Attempts to distinguish between the Knight’s Tale’s Palamon and Arcite have most frequently been met with some critical scepticism: cousins, indeed ‘sworn brothers’, they are captured in the same battle, imprisoned in the same tower, fall in love with the same woman, and do so at almost exactly the same moment. In fact, Chaucer takes pains to remove most of the points of differentiation that were present in his Boccaccian source. His two young knights are more alike than those found in the Teseida; and their disparate motivations for action are replaced in the English text with a multitude of references to chance and fortune. And yet, once Chaucer has brought his protagonists to a level that could be claimed to be one of ‘exact equivalence’, he then introduces some significant points of difference, all of them related to the character of Arcite, and all of them notably scientific in nature. Both main protagonists may be deliberately ‘remote’, ‘devoid of psychological revelations’, but, startlingly, Chaucer allows us a glimpse into the mind of Arcite in its most literal sense, as he causes him to suffer a disease of the brain in a detail that is original to the Knight’s Tale. While both knights can be said to be ‘lovesick’, Arcite’s lovesickness is the genuine malady, worthy of the study of doctors, philosophers, and theologians, his wild mood swings, deathly pallor, and continual swooning being,

\[
\text{Nat oonly lik the loveris maladye}
\]
\[
\text{Of Hereos, but rather lyk manye,}
\]
\[
\text{Engendred of humour malencolik}
\]
\[
\text{Biforen, in his celle fantastik. (I.1373–6)}
\]

While Palamon does what knights in stories are supposed to do, and falls in love at first sight, Arcite’s ‘love at first sight’ is significantly different, because he alone suffers from the most extreme form of desire, enduring not just conventional ‘love-longing’ but the full medically acknowledged condition of amor hereos. Both he and Palamon can claim to be lovesick, but there is a scientific precision to Arcite’s lovesickness that the other knight does not share. The romance narrative is interrupted as the customary literary device of illness and obsession becomes, in Arcite’s case, literalized, and the metaphorical disease is supplanted by an exploration of the medical effects of love, as the fourteenth century believed them to be. The prevailing view that the two knights are rendered indistinguishable by the changes Chaucer makes to the
Teseida therefore oversimplifies the situation. The reader is in fact invited to discriminate between the lovers, but on more philosophical terms than in Boccaccio’s version. While small differences in character have been erased by Chaucer, the one differentiating feature he adds becomes foregrounded, so that the tale invites us to focus exclusively on the scientific difference between the chronically smitten Palamon and the morbidly lovesick Arcite. The crucial role of the imagination in that process, and the extent to which the individual is responsible for his own imaginative state, become key questions not just in the Knight’s Tale, but in the subsequent tales of the Miller and the Reeve. Indeed the Miller sums up the situation with unexpected sagacity, noting that ‘Men may dyen of ymaginacioun’ (I.3612). This, then, is an exploration of the role of the imagination in the first three Canterbury Tales: its position and function in the cerebral process, and its contribution to the amorous desire that afflicts almost every creature in those tales whether they are young men locked in prison towers or a stallion in a field of mares.

Medical interest in the psychology of love was not, of course, new in the Middle Ages. Ancient Greek and Arabic medical texts often included chapters on lovesickness, and many of these were later transmitted to the West via Latin translations. The extremely influential Viaticum of Constantine the African (d. 1087), the ‘cursed monk’ of Chaucer’s Merchant’s Tale (IV.1810), for example, belongs to this long tradition of medical handbooks, and contains a substantial section on morbid love or extreme lovesickness. Records from the universities of Cambridge and Paris reveal that the Viaticum was a required text on the medical curriculum, and though the texts studied in medieval Oxford are less well documented, it is likely that the Viaticum was part of the syllabus there too. And since the study of medicine in the medieval universities was not confined to those seeking a medical degree, knowledge of such texts can be considered widespread. In medieval Oxford it was apparently the practice for students enrolled for other degrees to take some medical courses, and for those who did become bachelors of medicine to continue their studies as masters of arts or scholars in theology. The poet Guido Cavalcanti, a close friend of Dante, was clearly inspired by contemporary medical ideas when he wrote ‘Donna me prega’; and, in its turn, this love poem elicited a lengthy and detailed medical commentary from the Florentine physician Dino del Garbo, preserved in a manuscript copied by Boccaccio. Lovesickness was undoubtedly a matter for serious study with information being passed backwards and forwards between poets and men of science. Even Pope John XXI (1276–7), otherwise known as the physician Peter of Spain, was the author of a commentary on the Viaticum, including a much imitated section on lovesickness. After many centuries of confusion, Chaucer’s ‘lovers’ malady of Hereos’ was identified in 1914 by John Livingstone Lowes as ‘amor hereos’, a disease of the brain described not only in the Viaticum, but in the works of, amongst others, Arnald of Villanova (Chaucer’s Arnold of the Newe Toun: VIII.1428) and Bernard of Gordon, listed by Chaucer as one of the Doctour of Physik’s authorities (I.434). That the term ‘Hereos’ should have caused such confusion is unsurprising. It is, leaving astrology aside,
one of the most technical scientific terms Chaucer ever uses in his poetry; and
the description of the disease itself, as Lowes commented, ‘might almost be a
paraphrase of a chapter … from one of the medical treatises’.
Indeed, the
length and scientific nature of the description of Arcite’s love is matched only
by the highly technical and detailed description of his death. Each is strikingly
unlike anything normally found in medieval romance, allowing us to see inside
the hero’s brain as he succumbs to love, and inside his lacerated torso as he
succumbs to death.

It all begins, however, conventionally enough, with both knights falling in
love at first sight. The convention is not, though, one that Chaucer inherited
from Boccaccio. Indeed, a large number of the changes that he made to his
source material are related to his interest in vision: in the role that vision plays
as the first step in the process of falling in love. While Boccaccio’s Arcita and
Palemon do, admittedly, devote themselves to Emilia when they see her, it is
not her beauty that first attracts them to her. Rather, they are first drawn to her
by the sound of her voice as she sings in the garden below their prison tower.
Chaucer’s knights, on the other hand, simply do not respond to aural stimulus.
Instead the emphasis is solely upon the eyes. Palamon, roaming an upper room
of the prison (and significantly freer in this respect than his Italian counterpart),
just happens to cast a glance from a window and see Emelye below:

And so bifel, by aventure, or cas,
That thurgh a wyndow, thikke of many a barre
Of  iring greet and square as any sparre,
He cast his eye upon Emelya,
And therewithal he bleynte and cride, ‘A!’ (I.1074–8)

The knight experiences this event in passive terms and yet, as H. Marshall
Leicester has pointed out, the stress is very much upon Palamon’s aggressively
active vision, a probing look that must penetrate the thick iron bars of the
prison window and traverse a considerable distance before it reaches Emelye.
In fact, ‘cast’ is the very same verb used to describe the amorous looks
given by that other lovesick hero of the Canterbury Tales – Absolon. The to-ing
and fro-ing of the incarcerated Palamon is mirrored by Absolon, rhythmically,
‘Sensyne the wyves of  the parisshe faste; / And many a lovely look on hem
he caste’ (I.3341f.). He may be less exclusive in his glances than Palamon, but
this is essentially the same activity, and the resulting lovesickness is similar in
kind, if not in degree. Absolon develops a severe ‘love-longynge’ (I.3349) in his
own heart, and subsequently ‘waketh al the nyght and al the day’ (I.3373). In
both cases, though of course more emphatically in the Knight’s Tale, there is
a development of the recurrent romance scene in which the sight of a woman
wounds a man with love.

