

## POETRY AS CONJURING ACT: THE *FRANKLIN'S TALE* AND *THE TEMPEST*

by Sherron Knopp

And whan this maister that this magyk wroughte  
Saught it was tyme, he clapte his handes two,  
And farewel! Al oure revel was ago.

(*Franklin's Tale* V 1202–4)

Our revels now are ended. These our actors  
(As I foretold you) were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air.

(*The Tempest* 4.1.148–50)

Shakespeare scholars have pointed out since 1978 that the verbal echo of revels ending that links *The Tempest* to the *Franklin's Tale* extends beyond superficial coincidence to include striking similarities of plot, characters, and themes. R. Ann Thompson, in the first book-length study of Chaucer's influence on Shakespeare, saw enough similarity between the magic show in the *Franklin's Tale* and Prospero's wedding masque to argue for definite Chaucerian influence.<sup>1</sup> Apparently unaware of Thompson's argument, John Simons made a similar case for a connection between the two works in 1985: in both, a magician dispels spirits that he "has conjured up for the delight of his audience"; in both, the line about revels ending is followed by a passage that reinforces the fact that "the 'actors' are merely spirits." To these parallels, he added two larger ones: magic is intended to prevent a shipwreck in the *Franklin's Tale*, while it causes a shipwreck in *The Tempest*; magic is used to further adulterous desire in the *Franklin's Tale*, while it is used to protect chastity in *The Tempest*.<sup>2</sup> Two years before Simons's article, Richard Hillman had already in fact claimed the *Franklin's Tale* as "a major source" for *The Tempest*.<sup>3</sup> For Hillman, the central magic of the *Franklin's Tale* is "nearly a mirror-image of Prospero's great trick," and Dorigen's tearful complaint about the rocks bears striking resemblance to Miranda's distress over the storm.<sup>4</sup> Hillman sees strong parallels not just between the magic show in Orléans and Prospero's wed-

ding masque, but between the two magicians and their active involvement in themes of suffering, release, and redemption. Most recently Lewis Walker has used Hillman's analysis as a starting point for "an even richer and more detailed account of the relationship" between the two works.<sup>5</sup>

That Shakespeare drew on Chaucer for *The Tempest* seems no longer a matter requiring proof. Yet the parallels in plot, characters, and theme that Shakespeare scholars have pointed out do not really illuminate the art of either poet, much less do they suggest the kind of profound creative conversation that (for example) medievalists routinely assume between Chaucer and Boccaccio in *Troilus and Criseyde*, or between Chaucer and Dante in the *House of Fame*—relationships in which specific parallels are the *least* interesting and informative component. As Dorothy Bethurum Loomis has observed:

That Shakespeare read [Chaucer] and used him is indubitable, but his real influence is better judged by similarities in tone and situation . . . than by verbal parallels here and there. . . . It must be recognised, too, that the alchemy of a genius like Shakespeare's transmutes whatever it uses to another metal entirely, so that it is difficult to speak of "influence" in any normal sense.<sup>6</sup>

Arguments about such relationships are, of course, less easy to document, and may seem always charged with an aura of imaginative speculation, but that is the limb I intend to walk out on in this paper, as I will argue not against the similarities between the *Franklin's Tale* and *The Tempest* that Shakespeare scholars have pointed out since 1978, but beyond them, to a shared engagement on the part of both poets with the status of poetry as illusion and conjuring act. For reasons that stretch back through Augustine to Plato, this is a troubled status for both poets. On the one hand, the projections of poetry, like those of magic, dazzle with an immediacy that feels compellingly real and potentially transformative. On the other hand, the illusions they rely on are fraudulent and cause for damnation.

While it is a cliché in Shakespeare criticism to see Prospero as a stand-in for Shakespeare the artist, Chaucerians almost without exception resist identifying the clerk magician of Orléans with the medieval poet. "Chaucer means to define himself against this figure," V. A. Kolve writes, to prove himself "no trafficker in appearances-for-their-own-sake, no vendor of easy fantasies, no lousy juggler, no clerk of Orléans."<sup>7</sup> The identification of literary art with illusion has deep roots in the Platonic/Augustinian poetic theory of the Middle Ages, and it is no accident that the Franklin's relentless indictments of magic echo medieval indictments of poetry:

swich folye  
 As in oure dayes is nat worth a flye—  
 For hooly chirches feith in oure bileve  
 Ne suffreth noon illusioun us to greve.

(V 1131–34).<sup>8</sup>

Augustine's indictment of Virgil's *Aeneid* in Book 1 of the *Confessions* provides the terms for such indictments: the wanderings of Aeneas (*errores*) are literally untrue, portrayed in fictions that are empty illusions (*figmenta vana, spectaculum vanitatis*), and the pleasure they produce is madness (*dementia*).<sup>9</sup> The voice that caught Shakespeare's ear in the *Franklin's Tale*, however, is one that, for an instant, literally *revels* in the "sighte merveilous" (V 1206) that the magician conjures in Orléans. Derek Pearsall stands alone among Chaucerians when he calls the magic show "an almost gratuitous exhibition of Chaucer's delight in his own poetic powers" and the clerk magician "an early Prospero," but his remark is only a passing comment.<sup>10</sup> I want to pursue the implications of this remark, to argue that Shakespeare's response to the *Franklin's Tale*—and to the *Canterbury Tales* more broadly—extends, as I have said, beyond superficial similarities to a profound shared engagement with issues of poetic theory. Although the clerk magician is only a minor figure in the *Franklin's Tale*, Hillman is right in his claim that "his importance is easy to undervalue."<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare recognizes his importance accurately when he associates Prospero with him in the lines about revels ending, and, in so doing, Shakespeare arguably points *us* towards a more early modern Chaucer than contemporary scholarship has yet caught up with.

