merchant's Tale* is on several levels *about* "fantasye" and self-enclosure.'[43] But it is important to realize that Januarie's 'heigh fantasye' is altogether different from the word's modern meaning: it denotes his imagination, one of the primary faculties of the mind.[44] Chaucer tells how Januarie's 'fantasye ... fro day to day gan in the soule impresse' (IV.1577–8), referring to the imprinting of the species from Januarie's imagination onto the central faculty of judgment. He follows the long tradition referring to the imagination as the mirror of the soul:

> As whoso tooke a mirour, polisshed bryght,
> And sette it in a commune market-place,
> Thanne sholde he se ful many a figure pace
> By his mirour; and in the same wyse
> Gan Januarie inwith his thoght devyse
> Of maydens whiche that dwelten hym bisyde. (IV.1582–7)

By placing the mirror in the 'commune market-place,' Chaucer stresses the role of the *sensus communis* in passing the sensible species to the imagination. At the same time, the 'commune market-place' also evokes the mercantile ethic which informs the tale.[45]

Januarie concludes by choosing one image 'of his owene auctoritee' (IV.1597), but that decision is framed in terms of blindness: 'For love is blynd alday, and may nat see' (IV.1598). By allowing himself to be governed by imagination rather than by judgment, relying upon no outside source of counsel but only his own desire, Januarie sets the stage for his own downfall. He continues to be preoccupied by the imagination, 'purtrey[ing] in his herte and in his thoght / Hir fresshe beautee' (IV.1600–1). Januarie is certain that his decision is right, thinking 'ech oother mannes wit so badde / That inpossible it were to repplye / Agayn his choys; this was his fantasye' (IV.1608–10). That is, his fantasy or imagination rather than his reason tells him that others' judgment is faulty. At the same time, the concluding phrase suggests an equivalence between 'choys' and 'fantasye' ('his choys [this was his fantasye]'), indicating that Januarie's will is operating, not in the rational faculty, but in the imaginative faculty of his mind. Because Januarie is dominated by his imagination, he falls in love not with a real woman, but with the idea of a woman. He is never able to see the real May because he is too preoccupied with the image he has generated in his own fantasy.[46] After the wedding, Januarie's wilful blindness metamorphoses into physical blindness; but even this apparent 'real' blindness may be caused by a failure of will. Medieval perspectivists such as John Pecham argued that vision is not a passive act, but rather that 'the natural light of the eye contributes to vision by its radiance.' Blindness is the result of that natural light being disturbed by infection or injury; but vision can also be impaired by a failure of the rational faculty. Pecham writes 'Reason operates imperceptibly in the distinction of visible objects. For no visible object is recognized without a distinction of the visible intentions or without a comparison or relation to the universals of known things previously abstracted from sensible things; and this cannot occur without reasoning.'[47] Januarie's rational faculty fails to make the link between the sensible species he receives and the universal form in his mind, making him psychologically (but not physiologically) blind.[48]

Januarie's blindness is miraculously cured by Pluto as he stands below the tree in which Damyan is having intercourse with his wife. In other versions of the tale, the blind man is invariably cured by God, or by St Peter acting in accord with God's will.[49] Chaucer substitutes Pluto in part to transform the earthly paradise of the garden into a hell on earth. But

Pluto's debate with Proserpine regarding whether or not to restore the sight of a cuckolded husband also affords an opportunity to reexplore the question of wifely counsel previously articulated in the *Melibee*. The couple appear first in the poem not as living characters but as literary allusions, dancing in the garden long ago 'as men tolde' (IV.2041). They materialize at the moment before May's deception of Januarie, when Damyan is already concealed in the tree above. Pluto, outraged by May's deception of Januarie, quotes Solomon, 'fulfild of sapience' (IV.2243), to support his claim that women are wicked, and declares 'Now wol I graunten ... / Unto this olde, blynde, worthy knyght / That he shal have ayeyn his eyen syght' (IV.2258–60). Proserpine belittles the importance of 'this Jew, this Salomon' (IV.2277), for 'He was a lecchour and an ydolastre, / And in his elde he verray God forsook' (IV.2298–9). Their debate recalls Melibee's rejection of Prudence's counsel on the basis that 'alle women been wikke' (VII.1057), where he quotes the same passage from Ecclesiastes cited by Pluto (IV.2246–8). Just as Melibee responds to Prudence's 'semblant of wratthe' by finally declaring 'I putte me hoolly in youre disposicioun and ordinaunce' (VII.1706, 1725), Pluto acquiesces 'Dame ... be no lenger wrooth. / I yeve it up!' (IV.2311–12).

