Through Glass Darkly: The Spatial Memory of the Temple of Venus in Chaucer's "The House of Fame"

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by

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It is ten days after the death of Laura Palmer. Her cousin Maddy has come to the town of Twin Peaks to help out her aunt and uncle as they grieve the loss of their daughter. One night while she is alone, she has a vision of Bob, an evil supernatural entity connected to Laura's death. She sees him enter the living room, and slowly begin to walk towards her, crawling over furniture until he is directly before her. She screams, and Bob vanishes, but his presence can still be felt in the fear he leaves behind.

I offer this brief glimpse into the world of *Twin Peaks* to illustrate the importance of space in our interactions with the world. Our entire lives are spent navigating through and interacting with spaces, whether natural or manmade. However, we tend to privilege the objects and individuals we encounter as the basis for understanding our interactions with the world. In the story above, it is not just the presence of Bob that makes the scene so terrifying, although it certainly helps. As a television show, the scene attacks the viewer's own sense of space in its creation of terror. Bob's casual walk through a comfortable and familiar setting raises the idea that he could just as easily be in our own living room, where we would be watching the show. As he climbs over the couch and table to approach Maddy, he walks towards the camera, gazing directly at us as viewers until his face fills the entire screen. We expect him to come out of the frame right into our own space; by having Bob approach the camera in this way, the director David Lynch has made us fearful Bob will come out of our television and into our room, erasing the barrier between the world of the screen and our own.

With this focus on space in mind, we now turn to the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer. Much of his poetry has some source behind it, whether it be Dante, Virgil, or his own personal favorite, Boccaccio. Indeed, scholars have debated again and again what Chaucer was reading, when he

was reading it, and how it is made manifest in his work. I too am joining this conversation, but I aim to take a different approach. I propose we focus on the architectural spaces found in his poetry. By closely examining these built environments, we can see the relationship Chaucer has towards his source material. In particular, I will focus on the Temple of Venus found in "The House of Fame," otherwise known as the "temple ymad of glas" (HF 121). This structure is a temple dedicated to Venus, giving it a connection to antiquity and the Classical past. Due to this link, it becomes a site for meditating on the past, giving the poet a place to contemplate his relationship to both antiquity and literary history. Within the poem, that meditation takes the form of transformation. Both history and literature are refocused and remediated within the space of the Temple of Venus, making it a dynamic site of remaking.

The material that makes up the structure of the Temple of Venus is glass, so we have to start there in our analysis of the space. Most critics have seen the "glas" as representing the fragility of the structure. Alastair Minnis points to the "large amount of glass in the Temple of Venus [as] a symbol of the very instability of the structure – which is entirely made of glass," making the temple is "not a structure...to rely on" (Minnis 192). Due to glass' inherent danger of shattering, Minnis believes the temple is always moments from coming apart; it will take the slightest disturbance to bring it down, tearing the temple into tiny shards.

This view is representative of most critics, and they go onto expand this instability further. In their readings, the glass structure is the embodiment of the instability of the text as a whole, representing its moments of swerving narrative, and its very incompleteness. As Piero Boitani says, "glass [belongs] to an artificial universe of immobility, fragility, transparency, and magnification" (Boitani 160). It is not difficult to see how these aspects of glass are pertinent to

"The House of Fame." It is a dream vision, fragilely existing while Geoffrey sleeps, and its fantastic elements constantly remind us of its "artificial" construction.

Boitani leaves out two key aspect of glass that I want to bring bring to bear on the text. Glass both reflects and refracts the world, allowing it represent and transform the world. As I look out a window I see a bus go by. Its glass windshield lines up with the window I am sitting at, and for a moment I see myself reflected in the windshield. Glass is still a part of the "artificial universe" Boitani speaks of, but it is a universe I have been transported into. I am now a part of a new space because of the glass; a representation of me exists in the bus' windshield as I continue to exist on my side of the window. I have been doubled, given an existence where I am both here and there. Normally I am unable to project myself to other places, but because of the particular reflective properties of glass, the world is remade to accommodate two of me.

Staying with the bus for a moment longer, we see glass' powers of refraction when the bus begins to turn. Now the image of me becomes reshaped and distorted, creating a new figure and form. It is important to realize this is not a moment of destruction. Rather, it is a moment of transformation and remaking. Through the glass a new me has been made. I take on a new shape as the glass changes my perspective, setting up a new relationship between me at the window and the image of me in the glass. This distorted and refracted vision of me allows me to see myself as a Cubist representation, or gives me that chance to see myself how strangers see me, just a sudden glimpse that quickly disappears.

This alternative perspective on the properties of glass can be found in medieval uses of glass. Coley, in arguing against the idea that glass is an unstable building material, points out the importance of stained glass windows in medieval churches. By commissioning a window, a

patron would ensure they would not be forgotten by both their descendants, and the community as a whole. The family would continue to pray for the patrons' release from purgatory, and the community would recognize their spiritual devotion. Given the high spiritual stakes involved in the creation of these windows, they are “not insubstantial, transient things” (Coley 62) but permanent records of a patron's piety.

The glass at Chartres Cathedral, which contains some of the most famous surviving pieces of medieval stained glass, is densely populated with donor images. For example, surrounding the panels that illustrate the parable of the Good Samaritan are the Shoemakers at work at their trade (Fig. 1). Of particular interest is the image of the Shoemakers presenting their window (Fig. 2). It is clear this scene is included as a way to recognize their donation to the cathedral, but what is striking is how they are represented. The figure in green leads the group, holding the window before him in a gesture of offering. Behind him is a figure in white, who's pointing hand helps highlight the lead figure's gift, drawing our attention as viewers to the window itself. This creates a moment of reflection where we see the window in two forms at once; it exists as the actual physical window we are currently looking at, and as the painted representation found in the panel itself. This double existence reminds the viewer that this window is a material object that exists because of the donation of the Shoemakers. Only through its manifestation within the window are we reminded of its constructed nature.

