

# 05. Chaucerian Resonances in Tudor and Stuart Performance Contexts

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**Shakespeare's Chaucerian Greeks:  
The Jailer's Daughter in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen***  
Larry Bonds

What does Shakespeare do when he dramatizes Geoffrey Chaucer's works that deal with Greek subjects and settings? To begin to answer this question, it is crucial to realize that Chaucer is extraordinarily important to the people of Shakespeare's era. He is regarded especially highly as the Father of the English vernacular literary tradition, with Thomas Speght publishing in 1598 an edition of Chaucer partially titled *The Workes of our Antient and learned English Poet*, and a second edition in 1602. Both of these appear in the middle of Shakespeare's prolific career and may account for Shakespeare's repeated interest in Chaucer as a source. If we stretch the Sixteenth Century to include the last two and a half decades of the Fifteenth, then important Sixteenth Century editions of *The Canterbury Tales* are published by William Caxton in 1478 and 1483 and by Richard Pynson, who publishes the first true collection of Chaucer's works (including *The Canterbury Tales*) in 1492. William Thynne in 1532 issues an edition followed by a second in 1542, and the chronicler John Stow, author of the famous *Survey of London*, also issues a Chaucer in 1561—just three years before Shakespeare's birth in 1564. Thus, going back to Caxton, at least eight printed editions of Chaucer circulate in England across this "long" Sixteenth Century. Chaucer, for Shakespeare and his contemporaries, *is* the English literary tradition, the one author whom readers regard as quintessentially English.

Yet there are at least two problems with Chaucer for Elizabethan/Jacobean readers and writers. First, because of pronunciation changes caused by the Great Vowel Shift (which happens roughly between 1450 and 1550), Chaucer is hard for English audiences to read. In fact, Sixteenth-Century reviewers of Sir Francis Kynaston's Latin translation of *Troilus and Criseyde* praise Kynaston for making it possible to read Chaucer without having to resort to an English dictionary! Second, although much of Chaucer is high-style literature (including *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Knight's Tale*), much of Chaucer is also bawdy, scatological, and lowbrow. An especially relevant example in my larger project on Shakespeare and Chaucer is the wonderful fabliau of the fornicating "hende Nicholas" in *The Miller's Tale* that seems to be the source of the bestiality plot involving Titania and Nick Bottom. Coupling the ambiguously laudatory and unsavory reputation of Chaucer's works with the reputation of the Greeks as a frivolous ("merry"), over-sexed people who lack venerable Roman gravitas make it easy for Shakespeare to see his dramatizing of Chaucer as a staging of stories that his early audiences expect to have a great deal of amorous intrigue and crude language. Shakespeare creates in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and the putatively collaborative *The Two Noble Kinsmen* plays with fascinating mixtures of the highbrow and lowbrow, combinations of the wonderfully sublime and the extraordinarily crude, brutish, and brutal.

My seminar paper will be a draft of a portion of the book's chapter devoted to Shakespeare and John Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The character of the Jailer's Daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a huge expansion of a character briefly mentioned in Chaucer. Palamon, the knight who has been languishing in the Athenian prison, on the night of May 3, "soone after the midnyght" and "by helpyng of a freend" is set free from prison. Shakespeare and Fletcher expand this "freend" into the character of the Jailer's Daughter, who sets the play's Palamon free and goes insane when Palamon does not return her love. The Daughter is "cured" of her Ophelia-like madness through being cruelly

and deceptively wed to and raped (horrifically according to a physician's orders) by a suitor who pretends to be Palamon. The insanity of the daughter and her marital and coital "cure" are a striking instance of the Chaucerian Greek stereotype that guides Shakespeare and his younger colleague John Fletcher in their adaptation of Chaucerian materials in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

**The 'female knights' Tale:  
'Noble' Chaucer and the Invisible Moon in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by Shakespeare and  
Fletcher**