Arcite’s love is, however, significantly different from both of these. Crucially,
Chaucer chooses to alter his source so that it is Palamon who sees Emily first.
In the Teseida it is Arcita who has the prior claim and, like Palamon, he believes
that he has seen Venus herself in the garden. Chaucer’s Arcite, therefore, is a
less romantic figure. He is the man who sees Emily second, and who asserts her flesh and blood existence:

… Thou woost nat yet now
   Wheither she be a womman or goddesse!
Thyn is a feccioun of hoolynesse,
   And myn is love as to a creature. (I.1156–9)

He is also different from Palamon in terms of the location of the ‘wound’ that he suffers, for there is no explicit reference to Arcite’s heart. In fact, all of the references Boccaccio makes to the heart of Arcita at this point are omitted by Chaucer. Five times during his imprisonment the Italian Arcita explicitly declares that Emilia has wounded, or captured, or broken his heart (more references than Palemone makes), and yet Chaucer removes all of them. Instead, the well-known motif of the dart of love entering the eye and piercing the heart becomes solely the preserve of Chaucer’s Palamon. As for Arcite, all of the references at this point in the Knight’s Tale keep us focused entirely on his eyes. Indeed, in the space of only a few lines, Arcite moves from seeing Emelye for the first time, to declaring that he will die if unable to see her, an assertion that is reiterated nine times over the next 300 lines: the sight of Emelye is all that he desires. Of course, imprisoned as he initially is, it could be argued that he cannot realistically hope for much more than this. Palamon, however, incarcerated in exactly the same way, is not given the same emphatic desire to ‘see’. And indeed, when Arcite is released, Palamon envies him the ability to act, to wage war, to win Emelye; while Arcite himself merely bemoans the fact that he can no longer gaze upon the object of his devotion. Without the sight of her, his purgatory becomes a hell: ‘Now is my prisoun worse than biforn’ (I.1224).

But the important question here is the nature of this new prison, no longer literal but every bit as real as the tower had been. Arcite may feel that he is constrained by his exile but the true manacles henceforth in the tale are the mind-forged ones he readily adopts in his pursuit of Emelye. Like Froissart’s captivated lover in ‘La Prison amoreuse’, the road to his prison is built by his own senses, though in Arcite’s case entirely by his eyes. It remains, however, a road, and the process by which perception leads to judgement and thence to action must be understood if we are to comprehend Arcite’s malady and eventual death.

Of all the accounts of the workings of the brain that circulated in the Middle Ages, the De anima, part of a philosophical encyclopedia by the Arab author Avicenna, is the most detailed and informative. Translated into Latin in the twelfth century, this work charts the whole psychological process from the functioning of the senses through to the retrieval of memories. It divides the brain into five distinct cells: sensus communis, imaginatio, imaginativa, estimativa, and memorialis. Avicenna’s discussion of each cell is lengthy, but in essence it was believed that the impressions of the five senses proceeded along nerve channels to the front of the anterior ventricle of the brain, where sensus communis processed and assimilated the information received from each sense. This cell
was able to retain the impressions it gathered for only a short period of time before passing them on to \textit{imaginatio}. Also located in the anterior part of the brain, \textit{imaginatio} formed a pair with \textit{sensus communis} but was distinguished by its ability to retain forms, functioning as a temporary memory. In the thirteenth century, working with essentially the same model, Roger Bacon described this cell as the ‘coffer and repository’ of the senses, explaining that the difference between \textit{sensus communis} and \textit{imaginatio} is like the difference between water and wax, impressions merely passing through the former but being retained in the latter.\footnote{Together these two cells compose the \textit{phantasia}, what Chaucer calls the ‘celle fantastik’ (I.1376), and the site of the illness that inflicts Arcite. However, while his malady may arise here, it is not isolated in the front ventricle, for what exists in the anterior of the brain is then passed to the two cells that exist in the middle: \textit{imaginativa} and \textit{estimativa}. The former is a creative power, able to separate or combine the forms that it retrieves from \textit{imaginatio}, thus providing man with the mental power to imagine things, even things that do not exist; \textit{estimativa} can then form judgements based on all the information derived from the other three cells, deciding what is good or bad. Furthermore, it can also draw upon all the information it has already established in the remaining, posterior cell, the memory (\textit{memorialis}).\footnote{By the thirteenth century, the extremely influential \textit{De apprehensione} of Albertus Magnus had placed the focus firmly on the brain’s middle cell, and \textit{imaginativa}, now called \textit{phantasy}, is placed at the centre of the process of human thought. Its power is the subject of many warnings, for while it should be subservient to reason, its strong creativity is a danger in itself and can mislead the reasoning part of the brain.\footnote{Indeed, the power of the imagination is deemed to be so great that in the fourteenth century it is even legislated against, the 1352 Statute of Treasons stating that even imagining regicide, for example, is treason.\footnote{Negotiating between the senses and reason, \textit{phantasy} must control its potential creativity and serve the judging part of the mind. Otherwise, the reason can be lead astray, misjudging and even imagining things that are not there. John the Carpenter is a victim of such a process in the Miller’s Tale, the evidence of his senses overcome by his overactive imagination as Nicholas gives an account of the second Flood. In the end, it is precisely for his reiterated ‘fantasie’ (I.3835 and 3840) that he is mocked, as the townspeople gather round him and laughingly refuse to listen to any of his justifications. Indeed the words of the Miller on the subject serve as a moral for the first three \textit{Canterbury Tales}:}
\begin{quote}
\textit{Lo, which a greet thyng is affeccioun!}
\textit{Men may dyen of ymagnacioun,}
\textit{So depe may impressioun be take.} (I.3611–13).
\end{quote}

The power of emotion to influence the brain, to the extent that judgement and reason fail, is evident in the fabliau worlds of the Reeve and Miller. Their protagonists grope around in both metaphorical and literal darkness, driven by lust, or anger, or pride to make mistaken judgements about the environments in which they find themselves: a baker’s tub is a latter-day ark; a husband’s skull...}
is that of an interloper; an anus is the mouth of the beloved. But the genre is such that no one dies as a result of these errors. In the case of the Knight’s Tale, however, a man does indeed ‘dyen of ymaginacioun’, as Arcite succumbs to a disease of the brain that leads ultimately to his death. What is crucial, however, is the extent to which this lovesick mania is the result of his own will, or merely another affliction imposed by a malign fortune.