This view of the window as a material object does not completely deconstruct the image down to its material makeup, however, for the figures in the back of the crowd are reacting in a different manner. Instead of looking at the window, they are looking up, and if we trace their lines of sight we find them gazing at Jesus as he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to the

Pharisees (Fig. 1). This group that is presenting the window in 13th century France is also listening to the words of Christ in ancient Jerusalem. Just as glass bends light, it has bent time, bringing the Shoemakers into contact with this historical moment in the life of Christ. This refraction takes another turn when we realize the figures depicted could stand before this window when it was installed in the cathedral. Now, the viewer is seeing a representation of himself listening to the Word of God, and can consequently imagine himself there, making the image a tool for prayer.

The point here is not to privilege one of these interpretations of the glass over the other. Rather, I offer these various readings to show how how flexible and fluid glass can be. It can reflect the world in multiple ways simultaneously, offering freedom in one's perceptions.

We now return to Chaucer, and with all these thoughts in mind I propose we view the Temple of Venus as a space of creation. Within the glass walls of the temple, various pieces of the literary and classical past are remade into new forms. From this perspective, the glass of "reflexions" (HF 21) that makes up "The House of Fame" becomes a place where Chaucer can approach the past in new ways, helping him to situate himself to what has come before.

As the "temple ymad of glas" is introduced, it unfolds as a Christian church. As seen in Coley's argument, glass as architecture carries with it a specifically Christian connotation. One cannot help but think of stained glass windows. Additionally, the decorations of the temple appear to follow the Christian church decorative plan. The "ymages / Of gold, stondynge in sondry stages" (HF 121-122) point to the frescos or altarpieces that filled medieval churches, such as Giotto's frescos at Padua, or the famous Ghent altarpiece. The "ryche tabernacles / And with perre moo pynacles" (HF 123-124) recall the statuary niches from which statues of the

saints would stand watch (Fig. 3). Labeling these niches as “tabernacles” helps to situate them within a Judeo-Christian context as well. As the Middle English Dictionary points out, “tabernacle,” in addition to being a technical architectural term, also describes the “portable sanctuary of the Hebrews,” as well as “the dwelling place of God.” These Judeo-Christian undertones color the space, helping to set it up as a recognizably, if highly elaborate, Christian space.

In looking at the potential inspirations for Chaucer's Temple, we find establishing the structure as a Christian space is itself an act of transformation. Mary Braswell points out that the poem's temple resembles the Sainte Chapelle de Paris (Braswell 104), a mid-13th century chapel that is part of the royal French residence, the Palais de la Cité. The defining feature of the chapel is its stained glass windows. Rather than functioning as openings in the walls, they practically are the walls, starting at the top of the arched arcade and stretching all the way up to the vaulted ceiling above (Fig. 4). Since all the light that comes in is colored by the stained glass, the painted stone frames for the windows appear as if they are glass as well; notice how the rich red of the columns along the walls and the blue ceiling with its flecks of gold echo the palette and pattern of the windows (Fig. 5). As the light passes through the windows and lights the space, the entire atmosphere of the chapel is transformed (Fig. 6). It is as if you are inhabiting a three-dimensional stained glass world, where the air around you acts like the blue background in stained glass.

As seen in these two examples, glass in a Christian context has a transformative power. The stone reflects the properties of the glass it frames, and the air is colored and changed by the light's journey through the glass. Rather than the transformation of the donor seen in Shoemakers' panel from Chartres, in this case glass remakes the entire architectural space it

occupies. Our perception of all the architectural elements is reworked, producing a new way of understanding the chapel. Glass is a fundamental element in chapels, as it colors our perceptions and experiences of these spaces.

Glass' ability to transform an entire space is shared by the “temple ymad of glas” as well, for the Christian vision of the temple begins to come apart when the statues that fill the “tabernacles” are described. Instead of saints, the niches are filled with “moo curiouse portreytures, / And queynte maner of figures / Of old werk” (HF 125-127), which transforms the space. The specific moment of this transformation is found in the line break between “figures” and “old.” Before, we could assume the statues are the typical images of saints found in Christian cathedrals, but once they are modified to be “Of old werk,” they become ancient statuary. This shift comes about through a glass-like moment of refraction. The line break brings about this sudden transformation; just as light bends when passing through glass, so too do the statues. They are changed by the enjambment, reshaped before our eyes into pieces of the ancient past.

This transformation of the “figures” consequently changes the entire space of the Temple. Upon seeing the statues “Of old werk,” Geffrey “wel wyste I / Hit was of Venus redely, / The temple” (HF 129-131). The space of the temple has shifted from Christianity to the paganism of antiquity, and again the shift comes through a refracting enjambment. “Hit,” rather than “The temple” comes first, leaving it unclear what exactly is “of Venus.” It is only at the start of the next line when we find out it is “The temple” that belongs to her, which revises all the architectural details that have come before. The “curiouse portreytures” now could potentially take on a scandalous tone when we hear Venus is “in portreyture...Naked fletynge in a see” (HF 131-133). Alternatively, they could be representations of “daun Cupido, / Hir blinde sone, and

Vulcano" (HF 137-138), as the earlier "figures" are transformed into those that surround the image of Venus. Regardless of what the "figures" are transformed into as one reads the poem, the fact of the matter is they are transformed, shifting from Christian architecture into objects from the ancient pagan past.

This shift from Christian to pagan elements can be understood as a manifestation of the façade, in the architectural sense of the term. As Christy Anderson points out, "the use of rustication, attached columns, and pilasters was often unrelated to a building's construction, although it appeared to be a form of ornament that expressed a system of structure" (Anderson XIX). In short, our initial perception of a building might not aline with the architectural framework that undergirds the structure. For example, a house from the outside might appear to be in the adobe style, with exposed wooden support beams sticking out from the imitation stucco. However, if one were to peel back the walls, one would see the house uses a steel I-beam to support itself. Similarly, when we first approach the Temple, we believe it to be a Christian space, with the "ymages...sondry stages...ryche tabernacles / And...perre moo pynacles" standing in for the "attached columns and pilasters" of a façade. Yet, once we begin to explore the temple's inner contents by continuing through the poem, its status as a pagan space devoted to Venus emerges, revealing our preconceived notion of the space as a Christian one to not match its true "system of structure." We see the space through the transformative glass architecture that makes up the Temple, producing this shift from the Christian to pagan.

Following this act of transformation, the question becomes why does Chaucer present Classical elements in this manner. Yes, it is true one could argue that this shift from Christian to the pagan architecture is representative of the instability of the poem so many critics fixate on.