This association is not immediately apparent. The storm Prospero conjures at the beginning of *The Tempest* is a spectacular display of both the magician's art and the poet's. For the characters on the ship, it is excruciatingly real and absolutely terrifying. For the audience watching in the theater—until Miranda surmises at the beginning of the next scene that it is only her father's "art"—it is real as the storm in *King Lear* is real, real as Bottom's inept mechanical representations of lion and moonshine in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are not. Even when Miranda guesses that the storm is illusory, it continues to move her. And her very recognition bolsters the illusion that she herself is not illusory. The clerk's effort to conjure the sea in Chaucer's tale could not be more different. The brother who directs Aurelius to magic in the first place seems to expect only some kind of mechanical stage illusion, "Swiche as thise subtil tregetoures pleye" (V 1141):

For ofte at feestes have I wel herd seye  
 That tregetours withinne an halle large

Have maad come in a water and a barge,  
 And in the halle rowen up and down.  
 Somtyme hath semed come a grym leoun;  
 .....  
 Somtyme a castel, al of lym and stoon.

(V 1142–46, 1149)

The remarkable capabilities of stage technology, both medieval and early modern, have been abundantly documented, and a number of scholars look no further for an explanation of what happens to Chaucer's rocks.<sup>12</sup> It is worth pointing out that Shakespeare's contemporary John Dee (1527–1608) first began to acquire the notoriety that made him one of the most famous conjurers of the sixteenth century when he terrified audiences as a student at Cambridge with an elaborate mechanical flying beetle in a production of Aristophanes' *Peace*.<sup>13</sup> Dee's learned bookishness provides a real-life example of the tradition to which both Prospero and Chaucer's clerk belong. Among his accomplishments, Dee was a distinguished philosopher, scientist, mathematician, navigational expert, cartographer, advisor to Queen Elizabeth, acquaintance of Philip Sidney, and owner of the largest library in sixteenth-century England.

I want to say that Prospero's storm is *not* a stage trick, but of course that is precisely what it is for the audience watching in the theater as Shakespeare, like the Franklin's *tregetoures*, makes "withinne an halle large / . . . come in a water and a barge." (And is it only coincidence that Bottom and Quince attempt the "grym leoun" and the wall, if not castle, "al of lym and stoon"?) Prospero shows off his own mastery of stage technology in the banquet/Harpy scene he produces for the guilty courtiers. The prominence of stage directions, elsewhere so sparse in Shakespeare,<sup>14</sup> flags the theatricality of the "magic" being performed:

*Solemn and strange music; and PROSPER on the top, invisible.* (s.d. 3.3.17)

*Enter several strange SHAPES, bringing in a banquet; and dance about it with gentle actions of salutations; and inviting the King, etc., to eat, they depart.* (s.d. 3.3.19)

*Thunder and lightning. Enter ARIEL, like a harpy, claps his wings upon the table, and with a quaint device the banquet vanishes.* (s.d. 3.3.52)

*He vanishes in thunder; then, to soft music, enter the SHAPES again, and dance, with mocks and mows, and carrying out the table.* (s.d. 3.3.82)

The effect is impressive. Sebastian embraces the reality of unicorns and the phoenix while Antonio proclaims the truth of travelers' tales, and the

“Harpy’s” pronouncement of “Ling’ring perdition” (3.3.77) drives Alonso to suicidal despair. Although one critic links the banquet/Harpy scene and the wedding masque to the elevation of imagination in the neoplatonic philosophy of Ficino, calling them “the two most important magical actions” Prospero performs,<sup>15</sup> others see the performance as a “bravura display of hocus pocus” borrowed from the repertoire of street-corner illusionists.<sup>16</sup> Indeed the famous sixteenth-century magician Cornelius Agrippa tells of a popular “jugler” named Pasetes whose trademark specialty was making banquets disappear: he “was wonte to shewe to straungers a very sumptuose banquet, and when it pleased him to cause it vanishe awaie, all they whiche sate at the table beinge disapointed both of meate and drinke.”<sup>17</sup> Stage technology and popular street juggling are not in Prospero’s estimation a lesser magic. “My high charms work” (3.3.88), he gloats after Ariel’s performance.

Aurelius’s brother realizes in the *Franklin’s Tale*, however, in vague allusions to “moones mansions” or “oother magyk natureel” (V 1154, 1155), that the clerk will need more than stage props to make the rocks disappear. The Franklin himself attributes the clerk’s feat entirely to science or pseudo-science, giving him thirty-five lines and several days of intricate astrological calculations. Again, some critics are impressed, but those who know enough to decipher the calculations come up baffled. Chauncey Wood’s proposal that the clerk goes through the motions of elaborate calculations simply to buy time as he waits for a high tide that he knows from astrology is coming anyway is perhaps the most popular theory.<sup>18</sup> But the Franklin undercuts all rational explanation in the end by reducing everything to “illusioun” anyway (V 1264): “apparence or jogelrye” (V 1265), “supersticious cursednesse” (V 1272), “swiche illusiouns and swiche meschaunces / As hethen folk useden in thilke dayes” (V 1292–93). His concluding comment, that “thurgh his magik, for a wyke or tweye, / It semed that alle the rokkes were awaye” (1295–96), sabotages the very event his story needs to make it work.

In larger terms the Franklin’s distaste for magic is a distaste for fiction. By relentlessly undermining the clerk’s feat, the Franklin makes his characters look fatuous for participating in the strained plot that revolves around it, and because he never for a moment allows his audience to be taken in by the illusion, he positions them to share his contempt for magic as sham. Shakespeare also distances his audience from his characters by focusing on Prospero’s illusion-making. Alonso grieves over a son we know is not dead, Ferdinand labors to win the hand of a woman we know Prospero intends him to have, the courtiers are terrified by a Harpy we know is only Ariel. But Shakespeare does not trivialize or ridicule Prospero’s conjuring, and the spectacular effect of the opening storm for both characters and audience puts the status of illusion on a

different plane. It may be a sly nod towards the *Franklin's Tale* when Prospero attributes his conjuring to

A most auspicious star, whose influence  
If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes  
Will ever after droop.