The disease from which Arcite suffers, amor hereos, is as Chaucer tells us, an illness of the two anterior cells of the brain, which together he nominates the ‘celle fantastik’ (I.1376). As this is the part of the brain that processes and retains the information from the senses, Arcite’s obsessive insistence on ‘seeing’ Emelye is unlikely to be accidental. Indeed, Chaucer’s addition of so many references to the eyes, together with the elimination of most of the references to the heart, would seem to be setting the scene for the early stages of this disease. The correlation between repeated gazing upon the beloved and some kind of cerebral malfunctioning is common to almost all the medical works on amor hereos. Gerard of Berry’s early thirteenth-century essay on lovesickness, for example, is among the first western texts to attempt to explain the disease, and does so in terms of the relationship between sensory perception and the estimative faculty of the brain:

The cause, then, of this disease is a malfunction of the estimative faculty … The estimative [faculty], then, orders the imagination to fix its gaze upon a certain person. The imaginative [faculty orders] the concupiscible, in fact, so that the concupiscible desires this one alone, for just as the concupiscible [faculty] obeys the imaginative, so the imaginative [obeys] the estimative, at whose command the others are inclined towards the person whom the estimative judges to be fitting, though this may not be so.23

This explanation, based largely on Avicenna’s De anima, considers the estimative faculty as failing due to the influence of a particularly desirable sense perception on the middle ventricle. Struck by the pleasurable sensation, estimatio orders sensus communis to repeat the process, turning its attention once again to the desirable object, ultimately to the exclusion of all others.24 Finally the estimatio must consider the object to be the greatest good, if only because all other potential goods are simply eliminated from consideration by the exclusive attention to this one. In the process, the overactive estimative faculty, having focused so hard on this object, draws the essential heat away from the anterior ventricle, leaving the imaginativa uncharacteristically cold and dry, and thus more retentive. The image of the beloved, already bombarding the brain, thus becomes even more literally ‘fixed’ in the mind. Physical proof of this withdrawal of essential heat is that the eyes, part of this crucial flow from desired object to anterior cells, to middle ventricle, become sunken, like Arcite’s, ‘holwe and grisly to biholde’ (I.1363).25

But the crucial question in all of this is one of responsibility. It is not simply a matter of cerebral short-circuiting with Arcite a helpless victim of love. Chaucer’s use of science in the tale is designed to make us consider the actual mental processes involved in falling in love, or even of falling so deeply in love
Dying of imagination

That illness ensues. For love, of course, is not an illness per se. The references to ‘amor hereos’, to the brain, to the ‘celle fantastik’, move us away from a simple acceptance of the traditional topos of love at first sight, and the effect of this is to make us question whether or not Arcite can be held responsible for his actions. In the first instance, though he claims to have been wounded, it is not clear what exactly has wounded him. While Troilus is at least described as having been shot by Cupid’s dart, there is no such winged scapegoat in the Knight’s Tale. As for the lady herself, the notion of a dangerous female gaze might have been a commonplace, described by Peter of Limoges, for example, as being as deadly as that of a basilisk, but there is nevertheless no such poisonous glance from Emelye. While Boccaccio’s Emilia is aware of her admirers in the tower, watching them watching her, Chaucer’s Emelye is entirely oblivious to the two knights: she does not even glance in their direction at this point in the tale. Indeed, she is distinguished as a romance heroine by being described from behind, the focus being on the long plait of blonde hair down her back, as she looks in the opposite direction.

Chaucer, of course, is entirely aware of the potential harm of a gaze, and of the optical theory of species upon which it is based. For vision, it was thought, occurs either when darts of light emanate from the eye and illuminate the object upon which they fall; or else, the object replicates its own image until it reaches the eye. These two schools of thought, known respectively as the extramission theory and intromission theory, were the subject of centuries of debate, though by the fourteenth century scientists, if not poets, inclined more towards the idea of objects multiplying their image in the process of intromission. A fourteenth-century encyclopedia, such as John Trevisa’s translation of the work of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, is clear about the superiority of the intromission theory, though less settled on how multiplication of the species works between object and eye:

How þe siȝt is imade, olde men hadde diuers opunyouns … In on maner, by straite lynes vpon þe whiche þe liknes of þe þing þat is iseyne comeþ to þe siȝt. In þe oþir maner, vppon lynes reboundid aȝen when þe liknes of a þing comeþ þerfrom to a schewere and is ibend and reboundid fro þe schewere to þe sight. þe þridde maner, bi lynes þat buþ noȝt so ibend and rebounded but strecchiþ bytwene þe þing þat is isene and þe siȝt and passiþ noȝt alleyway forþriȝt, but blenchith somewhatir aside out of þe streiȝte wey.

It is clear, however, that the property governing vision is fire, as Trevisa states several times that, of all the senses, ‘þe siȝt is most sotil for þe kinde þerof is fury’. And while there is a distinct absence of any fiery darts, or species of any kind actively emanating from Emelye at this point, the motif was nevertheless on Chaucer’s mind elsewhere. The dénouement of the Miller’s Tale would appear to be very much concerned with the whole business of the dangerous gaze, and with theories of extramission and intromission. Absolon, lovesick hero that he is, is ‘wounded’ by his lady as he engages with her ‘nether ye’ (I.3852). As for the ‘nether eye’ of Nicholas, while it cannot readily produce optical darts, it
nevertheless manages at the crucial moment of encounter to produce a striking emission so forceful that Absolon is almost blinded:

>This Nicholas anon leet fle a fart  
>As greet as it had been a thonder-dent,  
>That with the strook he was almoost yblent. (I. 3806–8)

Absolon is, however, ready to return the ‘gaze’ this time, and with a little more firepower than the eye customarily produces as he thrusts a red-hot coulter at Nicholas. What happens next is a parody of the vital heat rushing to the centre of the brain described earlier; an inflammation of the estimatio described in all of the manuals on lovesickness:

>... the imaginative faculty is fixated on [the beloved] on account of the imbalanced complexion that is in its organ, for the vital spirit and innate heat are drawn to the middle ventricle [of the brain], where the estimative faculty functions intensely.  

Nicholas cries out, as is the custom of the lovestruck, and like so many lovers before him, wishes he were dead, his moans sounding like those of a madman (I. 3813f). In fact, all the symptoms we associate with Palamon and Arcite.

This comparison between the wounding gaze of love, and the literal wounding of the anus, extends beyond Chaucer’s tales. It is a motif that appears in the margins of a number of medieval manuscripts, where the gaze between a knight and lady shares the page with an image of a man being shot.

Figure 1. Lancelot du Lac. MS 229 fol. 39v. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
in the hindquarters. A notable example can be found in the richly illuminated *Queste del Saint Graal* now in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Perceval and the damsel look at one another in a very clear exchange of gazes; meanwhile, standing on the frame of their picture, a half-naked man has an arrow protruding from his rear, having been shot by an archer below him. The same manuscript contains a further example, Hector this time exchanging looks with a lady, then jousting within the miniature; while at the foot of the page an archer takes aim at the exposed buttocks of a male figure who points directly at the courtly exchanges above him. The correlation between the wounding darts of the eye and the more prosaic wounding of the ‘nether eye’ is not, therefore, exclusive to Chaucer.31

What is, perhaps, surprising is that the opening of the Knight’s Tale does not provide us with the kind of mutual exchange experienced by Perceval and Hector in the miniatures. It will come later when Emelye finally returns the gaze of Arcite at the tournament, but the process in which he is involved as he looks upon Emelye in the garden is a solo engagement with the back of her head, all driven by his own will and his own desire. For while it is correct in terms of medieval faculty psychology that the *estimatio* is being bombarded by images of the beloved received from the anterior cells, there is a crucial act of free will at the centre of this process that must be acknowledged. The brain is not simply besieged: the will can and should control what is viewed and what is then visualized, and judgement must be exercised in any act of seeing. Arcite himself is aware of this. He even tries to exploit it in his first ever argument with Palamon. When his cousin makes the classic claim, ‘I loved hire first’ (I.1146), Arcite’s response is to question Palamon’s judgement and the evidence of his eyes, concluding that he simply has not processed the information correctly. For while Palamon declares that he thinks he has seen Venus herself in the garden, Arcite maintains that Emelye is a flesh and blood creature, and that having seen her for what she is, his own love has the prior claim. It is interesting in the light of what later happens to Arcite that he should both claim and prove the superiority of his whole optical cerebral process at this point; because whether or not Palamon was wholly in earnest, we do know that Arcite at least starts off seeing properly, and only later descends into a self-indulgent and morbid fascination that he allows to take over his mind.