Indeed, it is not difficult to make the case that Venus herself is unstable. Loomis for example, argues that the Venus of "The House of Fame" is a single ambiguous goddess who presides over love that is both idealistic and sensual (Loomis 191). There is also the fact Venus is linked to the planet Venus, a celestial body that complicates her portrayal by allying "her with destinal forces that can not be resisited" (Loomis 192).

If Venus is understood to exist in these different forms, it is not difficult to see why critics argue both her and her temple must be a place of shifting instability. Yet, turning this idea around, it is also true that because Venus is understood to posses these dualities, she is a figure of transformation. The back and forth between ideal and physical love, or pagan goddess and scientific force is not so much about instability, but reflection, where the two sides play off of and inform one another. For example, the Arabian astrologer Albohazen Haly says those born under the sign of Venus are given "a tall, elegant, white body, pleasing eyes sparkling with splendid beauty, and thick hair agreeably fluffy and sometimes curly or charmingly waving" (Curry 166). The planet bestows the physical properties of beauty associated with Venus upon those born while the planet has celestial influence. Both aspects, the pagan religious iconography and the medieval scientific process of astrology, are required; the properties would not exist with Venus' pagan associations, and the properties would not be made manifest without the planet's astrological influence. Instead they work together to transform the body of the individual born. Past knowledge is filtered through a modern scientific lens to rework how Venus is understood to exist in the present. Therefore, because of these varying perspectives, her temple must be a place of transformation as well; it takes on the properties of the goddess it is dedicated to. Venus as a goddess possesses the same transformative properties as glass, so her temple must act as a

site of remaking and reshaping.

We can see Venus' inherent transformative powers in the very way she is represented in the temple. Geffery describes how “in portreyture, / I saw anoon-right hir figure / Naked fletinge in a see” (HF 131-3). Scholars tend to want to figure out what texts Chaucer pulled this image from, which to be fair is a question worth asking. Some, such as Wilkins, point to the similarities between the Venus of “The House of Fame” and the description of her found in the *Libellus de Imaginibus Deorum*, as the *Libellus* forgoes allegorical exegesis and instead presents pictorial description. Steadman on the other hand argues in favor of Chaucer working from Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus*, which allegorizes Ovid's tales (Twycross 2-10).

I, however, am not particularly interested in trying to determine what manuscripts Chaucer might have had and when, and instead want to focus our attention on the image itself. If we just look at the scene described, we find this image of Venus points to a scene depicting the moment of her birth, when she arises fully formed from the “see,” as most famously depicted in the 1486 painting by Botticelli (Fig. 7). Lurking in the background of this moment, is the story behind how she was born. Cronus castrates his father Uranus after deposing him as ruler of the gods, and casts his genitals into the sea. As they float along they become a woman who arises fully formed from the sea-foam, giving Venus her Greek name Aphrodite (Hesiod 173-205). Her “portreyture” in the temple shows the moment where she is transformed from the male Uranus into the female Venus, which helps set up the space of the temple as a space of transformation, reflecting the transformative and refractive properties of the glass that makes up her temple.

This aspect of Venus is a purely classical one, and fails to address why Chaucer includes Christian elements in his portrayal of the transformative Venus. The glass-like transformative

properties are still present if one focuses only on the Classical elements. After all, as we just saw, Venus herself stands in for the transformative power of the temple. However, by turning to the methods the English clergy used to approach antiquity, we see Chaucer's reflecting of a pagan past through the lens of Christianity is representative of how the Classical past was portrayed at the time. This is not to say Chaucer was reading these individuals' work. Rather, I am pointing out that Chaucer's efforts exist within a larger tradition that help to inform why "The House of Fame" deals with antiquity the ways it does.

Thomas Waleys, a Dominican friar active from 1318 to 1350, was one of these English clergymen fascinated by antiquity. In his commentary on St. Augustine's *The City of God*, he looks back to pagan Roman worship as a model for Christendom. He describes the transfer of an image of "the mother of gods, meaning the earth," from Rome to Pessinunte, a city in Turkey, and tells the reader "Christians should reflect on the great distance between Rome and Pessinunte so as to see what reverence they owe to the Mother, not of false gods, but of the one true high God." (Smalley 103). For Waleys, it is not the past event of the transfer itself that interests him. Rather, he wants to see how pagan religious fervor might be realized in a Christian context. If Romans could worship a false god with such energy and loyalty that they could carry a statue across the Mediterranean, why cannot Christians devote themselves to Mary in the same way? Instead of presenting Roman religious practices as they were and consequently offering his reader a way to explore antiquity, Waleys views it through a specifically Christian lens, turning a pagan practice into a Christian event.

This layering is made more explicit when Waleys discusses the Pantheon. Waleys impresses upon the reader the continuity between the past and present, a continuity that

ultimately merges them into one. He explains that "Domitian built the temple at Rome in honour of [the mother of gods] and it was called the Pantheon. Pope Boniface hallowed it in honour of blessed Mary, as is told in the Legend of All Saints. Now it is called the church of Santa Maria della Rotonda." (Smalley 103-4). While he gets some facts wrong (Domitian merely restored the Pantheon), what matters is how Waleys blends history together. Domitian, from the 1st century CE, is followed by Pope Boniface IV, from the 7th century CE, a jump of some 600 years signaled by a mark of punctuation. Then, he reminds the reader how the Pantheon is "now" the Santa Maria della Rotonda, carrying the reader in the present of the 14th century. With these two sentences, we have undergone massive shifts in time, but our attention is not drawn to it; these events all appear to be taking place in close proximity to one another. Additionally, distinction between the pagan past and Christian present is further blurred by the Pantheon's similar function in both periods. It was a place where the "mother of god(s)" was worshiped, making pagans like medieval Christians, and vice versa. Likewise, it makes a pagan space a Christian one, and perhaps more importantly, a Christian space become pagan.

In the example from Waleys, we see the transformation of space involves the remaking and reordering of time. Chaucer's own work shows this as well. Within the Temple of Venus time is bent, or more properly refracted, changing the way moments in time relate to one another. First, the Classical elements themselves are blurred. Included in the image of Venus are "Cupidio / Hir blynde sone, and Vulcano" (HF 137-8), which makes sense as they are figures closely associated with her. However, as we discussed earlier, this image depicts the moment of her birth, making the presence of her son and husband anachronistic; despite the fact Venus arises

form the ocean fully formed, she does not already have a family and offspring. Instead, this image in the temple blurs the distinctions between separate moments in her chronology in order to create a depiction of her that contains as many representative features of Venus as possible. Her future has been bent to appear alongside her past, in order to present a more complete picture.