While the debate of Pluto and Proserpine alludes to the *Tale of Melibee*, their union also evokes that of the God of Love and Alceste in the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. In each case, a male god is accompanied by a woman who has been removed from her rightful place on earth into Hades. There are also a number of very specific parallels between Alceste and Proserpine: one is the flower of good women, the other a defender of 'Wommen ful trewe, ful goode, and vertuous' (IV.2281). They parallel one another not only materially, but also spiritually: because both have descended into hell and returned, they are figures of Christ. But on this level, Proserpine is a parodic version of Alceste, for while Alceste facilitates clear vision, Proserpine resists Pluto's efforts to restore Januarie's sight. Her support of May ensures that Januarie will regain only 'som glymsyng, and no parfit sighte' (IV.2383). Alceste and Proserpine also parallel one another by each being the type of a particular kind of woman. In the *Legend of Good Women*, a group of women 'trewe of love' praise Alceste as the 'trouthe of womanhede' (F290, F297); in the *Merchant's Tale*, Rebekke, Judith, Abigayl, and Ester are named as women who persuaded men by offering 'good conseil' (IV.1362–74), forerunners of Proserpine's persuasion of Pluto. Otten notes the importance of these biblical figures and Alceste, stating that Proserpine, 'like them, is a Deliverer. But there is a contextual difference: she announces herself the saviour of an adulterous woman, May.'[50] At the same time, as deliverers, these biblical women are also forerunners of Mary, who by bearing Jesus played a role in the redemption of man. In this context, May's identification with Mary through the tale's resemblance to the 'Cherry-Tree Carol'[51] takes on new resonance: May delivers her people (that is, women) by conceiving a child whose father is not her husband.

Although Pluto avows his intention to cure Januarie, stating 'I wolde graunten hym his sighte ageyn' (IV.2313), May claims credit for the cure: 'I have maad yow see' (IV.2388).[52] But what May has in fact done is to teach Januarie how to not see without being blind, by telling him that he cannot trust his eyes. Her deception of January is the comic manifestation of Chaucer's determination, most explicitly articulated in the *House of Fame*, that vision is incapable of transparently mediating between the viewer and the world. In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer argues that there are things which the eye cannot see but which nonetheless exist (F10–11); in the *Merchant's Tale*, he suggests that there are things which the eye can see but which do not exist unless the will accepts their existence.

Chaucer expresses the possibility that a thing may be true and not true, seen by the eye but not seen by the mind, in terms of double vision. Januarie's name, that of the Roman god who looks both forward and backward, anticipates his fate. May says that Januarie's vision is not yet 'ysatled' and is only 'glymsyng' (IV.2405, 2383), but Januarie, who 'Up to the tree ... caste his eyen two' (IV.2360), claims instead that he saw her there with Damyan 'With bothe myne eyen two' (IV.2385). By stressing the two eyes, as opposed to the monocular vision of the daisy in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer gives Januarie double vision, able to switch between fantasy and reality at will: if he exercises his will, he will see reality; if he subordinates his reasonable faculty to the imaginative, he will see only fantasy. The doubleness of Januarie's vision is a model for the doubleness of the tale's meaning. Otten suggests that the biblical allusions in the *Merchant's Tale* provide two levels of signification: 'Chaucer could count on the dual vision' from which 'springs the humor, and in the recognition is the instruction.'[53] The *Merchant's Tale* is not an allegory, any more than it is a fabliau;[54] but it does what an allegory does, even as it does what fabliau does. On a literal level, the tale is about the woe that there is in marriage, and wives' tendency to deceive their husbands; on a figurative level, the interaction of May and Januarie depicts the unreliability of sense perception.

This definition of the tale in terms of a conventional allegorical structure, where the literal level exists merely as a means to the figurative, is necessarily reductive. The 'literal' level of the *Merchant's Tale* is also allegorical, in the sense that it requires an informed reader to provide the context for its interpretation, a context found in Solomon's book of Proverbs:

> My child, be attentive to my wisdom;
> incline your ear to my understanding,
> so that you may hold on to prudence,
> and your lips may guard knowledge.
> For the lips of a loose woman drip honey,
> and her speech is smoother than oil;
> but in the end she is as bitter as wormwood,
> sharp as a two-edged sword.
> Her feet go down to death;
> her steps follow the path to Sheol.
> She does not keep straight to the path of life;
> her ways wander, and she does not know it.
>
> (Proverbs 5:1–6)

The prudence and wisdom mentioned here inform, not only the *Tale of Melibee*, but also the *Merchant's Tale*'s exploration of the value of wifely counsel. May's lips drip the honey of placating words, the reward for Januarie's desire for 'mariage hony-sweete' (IV.1396). Her steps follow the path to Sheol, that is, to the garden presided over by Pluto. She is the two-edged sword, the 'knyf' that Januarie believes will never harm him: 'A man may do no synne with his wyf, / Ne hurte hymselven with his owene knyf' (IV.1839–40). The synonymity of wife and knife is stressed by the couplet's repetition (IV.2163–4) and by Damyan's introduction as 'a squyer, highte Damyan, / Which carf biforn the knyght ful many a day' (IV.1772–3).