(1.2.182–84),<sup>19</sup>

but his subsequent exchange with Ariel celebrates the mimetic power of the poetic imagination in terms inconceivable to Chaucer's Franklin:

*Pros.* Hast thou, spirit,  
Perform'd to point the tempest that I bade thee?  
*Ari.* To every article.  
I boarded the King's ship; now on the beak,  
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,  
I flam'd amazement. Sometime I'd divide,  
And burn in many places; on the topmast,  
The yards and boresprit, would I flame distinctly,  
Then meet and join. Jove's lightning, the precursors  
O' th' dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary  
And sight-outrunning were not . . .

(1.2.193–203)

The failure of both magic and poetry in the clerk's operation on the black rocks would seem to measure the distance between medieval Catholic theology and early modern classical humanism. But the more appropriate comparison to Prospero's storm is not the operation on the rocks, which the Franklin contemptuously undermines with every turn of his description, but the magic show in Orléans.

Like the storm, the magic show is not presented initially as a "show" at all—not to Chaucer's audience.<sup>20</sup> Aurelius and his brother travel to France where the clerk meets them and takes them to his home—the most "wel arrayed" house Aurelius has seen in his life (V 1187). What comes next sounds like a tour of equally "wel arrayed" grounds:

He shewed hym, er he wente to sopeer,  
Forestes, parkes ful of wilde deer.

(V 1189–90)

Suddenly the scene explodes into activity as a hundred deer are slain by hounds and arrows. The first hint that something *merveillous* is going on comes in the transition to a new scene: "He saugh, whan voyded were thise wilde deer . . ." (V 1195). Although the syntax alternates between

Aurelius seeing and the clerk showing, the import of that syntax is not clear, and before one can ponder what it means that deer are *voyded*, the pace quickens. The deer hunt occupies four lines; falconers kill heron by a river in two; knights joust on a plain in one. Then the vision slows down as the clerk shows Aurelius his lady in a dance, and—in the climactic last line—the seemingly impossible sight of Aurelius dancing with her. The audience shares the amazement of Aurelius here. We know that Dorigen cannot be present, and we know that Aurelius cannot be watching and dancing at the same time. But when did the magic show begin? With forests and parks full of deer? Or with the “wel arrayed” house itself that must surely be beyond the means of a university student?

With an abruptness similar to Miranda’s surmise in *The Tempest*, the poet reveals to his audience what his characters already know, that the vivid scenes have been illusions:

And whan this maister that this magyk wroughte  
 Saugh it was tyme, he clapte his handes two,  
 And farewell! Al oure revel was ago.

(V 1202–4)

Because Chaucer’s audience, like Shakespeare’s, experience the magic as powerfully as do the characters, they are positioned to resist the Franklin’s corrosive skepticism. The spell that breaks the illusion, far from diminishing it, confirms its complete and absolute effectiveness. But a more fundamental spell is broken in the shift from third-person pronouns to first-person plural in “Al oure revel.” The narrating voice seems to forget where it is, and even who it is, to share the wonder of the characters. Critical arguments to the contrary, this is not the Franklin’s voice.<sup>21</sup> His denunciations of illusion, in first-person plural and singular, both before and after the magic show, never waver: “For hooly chirches feith in oure bileve / Ne suffreth noon illusioun us to greve” (V 1133–34). But if sympathetic identification with the magician and shared pleasure in “oure revel” is not the Franklin’s, then whose is it? The final stunning revelation signals the literary nature of the magic we have experienced and confirms the identity of the “maister” responsible for it. Once again this revelation is not for the characters, who already know where the magic show has taken place, but for the audience who have every reason to imagine themselves still outside on magical grounds:

And yet removed they nevere out of the hous,  
 Whil they saugh al this sighte merveillous,  
 But in his studie, ther as his bookes be,  
 They seten stille, and no wight but they thre.

(V 1205–8)

*They thre* are obviously Aurelius, his brother, and the clerk, but “we” who experience the revel as “ours” can only be the poet and his audience.

As Shakespeare arguably recognized, the voice that identifies with the magician to share the breaking of the spell, the voice that identifies the magician’s art with his own is that of the poet himself. The importance of the study and its books, underscored a mere six lines later in the magician’s own reference to “my studie, ther as my bookes be” (V 1214), recalls the familiar bookish persona of the poet himself. Prospero’s immersion in books, “neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated / To closeness and the bettering of my mind” (1.2.89–90), recalls not only Chaucer’s clerk magician but the comical self-portrait of the poet himself in the *House of Fame*, where, oblivious to the activities of “thy verray neyghbores, / That duellen almost at thy dores” (649–50), he sits at his books, in the eagle’s words, as

domb as any stoon,  
 .....  
 Tyl fully daswed ys thy look;  
 And lyvest thus as an heremyte.

(656, 658–59)

Prospero uses the language of enchantment to describe himself being “transported / And rapt in secret studies” (1.2.76–77), but the books he reads are the same liberal arts the magician studies in Orléans, the same that Chaucer’s more familiar comic personae pore over in the dream visions. If the self-deprecation of the dream vision narrators prevents modern critics from seeing a connection between the magician and the poet, it does not mislead Shakespeare.

While the magic show, like Prospero’s storm, celebrates literary art and the artist-magician to reveal a more early modern Chaucer than we might expect, however, the verbal link that connects the magic show to the wedding masque leads to a confrontation with the limits of art to reveal a more medieval Shakespeare. For Ferdinand the vision of the goddesses, like the *sighte merveillous* in Orléans, elicits wonder and delight:

*Fer.*            This is a most majestic vision, and  
 Harmonious charmingly. May I be bold  
 To think these spirits?

*Pros.*           Spirits, which by mine art  
 I have from their confines call’d to enact  
 My present fancies.

*Fer.*            Let me live here ever;  
 So rare a wond’red father and a wise  
 Makes this place Paradise.