When the Christian church is transformed into a pagan temple we find this refracting of time as well. When we discussed the moment of transformation earlier we noted how it was the "portreytures" and "figures" that were changed from saints into Classical sculpture. As this transformation takes place, however, the elements that surround the decorations do not change. The spires, pinnacles, images, and tabernacles which Braswell notes are representative features of a Gothic cathedral, are still the building blocks of the temple. When it is remade into a pagan space, the architecture does not suddenly become Classical, with marble columns and domes. Instead it retains its Gothic structure, only now it houses pagan art, and is dedicated to a pagan goddess. The combination of these two religions into one space chips away at linear time, merging the pagan past and Christian present together that they might be experienced simultaneously.

This refracting of linear time that layers paganism and Christianity upon one another takes us back to the very nature of glass itself, for its transparency is architecturally significant. When a structure is transparent, like the "temple ymad of glas," there is the "simultaneous perception of different spatial dimensions" (Kepes 77). The pagan and Christian elements do not supersede one another, with one coming to dominate the temple over the other. Instead, a dialogue is established between the two. As the the architectural historian Rowe writes of

architectural transparency:

> Each can be itself and its opposite; so that any specific instance of figure-ground is a condition of being of which the components are at once the product and the cause, a structure which becomes significant by reason of reciprocal action between the whole and its parts, and - one might say - an area of reference, qualified by and at the same time qualifying the objects which are referred to" (Rowe 300)

Because the space retains both the original Christian elements ("itself") and its transformed pagan elements ("its opposite," or other "site"), we can begin to play with the juxtaposition of the two.

This play is what I understand Rowe's "reciprocal action" to be, and it is a twofold process. First, there is the "reciprocal action" between the different architectural elements themselves, such as the pagan statues in the Gothic frames. They both work to build the architectural space of the Temple; the entire structure of the Temple only comes into being because both these elements are there. They are fitted against one another with the mortar of the poem's line breaks, building off and upon their "opposites" to create the space of the temple. Secondly, our own interaction with the temple is a form of "reciprocal action." Our reading of the poem is an action we take upon the text, where our experience is "qualified by" the introduction of pagan elements, and we "qualify" the objects and space itself when we respond to the transformation the Temple's glass calls out for. The time separating the pagan and Christian becomes transparent, just like the "glas" that makes up the temple, creating a "simultaneous perception" where we can bounce back and forth in time, and discover new relationships between the pagan and Christian.

One of these relations teased out by the blurring of pagan religion and Christianity speaks to the architectural history of Christian churches, for these churches have their roots in the

Roman basilica. Looking at Trajan's Basilica Ulpia demonstrates this continuity. Constructed around 110 CE as part of Trajan's efforts to establish his new forum as the center of Roman civic life (Packer 5), the basilica is built upon a long central nave with rounded apses at both ends (Fig. 8). In imagined renderings (Fig. 9), we can see the clerestory that rings the top of the walls, flooding the nave with natural light. These elements are repeated in Santa Sabina, an early Roman Christian church from approximately 420 CE. The predominant features are the central nave leading to a rounded asp (Fig. 10), as well as the clerestory (Fig. 11), which both echo those seen in the Basilica Ulpia. Returning to the cathedral at Chartres, we continue to see repetitions of these Roman patterns. Sure, Chartres has a collection of chapels sprouting from its asp, a transept that cuts across the nave, and the clerestory is filled with stained glass, but the basic floor plan remains the same (Fig. 12). This is not to say that Chaucer had all this in mind as he was conceiving of the Temple in "The House of Fame," but that the Roman genealogy of Christian spaces cannot be denied. The Classical roots of Christianity remain in the built environment's vernacular, even if there is no explicit meaning or understanding by those inhabiting these spaces. Within the Christian church, the Classical world remains a physical presence. Their Roman heritage remains, requiring only a gentle nudge to bring it back to the surface and change how we interact with and understand Christian churches.

Looking at Chaucer's travels abroad reveals another structure that blurs the boundaries between the Classical and Christian. Due to Chaucer's work as a civil servant we have fairly clear records of when exactly he was sent by the King on missions abroad. Many scholars are particularly interested in his 1378 trip to Milan, as most believe this is when he discovered the works of Boccaccio. Chaucer's references to Boccaccio's work greatly increase following this

trip, and Coleman's inquiry into what Boccaccio manuscripts Chaucer might have had access to while in Milan are representative of the typical scholarly work done in relation to his travels. I, however, am going to look at an earlier trip Chaucer took to Italy. On December 1st, 1372, he left England for Genoa along with John de Mari and Sir James de Provan as part of a delegation to negotiate for the establishment of a special seaport in England to be used by Genoese merchants (Pearsall 102). He returned on May 23rd, 1373, which, subtracting the time spent traveling, means he was in Italy for about three months. Part of this trip involved time spent in Florence to tend to "the king's private business with the Bardi banking family" (Pearsall 103), as the crown needed funds to finance its ongoing wars and building projects.

While it is unclear how long he was in Florence, there are a few reasons I feel it is a city worth devoting attention to in relation to Chaucer. To state an obvious fact, the city was the literary and artistic center of Italy. While Chaucer was there, a series of lectures were being given on Dante, and Boccaccio himself was slated to give the next year's series (Wallace 5). Additionally, this was the home of Dante, where he was worshiped in an almost cult-like fashion (maybe similar to the reverence shown to Thomas Jefferson at the University of Virginia). Indeed, so deep was this devotion that Dante had his image painted by the famous religious painter Giotto. A fresco containing a portrait of Dante, dated to 1335, adorns the walls of the Podestà Chapel in the Palazzo del Bargello, the manor and fortress that would later become the stronghold of the Medici family.