The figurative meaning of the knife is not lost on the Host, who relates May to his own wife, just as later in the tales he compares her to Prudence: 'as trewe as any steel / I have a wyf' (IV.2426–7; cf. VII.3086, 3096–7). The Host, as is evident in the link following the *Tale of Melibee*, is a relentlessly literal reader; but even he can understand the allegory of the fabliau. Something of the old-style vertical allegory of the *Book of the Duchess* persists here in the tale's allegory of visual perception; but a new method of embedding figurative meaning also appears in the tale, one

that is accessible to 'sondry folk' (I.25). The tale can be understood by a wide variety of interpreters on different levels and in different ways: people like the Host can interpret the metaphor of the knife in terms of misogyny, while people like the Clerk, for example, can interpret the knife in the more learned contexts of scripture and natural science.

The dominant framework for the figurative level of the *Merchant's Tale* is the most basic relationship in western epistemology: that of form and matter. The mirror of Januarie's imagination is like wax in that it receives the impression of the species from the common sense. Januarie believes that May is like that mirror, ready to receive his imprint both figuratively, in the form of his authority over her, and physically, in the imprint of his sperm during conception; his avowed purpose in marrying, of course, was to produce an heir (IV.1272, 1432–7). He marries May thinking that she will be as pliable as wax, for 'a yong thyng may men gye, / Right as men may warm wex with handes plye' (IV.1429–30). But when heated by Venus' 'fyrbrond' (IV.1727), or perhaps by Januarie's 'fyr of jalousie' (IV.2073),[55] the wax turns out to be receptive to the imprint of others as well. Damyan's desire for May causes her to 'take swich impression that day / Of pitee of this sike Damyan / That from hire herte she ne dryve kan / The remembrance' (IV.1978–81).

Within the terms of this analogy, May is the counterpart of the Virgin Mary as Dante describes her in his *Purgatorio*. After entering purgatory, Dante says, he saw a pure white wall on which was etched a scene of the Annunciation:

> [I]v'era imaginata quella
> ch'ad aprir l'alto amor volse la chiave;
> e avea in atto impressa esta favella
> 'Ecce ancilla Deī,' propriamente
> come figura in cera si suggella.
>
> [T]here she was imaged who turned the key to open the supreme love, and these words were imprinted in her attitude: 'Ecce ancilla Deī,' as expressly as a figure is stamped on wax. (Pg.10.41–5)

Mary is like wax in that she passively receives God's imprint, conceiving Christ within the locked garden that, in exegetical interpretations of the Song of Songs, is her body.[56] The creation of Adam in the Garden of Eden is thus reenacted in this second creation. But there is an important difference: while Adam was created solely as a result of God's will, Christ

is incarnated as a result in part of the will of a human being, Mary. Mary's body is like wax in that she receives the form that generates Christ's body; but her soul is like wax in that it conforms itself to the divine will. That act of conformity took place in the moment that she declared 'Ecce ancilla Deī,' a moment that Dante figuratively describes as the turning of a key in a lock: by surrendering her will to God, Mary opens the door to the garden. May, on the other hand, does not submit so willingly. When Januarie locks the garden gate, she finds a way to admit the person whose impression she chooses to take. In this sense, May is both a parody of Mary as Dante presents her in the *Purgatorio* and an illustration of the power of the individual will.

Conversely, Januarie's plight illustrates the weakness of the individual will. Because he allows his mind to be dominated by the passive faculty of imagination rather than the active faculty of reason, Januarie comes to be emblematic of passive matter rather than active form. Januarie's passivity is stressed, both in his telling May that 'Ye been so depe enprented in my thoght' (IV.2178) and in his crying out, when he regains his sight, 'As dooth the mooder whan the child shal dye' (IV.2365). The wax that figuratively represents May is literalized when she conspires with Damyan to meet secretly in the garden: 'This fresshe May ... / In warm wex hath emprented the clyket' (IV.2116–17). The slippery nature of warm wax allows the term itself to slip, from denoting May to denoting the agent she uses to take an impression of Januarie's key to the garden. May continues, like wax, to accept impressions, but she now accepts the impression of Damyan's key rather than Januarie's, conceiving a child whose father will never be known.

Januarie's double vision – his ability to conceive two visual images simultaneously, one realistic, one fantasical – is echoed in May's conception of a child with two fathers – one real and one apparent – for each case involves the same process of impressing form upon matter. Just as the sensible species is impressed upon the imagination, so the species of the sperm is impressed upon the inchoate matter supplied by the female. The last words spoken in the tale confirm the parallel: May hops down from the tree remarking 'Ful many a man weneth to seen a thyng, / And it is al another than it semeth. / He that misconceyveth, he mysdemeth' (IV.2408–10). Her explicit meaning is that misconceiving, that is, faulty exercise of the imagination, causes faulty judgment. Her implicit meaning is that misconceiving, that is, failing to conceive an heir, is the cause of Januarie's error.

