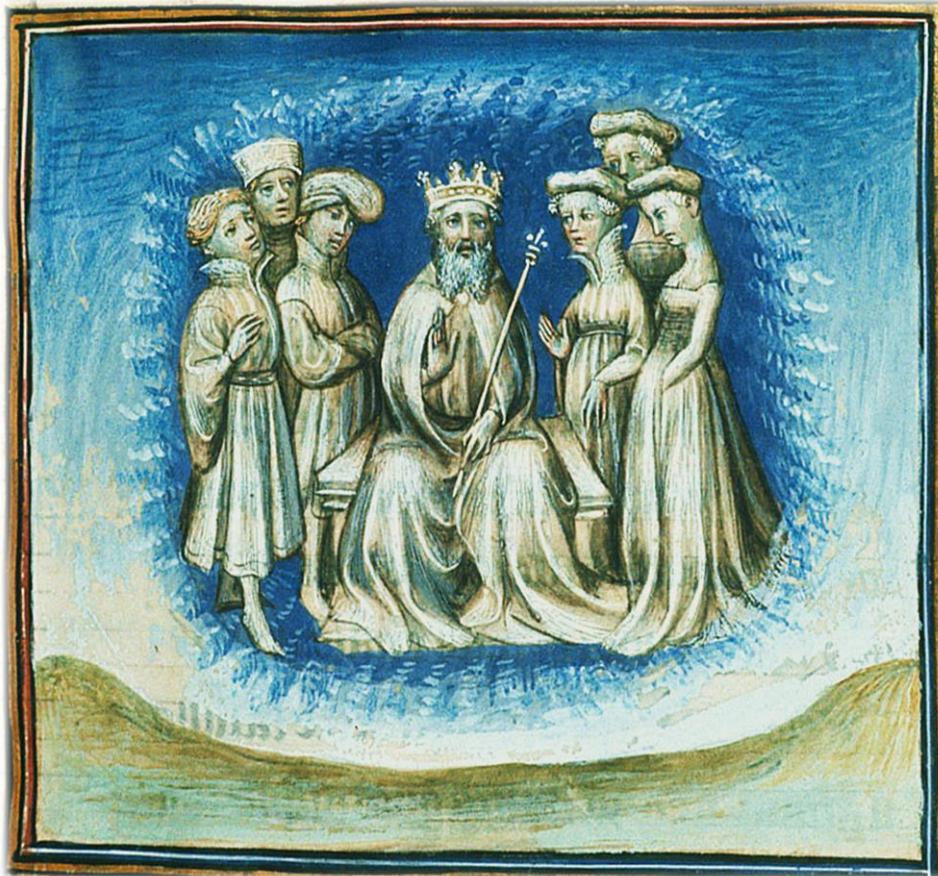


## “Goddys of Metal and of Ston”

The auctoritas of the Roman gods in classical and Middle English literature.



BA Thesis English Language and Culture, Utrecht University

Jantine Broek

3626733

Dr. A. Auer

January 2014

British English

12,820 words

## Index.

I.	Introduction .....	3
II.	Method .....	9
III.	The gods .....	10
<i>Jupiter</i>		
a.	The auctoritas of Jupiter in selected classical texts.....	10
a.	The auctoritas of Jupiter in selected Middle English texts.....	17
<i>Mars</i>		
a.	The auctoritas of Mars in selected classical texts.....	27
b.	The auctoritas of Mars in selected Middle English texts.....	31
IV.	Conclusion .....	39
V.	References .....	40