(4.1.118–24)



For Prospero, in a gesture that one critic finds Chaucerian in its self-deprecation,<sup>22</sup> the wedding masque is merely “Some vanity of mine art” (4.1.41), an idle indulgence in “present fancies” (4.1.122). Its playful undermining of the boundary between art and life, metaphor and reality, however, belies its seriousness. Before the masque begins Prospero surprises and rebukes Ferdinand in a moment of ardor with Miranda:

Look thou be true; do not give dalliance  
 Too much the rein. The strongest oaths are straw  
 To th' fire i' th' blood. Be more abstenious,  
 Or else good night your vow!

(4.1.51–54)

In the masque itself, as in the banquet/Harpy scene, Prospero’s “art” enlarges his personal concern into the authoritative significance of myth when Iris assures a suspicious Ceres that Cupid and Venus are nowhere near:

I met her Deity  
 Cutting the clouds towards Paphos; and her son  
 Dove-drawn with her. Here thought they to have done  
 Some wanton charm upon this man and maid,  
 .....  
 ..... but in vain.

(4.1.92–95, 97)

For a moment, and in a way more complicated than what happens in the banquet/Harpy scene, we are asked to ponder which is more real: Venus and Cupid (here of course “played” by “spirits”)—or the “fire i’ th’ blood” that Venus and Cupid personify that is itself a metaphor.

At the sudden recollection of Caliban’s conspiracy, however, Prospero aborts the performance in “some passion” and “so distemper’d” (4.1.143, 145) with anger that Ferdinand and Miranda are both alarmed. The words that close the magic show on a note of climactic wonder in the *Franklin’s Tale* signal disappointment and disillusionment in *The Tempest*:

You do look, my son, in a mov’d sort,  
 As if you were dismay’d; be cheerful, sir.  
 Our revels now are ended. These our actors  
 (As I foretold you) were all spirits, and  
 Are melted into air, into thin air.

(4.1.146–50)

What follows is not an artist-magician reveling in his art, but a meditation in which spirits melting into thin air epitomize not only the “base-

less fabric of this vision,” “this insubstantial pageant faded” (4.1.151, 155), but the baseless fabric and insubstantial pageant of the solid material world itself. Some critics have found this speech so deeply pessimistic as to be out of keeping with the rest of the play, but it is also profoundly Platonic and Augustinian in its perspective. In his subsequent renunciation of magic, Prospero acknowledges even while he abjures a kinship with Ovid’s black witch Medea. And in the Epilogue, in a move reminiscent of Chaucer’s “Retraction,” he puts off his identity as artist (“Now my charms are all o’erthrown, / And what strength I have’s mine own, / Which is most faint . . .” [Epil. 1–3]) to appeal directly and humbly to the audience for prayers and pardon.<sup>23</sup>

The relationship of art to morality is problematic for both poets, in part because art is a limited vehicle for moral transformation. For the Franklin, the fraudulence of what the magician does in hiding the reality of the rocks mirrors what Aurelius does in projecting his own fantastic courtly fiction over the reality of Dorigen’s marriage to Arveragus.<sup>24</sup> While Prospero’s efforts to impose classically inspired fictions of vengeance on the courtiers and ideals of chaste fertility on the engaged couple also strike some critics as inappropriately aggressive,<sup>25</sup> Prospero’s moral superiority to Aurelius makes the clichéd oppositions between truth and illusion that Chaucer puts in the mouth of the Franklin more complicated. At issue in Prospero’s conjuring is not whether the images of the Harpy and the goddesses are real or illusory. We know they are just as illusory as the disappearance of the black rocks in the *Franklin’s Tale*. But Prospero’s activity evokes something the clerk’s does not: the chilling anxiety already explored in the tragedies that morality itself may be a fictional construct. The poetic invention of the Harpy, by invoking destiny and outraged nature, elevates the personal injury Prospero has suffered into a moral offense with cosmic repercussions in a way that Prospero speaking in his own person could not. The goddesses of fertility and abundance in the wedding masque solemnize Prospero’s directives to Ferdinand and Miranda about chastity into a similarly elevated moral imperative. But these artful images only move those who already share the values they represent. The Harpy that drives Alonso to suicidal despair provokes Antonio and Sebastian to furious retaliation. Their breezy dismissal of conscience because it does not produce the palpable pain of an ulcer on the heel (2.1.275–78) puts them in the company of the cynical materialists who triumph so appallingly in the tragedies. Prospero can with force restrict their power to do harm, but he cannot through *art* transmute base metal into gold. And Chaucer knows this as well as Shakespeare—despite the “ful devout corage” (I 22) of a narrator who undertakes to guide his audience on a pilgrimage from sin to salvation, despite the fact that the artist-villains of Shakespeare’s tragedies

are beyond the imagination of a character like the Franklin. Chaucer arguably provides a prototype of Shakespeare's villains in the figure of the Pardoner, who turns virtue against the virtuous and boasts of it, whose "entente is nat but for to wynne, / And nothyng for correccioun of synne" (VI 403–4). Like Iago in particular, the Pardoner is a "ful vicious man" who knows how to tell a "moral tale" (VI 459–60), and his insistence that "I moot thynke / Upon som honest thyng while that I drynke" (VI 327–28) eerily anticipates the epithet of "honest Iago" that echoes throughout *Othello*.<sup>26</sup>

But the relationship of art to morality is problematic not primarily because art is a limited vehicle for moral transformation, but because the real power and pleasure of the illusionist have nothing to do with morality. His goal is simply to compel belief. The exuberant shapeshifting Ariel indulges in to create the storm in *The Tempest* is precisely what Plato targets for condemnation in his magisterial attack on poetry in the *Republic*. As Ariel becomes fire and thunder, the poet becomes the characters he represents: Homer speaks the words of Chryses, in Plato's example, assumes his manners, gestures, and characteristics, and "does all that he can to make us believe that the speaker is not Homer, but the aged priest himself" (80; III.393B–C).<sup>27</sup> The disturbing implications of the poet's shapeshifting echo Plato's earlier objection to poetic representations of shapeshifting gods and rest on an investment in a single truth over a world of illusory appearances:

Shall I ask you whether God is a magician (γόης), and of a nature to appear insidiously now in one shape, and now in another—sometimes himself changing and passing into many forms, sometimes deceiving us with the semblance of such transformations; or is he one and the same immutably fixed in his own proper image? (66; II.380D)

Just as the power of Greek tragedy intersects with the tricks of a street-corner juggler in *The Tempest*, the formidable image of the shapeshifting magician degenerates quickly for Plato into the stage buffoonery of a carnival huckster as he catalogues the excesses of the undisciplined mimetic temperament:

[H]e will be ready to imitate anything, not as a joke, but in right good earnest, and before a large company. . . . the roll of thunder, the noise of wind and hail, or the creaking of wheels and pulleys, and the various sounds of flutes, pipes, trumpets and all sorts of instruments: he will bark like a dog, bleat like a sheep, or crow like a cock. (84–85; III.397A)<sup>28</sup>

Ariel's extravagant versatility in *The Tempest*, from the sound of thunder, wind, and rigging in the opening storm to the frenzied minor climax of "divers SPIRITS in shape of dogs and hounds" pursuing the clowns, with "Prospero and Ariel setting them on" (s.d. 4.1.254), plays like a manic celebration of Plato's worst fears.

The equivalent of Plato's magician in medieval Christian theology is of course the devil, the father of lies and inventor of fiction, who speaks through the serpent to replace God's Truth with his own seductive fiction.<sup>29</sup> If the clerk magician in the *Franklin's Tale* resembles Prospero as a figure for the poet, it should be no surprise that the Chaucerian character who resembles Ariel as a figure for the poetic imagination is the shapeshifting devil in the *Friar's Tale*.

"Somtyme lyk a man, or lyk an ape,  
Or lyk an angel kan I ryde or go.  
It is no wonder thyng thogh it be so;  
A lowsy jogelour kan deceyve thee,  
And pardee, yet kan I moore craft than he."

(III 1464–68)

The devil's exhilaration in his craft here is not about damning souls but about illusion-making for its own pleasure. So compelling is his impersonation of a yeoman that even after he identifies himself as a fiend, the summoner in the tale continues to cling to his initial impression: "I wende ye were a yeman trewely" (III 1457). Fully informed about the physics of devil shapeshifting, promised the equivalent of a university chair and a knowledge of hell superior to Virgil's and Dante's—experience that will catapult him beyond the illusory thrills of fiction—he *still* cannot relinquish the initial image:

"For thogh thou were the devel Sathanas,  
My trouthe wol I holde to my brother."

(III 1526–27)

Even though he knows intellectually that the fiction is illusion, as Miranda knows the storm is art, he is still vulnerable to its power. As Chaucer's Miller puts it in yet another tale about the power of illusion,

Men may dyen of ymaginacioun,  
So depe may impressioun be take.

(I 3612–13)

Although the devil "gets" his fictional counterpart just as the Friar "gets" the pilgrim Summoner he is baiting with the tale itself, the brilliance

of their art makes them look neither malicious nor blameworthy nor even responsible for the spectacles of spiritual depravity they cunningly stage. The devil repeatedly offers sound moral counsel to the summoner, and gives him every opportunity to rethink his choices and avoid damnation. The Friar narrating the tale offers it exactly the way the narrator offers the *Canterbury Tales*—both as “game” (III 1275) and moral doctrine (III 1645–64). Indeed the Friar’s moral could not be more admirable:

Disposeth ay youre hertes to withstonde  
The feend, that yow wolde make thral and bonde.  
He may nat tempte yow over youre myght,  
For Crist wol be youre champion and knyght.

(III 1659–62)

In a different context it might even be compelling. In this context, however, the Friar’s skilful baiting of the Summoner turns damnation into an amusing spectacle that has nothing to do with piety. And the whole performance is made to feel compellingly real by the faithful reporting of an earnest narrator who never wavers in his own “devout corage.” Although the narrator’s sincerity seems infinitely more trustworthy than the devil’s or the Friar’s, to mistake it for Chaucer’s is to be entrapped by the master shapeshifter who plays all the characters and speaks all the parts. *His* pleasure is not to lead an audience to virtue, but to persuade them that they hear a Friar or a Miller or a Franklin speaking. In this respect Chaucer is of the devil’s party long before Blake’s Milton. That he was valued precisely for this craft in Shakespeare’s time is evident from the prefatory letter Francis Beaumont wrote for Speght’s 1598 edition of Chaucer:

one gifte hee hath aboue other Authors, and that is, by the excellencies of his descriptions to possesse his Readers with a stronger imagination of seeing that done before their eyes, which they reade, than any other that ever writ in any tongue.<sup>30</sup>

But do the poets repent? They certainly make gestures of repenting. When Prospero steps out of his role at the end of the performance to ask the audience for prayers and forgiveness, many, many critics are convinced that they hear Shakespeare’s farewell to his art. The “release” Prospero asks for, however, is not a release from “this bare stage,” but from “this bare island”—so that he can return to Naples through the “spell” of an applauding audience (Epil. 8). The Epilogue is not an end to illusion but an extension of it.<sup>31</sup> It is more clear that the Franklin does not represent Chaucer, either in his half-learned denunciations of magic and sleight-of-hand or in his own clunky sleight-of-hand resolution of the

problems of his story.<sup>32</sup> The *Retraction* is a more slippery matter. But the impression of fiction dissolving into real life, and the voice of the narrator becoming the voice of the poet, may itself be the crowning illusion of the fiction. Unlike the Franklin, and unlike the earnestly moral, literal-minded narrator who careens between competing modes of symbolic allegory and documentary realism, the poet of the *Canterbury Tales* is the master-conjurer of all the characters—an activity he simultaneously conceals and flaunts with every assertion the narrator makes about having to repeat exactly what he saw and heard, or else “telle his tale untrewē, / Or feyne thyng” (I 735–36). Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, at least in part amidst the myriad other sources and influences he juggles in that complex work, paid tribute to his medieval predecessor as the feigner, the conjurer, the magician, the one confident enough in the brilliance of his art to conceal it in the condemnations of the disapproving Franklin.