The disordered state of Januarie's mental faculties, dominated by imagination instead of reason, is the result of a failure of Januarie's will. The Merchant forecasts this failure by declaring that a man 'may nat be deceyved ... / So that he werke after his wyves reed' (IV.1356–7). The irony is that a man is not deceived if he follows his wife's counsel only in the sense that she tells him that he is not deceived, as the Merchant suggests: 'as good is blynd deceyved be / As to be deceyved whan a man may se' (IV.2109–10). By inclining his own will to that of his wife, as Melibee and Pluto do, Januarie abnegates control of his rational faculty, allowing imagination to run free and memory to fail. The failure of his memory is evident when he fails to heed both Justinus's advice to 'have in youre memorie, / Paraunter she may be youre purgatorie' (IV.1669–70) and Pluto's praise of Solomon: 'Ful worthy been thy wordes to memorie / To every wight that wit and reson kan' (IV.2244–5). Because Januarie does not exercise 'wit and reson,' Solomon's warning regarding women is not retained in his memory.

Januarie's blindness, both the temporary eclipse of his physical vision and his subsequent inability to accept the reality he sees, is the result of a lapse in his rational faculty. The nature of this lapse is revealed by Chaucer's allusion to Argus, who 'hadde an hondred yen, / For al that evere he koude poure or pryen, / Yet was he blent' (IV.2111–13). Argus, however, was not physically blinded but rather put to sleep by the song and stories of Mercury.[57] This equation of blindness and sleep reappears in the tale's conclusion when May argues that, just as a man who has suddenly awakened may not see 'parfitly, / Til that he be adawed verraily,' so a man that has been blind may not see properly until he has 'a day or two yseyn' (IV.2397–2404).[58] Thus Januarie's blindness is the result of his dormant will.

A similar inability to see afflicts the narrator of the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. Although he sees Alceste with his bodily eye, he does not recognize her (F505–6). Dumbleton explains such failures as the result of inadequate prior knowledge: a person who hears or reads the term 'white' recalls a prior experience of whiteness, uniting sense perception and memory by an act of the intellect. A person who has had no such experience, however, cannot make that connection: that is why, when we see words to which there are no corresponding things in our memory, we call them 'unintelligible.'[59] The narrator does not recognize Alceste until the God of Love stimulates his memory by reminding him that he *has* seen her before: that is, he has seen her in books.

'Hastow nat in a book,' asks Love, 'The grete goodnesse of the quene Alceste / That turned was into a dayesye?' (F510–12). 'Yis,' the narrator responds, 'Now knowe I hire' (F517–18). For the narrator of Chaucer's dream visions, including the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, books serve as a kind of collective memory by means of which objects in the here and now are recognized – or not. Januarie has no such resource or, rather, chooses to have no such resource. In spite of the abundant information on wives and marriage recounted to him by the bookish Justinus (IV.1521ff.), Januarie refuses to 'wake up,' as it were, to what his eyes tell him is so. His dormant will is like that of the narrator of the *Legend of Good Women*, to whom the God of Love says reproachfully, 'Thy litel wit was thilke tyme aslepe' (F547). Sleep – whether the bodily sleep of Argus or the intellectual sleep of Januarie – allows the sleeper to be deceived and even, in the case of Argus, destroyed. The failure is not in the bodily eye, but in the eye of the mind: as the narrator of the *Merchant's Tale* puts it, 'as good is blynd deceyved be / As to be deceyved whan a man may se' (IV.2109–10). And what blinds a man is language, whether the songs of Mercury or the 'household rhetoric' of wicked wives.

It is, in the end, appropriate that the *Merchant's Tale* is a tale without a genre, of no fixed type. It can be read allegorically on a number of levels, but it is not an allegory. In general, allegory is a genre designed to be accessible only to the elect, following the model of Jesus' parables (cf. Matthew 13:10–17); conversely, the *Merchant's Tale* is all things to all people, able to be read with Argus's eyes, from as many different perspectives as there are viewers.[60] Its lack of genre – or plurality of genre – makes it accessible to each of the 'sondry folk' which make up the group of storytellers. Because each tale is filtered through the individual perspective of one of the pilgrims, the reader sees from a different point of view in each tale.[61] If allegory is vestigial here, it is thus fragmented so that each person may have a part.

By following the evolution of vision's role in Chaucer's works, we can better understand how he progressively alters and finally uses up the genre of allegory. Although the early dream visions are recounted by a narrator, the reader sees the images not from a unique point of view but generally, with an all-encompassing eye modelled on the sight of God, who sees all things at all times. By the *House of Fame*, however, it has become evident that reality does not look the same to every person; therefore, in the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer finds a way to take into account the position, both physical and spiritual, of the viewer. He enables

the reader to see from the perspective of the teller, and thus to receive a picture of the world that does not pretend to be true or sufficient, but merely an accurate rendering of what it looks like from one point of view. By means of the verbal exchange of storytelling, the hearer or reader accumulates many of these perspectives, finding in each of them much that is 'fals' and much that is 'soth.'

optical textbook of the late Middle Ages' (29).