Scholars have tried to use this connection between Dante and Florence as evidence for Chaucer actually meeting Dante, and while the desire for such an interaction is understandable, it is misplaced. Dante was, in the words of Pearsall, "old and crotchety, and very distinguished, and

did not have much time for young travellers of no rank, and from England of all places" (Pearsall 104), making a meeting unlikely at best. However, when Chaucer was in Florence he did have other meetings that shaped his future work. There were not with people or books, but with spaces, interactions of flesh and stone, eyes and pigment, human and building.

While there were a vast number of architectural and artistic marvels in Florence at the time Chaucer was visiting, there is one in particular worth devoting time to in relation to "The House of Fame:" the San Miniato al Monte. Built in honor of Saint Miniato, a somewhat obscure martyr saint, work was begun in 1018 and continued up until 1207 (Zucconi 30). The group who financed the construction of the church was the powerful Calimala guild, who controlled the wool and cloth trade in Florence (Levey 24). This connection helps to relate the building to Chaucer, as part of his mission abroad was an economic one. Indeed, following his return, trade between Genoa and England grew, with the Genoese merchants making "more than usual use of Southampton" (Pearsall 103). Wool was a key piece of the English exporting economy, and of Chaucer's own background, as a little more than one year later Chaucer was appointed the controller of the wool custom for London (Crow 149). It makes sense that while meeting with the Bardi bankers of Florence, Chaucer and his associates would at least introduce themselves to the leaders of the city's textile industry. Since San Miniato was the patronal church of the Calimala (Goy 194), it stands to reason that this structure was one place where they could have met; what better place for the guild to display their power and wealth to potential business prospects than the church they paid for themselves. While this by no means proves Chaucer visited the San Miniato al Monte, the plausibility of the situation cannot be ignored, and our investigation of the space is warranted.

All interactions with buildings start with our approach to them from the outside. The church of San Miniato is situated just beyond Florence's city walls, seated atop a hill that looks down across the Arno River to the city below (Fig. 13). Rather than navigating narrow medieval city streets, one would travel uphill to the church, and be greeted with a truly stunning sight, San Miniato's façade (Fig. 14). It still retains its original polychrome Romanesque style, where the façade's white and green marble is laid against one another to create decorative patterns, causing the building to stand out from the others that surround it.

This distinctive mode of design links this structure to Chaucer's Temple of Venus. While it lacks the dazzling brilliance of the Sainte Chapelle de Paris' towering glass windows, the disjuncture between San Miniato's façade and the buildings around it recall the singularity of Chaucer's temple. The beauty and intricacies of the marble decoration are so incredibly unique compared to the unadorned stone walls surrounding it, turning the building into a shimmering, almost unreal structure. Just like the "temple ymad of glas," it is a singular piece of architecture. Additionally, the mixture of different colored marble speaks to the transformative powers of the Temple. These pieces of stone are all marble, and yet because of their different tones they are not the same; they are at once alike and different, echoing the transformations seen in the temple. However, it is because they are different that they can come together and create the patterns that appear to hold the entire structure up. The diagonal lines of green marble create triangles that support the pediments on the left and right, and white marble forms the capitals of the green columns which links them to the green arches above. Just as both pagan and Christian elements are required to create the temple, so two are both forms of marble necessary to complete the façade.

These links to the transformative power of the Temple's glass continue as we enter the interior of San Miniato. The devotional artwork continues this trend of crossing boundaries, transforming our experience of the church. The walls of the side aisles that flank the nave are decorated with frescos, which in itself is not particularly unusual. However, these frescos are framed and painted to make them look like sculptures. Surrounding the pictorial space of the figures are painted frames, which duplicate architectural elements of the church. Along the top edge, surrounding a miniature figure, are diagonal lines creating diamonds, mimicking the design of the façade (Fig. 15). This echoing makes the painted elements appear to act like built architectural features, turning two-dimensional paint into a piece of the three-dimensional building.

This framing fails to contain the images of the frescos, however, for within the actual pictorial space we see this blurring of painting and architecture continue. The figures are depicted within an architectural frame, such as a chiborium or arch. These elements duplicate the built space of the church (Fig. 16), making the pictorial space within the frescos connected to the church; they are not independent, autonomous representations, but continuations of the architectural space, reframing the visual arts as architecture. When we look at the frescos we get the "simultaneous perception of different spatial dimensions" that is associated with the "temple ymad of glas," as they invite us to try on different modes of looking. They are flat, two-dimensional painted surfaces, as well as built spaces growing out from the body of the church that we are seeing through the frame, or glass, of the image.

San Miniato al Monte also contains elements that bring it in contact with the Classical past. At the most basic level, this is made manifest in its floor plan. It fits the pattern we

discussed earlier, as it is modeled on a Roman basilica (Fig. 17). Such continuity brings the space into contact with antiquity by integrating an ancient architectural structure into a contemporary Christian space, recalling the blurring of time seen in the Temple.

Inlaid in the floor of the nave is a mosaic depicting the different signs of the zodiac (Fig. 18). It may appear odd for a Christian church to have pagan symbols so prominently featured, but Christian exegesis reads the twelve symbols as representing the twelve apostles (Lubac 370). Despite this interpretive move, the pagan history of the zodiac signs remains, making this mosaic a site where antiquity and the Christian present are overlaid upon one another, reflecting the duality of the Temple of Venus. The mosaic itself is an art form closely associated with antiquity. Additionally, the circular design of the mosaic works to blur and break down linear time. It is true the circle is simply following the convention of representing the circular pattern the zodiac forms in the night sky, but it also hints at the continuity between antiquity and the present by breaking down linear time. Once one enters the circle of symbols, they flow from one to another without a point marking the end. You can endlessly repeat the journey of the stars, traveling through time as you trace the path of the stars throughout the annual zodiac cycle. From this cyclical representation of time, it is possible to realize the separation of the past and present is arbitrary, and they are in closer contact than we might realize. After all, these same stars shone over the ancient Romans, just as they shine over us.

Chaucer depicts glass-like transformation and refraction within in the “temple of glas” in specifically spatial terms, making this link to the specific building of San Miniato al Monte not unlikely. His insistence on one's interaction with space opens up new pathways to connect with the past. Within the poem, Geffery is actively exploring the space of the temple; he “romed up

and doun" (HF 140), showing these details come to us through his interaction. He has no guide. Instead, it is his walking that brings him into contact with the various artifacts on the "walls" (HF 141). This emphasis on spatial movement makes sense if Chaucer was influenced by specific buildings, such as the church of San Miniato, because physically built environments solicit and determine bodily responses. The structure asks our eyes or legs to "roam up and doun" as we explore and interact with its space.