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A greatly condensed version of this paper was presented at the New Chaucer Society meeting in Boulder, Colorado, July 2002. I am indebted to helpful comments from session leader Kathryn Lynch, and from my colleagues at Williams College, Lynda Bundtzen and Christopher Pye.

1. R. Ann Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A Study in Literary Origins* (New York, 1978), 76. See also her earlier brief note, “‘Our revels now are ended’: An Allusion to *The Franklin's Tale*?” *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 212 (1975): 317; and Gordon N. Ross, “*The Franklin's Tale* and *The Tempest*,” *Notes and Queries* 25 (1978): 156. F. N. Robinson associates the clapping of hands to break a spell with the Epilogue of *Tempest*, but does not comment on the verbal echo (*The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd edn. [Boston, 1957], 725, note to line 1203).

2. John Simons, “Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* and the *Tempest*,” *Notes and Queries* 230 (1985): 56.

3. Richard Hillman, “Chaucer's Franklin's Magician and the *Tempest*: An Influence beyond Appearances?” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34 (1983): 426–32, at 431.

4. Hillman, “Chaucer's Franklin's Magician,” 428.

5. Lewis Walker, “Chaucer's Contribution to *The Tempest*: A Reappraisal,” in *Renaissance Papers*, ed. T. H. Howard-Hill and Philip Rollinson (Rochester, N.Y., 2000), 119–35. Samuel Schuman extends a comparison of the magician as artist in *FranT* and *Tempest* to Nabokov's *Lolita* (“Man, Magician, Poet, God—An Image in Medieval, Renaissance, and Modern Literature,” *Cithara* 19 [1980]: 40–54). E. Talbot Donaldson surprisingly does not discuss the two works in conjunction with one another (*The Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer* [New Haven, 1985]).

6. Dorothy Bethurum Loomis, “Chaucer and Shakespeare,” in *Chaucer's Mind and Art*, ed. A. C. Cawley (Edinburgh, 1969), 166–90, at 167. Loomis disappointingly does not produce the pay-off from this insight that she might, and goes on to assert (inexplicably to this writer) that Chaucer is the “least dramatic of writers of poetic fiction” and that the drama is “a form so different from Chaucer's longer fiction as to make a comparison of the two unprofitable” (173, 175).

7. V. A. Kolve, “Rocky Shores and Pleasure Gardens: Poetry vs. Magic in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*,” in *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature*, ed. Piero Boitani

and Anna Torti (Cambridge, Eng., 1991), 165–95, at 187, 189. Judith Ferster argues that both Chaucer and the Franklin resemble the magician, “the character [the Franklin] values least,” in ways they would not be happy to embrace (“Interpretation and Imitation in Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*,” in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology & History*, ed. David Aers [New York, 1986], 148–68, at 158). Sandra McEntire sees both the Franklin and the magician as male artists imposing their own self-serving perspectives on women (i.e., Dorigen), but she dissociates Chaucer from such art, arguing instead for his allegiance to the Incarnate Word (“Illusions and Interpretations in the *Franklin’s Tale*,” *Chaucer Review* 31 [1996]: 145–63, at 160). Douglas A. Burger contrasts the “real” magic in Boccaccio’s *Il Filocolo* with the “unnatural,” “illusory,” and superstitiously pagan character of the magic in Chaucer, but does not relate that magic to either the Franklin’s or Chaucer’s art (“*The Cosa impossibile* and the Impossible of *The Franklin’s Tale*,” in *Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction*, ed. Leigh A. Arrathoon [Rochester, Mich., 1986], 165–78, at 175).

8. All quotations of Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1987), although I have also consulted the facsimile of William Caxton’s 1484 edition of *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. J. A. W. Bennett (London, 1972), and William Thynne’s 1532 edition of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (London, 1905). Quotations of Shakespeare are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd edn. (Boston, 1997).

9. Augustine, *Confessionum libri XIII*, ed. Lucas Verheijen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 27 (Turnholt, 1981), I.13.20–23. For the status of imagination in medieval philosophy, see: Murray Wright Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought* (Urbana, Ill., 1927); Wesley Trimpi, *Muses of One Mind: The Literary Analysis of Experience and Its Continuity* (Princeton, 1983); and Sherron Knopp, “Augustinian Poetic Theory and the Chaucerian Imagination,” in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: A Festschrift in Memory of Donald R. Howard*, ed. James Dean and Christian Zacher (Newark, Del., 1992), 91–107. Distrust of the imagination, and consequently of fiction, survives unabated into the early modern period, as Russell Fraser makes clear in *The War Against Poetry* (Princeton, 1970).

10. Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London, 1985), 154; cited by Kolve, “Rocky Shores,” 188. W. A. Davenport comes close to such a position in his chapter on the *FranT* in *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative* (Cambridge, Eng., 1988), 178–97. Although he begins his discussion of the clerk, following the lead of Germaine Dempster and J. S. P. Tatlock (“*The Franklin’s Tale*,” in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster [London, 1941]), 377–97, at 383), by associating him with the Merlin of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, who moves the stones of the Giant’s Dance from Ireland to Britain at the request of Uther Pendragon’s brother Aurelius (181–82), he later recognizes him, in terms suggestive of Prospero, as a “modern philosopher . . . who consults esoteric books” (195), and he links Orléans “both with modern, scientific, intellectual command over the forces of life and with literature and grammar (developing from rivalries among thirteenth-century rhetoricians and reactions to the anti-literary forces of Parisian dialectic)” (197). Because Davenport takes the Franklin’s condemnations of magic for Chaucer’s own, however, he sees the representation of the clerk as “a curious balancing act” between condemnation and identification, despite the fact that “[t]he professional magician, like the poet, must be on the side of the power of illusion” (197).