Sight, according to the philosophers, may be man’s most noble and dependable sense, but the will must exercise control in both initiating vision and monitoring the retention of images. To Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, the senses are mere apertures in the body, and if left openly receptive and unattended, the memory will ultimately become like an overflowing sewer.32 As Carolyn Collette points out,
Theories of medieval faculty psychology, stressing the creative nature of *phantasy*, simultaneously stressed the need to control that creative power, to make it subservient to reason.\(^3\)

She goes on to trace this tradition to Augustine in the early Middle Ages, the *De Trinitate* positing that there are three essential elements in vision: the object viewed; the actual vision; and the will. The proof of the supremacy of the will lies, according to Augustine, in the fact that the will not only initiates vision but can retrieve the likeness of objects from the memory, even in the absence of those objects.\(^4\) Certainly, during his years of exile from Emelye, it is the will of Arcite that obsessively retrieves her image from his memory. Such behaviour is entirely in keeping with the accounts of *amor hereos* found in the manuals on lovesickness. Arnald of Villanova, for example, tells us that

> Love of this kind (that is, of the kind known as *hereos*) is caused by vehement and assiduous thought … and because of the desire for this object the eager lover vigorously retains its impressed image as a phantasm, and consigning it to memory, thinks of the object continually.\(^5\)

The pre-eminence of the will in this whole process is stated elsewhere in Chaucer’s works too. In *Boece* he tells us that

> all that ever is knowe, it is rather comprehedid and knownen, nat aftir his strengthe and his nature, but aftir the faculte (that is to seyn, the power and the nature) of hem that knowen. (Book 5, prosa 4, 137–41)

Each step in the process from sense perception through to judgement is a building block, and there is an ultimate willed intelligence that must evaluate the perceived objects. Lady Philosophy is clear about this as she argues that even shellfish have the capacity of sensation that is the preserve of man’s *sensus communis*; as for the ‘ymaginacioun’, this is shared with the animals. To be a slave to either capacity is therefore to limit one’s true understanding. Each stage in the cerebral process leads man onwards, and the higher reasoning powers should not be enslaved to the lower capacities. The will should be guided by the *estimatio*, for, as Aquinas argues, ‘choice is neither just appetition nor just deliberation, but composed of both’.\(^6\) Ultimately the individual remains responsible for his or her own reaction to the objects perceived.

The Miller’s Tale provides a classic example of mankind unable to move beyond an engagement with the senses, as, like one of Lady Philosophy’s molluscs, an uncomprehending Absolon relies only on his sense of touch, and is left in confusion by his encounter with Alisoun:

> Abak he stirte, and thoughte it was amys,
For wel he wiste a womman hath no berd.
He felte a thyng al rough and long yherd. (I.3736–8)

As for the protagonists of the Reeve’s Tale, similarly groping around in the dark, both touch and vision fail them, as the miller’s wife not only gets into the wrong bed, but attacks the wrong man in the fracas that follows as she makes
decisions based entirely on the muddled evidence of her senses:

‘Allas!’ quod she, ‘I hadde almost myssoone;
I hadde almoost goon to the clerkes bed …
And forth she gooth til she the cradel fond.
She gropeth alwey forther with hir hond,
And foond the bed, and thoghte noght but good,
By cause that the cradel by it stood,
And nyste wher she was, for it was derk. (I.4218–25)

The literal darkness of the two fabliaux mirrors the state in which Arcite finds himself: a slave to his senses as he gazes upon Emelye. Even the Church Fathers, quick to condemn female sexuality, were aware that true responsibility lay not with the object but with the perceiver. In the words of John Chrysostom,

… for the sake of the brief pleasure of a glance, we sustain a kind of prolonged and continual torture … The beauty of a woman is the greatest snare. Or rather, NOT the beauty of a woman, but unchastened gazing.37

That this should be the case is further emphasized by the long interruption to the narrative occasioned by the ekphrastic description of the three temples that occurs in the middle of the tale. The object of a great deal of critical attention, these passages are much concerned with the gaze, the third in particular being the locus for a whole cluster of words to do with sight.38 In the course of the description the narrator ceases to maintain a critical distance and instead intrudes upon the tale, asserting repeatedly his own presence and status as an eye-witness rather than his protagonists: ‘I saugh’. Indeed, in the course of describing the third temple, he becomes an uneasy spectator of one of the most infamous acts of voyeurism in classical literature: the spying of Actaeon upon the bathing Diana. He stays, however, at one or two removes from this dangerous act, recounting instead how he saw Actaeon transformed into a hart because Actaeon, not he, had seen Diana naked. His need to emphasize this fact explains the halting and unnecessary distinction he feels compelled to make between Daphne and Diana. He may have seen one, but enticing as the thought of the other might be, he did not look upon her himself. He is, in the words of A. C. Spearing, ‘hiding his eyes’:39

Ther saugh I Dane, yturned til a tree –
I mene nat the goddesse Diane,
But Penneus doghter, which that highte Dane.
Ther saugh I Attheon an hert ymaked,
For vengeaunce that he saugh Diane al naked;
I saugh how that his houndes have hym caught
And freeten hym, for that they knewe hym naught …
Ther saugh I many another wonder storie,
The which me list nat drawen to memorie. (I.2062–74)

The narrative calls for a simple account of the static images on the temple walls, as the knights and Emelye saw them. What we get instead is a description in
which the narrator has become a participant, himself observing images that are somehow alive. There is an almost palpable sense of danger in these lines: looking is problematic; potentially fatal. But the wise man can exercise control, as the narrator does at the end of his account: there were many more things he saw but he doesn’t care to remember. Essentially, he can choose or not choose to summon images from his memory.