## I. Introduction

The fascination with classical Greek and Roman legends has persisted in English literature from classical times into the Middle Ages, and reached its peak in the Renaissance. The polytheistic and idolatrous religious beliefs of ancient Greece and Rome, grouped together as pagan religions, were the subject matter of classical literature and greatly influenced it. Greek gods were assimilated into Roman culture and given different names, and several indigenous Roman gods were added to the pantheon. Knowledge of the Mediterranean pagan myths and legends was brought to Great Britain by the Romans in the first century AD, and then again when Christianity was introduced to Anglo-Saxon Britain in the sixth century. Despite the popularity and the doctrines of this monotheistic Christian religion, the remaining works of classical Roman and Greek writers were still widely read. Much of this literature, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Hesiod's *Works and Days*, included stories about the pagan gods and their relationships with mortals. Furthermore, these writers were considered to be great authorities on subjects like philosophy, politics, and science (Minnis 1). For example, as part of his programme to educate the English people, King Alfred the Great of the southern Anglo-Saxon kingdom Wessex had works from fourth- and fifth-century Roman writers translated, such as Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*. In the Middle Ages, many elements of classical philosophies were incorporated into Christian literature. Some Middle English writers, such as John Lydgate and John Gower, tended to view pagan writings through moralistic Christian eyes, and they would often imitate or borrow story lines or characters from classical writers to suit their own purpose, sometimes taking them completely out of context. They proposed the virtues of Christianity, while rejecting the religious pagan doctrine of their sources. However, as McCall points out, Christianized interpretations of classical mythology and literature were not the norm. Moral, etymological and naturalistic interpretations of the gods were also common, just as they had been in

classical times. (6-7) Thus, while classical writers were considered authoritative on subjects that did not abjectly have to do with religion, their religious convictions were interpreted differently in medieval English society. (idem 1) The Renaissance brought a true revival of classical literature and art, as ancient manuscripts were studied and translated anew by scholars and freed from medieval interpretations. (Morford et al. 705-6)

The role of Greek and Roman gods in Middle English literature has already drawn much scholarly attention. Some relevant studies will be discussed below. Several studies have investigated the roles of individual deities, such as Venus, Cupid, Saturn, Fortuna and Jupiter in Middle English literature, regarding the themes of courtly love and sexuality, melancholy, fatalism, and common fortune, respectively<sup>1</sup>. Attention has also been paid to astrology in connection with the pagan legends, based on the medieval belief that the nine most important planets, named after nine pagan gods, influenced people's lives and decided their Fate. This function of the planets was incorporated in studies of medicine, astronomy, astrology, religion and natural science.<sup>2</sup> In Middle English literature, there is a close correlation between the planets and the deities they were named after, as they share characteristics and are equally powerful.<sup>3</sup> This belief was assimilated in Christian thought, where the planets and their corresponding pagan deities became angels of God. They still influenced people's lives, by carrying out God's will.<sup>4</sup> Medieval attitudes towards life, death, age and youth, and gods like Fortuna and Venus as found in Middle English literature have been compared to the same

---

<sup>1</sup> See Tinkle, Theresa. *Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, & English Poetry*. Stanford Press: 1996. Print.; Brown, Peter and Andrew Butcher. *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in the Canterbury Tales*. Basil Blackwell: 1991. Print.; Patch, Howard R. *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature*. Harvard University Press: 1927. Print.; Kurose, Tamotsu. "Rhetorical use of 'Jupiter' in Medieval and Elizabethan Literature". *Anglica*: 1964. Web.

<sup>2</sup> North, J.D. *Chaucer's Universe*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1988. Print.

<sup>3</sup> See Moseley, Charles. *The Knight's Tale: A Critical Study*. Penguin Press: 1987. Print.; Rivers, Isabel. *Classical and Christian Ideas in Renaissance Poetry: A Students' Guide*. 2nd ed. Routledge: New York, 1994. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Rivers, Isabel. *Classical and Christian Ideas in Renaissance Poetry: A Students' Guide*. 2nd ed. Routledge: New York, 1994. Print.

attitudes in classical literature by Tristram.<sup>5</sup> A large and growing body of literature has investigated Chaucer, his writings, and his influences. Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400) was a late medieval English writer and author of *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories told by travellers on their pilgrimage towards Canterbury. Chaucer's literary works can be divided in three periods: French, Italian, and English.<sup>6</sup> In the first two periods, Chaucer's writings were inspired by French sources, such as the *romans classiques*<sup>7</sup>, and in his Italian period he was influenced by writers such as Dante and Boccaccio. *The Canterbury Tales* is the key work of Chaucer's English period, and shows that by then he had come into his own as a writer and had developed an independent style.<sup>8</sup> Still, his reliance on earlier medieval and classical sources was evident. Chaucer's interest in pagan myth pervades all three periods. From classical writers such as Cicero, Virgil, Ovid and Statius<sup>9</sup>, whose morals, values, rhetorical and literary skills he admired and imitated, he learnt about the classical deities and how they were typically associated with certain aspects of human nature and morality, and often became personified as certain ideas. (McCall 15) A study by Minnis<sup>10</sup> discusses Chaucer's interpretations of pagan mythology, and stresses the lack of Christian bias in selected works by Chaucer. By using their stories and characters in his own works, knowledge of classical literature became widespread among his peers and audience. Scholars agree that Chaucer himself was a great influence on his contemporary John Lydgate<sup>11</sup> (c.1370-c.1451), a former

---

<sup>5</sup> Tristram, Philippa. *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 1976. Print.