87 Quoted in Irvine, 'Grammatical Theory' 865.

88 This connection has been noted previously; see Leyerle, 'Chaucer's Windy Eagle.'

89 '[L]atitudo hesitationis,' book 1, ch. 21 passim. (1: 61–9); on truth and falsehood in propositions, see book 1, cap. 21 (1: 62).

90 On the memorial function of these images, see Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative* 41–2; Rowland, 'Bishop Bradwardine'; and Carruthers, 'Italy, *Ars Memorativa*, and Fame.'

91 Delany gives an account of contemporary usage of the word 'fantome,' stating that 'As a strictly technical term, then, *phantom* denotes a mental process, or the product of a mental process, which is deceptive in that it does not accurately mirror the phenomenal world' ('Phantom' 70).

92 Beryl Rowland, 'Bishop Bradwardine' 49, 48.

93 See Knapp, 'Relyk of a Saint.'

8: Chaucer's Personification and Vestigial Allegory in the *Canterbury Tales*

1 Quilligan, *Language of Allegory* 42. On the interrelation of personification and allegory, see Paxson, *Poetics of Personification* 38–41, 70–4.

2 Whitman, *Allegory* 270.

3 Delany, 'Undoing Substantial Connection'; Paxson 138. See also the critique of Delany in Penn, 'Literary Nominalism.'

4 Penn 186. See also Minnis, 'Authorial Intention' 17.

5 The story of Ceyx and Alcione, recounted by the narrator, includes gods from classical literature (Juno, Morpheus) who can, in a sense, be considered as personifications; but they are contained in a story within the story and are not part of the interaction of the narrator and Man in Black.

6 Lynch, 'Book of the Duchess' 293, 297.

7 Dumbleton, *Summa* book 1, ch. 5 (1: 17.5–7).

8 'Cum homo intelligens istum terminum "album" viderit in scripto vel audierit in voce, statim reducitur ad memoriam illius hominis vera intentio albi. ... [T]erminus intentio et intentio rei idem nomen habent propter hoc quod per terminum aliqua intentio ad actum nostrum reducitur.' Dumbleton, *Summa*, book 1, ch. 2 (1: 3.9–11, 26–7).

9 Although Priapus appears 'in sovereyn place' in Venus's temple (254), he is clearly secondary to the goddess herself, who is tucked away in the innermost recess of the temple (260). The phallic god is (to put it allegorically) the point of entrance into Venus's sacred precincts.

10 Ferrante notes that 'Venus is degraded progressively in the allegories – from her role in Martianus as essential to marriage and life, to the corrupted aide of Nature in the *De planctu* and the cohort of evil in the *Anticlaudian*. In the *Roman de la Rose*, she becomes a powerful figure of lust, who uses Nature and Genius to do *her* will' (*Woman as Image* 61n38). See also Economou, 'Two Venuses' and *Goddess Natura* 136–9; Tinkle, *Medieval Venuses*.

11 Dronke notes Chaucer's alteration of Alanus's description of Nature's palace in the *Anticlaudianus*: 'Chaucer has a subtle detail that goes beyond Alan, or indeed deliberately contradicts him: where in Alan's garden Natura has a house made of gold, silver and gems, in Chaucer's, "Of braunches were here halles and here boures"' (Dronke and Mann, 'Medieval Latin Poets' 166). Hewitt describes how Chaucer magnifies the gap between the abstraction Nature and her earthly domain: 'What Chaucer's dreamer has done to the *Plaint of Nature* is to turn the allegorical birds on Nature's gown into natural fowls without separating them absolutely from their prior frame of reference. The *Parliament of Fowls*' feathered assembly, that is, transfers the two-dimensional fowls from the fabric of Nature's magnificent robe in Alain's poem onto the earth, lake, and tree-branches of a three-dimensional world' (Hewitt, 'Ther It Was First' 26).

12 These include Cupid, Wille, Plesaunce, Aray, Lust, Curteysie, Craft, Delyt, Gentilesse, Beute, Youthe, and at least fifteen others (211ff.)

13 Ferster, 'Reading Nature' 198.

14 Ibid. 194.

15 For Chaucer's allusions to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in his description of Fame, see Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* 23–64.

16 'If a film were made of the *Anticlaudianus* she would be played by Susannah York.' Trout, *Voyage of Prudence* 41.

17 The earliest example I have seen cited is a manuscript of ca. 1470 noted by Tuve in *Allegorical Imagery* (74 and fig. 17).

18 Isidore of Seville, *Libri differentiarum* 2.39.154 (*PL* 83: 94); noted in Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices* 55. (Note that the illustrations are larger and therefore more legible in the 1939 edition than in the 1989 reprint.)

19 Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories* 56 and 56n4, 76n1.

20 Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity* 225.