Arcite’s lack of imaginative control, on the other hand, is manifest: willingly embraced and self-confessed. Within fifty lines of his first setting eyes on Emelye he demands to know ‘who shal yeve a loverys any lawe?’ (I.1164). It is a line that comes from Boethius, from the section of the Consolation that deals with the immoderate love of earthly things. The moral tale told by Lady Philosophy is that of Orpheus and Eurydice, lovers famous for one of the most disastrously unrestrained gazes in literary history. A long tradition of commentary on Boethius explicitly associates Orpheus with the rational intellect and Euridice with desire, a tradition that Robert Henryson would later explicitly follow in his own version of the legend, Orpheus being the ‘paitre intellelyfe’ and his wife our ‘effectioun’. The allegory is thus of man’s reasoning, intellectual faculties being overcome by desire, and at the heart of the story is the act of looking that leads to loss and death. Indeed, Henryson goes so far as to say that it is ‘fantasy’ that moves us. The lover who fails to control himself is Orpheus, and it is with Orpheus that Arcite inadvertently equates himself here as Chaucer has him justify his actions using a quotation from Boece:

But what is he that may yeven a lawe to loverys? Love is a grettere lawe and a strengere to hymself thanne any lawe that men mai yyven. Allas! Whanne Orpheus and his wif weren almes at the termes of the nyght (that is to seyn, at the laste boundes of helle), Orpheus loked abakward on Erudyce his wif, and lost hire, and was deed. (Boece, III, m. 12, 52–9)

The ensuing comment upon this episode makes it clear that this backward glance is not to be interpreted as the comprehensible reflex of true love, but rather an indulgence in the desires of the flesh that ought to have been resisted at all costs:

This fable apertenith to yow alle, whosoever desireth or seketh to lede his thought into the sovereyn day, that is to seyn, to cleernesse of sovereyn good. For whoso that eve re be so overcomen that he ficche his eien into the put of helle, that is to seyn, whoso sette his thoughtes in erthly thinges, al that evere he hath drawen of the noble good celestial he lesith it, whanne he looketh the helles, that is to seyn, into lowe thinges of the erthe. (Boece, III, m. 12, 60–9)

This longing gaze upon earthly things, the sensuous look that brings death in the Orpheus legend, is re-enacted in the Knight’s Tale at the tournament. Triumphant in the contest, Arcite has won his lady and, like Orpheus, gazes upon the object of his desire. And, for the first time in the poem, Emelye returns the look. Her Italian counterpart, Emilia, had already stolen a few glances at the young knights who watched her from their prison; and, at the moment of Arcita’s victory there is nothing significant about her response: she simply spectates as he gallops around in triumph, there being no emphasis upon the
meeting of their eyes. Chaucer’s Emelye, on the other hand, had been oblivious to the young men watching her from their tower, never looking in their direction. Now, however, Arcite takes off his helmet ‘for to shewe his face’ (line 2677), rides the length of the stadium in order to look up at Emelye, and, for the first time, ‘she agayn hym caste a freundlich ye’ (line 2680). The effect is disastrous. Saturn unleashes a fury that startles Arcite’s horse, and the knight is mortally injured in the process.

At this point, the case for planetary determinism seems strong. This, after all, is what Arcite has been arguing from the beginning of the tale, urging Palamon to resign himself to their imprisonment which is, he declares, their fate, imposed upon them by the malign force of Saturn (I.1087–90). Saturn was in their birth charts; Saturn caused their imprisonment; and now Saturn has finished off the job by sending a fury to cause Arcite’s death. As for Palamon, he is equally guilty of declaring himself to be a victim of not just Saturn, but a whole pack of envious and despotic gods. In spite of this, of course, he one day simply decides to escape from prison and off he goes. The comparison with the hopelessly passive Arcite is nicely heightened by the fact that Palamon employs a handy vial of Theban opium to subdue his guards, Theban opium being a well-known treatment for lovesickness. Rather than being incapacitated by love, love not only stirs him to action but provides the very means for his escape. It would seem that there is no excuse for accepting imprisonment, literal or metaphorical, and that the true manacles here are of the mind-forged variety.

Certainly, the deities to whom the knights pray are not gods but planets, and Chaucer takes pains to remind us of this fact at crucial points in the narrative. At his potentially most anthropomorphic moment, Saturn himself describes his actions as those of an orbiting sphere, not as those of a god unleashing his anger on a whim. Even as he asserts his strength to Venus, he is in fact acknowledging his limits, and his defined position as the outermost planet with a ‘cours … so wyde for to turne’ (line 2454). While planetary influence might be regarded as a legitimate force, it cannot and should not be considered to be deterministic: our future is not written in the stars. That purveyor of homely wisdom, John the Carpenter, makes this clear in the Miller’s Tale, providing the cautionary example of the clerk who

... walked in the feeldes for to prye
Upon the sterres, what ther sholde bifalle,
Til he was in a marle-pit yfalle;
He saugh nat that. (I.3458–61)

And yet, confronted with the possibility of a Second Flood, this clear-sightedness deserts him and he can think only of his love for Alison; willingly confining himself in his ludicrous kneading tub boat, in order to preserve himself and his ‘honey dear’. Blinded, like Arcite, by his passion, he is duped by Nicholas’s astrological nonsense, and is consequently, and significantly, derided by his neighbours for his ‘fantasye’ (line 3840). His fabliau world is, by definition, more mundane than that of Arcite, but John too is motivated by love, and his
‘fantasye’ links him directly to Arcite through the shared process of the ‘celle fantastik’. No one, of course, believes that the Carpenter has anyone to blame but himself, and the Miller’s Tale is one of crystal clear causality: each element leading obviously to the next and resulting in the final cry of ‘Help! Water! Water! Help’ (I.3815) that brings John crashing to the ground. Ludicrous as events may seem, there is a supreme logic of cause and effect that makes the world entirely comprehensible, and the responsibility borne by each of the characters manifestly clear. It is the Miller’s comment upon all the professed determinism of the Knight’s Tale, and the catalyst is a parody of the ‘look’ that results in Arcite’s literal downfall, with Nicholas exposing his ‘nether eye’ to the fiery intromission of Absolon’s response. When John the Carpenter cuts the ropes of his ‘ark’ on hearing Nicholas scream ‘water!’ he is the victim of his own misinterpretation of events: having envisaged himself as the new Noah, such a cry could mean only one thing to him, and he consequently bears the scars of his error. Similarly, the wife of the Reeve’s Tale, groping around in the darkness of her room, has her own certainties: the cradle must be at the foot of her bed, and the man in that bed must therefore be her husband.

Cause and effect is not quite so clear in the Knight’s Tale, largely because of the celestial machinery that results in the appearance of the fury. But even the infernal monster can be explained in terms of the science that Chaucer has been at pains to set up in this tale. After all, there are very few monsters to be found anywhere in Chaucer’s work, and the changes to the source material move us away from a straightforward demon to something requiring more careful interpretation. In Boccaccio’s text the fury is summoned by the goddess Venus, and everyone in the arena senses it and trembles in fear. In Chaucer’s version, the fury appears at the instigation of a notably astrological Saturn (I.2462), and it goes completely unnoticed by everyone and everything in the amphitheatre, except Arcite’s horse, which rears in terror. The changes, as Edward Schweitzer has argued, move the narrative away from a deterministic reading and offer instead a fury of ‘psychological significance’. The disease of amor heros from which Arcite suffers, described so carefully by Chaucer in the early part of the tale, is, quite simply, a furia in its own right:

In fact, heros is called amor furiosus and a furia by Arnald of Villanova … Closer still to Chaucer’s ‘furie infernal’, in a tradition which goes back to Isidore’s Etymologies, Arnald explains mania, to which Chaucer likened Arcite’s malady in Thebes (1374), by deriving it from Manes: ‘mania quasi manium: id est, deorum infernalium insania’. And … the physician Valescus of Tarenta says flatly, ‘Mania etiam dicitur quaedam furia infernalis.’