<sup>6</sup> Pollard, A.W. "Geoffrey Chaucer." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Ed. Vol. VI. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910. Web.

<sup>7</sup> See Nolan, Barbara. *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press: 2008. Print.; *Writers and their Background: Geoffrey Chaucer*. Ed. Derek Brewer. London: Bell & Sons Ltd, 1974. Print.

<sup>8</sup> Huntington Fletcher, Robert. *A History of English Literature*. Boston: R. G. Bader, 1916. Web.

<sup>9</sup> See Moseley, Charles. *The Knight's Tale: A Critical Study*. Penguin Press: 1987. Print.; McCall, John. *Chaucer Among the Gods: The Poetics of Classical Myth*. Pennsylvania University Press: 1979. Print.; Guidry, Mark S. "The Parliament of Gods and Men in *The Knight's Tale*". *The Chaucer Review*. Vol. 43, nr. 2. Penn State University Press: 2008. Web.; Fyler, John M. *Chaucer and Ovid*. Yale University Press: 1979. Print.;

<sup>10</sup> Minnis, A.J. *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*. D.S. Brewer: 1982. Print.

<sup>11</sup> See Schirmer, Walter F. *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century*. Transl. Ann E. Keep. London: Methuen & Co, 1979. Print.; Renoir, Alain. *The Poetry of John Lydgate*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967. Print.

monk. Lydgate wrote his *Siege of Thebes* as an additional Canterbury Tale, in imitation of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. *Siege of Thebes* became more of a historical account than an epic and is interspersed with the author's moralistic and philosophical views of the pagan legends he treated, and reads like a manual for rulers on the subject of war and peace and the relationship with his people.<sup>12</sup> Lydgate's knowledge of classical writers was slim, and he shows an altogether ungracious attitude towards the classical deities, excepting his treatment of them in his other major classical adaptation, the *Troy Book*<sup>13</sup>.

Several studies have discussed the roles of the pagan gods in both classical and Middle English literature. A comprehensive study is provided by McCall<sup>14</sup> who discusses the widely variant moral, etymologist and naturalistic interpretations of the pagan gods in Middle English literature. Seznec<sup>15</sup> traces interpretations of the gods from classical times into the renaissance, and provides a useful overview of the role of the pagan gods in Roman times. He first proposes that the gods functioned as explanations of the natural world. The myths that featured the gods had the greatest effect on the pagans when they were still ignorant of the laws of the natural world and believed only in the divine, but as Seznec points out, this "primitive mentality" disappeared long before paganism came to an end as the ruling religion. He then distinguishes three main functions of the gods according to the ancient pagans themselves: 1) They are mere men who have been raised up to be immortals, and the myths are distortions of historical facts; 2) They are cosmic symbols who express the union or conflict of the elementary powers which created the universe; 3) The gods are allegories, which constitute moral or philosophical ideas in fable. (4) A study by Fox<sup>16</sup> examines Roman

---

<sup>12</sup> Schirmer, Walter F. *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century*. Transl. Ann E. Keep. London: Methuen & Co, 1979. Print

<sup>13</sup> Pearsall, Derek. *John Lydgate*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970. Print.

<sup>14</sup> McCall, John. *Chaucer Among the Gods: The Poetics of Classical Myth*. Pennsylvania University Press: 1979. Print.

<sup>15</sup> Seznec, Jean. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*. Transl. Barbara F. Sessions. Princeton University Press; 1953. Web.