This emphasis on spatiality by Chaucer helps to differ his work from what was seen in Waleys' commentary, where the past is filtered through his own specifically didactic, Christian lens until the past is made abstract. Moving through an actualized space yields a more direct connection with antiquity. As the temple is described through ekphrasis, we can understand the "narrator's gaze as turning the artifact into the real" (Olson 126), transforming this imagined structure into a real, physical space. The description builds the Temple, prompting a tactile, intimate interaction for both Geffery and the reader.

This closer connection comes about because of medieval conceptions of memory. A common technique used to aid memorization was tying memory to imagined architectural spaces, where one would create an imagined space and move "in imagination through his memory building whilst he is making his speech, drawing from the memorised places the images he has placed on them" (Yates 3). Various parts of the space would be linked to specific details, reminding one of one's place in the memorized piece. Cicero claims this method was invented by Simonides, a poet who could identify the mutilated victims of a collapsed roof because he remembered the places each person had been sitting at the table. As Cicero says:

> He inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty (of memory) must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that

the order of the places will preserve the order of things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves, and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it (Cicero, 351-254).

Within the "House of Fame," one can remember, or reconstruct, the vanished pagan past by mapping it onto a contemporary Christian space; the "images" of antiquity are "store[d]...in the place" of Christianity. When the temple is transformed, the Gothic architectural features are imbued with a Classical context, and become touchstones for reaching back to the past. The "sondry stages" that surround the "figures / Of olde werke" act as windows, presenting a vision of antiquity so that it might be remembered and remade in the Christian present. Within the Temple, "the fundamental opposition between Christian and pagan might be overcome, or at least alleviated. Thus historical separation can be defeated" (Spearing 5). The opaque wall of time is replaced with a clear, transparent window of glass, allowing what is covered up to be seen once more.

The idea of recovering a connection with a vanished past speaks to Braswell's claim that the Temple is modeled on a reliquary. Pointing to the "trappings of glass and gold" (Braswell 104-5) as similarities between reliquaries and the Temple, she argues that the *Châsse aux Oiseaux* inspired Chaucer to create the temple. Rather than determine if this particular object is the basis for Chaucer's imagined space, I want to focus on the implications of linking the Temple of Venus with a reliquary, making it a space for sacred remains. Relics provide a direct connection with the divine; through the glass of the reliquary, the bits of bone, hair or blood are made visible, making the saint available to the faithful. A touch, or even just a sight of these relics could be enough to perform miracles, emphasizing the transformative power of contact with these pieces (Madigan 324-326).

Similarly, the Temple of Venus in "The House of Fame" makes the pagan past available in a Christian present. By looking through the transformative glass that makes up the space, the viewer or reader is exposed to antiquity, as it is once again made available to them. In this case, however, it is not an individual object that facilitates this moment of seeing, as it is with a reliquary, but the entire space of the building itself. One cannot just look, but must "roam up and doun," interacting with and engaging with the space. By partaking in this activity, the vanished Classical past returns, and one has the chance to experience it; an experience that would otherwise be denied to us is made available as we walk through the world of antiquity.

We can see this idea of a building as a reliquary made manifest by returning to the church of San Miniato. Located behind the altar is the church's crypt which dates back to the eleventh century, making it the oldest part of the church (Fig. 19). Here are kept the supposed relics of the martyred St. Miniato, as well as a very different type of relic. The columns that support the roof of the structure are literal pieces of antiquity (Fig. 20). The thirty-eight columns are done in a variety of styles, and do not follow a particular order. This disunity in form in part stems from the fact some columns were taken from ancient Roman baths (Goy 190-4). Instead of presenting the symbolic layering of the past upon the present seen in the zodiac mosaic, these objects offer direct contact with antiquity. The antique is present, and can be physically touched, even as one is in the space of a Christian church. Borrowing from the power the bones of St Miniato possess as holy objects, these columns offer an avenue to connect with something that is gone. In their repurposed form, they show the Classical past is not vanished, but still very much a part of our experience of the world, making the church of San Miniato a real world example of Chaucer's Temple's ability to make antiquity a part of our world once more. It shows us the circular quality

of time, where elements of the past have never actually disappeared.

A key part of antiquity that Chaucer is interacting with in the "House of Fame" is its literary tradition, and we can see the space of the Temple of Venus shaping his approach to it. Within the dream, Geffery first comes into contact with the literary past when he "romed up and doun, / I fond that on the wal ther was / Thus writen, on a table of bras" (HF 140-3). Inscribed upon this table is the opening of Virgil's *Aeneid*, proclaiming:

> 'I wol now synge, yif I kan,
> The armes and also the man
> That first cam, thurgh his destinee,
> Fugityf of Troy contree,
> In Itayle, with ful moche pyne
> Unto the strondes of Lavyne" (HF 144-8).

Anyone with even the faintest familiarity with Virgil could not fail to recognize Chaucer's echoing of the *Aeneid*'s opening lines, which sets up the forthcoming section of the poem to be a recitation or remembrance of Virgil. Indeed, Geffery says "tho began the story anoon, / As I shal telle yow echon" (HF 149-50), implying that Virgil's "story" will be narrated and related in a verbal manner. After all, "telle" is what language is best equipped to do, presenting the poem through verbal representation.

This turns out to not be the case, however, for the story of Aeneas is filtered through Geffery's own perception of it. The tale he relates is not simply a retelling of Virgil, but an account of what Geffery experiences. He describes how he "sawgh...the destruction / Of Troye" (HF 151), and "saugh...such tempeste" (HF 209). In fact, the "I saugh" construction is used thirteen times throughout these approximately 330 lines as new moments in the narrative are introduced. This emphasis on sight points to these passages as being ekphrastic descriptions. Geffery even goes so far as to say "Ther sawgh I graven eke how he...with hys shippes gan to

saylle / Towards the contree of Itaylle" (HF 193-5), explicitly stating that the scenes are visual representations etched onto the walls. From this perspective, they might be part of the "ymages" and "curious portreytures" that fill the hall of the temple, illustrating the poem evoked by the words on the "table of brass."