Thus, lovesickness is an infernal fury according to all the greatest medical experts. To these we can add the practical experience of the Franklin’s Aurelius, a quintessential sufferer of lovesickness, who, we are told, languishes ‘as a furye dooth in helle’ (V.950), in a ‘torment furyus’ (V.1101); there is also the peregrine falcon of the Squire’s Tale, whose love-sick swooning, self-laceration, shrieking, and weeping is summed up by Canacee as a ‘furial pyne of helle’ (V.448).
Arcite’s ‘fury’ belongs, therefore, to a long line of furious torment, endured by
the most extreme of all Chaucer’s lovesick heroes and heroines. And, if Arcite
has been suffering from such a furia from the moment he allowed himself to
focus all his desires on Emelye, it is not surprising that disaster should ensue
when they exchange their first, all important, look. Indeed, as Schweitzer again
notes, that it should be his horse that responds to the presence of the fury is
highly significant.46

The horse and rider analogy is used extensively from antiquity onwards to
explain the difficult relationship between man’s intellect and his physical desires
or passions. As a symbol it is found in both art and literature, and was popular
throughout the Middle Ages. Chaucer makes reference to it many times in his
work, including several instances in the First Fragment of the Canterbury Tales.
The Miller’s Alisoun, the epitome of sexual vitality, is twice described as a colt
in the space of only twenty lines, the second occasion being a very evocative
description of her playfully struggling in the arms of Nicholas:

And she sproong as a colt dooth in the trave,
And with hir heed she wryed faste awey. (I.3282f.)

Examples from the Reeve’s Tale are even more explicit. The careful description
of the miller unharnessing the clerks’ horse and setting it loose amongst the
mares is a case of literal unbridled lust:

He strepeth of the brydel right anon.
And whan the hors was laus, he gynneth gon
Toward the fen, ther wilde mares renne,
And forth with ‘wehee,’ thrugh thikke and thrugh thenne. (I.4063–6)

‘Wehee’ is nicely glossed by J. A. W. Bennett as ‘the whinny of sexual desire’, and
the incident is a prelude to the equine description of the clerk’s own lovemaking:
‘He priketh harde and depe as he were mad’ (I.4231). Such equine metaphors are
so commonplace in the context of lovers that the opening lines of the De arte
boneste amandi of Andreas Capellanus admonish the newly lovestruck Walter in
these terms: ‘You claim … you do not know how to manage your horse’s reins
properly and you cannot find any cure for yourself.’47 The lovesick young man
is quite simply galloping out of control. In Arcite’s case this is both literal and
psychologically significant. He has failed throughout to control his passions, and
as he removes his helmet and gallops to the far end of the stadium, it is clear
that he is completely fixated on Emelye, to the exclusion of all else. In essence,
nothing has changed for Arcite: he is acting as he has always done, and instead
of considering his position – the dangers of any stadium, the feelings of those
around him, the control of his mount – he focuses solely on Emelye and his
all-consuming desire to reach her.

This is the response to V. A. Kolve’s assertion that, ‘no explanation can be
offered of how the stars can cause all this and yet leave man responsible for his
acts’.48 Arcite is not under the control of an astral deity, but his refusal to proceed
rationally makes him vulnerable to planetary activity. The planets influence the
physical world, and anything that consists of matter will feel their effects. Plants, animals, and the human body are all subject to the movement of the stars by virtue of the fact that they are physical things in a physical world. But the human will, being non corporeal, is not directly influenced by astral activity. Certainly, the will and the body are connected, but the former is not compelled to action by the latter. Aquinas reinforces this argument using the example of the man who lights a fire because he is cold:

The motions of our bodies can be resolved into the motion of the heavenly bodies in that our organic dispositions are somehow subject to their influence, also in that the sensitive appetite is changed by them, and furthermore in that external bodies are moved in accordance with their movements. On their conjunction, then, the will may begin to will or not to will, thus when it grows cold a man may decide to make a fire. This motion of will, however, arises from the side of the object, not from that of the subject by some interior impulse.49

The difference between the physical self and the will is emphasized by Chaucer in the distinction between Arcite and his horse. As stated earlier, only the animal, the lesser creature, sees the fury that appears in the arena through Saturn’s influence. By changing the situation that he found in his source – in which Arcite and all those in the arena see the monster – Chaucer brings home to us the relationship between the planets, the body, and the will. The planets influence physical things. In this case they influence the animal upon which Arcite rides and they also lay open to Arcite the possibility of succumbing to the furia of lovesickness. The horse, being a horse, simply bolts, but man’s rational faculties place him above the animals and able to exert his will. As Aquinas again says, the will remains independent and able to choose its course:

Now the will does not necessarily follow the direction of the lower desires, for although the irascible and concupiscible parts have some force in directing the will, it nevertheless remains within the will’s power to follow the passions or go against them.50

Man is not purely animal and possesses powers that lift him above the instinctual responses of the beasts. He exists beyond the state in which the lamb fears the wolf, and the lion stalks the antelope. In simple terms, he has free will. For Arcite, no matter what he might claim to the contrary, his pursuit of Emelye is a choice. Saturn may have been in his birth chart, and lovesickness may have been considered a Saturnine disease, but natural predisposition is not predetermination:

Consequently there is nothing to prevent us holding that impressions from heavenly bodies render some people more prompt to anger than others, or to concupiscence, or to some such emotion. Indeed, they are such by temperamental constitution. Most men follow their passions; only the wise resist … The wise man dominates the stars; he checks their effects by withstanding their passions, for he is free and not under the sway of heavenly bodies.51

Arcite is not wise. The ‘sworn-brothers’ appear to share a horoscope, and the
influence of Saturn applies to both of them equally (l.1087–90). Only Arcite is completely overcome by lovesickness, because only Arcite denies his own freedom and actively permits his body to be overcome. In the course of several years he moves from being in love, to succumbing to psychological illness, partly because Saturn predisposes him to love-melancholy, but mostly because he chooses to obsess about Emelye, to the neglect of all else. Saturn is not, therefore, a deus ex machina, but rather part of what Arcite is in scientific terms.

The use of a pantheon of planetary gods to show the workings of a disease is found elsewhere in medieval literature. Robert Henryson was perhaps inspired by the Knight’s Tale when he gathered the celestial bodies to pronounce judgement in his Testament of Cresseid. Lamenting the stains upon Cresseid’s honour, the narrator chastises her for the abuse of her body, that she should

... be with fleschelie lust sa maculait,
And go amang the Greikis air and lait,
Sa gigotlike, takand thy foull plesance!52

Like Arcite, Cresseid develops a ‘lover’s malady’: she contracts leprosy, widely thought to be a sexual disease in the Middle Ages. Significantly, it is described in terms of the intervention of planetary deities, similar to that found in Chaucer’s poem. The two gods appointed to punish Cresseid are Saturn (once again) and the Moon. These are clearly not random choices.53 Leprosy, like amor heros, was considered a melancholic disease, and as such was characterized by an excess of coldness and dryness. Henryson describes how the lunar Cynthia sentences Cresseid to a deprivation of bodily heat, while an icicle-laden Saturn lays a ‘frostie’ wand upon her, and signals the beginning of the physiological process of leprosy. Henryson takes pains to emphasize that the celestial court is made up of planets, and that the disease to which they sentence Cresseid is not some divine whim, but rather the logical result of her own behaviour. Weakened by her promiscuity, a body that was used to fulfil all the appetite ‘and mair’ of the Greeks, she is susceptible to Saturnine leprosy, and succumbs.