11. Hillman, “Chaucer’s Franklin’s Magician,” 427.

12. The seminal article is Laura Hibbard Loomis, “Secular Dramatics in the Royal Palace, Paris, 1378, 1389, and Chaucer’s ‘Tregetoures,’” *Speculum* 33 (1958): 242–55. See also Mary Flowers Braswell, “The Magic of Machinery: A Context for Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*,” *Mosaic* 18 (1985): 101–10; Anthony Luengo, “Magic and Illusion in *The Franklin’s Tale*,” *JEGP* 77 (1978): 1–16; William Eamon, “Technology as Magic in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance,” *Janus* 70 (1983): 171–212; and Joyce Tally Lionarons, “Magic, Machines, and Deception: Technology in the *Canterbury Tales*,” *Chaucer Review* 27 (1993): 377–86.

13. Barbara Howard Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers: The Magician in English Renaissance Drama* (Columbia, Mo., 1984), 16–19. See also Peter J. French, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London, 1972), and William H. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst, Mass., 1995).

14. The stage directions are part of the authoritative First Folio edition of *Tempest* (1623), which is the first printed version of the play. The Folio text itself is based on a transcript made by Ralph Crane from some form of autograph manuscript (Evans, "Note on the Text," *Riverside Shakespeare*, 1686–87). Although elaborate directions become more frequent in Shakespeare's later plays, with *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII* exceeding even *Tempest* according to John Jowett ("New Created Creatures: Ralph Crane and the Stage Directions in *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Survey* 36 [1983]: 107–20, at 107), the language of the *Tempest* directions has sparked considerable debate since W. W. Greg first observed that some phrases—such as the banquet vanishing "with a quaint device"—sounded more like a spectator responding to ingenious staging than like precise technical direction from an author (*The Shakespeare First Folio: Its Bibliographical and Textual History* [Oxford, 1955], 419–20). Greg assumed that this spectator was Crane, and indeed Crane's role in wording the directions has been compellingly demonstrated by Jeanne Addison Roberts, "Ralph Crane and the Text of *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Studies* 13 (1980): 213–33, and by Jowett, 107–20. Jowett especially emphasizes the extent to which Crane gives the directions a "literary" flavor, as in "A *tempestuous* noise of Thunder and Lightning heard" (111, my emphasis), and one might note that the First Folio for which he was preparing copy was in fact more of a literary enterprise than a theatrical one. Scholars continue to believe, as Roberts puts it, however, that the stage directions "transmit the essence of authorial copy" (214). See Jowett, 114–15; T. H. Howard-Hill, *Ralph Crane and Some Shakespeare First Folio Comedies* (Charlottesville, 1972), 103; and Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery, eds., *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford, 1987), 612.

15. Karol Berger, "Prospero's Art," *Shakespeare Studies* 10 (1977): 211–39, at 214–17.

16. The phrase is from Harry Berger, Jr., "Miraculous Harp: A Reading of Shakespeare's *Tempest*," *Shakespeare Studies* 5 (1969): 253–83, at 256. See also Clifford Davidson, "Ariel and the Magic of Prospero in *The Tempest*," *Susquehanna University Studies* 10 (1978): 229–37, at 232; and Barbara Mowat, "Prospero, Agrippa, and Hocus Pocus," *ELR* 11 (1981): 281–303, at 293–301.

17. Cornelius Agrippa, *Of the Vanitie and Vncertainie of Artes and Sciences*, ed. Catherine M. Dunn (Northridge, Calif., 1974), cap. 48, 140; quoted also by Mowat, "Prospero," 298. Agrippa wrote this work in Latin in the summer of 1526. It was printed in 1530, with editions of James Sanford's English translation following in 1569 and 1575.

18. Chauncey Wood, *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars: Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery* (Princeton, 1970), 265–67. J. S. P. Tatlock concedes that the references to the moon's mansions do not make much sense but says that Chaucer "plainly intimates" their connection "in some especial way with magic" ("Astrology and Magic in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*," in *Anniversary Papers by Pupils and Colleagues of G. L. Kittredge* [Boston, 1913], 339–50, at 348). For a summary of critical responses to the calculations, see Angela Lucas, "Astronomy, Astrology and Magic in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*," *The Maynooth Review* 8 (1983): 5–16. For Chaucer's knowledge of astronomy, as distinct from the Franklin's, see Hamilton M. Smyser, "A View of Chaucer's Astronomy," *Speculum* 45 (1970): 359–73.

19. Walker, "Chaucer's Contribution," 126, sees a strong connection between Prospero's references to his astrological calculations in this scene and the detailed calculations of Chaucer's "subtil clerk," noting that both sets of calculations depend upon careful timing.

20. Harry Berger, Jr., also notices the delayed revelation, in "The F-Fragment of *The Canterbury Tales*: Part II," *Chaucer Review* 1 (1967): 135–56, at 148.

21. J. S. P. Tatlock labels the usage an example of "the domestic our"—like the Nun's Priest's reference to "Colle oure dogge" (VII 3383) or the Wife of Bath's to "Wilkyng, oure sheep" (III 432) ("Sources of the *Legend* and Other Chauceriana," *Studies in Philology* 18 [1921]: 419–28, at 425–28). But none of Tatlock's examples involves the jarring sense of inappropriateness this *oure* creates if we take it as the Franklin's. Efforts to reconcile it with the Franklin's character assume a covert identification with the magician that he is not willing to acknowledge openly, but it seems to me that such efforts give his character a more complex subtlety than the text supports or makes use of. See Berger, "The F-Fragment," 147–48, and Kenneth Bleeth, "The Rocks and the Garden: The Limits of Illusion in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*," *English Studies* 74 (1993): 113–23, at 118–19.