21 On the relationship between Boethius's Philosophy and Chaucer's Prudence, see Johnson 141.

22 Owen notes that Prudence speaks as 'a woman rather than an abstract quality' (270). Wallace more matter-of-factly calls Prudence 'a stay-at-home

wife' (*Chaucerian Polity* 224). Johnson points out that Chaucer's changes to the original treatise emphasize Prudence's wifely status: where Reynaud refers to her as having produced 'sage compagnie,' Chaucer calls her 'a wyf of so greet discrecioun' (144). Collette suggests that Chaucer's Prudence represents a specifically feminine form of 'aristocratic virtue' ('Heeding the Counsel' 419).

23 This was first argued in 1957 by Hartung, 'Textual Affiliations.' Building on Hartung's work, Matthews suggests a chronology which 'track[s] *Melibee* from its early composition near 1373 to its experimental flirtation with the *Canterbury Tales* in 1388 as the lead piece to be narrated by the Man of Law, and thence to Fragment B2 in the mid-1390's where it finally came to rest' ('Date' 231). Patterson questions Matthews's early dating and suggests that a date shortly after 1377 might be more likely ('What Man Artow?' 140n74).

24 Severs, 'Tale of Melibeus' 568n14. The original Latin text by Albertano of Brescia reads 'oculis.' Severs notes two passages near the end of the *Tale of Melibee* that do not appear in the French version but which do resemble the corresponding passage in the Latin (614, n. to 1170–1, 1174–5), suggesting that, though Chaucer was translating the French version, he remembered the general content of the Latin.

25 Strohm seems aware of the problem here, but dismisses it by suggesting that 'Chaucer's understanding of his obligations as a translator' outweighed his desire to maintain consistency within the allegory ('Allegory' 40). In light of the many minor alterations to Reynaud's text noted by Severs, Palomo, and Bornstein, such extreme fidelity to the original seems unlikely. Waterhouse and Griffiths also suggest that Chaucer's retention of the reading 'piez' is intentional, but this leads them to suggest that the first of Sophie's two wounds, to the hands and feet, allude to the crucifixion, identifying her as a figure of Christ ('Sweete Wordes' 345). Such an interpretation is suggestive: if Sophie is identified with Christ, and Christ as the second person of the Trinity is the model for one of the triune faculties of the mind, then injury to Sophie indicates injury to one of the three mental faculties.

26 Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity* 231.

27 See Burnley, *Chaucer's Language* 49–63, on the distinction between prudence and wisdom, prudence being a specifically human, rational power.

28 Wallace suggests that the incoherence of 'Prudence's allegorization' is not a significant shortcoming: 'it is only of local and limited effect [and] serves to help Melibee see who he is and where he is at this stage of the dialogue' (*Chaucerian Polity* 240).

29 Patterson, 'What Man Artow?' 158.

30 On the relationship of divine and human will in Ockham, see Adams, 'Ockham on Will'; for a brief but cogent summary, see Colish, *Medieval Foundations* 313–15.

31 See Sylla, *Calculators* 137. On the significance of Dumbleton's use of latitudes to quantify intellective acts, see North, 'Natural Philosophy' 88.

32 Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars* 365–8.

33 For more on the role of intention in the movement of Melibee's will ('entente,' VII.1871), see my 'Intention in *Troilus and Criseyde*,' forthcoming.

34 Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity* 228.

35 Patterson, 'What Man Artow?' 158.

36 Matthews comments that 'the particular indebtedness of the *Merchant's Tale* to the Melibean tract has been frequently remarked, and it was preponderantly this derivative relationship that misled Tatlock into concluding that the two were composed at about the same time' (231).

37 Pratt has argued convincingly that Robert Holkot's commentary on the Book of Wisdom, *Super Sapientiam Salomonis*, is an important source for passages on dreams in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* ('Some Latin Sources'). This suggests that Holkot's commentary may also have been a source for Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*, which alludes extensively to the Book of Wisdom. On Holkot's wide influence, see Coleman, *Medieval Memories* 263–5 and Minnis, 'Discussions of "authorial role."'

38 Interestingly, May's perspective on whether marriage is heavenly or hellish is left unanswered: 'I dar nat to yow telle / Or wheither hire thoughte it paradys or helle' (IV.1963–4).

39 Chaucer alludes explicitly both to Claudian (IV.2232) and, exactly two hundred lines earlier, to the *Rose* (IV.2032). In the *House of Fame*, Chaucer groups Claudian with Virgil and Dante as one of those who know about hell (449–50); Claudian also appears as a statue on a pillar of sulphur, the author who 'bar up al the fame of hell' (1510). The significance of the *De raptu Proserpinae* has been discussed by Pratt, 'Chaucer's Claudian'; Donovan, 'Image of Pluto' and 'Chaucer's January and May'; Wentersdorf, 'Theme and Structure'; and Otten, 'Proserpine.' On the *Roman de la rose* and the *Merchant's Tale*, see Economou, 'January's Sin'; Wallace, 'Chaucer and the European Rose'; Diekstra, 'Chaucer and the *Romance of the Rose*'; *and* Calabrese, 'May Devoid of All Delight.'