The same can be said of Arcite. The cold dryness of Saturn that overcame the weakened body of Cresseid overcomes him too, though in his case the vulnerable area is his mind. While Cresseid had abused her body, allowing it to be used by the Greek camp; Arcite’s abuse had been of his own mind, bombarding it with images of Emelye, refusing to think of anything but Emelye, until Emelye was a literal fixation. It is easy enough to accept, as critics have argued, that Saturn’s sending of a ‘furie infernal’ to startle Arcite’s horse is ‘an anthropomorphic representation of a cosmological phenomenon’.54 It is only one small step further to realize that what is important about these cosmological phenomena is their influence upon the bodies and minds of those who make themselves vulnerable to that influence. It is, to a large extent, an anthropomorphic representation of a psychological phenomenon. We are not flies to a wanton group of Olympian gods; we are not even flies to a wanton group of planets. What the Knight’s Tale does is explore the psyche: its susceptibility to illness, the role of the imagination and will, and the influence upon the mind of the
world it inhabits. While planetary influence in the tale is undeniable, Chaucer's scientifically precise emphasis on medical cause and effect forces us to think beyond astrology by allowing us to glimpse not just the mind, but the brain of Arcite, and compelling us to examine the whole imaginative process in which he engages. In the end, the text demands that we consider Arcite not as a victim of the malign planets but rather in terms of his own misapplication of the imaginative force.

As Arcite gazes upon Emelye in victory, and she returns his gaze encouragingly, the narrator feels compelled to remark: ‘For wommen, as to spoken in commune, Thei folwen alle the favour of Fortune’ (I.2681 f.). But these lines are missing from most of the authoritative manuscripts, and it is likely that the intention was to remove them. It seems that, while references to women being as fickle as fortune are always tempting, Chaucer ultimately had no desire to distract his audience from the fact that the responsibility for what happens next lies with Arcite. For years, he had obsessed about Emelye, his thoughts had been only of Emelye, and ultimately he dies of imagination, the impression of her having gone so deep that he became incapable of rational judgement, incapable of any kind of control.

As for Nicholas and Absolon, their devotion to Alisoun is, not surprisingly, less profound, and they can soon be cured of their lovesickness. Further, they can be cured in one of the classic ways described in the treatises on amor heros. If the distractions of wine, other women, and song do not do the trick, then aversion therapy might be required. The misdirected kiss accomplishes this for Absolon, and the crucial correspondence between the Knight’s Tale and Miller’s Tale is emphasized once again by a nice verbal echo. When Arcite falls from his horse, the text tells us that everyone expected ‘he shal been heeled of his maladye’ (line 2706). But, of course, he is not. He is not cured of his lovesickness and his wounds do not heal. Absolon, on the other hand, is cured:

His hoote love was coold and al yqueynt;  
For fro that tyme that he hadde kist hir ers,  
Of paramours he sette nat a kers;  
For he was heeled of his maladie. (lines 3754–7)

The various fantasies of the Miller’s Tale come crashing down (in John’s case, literally) in a dénouement that reintroduces the protagonists to reality. In the case of Nicholas and John the Carpenter, however, it is physical pain that restores them to their senses. While Arnald of Villanova would not have advised such methods, Gerard of Solo suggests beating recalcitrant patients with a belt, while Bernard of Gordon advises whipping them ‘until they begin to stink’. Certainly, the fracas that ends the Reeve’s Tale clears up the confusion in which the ‘toty’ headed protagonists find themselves (I.4253). A parody in miniature of the effect of Emelye upon Arcite, the ‘lady’ in this tale takes aim at her husband’s skull, gleaming in the real darkness of her bedroom, and delivers a hefty blow. Of course, it is unintentional, but like almost all the protagonists in the first three Canterbury Tales, she is incapable of seeing things for what they really are, and
Chaucer describes the process by which the senses and imagination conspire to allow two and two to make five:

For at an hole in shoon the moone bright,
   And by that light she saugh hem bothe two,
   But sikerly she nyste who was who,
   But as she saugh a whir thyng in hir ye.
   And whan she gan this white thyng espuye,
   She wende the clerk hadde wered a volupeer,
   And with the staf she drow ay neer and neer,
   And wende han hit this Aleyn at the fulle,
   And smoot the millere on the pyled skulle. (I.4298–306)

As Lady Philsophy says, sense perception we share with shellfi sh; our power to respond we share with the beasts. Only human beings possess reason. This is the system she describes to Boethius, and she is aware that the relationship between the three can be difficult. The way forward, however, is clear, for man's reason must control the inferior forces, encompassing as it does the capacities of the lower powers:

… thilke knowynge is more worth than thise oothre, syn it knoweth by his proper nature nat oonly his subget … but it knoweth the subjectz of  alle othre knowynges;
… in this manere stryvynge, thanne, we that han strengthe of  resonynge and of ymagynyng and of  wit, … we scholde rather preise the cause of  resoun. (Boece V.5, 37–73)

The dangers of the imaginative process are evident in all three tales, and it is not surprising, therefore, that amidst the lying, profanity, ‘swyving’, and injury of the Miller’s Tale, the only act held up for ridicule in the end is the twice repeated ‘fantasie’ of John the Carpenter. Arcite, of course, is dead, but the Knight narrator's studied lack of imaginative engagement with this fact is in itself interesting. For Boccaccio the death of Arcite had been an opportunity to describe his ascent to the heavens; the ending that Chaucer gives Troilus. Faced with that possibility here, however, the narrative closes down. The Knight simply refuses to engage his own imagination in this way:

His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther,
   As I cam nevère, I kan nat tellen wher.
   Therfore I stynte; I nam no divinistre. (I.2809–11)

It is a strangely bald assertion, but entirely in keeping with a narrator who had earlier covered his eyes before a naked Diana and refused to imagine her. His, after all, is a tale about the misuse of the imaginative faculty, a tale in which the misapplication of the will, and the obsessive focus on earthly things, leads to suffering and death. But the Knight’s reaction is a disappointing one. It is a withdrawal in the face of a power that he fears: for if Arcite’s fault had been an unreasonable response to the powers of the imagination then the Knight is guilty of a more prosaic version of the same crime. He will engage only with what he knows. He will not be guilty of any kind of fantasy but nor will he reach beyond
earthly things. And yet this in itself is blatantly at odds with the message offered to Boethius. In a passage that heaps terms of reaching and aspiration on top of one another until ‘man heveth heyest his heie heved, and stondith light with his upryght body’ (Boece V.5, 16–18), Lady Philosophy encourages man to aspire beyond the level of the beasts, and raise his thoughts to heaven. Arcite chose unwisely, directing his thoughts to an earthly creature, mistakenly judging her to be the greatest good. The Knight will not engage in Arcite’s type of fantasy, but his refusal even to contemplate what might await us beyond death is a failure of the imagination in its own right. The proper response to the flights of fancy that ultimately caused the death of Arcite is not to shut down the imaginative faculty and refuse to engage in the process at all; rather one must proceed with sound judgement, appreciating the proper value of things, and engaging the sensitive and imaginative faculties while keeping them subservient to reason. This, after all, is what Boethius teaches us, the final words of Boece invoking an image of perfect vision, and perfect reason, our lives being enacted ‘byforn the eyen of the juge that seeth and demeth alle thinges’ (V.6, 309f).