Hester Bradley

The Prologue in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* worries about what will happen if the play 'let[s] fall the nobleness' of Chaucer's 'constant' primary narrative. Shakespeare and Fletcher's version of Chaucer is elided with Chaucer's frame of the 'veray, parfit gentil knight' within *The Canterbury Tales* as the single, punishingly perfect, originator of the tale. This paper will reflect on how the play invokes and denies a rewriting of the 'nobleness' of this version of the Chaucerian narrative into a female 'Knight's Tale'. It does this through the aborted efforts of Emilia and the Jailer's Daughter, who have been denied material access to the moon-goddess, Diana, referred to as the 'abandoner of revels'—someone who has given up on the drama (5.1.138).

This paper considers the theatrical history of the moon as a character on the stage in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as alternative source material for the play to Chaucer's tale. It looks at how, through John Lyly and others, this mode of character came to be established as having the potential to prevent obligatory marriages and intercede in enforced modes of conducting relationships. It shows how Shakespeare and Fletcher adapt *The Knight's Tale* to emphasize the abandonment of Diana and draw on this more recent cultural memory of the staged moon to gesture towards the possibility of a 'female knights' tale. It shows how, in the play, this possibility is revoked. With the abandonment of the moon-character, the characters of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are pushed into a monolithic vision of enjoyment which is not their own, and which is instead a project of the singular hierarchized narrative of the play earmarked by Chaucer's knight.

**"Our Fangled World:" Fabricating Theophanies in *The Knight's Tale* and *Cymbeline***

Peter Cibula

In *The Knight's Tale*, Chaucer's gods are invested with an ambivalent form of power. Jupiter, the king and ostensible sovereign, does not himself produce the compromise between Venus and Mars that resolves the competing requests from Palamon and Arcite. Instead, it is "pale Saturnus the colde" (2444) who finds an "art" that will resolve the quarrel between Venus and Mars. The one who can harmonize these competing requests is the one who claims "Myn is the ruine of the hye halles,/ The falling of the toures and of the walles,/ Upon the minour or the carpenter" (2464-66). In the artful application of his ruin, Saturn harmonizes the prayers of Emelye, Arcite and Palamon. However, Theseus attributes the events of the poem to the "entente" (2989) of the "Firste Moevere," missing the participatory "art" that is the undoing of Theseus's own sovereign project.

The artful redirection of ruin is also the focus of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, with the final act repairing the damage done to Posthumus and Innogen's relationship by Giacomo. Yet, the appearance of

Jupiter, rather than a forced and histrionic moment, echoes Chaucer's own ambivalent divinity to similar effects. Like Chaucer's Theseus, Posthumus is unable to properly read the providential will of the gods, finding in a tablet left by Jupiter "a dream, or else such stuff as madmen/ Tongue, and brain not; either both, or nothing, / Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such/ as sense cannot untie" (239-242). Echoing the sovereign of Shakespeare's other famous *Dream*, Posthumus' own experience of divinity is one that defies interpretation. The tablet requires an "art" to interpret which Posthumus does not possess, since the tablet's promise requires more than one sovereign interpreter. Instead, the Jupiter's promise finds its fulfillment in the social world of action and participation. Chaucer's artistic collaboration among the gods becomes, in Shakespeare's play, the recognition and acknowledgement of competing human narratives.