40 Neuse, 'Marriage' 116. It is important to note that the allegory of the names May and January is original to Chaucer, as is the age difference; other versions of the tale do not mention the husband's age. See Dempster, 'Merchant's Tale'; Benson and Andersson, *Literary Context*. Though one of

the versions, 'The Blind Man and his Wife' written by one Adolphus in 1315, refers to the lover as a 'juvenis' (234, line 6), it does not specify the age of the husband.

41 Neuse 122.

42 Calabrese 262–3. Economou explores in greater detail the role of the mirror in both works, linking the mirror of Januarie's imagination to the deceptive mirrors described by Nature in Jean de Meun's continuation of the *Roman de la rose* (253–4).

43 Patterson, *Subject of History* 339. Patterson gives a particularly interesting interpretation of the relation of the teller to the tale (333–44). See also Edwards, who describes how some aspects of the tale 'counter the merchant's viewpoint, even as they presumably provide material for him ... The discontinuity of character and narrative, narration and doctrine, is an essential quality of the tale' ('Narration and Doctrine' 366).

44 Though Chaucer uses the term 'fantasye' in the *Merchant's Tale* to describe imagination specifically in the context of faculty psychology, in other tales he uses the term in something closer to the modern, more general sense of the term (e.g., I.3845; III.516). For a reading of January's 'male fantasye' in terms of 'projected wish-fulfillment' (76), see Collette, *Species, Phantasms* 75–88.

45 In this context, it is interesting to note that Chaucer likens the wedding of Januarie and May to that of Mercury and Philology, recounted by Martianus Capella (IV.1732–8), for Mercury is not only representative of eloquence but is also the patron of merchants.

46 Collette describes a similar failure of vision in her analysis of the *Franklin's Tale*: she suggests that Dorigen's will fails to regulate her imagination, causing the black rocks to be sometimes visible, sometimes not. 'Augustine['s] first point – that the will can fail to regulate the images that crowd the mind – parallels Dorigen's *derke fantasye*, her inability to deal with the visual experience, the sight of the rocks. ... Rather than accepting the rocks as part of creation and "looking" past them, she can deal with them only at the physical level, unable to move the *phantasms* of the rocks out of the imaginative section of the brain to the estimative, unable to deal rationally with them' ('Seeing and Believing' 405–6).

47 'Lumen oculi naturale radiositate sua visui conferre' (I.46); on infection or injury to the eye, see I.54; 'In distinctione visibilium rationem imperceptibiliter operari. Nullum enim visibile cognoscitur sine distinctione intentionum visibilium vel sine collatione aut relatione ad universalia cognitorum prius a sensibilius abstracta, qui fieri non possunt absque ratiocinatione' (I.57). John Pecham, *Perspectiva communis*, ed. Lindberg 128–9; 134–5; 136–7.

48 Peter Brown contextualizes Januarie's blindness more generally: 'when January becomes physically blind, it is but the external manifestation of internal disorders ('Optical Theme' 241).

49 Dempster, 'Merchant's Tale' 343–53. Two late fifteenth-century versions of the tale substitute Jove for God, but this is because the tale is collected within a nominally pre-Christian work, the Latin *Aesop* (Dempster 354–6).

50 Otten 284. Note that May is connected with Rebekke (IV.1704) and Ester (IV.1744).

51 Rosenberg, 'Cherry-Tree Carol.' Wurtele explores the significance of Chaucer's 'determin[ation] to place May in juxtaposition with Mary' ('Ironical Resonances' 75). See also Bleeth, 'Joseph's Doubting.'

52 In the language of Melibee, May is 'the fer cause and the ny cause' (VII.1395). Chaucer's exploration of the infinite regression of causality in the *House of Fame* suggests that, in the *Merchant's Tale*, final determination of a primary cause is impossible.

53 Otten 287.

54 Brewer remarks 'If the *Shipman's Tale* is closest to the fabliau-type, the *Merchant's Tale* is by general agreement furthest away ... It does not fit into any simple category ...' ('Fabliaux' 309). Arrathoon notes that 'the perception that *The Merchant's Tale* differs radically from the traditional fabliaux ... depends ... on the fact that treatment of marital strife in *The Merchant's Tale* is taken beyond the domestic sphere and given mythic significance' ('For craft is al' 264); she provides a detailed discussion of genre and the *Merchant's Tale* (241–328).

55 These flames affect Damyan as well (IV.1777, 1783, 1875–6), reinforcing the infernal aspect of the garden all three characters inhabit at the tale's climax.

56 Although Bernard of Clairvaux's identification of the bride with the Church is perhaps better known, Alanus de Insulis interprets the bride of the Song of Songs as the Virgin Mary in his *Elucidatio in Cantica Canticorum* (*PL* 120: 51–110); on Alanus's commentary, see Astell, *Song of Songs* 42–72.