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NOTES

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1 An early survey of attempts to differentiate between the two knights can be found in Charles Muscatine’s classic article ‘Form, texture, and meaning in Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale’, PMLA, 65 (1950), 911–29 (pp. 911f). A representative and more up-to-date account can be found in Lee Patterson, Chaucer and the Subject of History (Madison, Wis., 1991), p. 205.

2 Patterson, Chaucer, p. 205.

3 The same claim for a scientific distinction between the two knights is put forward by Edward C. Schweitzer, ‘Fate and freedom in The Knight’s Tale’, Studies in the Age of Chaucer, 3 (1981), 13–45.


5 Geoffrey Chaucer, the Knight’s Tale, in The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, Mass., 1987). All further quotations of Chaucer’s works are from this edition.

6 The Viaticum is included in Alexander Neckham’s list of works studied at Paris at the end of the twelfth century. Early Cambridge records were destroyed by fire in 1381 but the Viaticum is listed in subsequent statutes. See Mary Frances Wack, Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and its Commentaries (Philadelphia, Pa, 1990), pp. 47f. Wack also gives an account of the fourteenth-century will of Simon Bredon, a physician and Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, who was anxious that his copy of the Viaticum should be passed on to a medical practitioner who did not already own one.


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11 Ibid., p. 525.
12 Giovanni Boccaccio, Teseida delle nozze d’Emilia, ed. Aurelio Roncaglia, 3 vols (Bari, 1941), III.10–14, pp. 80f.
Boccaccio, Teseida, III.20, 21, 73, 79. The fifth reference is not explicitly to his cor, but rather to the alma (III.76), though it appears to be functioning in the same way. Palemone makes only two direct references to his own heart (III.22, 23).
17 Avicenna also provides a shorter account of these mental processes in his Canon of Medicine. See Michael R. McVaugh, Arnaldi de Villanova Opera medica omnia (Barcelona, 1985), III, 19–21.
18 Avicenna, Liber de anima seu Sextus de naturalibus, ed. Simone van Riet (Leiden, 1968), IV, i–iii. For a detailed account of Avicenna’s beliefs about the cells of the brain, see E. Ruth Harvey, The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (London, 1975), pp. 43–6. Further discussion, particularly of Avicenna’s conception of the imagination, can be found in Michelle Karnes, Imagination, Meditation and Cognition in the Middle Ages (Chicago, Ill., 2011), pp. 41–5.
20 For the interesting argument that the Knight’s Tale is itself structured to aid the memory, see Mary Carruthers, ‘Seeing things: locational memory in Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale’, in Art and Context in Late Medieval English Narrative: Essays in Honor of Robert Worth Frank Jr, ed. Robert R. Edwards (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 93–106.
23 Gerard of Berry, Glosses on the Viaticum, in Wack, Lovesickness, pp. 198f.: ‘Causa ergo huius passionis est error uirtutis estimatiue … Estimatiua ergo … imperat imaginationi ut defixum habeat intuitum in tali persona. Ymaginatiua uero concupiscibil, unde concupiscibilis hoc solum concupiscit, quia sicut concupiscibilis ymaginatiue obedit, ita ymaginatiua estimatiue, ad cuius imperium cetera inclinantur ad personam quam estimatiua iudicat esse conuenientem, licet non sit.’
24 The vocabulary of command and governance used here is consistent with that used by both Avicenna and Gerard of Berry. See Wack, Lovesickness, pp. 58f.
27 See Collette, Species, pp. 13–20. The extramission theory was disputed by Avicenna who argued that if beams of light emanated from the eyes then human beings would be much better at seeing in the dark. See David C. Lindberg, Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler (Chicago, Ill., 1976), pp. 51f.
Gerard of Berry, ed. Wack, Lovesickness, p. 200: ‘Ymaginatiua … uirtus fititur circa illud propter malam complexionem … quae est in suo organo, quia ad medium concauitatem ubi est estimatiua trabuntur spiritus et calor innatus ubi estimatiua fortiter operatur.’


Collette, Species, p. 21.


McVaugh, Arnald de Villanova, pp. 46f.: ‘amor talis (videlicet qui dicitur hereos) est vehemens et assidua cogitatio … [et] quod propter hoc rei desiderium vehemens eis formam impressam fantastice fortiter retinet et memoriam faciendo de re continue recordatur.’

St Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, ed. Thomas Gilby (London, 1970), 122ae, 13, 1, pp. 124f.: ‘electio neque est appetitus secundum seipsam, neque consilium solum, sed ex his aliquod compositum.’


Spearing, The Medieval Poet as Voyeur, p. 166.


Makars, ed. Tasioulas, p. 178 line 432.

For opium as a cure for lovesickness, see Wack, Lovesickness, pp. 89f.


Ibid.

Schweitzer sees it as significant that Arcite should be thrown forward, ‘emblematically upside down’: ibid.


Aquinas, Summa, 122ae, 9, 5, pp. 76–9: ‘Ad secundum dicendum quod motus corporales humani reducuntur in motum coelestis corporis sicut in causam, inquantum ipsa dispositio organorum congrua est ad motum alqualiter ex impressione coelestium corporum; et inquantum etiam appetitus sensitivus commovetur ex impressione coelestium corporum; et ulterius inquantum corpora exteriora moventur secundum motum coelestium corporum , ex quorum concursu voluntas incipid aliquid velle, sicut adveniente frigore incipit aliquis velle facere ignem. Sed ista motio voluntatis est ex parte objecti exterioris praesentati, non ex parte interioris instintus.’

Aquinas, Summa, 1a, 115, 5, pp. 106f.: ‘Sed voluntas non ex necessitate sequitur inclinationem appetitus inferioris, licent enim passiones quae sunt in irascibili et
concupiscibili, habeant quandam vim ad inclinandam voluntatem; tamen in potestate voluntatis remanet sequi passiones vel eas refutare.’

Aquinas, Summa, 1a2ae, 9, 5, pp. 78f.: ‘Unde nihil prohibet ex impressione corporum coelestium aliquos esse habiles ad irascendum vel ad concupiscendum, vel ad aliquam hujusmodi passionem: sicut ex complexione naturali plures hominum sequuntur passiones, quibus soli sapientes resistunt … sapiens dominator astrarum, scilicet quia resistens passionibus impedit per voluntatem liberam et nequaquam motui coelesti subjectam, hujusmodi coelestium corporum effectus.’

Makars, ed. Tasioulas, p. 192, lines 81–3.

For the link between Saturn, the moon, and leprosy, see Johnstone Parr, ‘Cresseid’s leprosy again’, Modern Language Notes, 60 (1945), 487–91.


Wack, Lovesickness, p. 142.

This is, indeed, an important concern that extends beyond the First Fragment. For a study of vision and man’s imperfect apprehension of his world in the Tale of Melibee and the Merchant’s Tale, see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory (Toronto, 2004), pp. 211–33.