### **Decorum, Distinction, & Shakespeare's Chaucer**

Jeff Espie

"I have said / she's an adulteress," exclaims Shakespeare's Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, chastising his wife's supposed infidelity in language measured to her social class: "O, thou thing, / which I'll not call a creature of thy place, / lest barbarism, making me the precedent, / should a like language use to all degrees, / and mannerly distinguishment leave out / betwixt the prince and beggar" (II.i.83-8). Leontes's concern with "distinguishment," this paper demonstrates, develops a Renaissance discourse on linguistic decorum shaped by the social heterogeneity of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The proximate source for Leontes's distinction, I argue, appears in *The Manciple's Tale*, in a similar rebuke of adultery, which distinguishes an unfaithful "lady" from an identically unfaithful "lemman." Like Leontes, who scolds Hermione in terms fit for "a creature of [her] place," the Manciple suits language to "degree," dividing ladies and lemmans based on their "estaa" (IX.207-20). Like Leontes, who calls his wife "as bad as those / that vulgars give bold'st titles" (II.i.94-5), the Manciple asserts a moral equivalence in adultery across the socio-linguistic divide: "men leyn that oon as lowe as lith that oother" (IX.222). The intertextual connection assumes special significance, I suggest, from the Renaissance printed editions that mediated Chaucer's poetry. In a letter prefacing Thomas Speght's 1602 edition of Chaucer's *Works*, Francis Beaumont quotes part of the relevant passage from *The Manciple's Tale*, and identifies in it a defining characteristic of Chaucer's poetry: his ability to match speech with social class. Shakespeare adapts both Chaucer's text and Chaucer's reputation, developing from *The Manciple's Tale* a native lineage for the social heterogeneity of his dramatic art. This paper thus complements scholarship by Scala, Williams, Termaura, as well as Cook, Singh, and Matthews, in locating Shakespeare's late career Chaucerianism beyond *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and in connecting Beaumont's letter with Renaissance literature beyond Spenser.

### **Shakespeare's Gower and Chaucer's Gower**

R. D. Perry

By the early Tudor period, a triumvirate of medieval poets had come to be canonized as the forerunners of the English literary tradition; these were Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower, and John Lydgate. As opposed to Lydgate, who came later and promoted himself as a laureate inheritor of the other two, Chaucer and Gower, did not bill themselves as founders of a new tradition, but instead were friends who shared their work with one another, two members of a coterie. This paper will track

the way that their friendship nevertheless impacted their place in the tradition that William Shakespeare inherited.

Chaucer's most famous epithet for his friend is "moral Gower," an assessment that has occasioned a great deal of critical commentary, with arguments treating it variously as an honest assessment or as a caricature. I will argue that Shakespeare and his contemporaries had their own thoughts on the matter, which surface in the character of "ancient Gower" from *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. In that play, the early modern vision of Gower partakes of both critical positions: his morality is both serious and a joke. Acting as a chorus, introducing and commenting upon the action, Gower exhibits a moral stance that occasionally bleeds over into sententiousness. At the same time, this is the moral Gower that Chaucer characterizes in the introduction to the *Man of Law's Tale* as overly interested in stories of incest, a predilection that renders his moral stance absurd. Chaucer's reception, then, shapes not only his own place in Tudor and Stuart England, but it also transforms the role of Gower for early modern playwrights. If Lydgate became an untenable medieval forebear due to larger social forces—like the way his monkishness was read after the Protestant Reformation—Gower eventually fell out of favor in comparison to Chaucer due to more personal forces, such as the way their competitive friendship was read after their death.

### **Chaucer's Dream Visions and the Design of *The Tempest***

Michael Plunkett

It is commonplace to suggest that Shakespeare's *Tempest* is both a portrait of the artist and a divergent imitation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (with a conspicuously Ovidian flair). This paper explores Shakespeare's engagement in *The Tempest* with features he found in Chaucer's dream visions, particularly the unflattering portrait of the artist, the bedtime reading into Ovid and Virgil that both reimagines the classics and gives rise to transformative dreams, and the station in outer space, "full of noises," from which the artist derives creative power.

I argue that Shakespeare vies with Chaucer in this play, not only as a rival poet but as a rival imitative poet and poetic theorist, answering the artistic vision of *The House of Fame*, in which a revisionist reading of *The Aeneid* gives way, in a dream, to an unruly space station where all the sounds of our world roar at once, with his own divergent adaptation of Virgil and remote sound station, the island, "full of noises." While this comparative study confirms the impression that Chaucer and Shakespeare are in many ways kindred spirits – irreverent neoclassicists more in tune with Ovid's enthusiasms than Virgil's – the poetics in action Shakespeare works into his late play parodies several aspects of the one Chaucer works into his early dream poems, most notably his pronounced sympathy for the feminine and his broad, largely benign vision of poetic inspiration.