22. Berger, "Miraculous Harp," 257.



23. In readings that recall discussions of the end of *CT*, both Robert G. Egan (“This Rough Magic: Perspectives of Art and Morality in *The Tempest*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 23 [1972]: 171–82, at 179–82) and Cosmo Corfield (“Why Does Prospero Abjure His ‘Rough Magic’?” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36 [1985]: 31–48, at 45–46) see the speech as a severe personal crisis for Prospero that moves him toward Christian charity and forgiveness. Although the *Retr* was omitted from Thynne’s 1532 edition of Chaucer’s works and did not appear again in any edition until the eighteenth century, Shakespeare may have known it from Caxton’s 1484 text (Alice S. Miskimin, *The Renaissance Chaucer* [New Haven, 1975], 242). Miskimin also notes that the *Retr* remained well known throughout the sixteenth century as its “bibliography” motivated the search for what the poet referred to as “many another book . . . and many a song and many a lecherous lay” (243) [Caxton: “many other bookys . . . and many a lecherous laye”]. Whether or not Shakespeare knew the *Retr* directly, he would certainly have known the ending of *TC* where the poet equates “the forme of olde clerkis speche / In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche” with “payens corsed olde rites” (V, 1854–55, 1849), and urges his audience: “Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte” (V, 1837). Karol Berger comes close to a Platonic/Augustinian view of the play as a whole: “By constructing *The Tempest* around the figure of the magus who is the author and producer of theatrical spectacles, Shakespeare created what might be labelled his most consistently metatheatrical play, the play that destroys the illusion of immediacy and, regardless of its subject, offers constant interpretation of the medium in which this subject is meditated upon—an interpretation, I might add, which is far from enthusiasm and full of distrust” (“Prospero’s Art,” 235).

24. McEntire’s reading of the tale in these terms is especially powerful (“Illusions,” 150–54).

25. See especially Clifford Leech, *Shakespeare’s Tragedies* (New York, 1950), 142–58; Egan, “This Rough Magic,” 175–79; Margreta de Grazia, “*The Tempest*: Gratuitous Movement or Action without Kibes and Pinches,” *Shakespeare Studies* 14 (1981): 249–65; Stephen J. Miko, “Tempest,” *ELH* 49 (1982): 1–17; and Corfield, “Why Does Prospero Abjure,” 36–43.

26. Harold Bloom also associates the Pardoner with Shakespeare’s villains, and with Iago especially, noting that both elicit violent reactions from the men whose virtue they abuse and both withdraw into silence when exposed (*Geoffrey Chaucer’s The Pardoner’s Tale* [New York, 1988], 8, 10). Donald R. Howard argues that the Pardoner is the character most like Chaucer the poet, and for reasons that will become clear in what follows, I think he is right (*The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* [Berkeley, Calif., 1976], 371–76).

27. Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Garden City, N.Y., 1937), cited by page and section numbers. My comments on Plato rely on Penelope Murray, ed., *Plato on Poetry* (Cambridge, Eng., 1996), and on Gerald F. Else, *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*, ed. Peter Burian (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), 25–35. For a reading (to me unconvincing) of *Tempest* as sustained “dramatic and poetic imitation of *The Republic*,” see Barbara Tovey, “Shakespeare’s Apology for Imitative Poetry: *The Tempest* and *The Republic*,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 11 (1983): 275–316. Jackson I. Cope does not refer to Plato’s indictment of poetry, but sees Prospero as Plato’s “philosopher-prince who knows that life is a dream, that in dreams begin responsibility, and that his own task is to teach these truths to the other sleepwalkers in the dark cave” (*The Theater and the Dream: From Metaphor to Form in Renaissance Drama* [Baltimore, 1973], 241–42).

28. Else points out that Plato trivializes the mimetic artist further in *Laws* 2.658A, where he equates him with vulgar θαυματοποιοί—“jugglers, acrobats, conjurers, magicians”—who deal in “tricks and marvels” (θαύματα) (*Plato and Aristotle*, 35).

29. Cp. Eric Jager: “The common belief that the Devil had spoken *through* the Serpent, using that creature as a kind of ventriloquist’s puppet, enhanced the Fall as a scene for not only rhetoric, but also fiction, theater, and performance in general” (*The Tempter’s Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature* [Ithaca, N.Y., 1993], 44).

30. Quoted by Miskimin, *Renaissance Chaucer*, 225.

31. As Egan puts it, the Epilogue invites the audience “to enter the play-world and assume a role, through their applause, as a moving force in its culmination.” It thus refuses any “terminal boundaries” for the play’s art and rather “subsumes the ‘real,’ extra-theatrical world of its spectators, supplanting their sense of reality with its own” (“This

Rough Magic," 173). But Egan also takes the religious language very seriously and sees Shakespeare "link[ing] his artistic vision with the orthodox principle of Christian charity" (182) in a way that Chaucerians also tend to see for the medieval poet.

32. My discussion has ignored the Franklin's idealistic reverence for *trouthe* and *gentillesse* that led George Lyman Kittredge to see *FranT* as the resolution of the "marriage debate," and that still makes the Franklin attractive to many critics: "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage," *Modern Philology* 9 (1911-12): 435-67; repr. in *Chaucer Criticism*, vol. 1, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Notre Dame, Ind., 1960), 130-59, esp. 157-58. It also made him attractive to Edmund Spenser, who gave the Franklin's opening lines about love ("Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye," V 764-66) almost verbatim to his heroine knight of chastity, Britomart, in Book 3 of the *Faerie Queene* (3.1.25). But if the Franklin has a counterpart in *Tempest*, it seems to me to be Gonzalo, whose idealistic vision of human nature and governance is similarly naive and similarly out of touch with the characters around him. It is tempting to imagine Shakespeare diminishing the Franklin even while he enlarges the clerk magician.