As Geffery continues his description of the narrative scenes, this idea begins to come apart, for it is not only his sight that engaged. In the moment he spots Aeneas' family fleeing from Troy as it burns, he "saugh next...How Creusa, daun Eneas wif...And hir younge sone Iulo, / And eke Askanius...Fledden eke with drery chere" (HF 174-9), keeping with the ekphrastic pattern established thus far. However, Geffery says this scene was "pitee for to here" (HF 180), which takes us beyond the realm of simple visual representation. His sense of hearing is involved in his interaction with the scene, which points to a more direct, physical interaction with the story. This aural aspect of the *Aeneid* passage registers with editors of the text so strongly that they feel the need to use modern quotation marks when Dido makes her plea to Aeneas (Benson 351-2) marking this passage as a specifically spoken monologue, with the speaking done by the character Dido, not Geffery.

This conflation of visual and auditory stimuli could be an example of Chaucer's "muddlement and inattention to the visual arts" as Henry Kelly says (Kelly 115) Or, if one wanted to make a more productive point, one could make a convincing argument that the introduction of sound into the "graven" images is a medieval prefiguring of Sidney's "speaking picture." Given the context of these images within the Temple of Venus, however, I feel it is most helpful to return to the question of memory and bring it to bear on the passage. As discussed earlier, the medieval act of remembering is related to moving through a space. Yates

tells us that this is not a silent movement, however, but one that is taking place "whilst he is making his speech" (Yates 3), meaning the act of remembering is linked to both sight and sound. One is prompted to remember by seeing the different parts of the memory house, as well as the sound of one's speech. Because of this relationship, "reading, seeing, hearing, and remembering are rendered as interchangeable" (Kolve 305) when Geffery recounts the story of Aeneas. Memory has become a space, where a jumble of senses, including sight and sound, are imbedded within a single place. He cannot help but have seen and heard the narrative events as he reads the brass tablet and examines the paintings along the temple's walls. The "ideal memory house" (Rowland 42) of the temple does not just cause Geffery to remember the story, but brings it to life by engaging both his and our own different bodily senses.

Critics are quick to point out that Geffery's account of the *Aeneid* is flawed and incorrect, which would appear to push back against this idea of memory. The account Geffery gives is not just that of Virgil, but also contains elements of Ovid's telling of the tale from *Heroides*. This conflation of two different accounts within the space of one narrative causes many critics to mark the passage as a failure; Chaucer doesn't get Virgil right, or he is attempting a moment of comedy that fails. Buckmaster rightly pushes back at these argument, noting "it is not a summary of a single poem...[but rather] a memorial reconstruction of a highly individualized act of reading and conflating two books" (Buckmaster 284). By going back to the story of Aeneas, Geffery creates a new work, where Aeneas "is Virgil's epic hero and Ovid's false lover, admirable and treacherous" (Buckmaster 284), taking on characterizations from both sources.

This new image of Aeneas comes about because of memory, or what we might be better off calling creative memory. Through the act of remembering the different accounts of Aeneas,

the ancient text comes alive; as we have already discussed, the audiovisual elements of Geffery's narration point to the story becoming a living thing through the very act of remembering. As this account is a combination of the two sources, however, it is more fitting to say Geffery re-members the work of Virgil and Ovid. The various limbs and pieces of the poems are moved, reordered, and reshaped. It's not that his version is incorrect. After all, do we claim that Shakespeare's retellings of older stories are wrong? The point is not to fixate on instability produced by this retelling, but to focus on the fact something new has been created. Within the Temple, it is possible to reframe and reshape these older texts, providing a new window through which to understand the story. These Classical texts undergo a glass-like transformation, creating a new version of the *Aeneid* in the present. This new memory of Aeneas' story has been transformed within a space where the senses are engaged, creating a spatial experience of the events.

There is one facet of the Temple of Venus we have failed to touch upon throughout our entire discussion of its spatial effects, a fact which I will now attempt to rectify. The building is not a structure that exists in the real world as we understand it, but exists within a dream. If we go backwards and look at the Invocation and Proem that start Book I, we can see why this must be the case. In order for the temple to function as a site of transformation and reworking, it has to be in a dreamspace, for it is within a dream that antiquity can be more fully inhabited and experienced once again. Pieces of antiquity are present in the Christian church, but within a dream we can see the shift between the two take place before our very eyes.

By starting with the Invocation, we can see the necessity of dreaming to glass-like transformation. At the poem's “gynnyng...I wol make invocation, / With special devocion, / Unto

the god of slep anoon" (HF 66-69), which is Morpheus. This choice in divine entity to call upon is interesting to say the least. Indeed, Bevington believes "the god of sleep is a ridiculous deity to invoke when Geffery is requesting the attention of his audience for the next hour" (Bevington 291). However, this view fails to take into account what exactly Morpheus is being called upon to do. Rather than this being a case of Geffery mistaking Morpheus' soporific power for poetic inspiration, he wants Morpheus to "me spede / My sweven for to telle aryght" (HF 78-79). The invocation asks Morpheus to send Geffery his "sweven," or dream, again so that he can give an accurate account of it, making the god of sleep the perfect figure to invoke before the start of his narration.

This fact does not completely negate the validity of Bevington's point. After all, even if Geffery is able to tell the story of his dream accurately, that does not change the fact that the listeners and readers of the poem are in danger of falling under Morpheus' spell. This danger is exactly what the poem requires; Morpheus is invoked to help create a dreamlike state in the audience, so that they may experience the spatial transformations and reshapings found in dreams. In order to see the refraction of Classical and Christian time, or the reflection of pagan art in church architecture, the audience must enter into the world of the dream. The dreamspace is fundamental to inhabiting the Temple of Venus, making its transformative power dependent on the larger landscape of the dream.

Within the Invocation itself we see examples of the blurring between pagan and Christian we have discussed already. Immediately after invoking Morpheus, the invocation shifts to begin talking about "that mover ys of al, / That is and was and ever shal" (HF 81-82), which is a clear reference to the Christian God. Once the audience has begun to "sweven" (HF 79) and begun to

see through the glass of dreaming, then cultures and times begin to blend together, layering the antique and the contemporary upon one another.