### **Figuring Economic Change: Shakespeare's Non-Chaucerian Characterology**

Bradley D. Ryner

I hope that the ideas roughly sketched in this paper will eventually contribute to a book project on how, in early English theatre, a play's markers of its relationship to received conventions and older representational traditions can provide audiences with heuristics for conceptualizing the history economic change. My provisional premise here is that approaching Shakespeare's most overt

reworkings of Chaucer, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*, in this context will allow for an exploration of underexamined aspects of Shakespearean characterology and a reconsideration of his presentation of plays as theatrical commodities. Specifically, I wish to put pressure on two tendencies in economically-focused readings of Shakespeare's plays: one that locates insights into the phenomenology of economic change primarily in the characters that evidence a tension between interior being and social performance, and one that aligns Shakespeare's privileged economic status as a shareholder in both the company and the playhouse with a celebration of the fecundity of theatrical representation. In these plays rich, interiorized characterization is associated with a bygone Chaucerian style and the early modern playhouse is presented as a locus of debased commercial spectacle.

### **Stealing Shives: *Titus Andronicus* as a Chaucerian anti-Roman(ce)**

Kurt Schreyer

Shakespeare's first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, or as it was originally titled in the 1594 quarto, *The Most Lamentable Romaine Tragedie of Titus Andronicus*, is famous for its Senecan influences as well as for its staging of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Yet perhaps in assuming, as Jonathan Bate does in his Arden edition, that the play is an "improvisation upon classical sources" alone, we have too casually grouped *Titus* among Shakespeare's "Roman plays," when, in fact, it may be more medieval than we have been led to believe. This essay hopes to illustrate, in particular, the play's indebtedness to Chaucer's adaptations of the lyrical tradition of dawn-song as well as his critical engagements with the problematic ethos of courtly love. In *Shakespeare's Ovid and the Spectre of the Medieval* (2018), Lindsay Ann Reid demonstrates that Shakespeare's use of the classical alba, or dawn-song, in moments such as the opening dialogue in 3.5 of *Romeo & Juliet* ("Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day..."), is inflected through Chaucer's *Troilus & Criseyde*. Building on Reid's work, this paper will consider whether Shakespeare's parodic borrowing of the *topoi* of the alba in three successive scenes in Act 2 of *Titus* also bear a Chaucerian stamp. I would further like to suggest that by conspicuously representing the rapists Chiron and Demetrius as courtly lovers, Shakespeare is responding to Gower and Chaucer. I want to consider, in short, what it would mean if we understood Q1's titular adjective "Romaine" more broadly to implicate medieval Romance as well as ancient Rome. Unsettling the play's categorization may perhaps allow us to recontextualize its depiction of rape through the body of scholarship on sexual violation in Chaucer and the courtly love tradition.

### **A Midsummer Night's Dream Vision**

Kayla Shearer

The Chaucer that we know today is not the same poet as he was known in early modern England. What we now perceive to be his canon is a much-reduced version of the compiled editions of his "works" produced variously over the years from 1532 to 1721 by, respectively, William Thynne, John Stow, Thomas Speght, and John Urry. While much has been gained by considering Shakespeare's and other early modern dramatists' familiarity with and use of Chaucer's accepted works, in this essay I want to explore the relationship between some of the apocryphal poems found in the expanded Chaucer canon of the early modern period and the creative environment in which Elizabethan playwrights worked. When Speght printed his first edition of Chaucer's works in 1598, he

includes two new poems to the canon: *The Floure and the Leafe* and *Isle of Ladies*. I suggest that we might turn to earlier Elizabethan drama to identify some cultural trends that may have influenced Speght's decision to claim and print these poems under Chaucer's name.