57 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I.622–721.

58 Brown points out that May's apparently scientific argument is actually specious: 'the science is misapplied since it is used to account for an event which was not an optical illusion at all.' Brown, 'Optical Theme' 234.

59 'Sed termini visi a nobis per quorum intentiones aliarum rerum memoriae nostrae non occurrunt, inintelligibiles apud nos dicuntur.' Dumbleton, *Summa* book 1, ch. 2 (1: 3–4).

60 Miller notes that 'competence in Christian allusion and symbolism – even in doctrine – was, it is clear, far from universal. Chaucer's pilgrims themselves exhibit a wide range of literacy which probably reflects that of his

own audience, capable of misapplying or of being ignorant of conventional doctrinal and allegorical materials' ('Allegory' 335).

61 Holley makes this point very emphatically: 'Chaucer's vision is simultaneously conceptual (showing how one could conceive things to be) and scientific (showing things *as the eye sees*) ... Each time the energy of a text strikes its reader, its contexts and its images come to life by *vertu* of the observing eye. The text is regenerative' (*Chaucer's Measuring Eye* 143).

9: Division and Darkness

1 'Prout oculis pictura imaginabatur, animalium celebratur concilium.' *De planctu Naturae*, prosa 1, trans. Sheridan 86.
2 Ibid., metrum 2, trans. Sheridan 106.
3 'the light so in my face / Bigan to smyte, so persing euer in one / On euere part, where that I gan gone, / That I ne myght nothing, as I would, / About me considre and bihold / The wondre hestres, for brightnes of the sonne' (Lydgate, 'Temple of Glass,' lines 24–9; ed. Norton-Smith 67.
4 Christine de Pizan, *Chemin de long estude* lines 2384–9, 2414; ed. Püschel. Subsequent citations are by line number in the text; translations are my own.
5 'Sompnium prioris de Sallono ad regem Francie super materia scismatis' in Honoré Bonet [Bouvet], *L'Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun et le Somnium super materia Scismatis*, ed. Arnold; cited in the text by page number.
6 Christine de Pizan, *Mutacion de Fortune*, lines 404–5 (identified as Nature at 469); ed. Solente.
7 Christine de Pizan, *Cité des dames*, ed. Curnow, trans. Richards; cited in the text by chapter number. See the illustration from one of the manuscripts of the *Cité des dames* executed under Christine's supervision (British Library, Ms. Harley 4431, fol. 290), reproduced in Richards's translation opposite p. 3. On the left, the illumination shows Christine in her room along with Raison, Rectitude, and Justice; on the right, it depicts Christine and Raison labouring side by side.
8 William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The B Version*, ed. Kane and Donaldson 535 (passus 15, lines 23–34).
9 Their names are, in order: 'Pax,' 'Concordia,' 'Guerra,' 'Oppinio,' 'Misericordie,' 'Sine Humanitate,' 'Inquisitionis vallis,' 'Ceca Ignorantia,' and 'Dulceloquium.' See Honoré Bouvet, *Somnium super materia Scismatis* 70–1.
10 Jean Gerson, 'Le Traictié d'une vision faite contre *Le Ronmant de la rose* par le chancelier de Paris,' ed. Hicks; cited in the text by line number.

11 Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*, trans. Sumner Willard, ed. Charity Cannon Willard 13 (1.1). An edition of Willard's text is forthcoming.
12 'Adont, surprise de somnie en mon lit couchiee, m'apparut en dormant par semblance une creature sicomme en la fourme d'un tres sollempnel homme d'abit, de chiere et de maintien d'un pesant ancien saige auctorisee juge.' Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. f. fr. 603, fol. 49, v.1; quoted in Coopland, trans., *The Tree of Battles of Honoré Bonet* 24n47; trans. Willard, *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry* 143 (3.1).
13 Honoré Bouvet, *L'Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, ed. Arnold; cited in the text by line number.
14 Honoré Bouvet, *The Tree of Battles* 79.
15 Macrobius, ed. Willis 10 (I.3.10); trans. Stahl 90.
16 John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Macaulay, Prologue 833, 851–5.
17 Christine de Pizan, *Lavision-Christine*, ed. Towner 108.9–10 (I.29).
18 Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval* 1, 158.
19 See Dinshaw, 'Chaucer's Queer Touches' and *Getting Medieval* 150–2.
20 Watson, 'Desire for the Past' 94–5.
21 Ibid. 60 and passim.
22 Bynum, 'Why all the Fuss' 29; see chapter 2, p. 22.
23 That is not to say that devotional literature is devoid of claims to authority: see Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*. The claim of authority within devotional narrative is, however, made indirectly and with what can only be described as anguish, as Jenifer Sutherland shows in her analysis of inexpressibility topoi in the writings of Walter of Wimborne and Margery Kempe.
24 On whether 'discourses,' in the Foucauldian sense of the term, can be said to be present in medieval culture, see Akbari, 'Orientation and Nation' 102–3, 124.