This call to Morpheus also reflects the transformation of literary tradition we have seen. Invocations were a fairly standard practice in poetry, and critics tend to see those in "The House of Fame" as looking to Dante's *Divine Comedy* for a model. For example, in Canto II of *Inferno* Dante calls: "Muses, high genius, aid me! Memory, / that recorded what I saw among the dead, here you will show your true integrity" (II.7-9). Chaucer's invocation in "The House of Fame" is different, however, for Geffery is not calling upon the mythological figures associated with poetry, such as Dante's "Muses" or Apollo. These figures augment or enhance the poetic abilities of the poet. Chaucer is instead focusing on his audience, rather than himself as poet; Morpheus will help produce a dreamlike state in the audience, so that they may become more receptive to the reshifting and reframing of antiquity found in the poem. This new focus in turn reframes the invocation as well. Instead of being completely about the poet, it is now about the audience, and works to establish their relationship to the poem that is to come.

At the end of the Invocation, we find this blurring is made even more explicit. For those who misinterpret Geffery's dream "thorgh presumpcion, / Or hate, or skorn, or through envye, / Dispit , or jape, or vilanye" (HF 94-96), he asks that "Jesus God" (HF 96) send "every harm that any man / Hath had syth the world began" (HF 99-100). While doing this, he compares those who misinterpret to "Cresus, that was king of Lyde" (HF 105), and says those that act like Croesus will "this prayer shal he have of me" (HF 107). This comparison once again brings the Classical into contact with the Christian; those who replicate the dishonest interpretation of dreams practiced by Croesus will suffer the wrath of the Christian Jesus. It is through a dream

that these elements meet one another, showing it is within the world of a dream that the past and present can make contact in this way.

Finally we have to answer the question of why dreams provide a space for transformation, and to do this we turn to the Proem. Within this section, we see what it means to dream through the various causes of dreams. One of these is “folkes complexions / Make hem dreme of reflexions” (HF 24-25). Regardless of whether or not it is actually individual's “complexions” that cause a particular dream, what matters is the dreams are “reflexions.” They are reshapings and remakings of the waking world; a dream is a glass that provides an alternative perspective where new ideas can come into focus. Within the dream of “The House of Fame,” we have seen the reflective nature of the temple again and again. Aspects of world, such as the church architecture of San Miniato, are reflected into something new, a process that is only possible because of dreams' ability to reflect. They function like glass, reshaping space in order to create new visions where pieces of the past can be recovered.

An alternative theory is dreams come about “by disordynaunce / Of naturel acustumaunce” (HF 27-28), where a dream is the result of changing one's habits. Again, what matters here is that dreams have the capacity to “disordyaunce [the] naturel acustumaunce” of the dreamer. Within a dream, the natural order is destroyed. Refraction and disorder take over, allowing pagan sculptures to be situated within the space of a Christian cathedral. As dreamers interact with this space of “disordyaunce,” their own preconceived notions of “naturel acustumaunce” melt away, allowing the creation of new systems, such as the hybrid Virgil and Ovid telling of the *Aeneid* given by Geffery. Through the creation of these new systems, we see that dreams and dreamspaces are real; they facilitate the creation of new visions that exist

beyond the world of the dream.

Dreams also can be prophetic warnings that "forwot that ys to come" (HF 44), provided the dreamer can interpret them properly. This idea of predicting the future speaks to the erasure of temporal boundaries within a dreamspace. The future can be known in the present, just as the antique past can return to life in the present. A temple to a pagan goddess exists within a Christian church; Dido breaths, speaks, and is heard by Geffrey. Time becomes full of "disordynaunce," which in turn allows things long past to be experienced once more.

We come to experience all these aspects of dreams in the Temple of Venus because Geffery decides to describe his dream to his audience. The tale that goes on to occupy the next 2000 lines or so comes from what he "kan now remembre" (HF 64). As we have seen, medieval memory relies on built spaces, so the built space of the Temple of Venus is necessary to the poem's existence. The focus on its spatial features helps Geffery "remember" his dream. Its spatial structure becomes the architectural framework upon which the poem is built, so that he may "tellen everydel" (HF 65) about the dream.

"Remembrance" has another context as well, that of remaking or reforming. As Geffery tells the audience his dream, each word and line builds upon the others to construct the poem, which is itself a rebuilding of the dream he had "Decembre the tenthe day" (HF 111). The dreamspace is being remade so that we may experience the dream he had. Using his memory, Geffery puts the pieces of the dream together in a poetic structure, recreating the space of his dream for us to explore. A part of this is the Temple of Venus, an architectural feature of his dream that exposes us to the remaking and transformative process of dreams. It is built as the dream is built, giving us a window of glass through which to see.

Dale Cooper, the FBI agent investigating Laura Palmer's death, turns out the light in his hotel room in Twin Peaks and begins to fall asleep. We cut to him in the midst of a dream, where he has aged twenty years and is in a room of red curtains. He is joined by a dwarf and a woman that looks just like the recently murdered Laura Palmer. They are all seated, with two lamps and a statue of Venus behind them. Suddenly, the dwarf tells Dale “I've got good news. That gum you like is going to come back in style.” His voice sounds as if it is recorded backwards, but we can still understand him. He introduces the woman who looks like Laura as his cousin, and she tells Dale “Sometimes my arms bend backwards.” As music begins to play, the dwarf gets up to dance, and the woman goes to Dale and whispers something in his ear. He begins to smile, and there is a sudden to cut to him sitting up in bed. He grabs the phone and calls the sheriff, telling him “I know who killed Laura Palmer.”

This dream sequence from contemporary television shares the same transformative qualities we have seen in Chaucer's “House of Fame.” Within Lynch's conception of the dreamspace, there is a nod to the artistic past with the Venus statue, and things that are lost return, like Dale's favorite gum. The prophetic utterance of the return of the gum speaks to time being disjointed, bending backwards like the woman's arms. And we have a fact about the real world revealed in the dreamspace; Dale discovers who the murderer is within the dream. These elements are a far cry from Chaucer's transformation of the Christian into the pagan, but both Chaucer and Lynch link these elements to the space of dreaming. The Red Room and the glass Temple of Venus provide the space necessary for transformation and remembering, whether that takes the form of memory or creation. The gum comes back, the pagan goddess returns, and we witness both through glass, whether it be the glass of the television, or the glass walls of the

Temple.

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