### **The Framing of the Shrews: Dream Skepticism from Chaucer's *House of Fame* to Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew***

Nathanial B. Smith

Christopher Sly, who slumbers drunkenly through the first scene of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew's* Induction, wakes in the second scene into an elaborate deception that raises a series of skeptical problems concerning the difficulty of distinguishing illusion from reality. Yet an examination of this play's skepticism—and that of its close relative, the anonymous quarto *Taming of a Shrew* (1594)—solely through the lens of well-known sources of ancient and early modern skeptical philosophy ignores their rich and complex engagement with the medieval dream vision, particularly Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame*. Excellent scholarship has strengthened our understanding of the relationship between Shakespeare's *Shrew* and Chaucer's earliest dream poem, *The Book of the Duchess*, less well known to early modernists, however, is how Chaucer's *House of Fame* participates in a rich and complex tradition of dream skepticism in the work of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century *via moderna* philosophers who challenged epistemologically realist theories knowledge and deployed dream imagery to question epistemological certainty. Chaucer's innovative use of dream frame narrative foregrounds the skeptical potential of extradiegetic frame tales that often introduce and conclude a dream vision, offering us the promise of a mastering perspective that collapses into a dizzying play of perspectives and vantage points echoed in skeptical philosophy. Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and its lesser-known analogue once considered a "bad" quarto, both deploy Chaucerian-inspired dream frames in sophisticated ways. Their inconclusive and missing frames encourage in audiences a skeptical reaction that leads us to question the dogmatic positions about marriage and gender at the heart of their training and taming plots. Audiences who recognize Chaucer's skepticism in the plays' frames, I suggest, would be much less likely to take such plots at face value, whether or not Katherina winks at the audience during her final speech.

### **The Word of Apollo:**

#### **Poetry and Prophecy in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida***

Rachel Stenner

After the opening proem, the first god invoked by Chaucer's romance is 'Daun Phebus or Appollo Delphicus'. (1). In *Troilus and Criseyde*, the words of this deity not only prophesy the fall of Troy, but instigate the departure from the city of Criseyde's father, so creating the conditions for the love story that ensues. Apollo is repeatedly mentioned in the poem, yet appears alongside Mars and Jove in its final lines only to be dismissed as an example of the 'payens [...] rascaille' (V.1849-53). Correspondingly, the significance of both prophecy, and poetic representation, are deeply complicated in Chaucer's self-reflexive and metapoetic work. The poem dismissively positions itself within 'a thousand olde stories' (III.297) of fallen women but also revels in the potential of artful words, Chaucer archly pointing out via Troilus that 'men might a book make of' Troilus' 'storie' (V.585). In Chaucer's recasting of the Matter of Troy, the figure of Apollo makes overt the ambivalent

inseparability of poetry and prophesy.

By contrast, Shakespeare's play barely mentions Apollo though it is similarly fascinated by the compromised vatic potential of literature. As the famous seduction scene asserts, the 'rhymes' of 'true swains in love shall in the world to come / Approve their truth by Troilus' (2). Considering its response to Chaucer and other intertexts, critics have established the play as an 'assemblage of the literary fragments of the Trojan war' that questions the significance of representation (*Troilus and Cressida: A Critical Reader*, ed. Eftirpi Mitsi, London: Bloomsbury, 2019, introduction para.2). At the extreme end of this perspective are the words of James Simpson, which characterise Troilus and Cressida as an instance of pitiless literary aggression, which seeks to infect and deface Chaucer's vision (James Simpson, "'The Formless Ruin of Oblivion": Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and Literary Defacement', in *Love, History, and Emotion in Chaucer and Shakespeare: 'Troilus and Criseyde' and 'Troilus and Cressida'*, ed. Andrew James Johnson et al., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016, 190-6).

This paper seeks to recuperate the play's relationship with Chaucer's poem. I argue that Shakespeare's suspicious metatextuality is a reworking of the ambivalent Apollonian connection between poetry and prophesy that Chaucer delineates.

### **Shakespeare and the Lost Medieval Friendship Plays of the Admiral's Men**

Rob Stretter

My SAA paper examines the possible influence on Shakespeare of *Alexander and Lodowick*, a lost play with origins in *Amis and Amiloun*, a widely known medieval tale of perfect friends that itself influenced Chaucer. We know from Henslowe's diary that the Admiral's Men performed the play, whose author is unknown, over a dozen times in 1597. While we know nothing about the play beyond its performance dates and the fact that the Admiral's Men purchased the playbook in 1598, we can guess at the outline of its plot from the two Renaissance versions of the story that have survived: one, the final tale in *The Seven Wise Masters of Rome* cycle, and the other, a popular ballad called "The Two Faithful Friends." Alexander and Lodowick's story closely follows the plot of the medieval legend of Amis and Amiloun, two sworn brothers whose friendship endures a series of increasingly severe tests, culminating in a happy ending that, perhaps surprisingly, involves child-murder.

*Alexander and Lodowick* is at least the second play on the subject of male friendship performed by the Admiral's Men in the 1590s, the other being the 1594 production of the also-lost *Palamon and Arcite*. This play, whether a revival of Richard Edwards's 1566 play of the same name or a new work, is of obvious interest to Shakespeare scholars given its origins in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, which Shakespeare and Fletcher reworked as *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. It is unclear whether Shakespeare would have known the Middle English romance *Amis and Amiloun* (c. 1330), but since it influenced Chaucer's depiction of Palamon and Arcite, the medieval tale's DNA lingers in the *Kinsmen*. *Alexander and Lodowick*, however, which Shakespeare must have known, offers a more direct line of transmission between medieval romance and Renaissance drama.

I am at the very early stages of my research for this project, so I hope to use our SAA seminar as a true workshop to develop my ideas. My hypothesis is that *Alexander and Lodowick*, in addition to *Palamon and Arcite*, reflects what seems to have been a vogue for friendship plays (now mostly lost) in the late 1590s. These plays, in reviving an idealized medieval form of male bonding, helped shape Shakespeare's treatment of male friendship in his own drama of this period, particularly *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

**'I am not against your faith yet I continue mine':  
Virginal Vocation in *The Two Noble Kinsmen***

Valerie Voight

In the first act of William Shakespeare and John Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (ca. 1613-1614), Emilia offers a striking defense of virginity and female community over and against Hippolyta's praise of marriage. Although Hippolyta insists that Emilia will eventually long for a husband, the debate ends in a stalemate when Emilia tells her that "I am not / Against your faith, yet I continue mine" (I.iii.96-97). While critics have explored the political and homoerotic connotations of Emilia's defense of virginity, less attention has been paid to the religious resonance of their debate. Emilia's devotion to Diana evokes not only the pagan past depicted in *The Knight's Tale*, but also the play's medieval heritage. Her sworn virginity, coded in her response to Hippolyta as "faith," gestures toward the medieval figure of the celibate nun, and the uneasy emphasis on marriage in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* reflects a cultural discomfort with vocation of votaress.

Alongside her counterpart, the Jailer's Daughter, Emilia embodies the tension surrounding the post-Reformation vocation of godly womanhood and the redefinition of chastity to privilege marriage. Both Emilia and the Jailer's Daughter push the boundaries of the appropriate social role for desiring (or, in Emilia's case, potentially non-heteronormative desiring) women. I will examine the ways in which both playwrights modify and complicate Chaucer's virginal Emilia, such as their decision to reorder Emilia's prayer to Diana to foreground marriage rather than chastity. I argue that these changes reflect the anxiety surrounding the discourse of married chastity extolled by the leading figures in the play.