<sup>16</sup> Fox, Robin L. *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Penguin Group, 1986. Web.

worship and rituals in detail, and he emphasises tradition and the mirroring of human relationships as key components of the gods' authority. The gods were "old and proven companions" who were revered and respected for their claims to tradition and antiquity, and expected to give their believers protection wherever they went. The traditions of the cults of the gods had become commonplace in pagan literature and seen as inseparable from the growth of cities and its inhabitants. However, change was also welcomed, as new gods were accepted and elements of worship and ritual were added or forgotten. The gods themselves, Fox argues, were modelled on the social relationships which mortals experienced amongst themselves on earth. A god might become the main protector of an individual, but not be the only god the individual was converted to. This helped people account for their misfortunes by error rather than sin: if one deity was neglected in worship, the individual's hardship could be blamed on that. The gods were not just superior patrons, but powers of immense superiority: they were concerned with honour and the due offering of gifts, and not committed to returning gifts.

I believe that what I have previously referred to as the 'function' or 'role' of the gods can also be referred to as 'auctoritas'. Auctoritas in its broadest translation means 'authority', but it is a multi-faceted concept which originated in Roman times, and it is difficult to define because it depends on the context in which it is used. "It could describe a judgment, advice, persuasion, a command, political influence, and constitutional power" (Scillon 39), and was used for persons—in case of ownership, for example—but also for texts and institutions. Thus auctoritas can be applied to political artefacts, but also to religion. A study by Pollmann argues that *auctoritas* was a concept rarely applied to the pagan gods at that time, and says the gods were viewed as "large-scale magistrates". (170) Auctoritas in Middle English literature occurs in several forms. It was used to ascribe authority to classical writers, as Chaucer does when he mentions "auctoritee" (Moseley 21); in the Middle Ages, classical writers such as

Ovid and Virgil were not only widely read, but also respected and believed.<sup>17</sup> *Auctoritas divina*, or divine authority, was in the time of Chaucer and Lydgate connected to the Christian god: by this term was meant either the overriding power of the Church or of a more spiritual form of Christianity over Christian society. (Scanlon 39) As a study by Pollmann points out, the authority of the Christian god is different from the authority we have seen ascribed to the pagan gods. The Christian god's authority is more compassionate and emphasises the consent and self-fulfilment of the Christian believers, whereas the pagan gods' authority comes down mostly to the overpowering of the believers. While much has been written about *auctoritas* in medieval literature on early Christian Italian and French writers<sup>18</sup> and about Chaucer as an *auctor* himself, *auctoritas* has not been studied in either the *Knight's Tale* or the *Siege of Thebes*. Attention has been paid to the role of the gods in the *Knight's Tale*, and I would like to compare this role, corroborated by already existing studies, to the role of the gods in Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*. Furthermore, based on my readings of *auctoritas* in antiquity, I shall compare these two Middle English texts to two of their classical Roman sources, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c. 8 AD) and Statius' *Thebaid* (c. 80—92 AD). I will single out the two pagan gods Jupiter and Mars and compare the role that they play in these four tales, which all have a similar theme, namely the Fate of the ancient Greek city of Thebes. Though the cults of the gods often differed per region and many aspects and attributes can present a muddled picture of their exact function, I shall focus on their aspects which are most highlighted when discussing the cycle of Thebes. Thus, I will investigate in what way these texts exhibit a transformation of the notion of *auctoritas divina*, and how the perception of the pagan gods

---

<sup>17</sup> See Dimmick, Jeremy. "Ovid in the Middle Ages: authority and poetry." *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*. Ed. Philip Hardie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Web.

<sup>18</sup> See Seznec, Jean. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*. Transl. Barbara F. Sessions. Princeton University Press; 1953. Web.; Pollmann, Karla. "Christianity and Authority in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of the Concept of Auctoritas." *Being Christian in Late Antiquity: A Festschrift for Gillian Clark*. Eds. Harrison, Humfress & Sandwell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Web.

by their pagan believers has changed in the Middle English adaptations compared to the original classical sources.

## II. Method

I will use the philological approach in this thesis. I will compare the following texts by way of close reading and selecting passages that illustrate parallels between the classical and the medieval texts. Moreover, I will make use of secondary literature that is relevant to my research. I will make use of the Penguin edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, translated from the original Latin into English by David Raeburn, because it is faithful to the original and accessible to read. For Statius' *Thebaid* I will rely on D. R. Shackleton Bailey's English translation for Harvard University, a modern and very readable edition of the epic. I will use these two sources to provide the required background information of the tales of Thebes. As the two classical texts are originally Latin texts, I will use the Roman names of the gods. Each god will be introduced by a brief summary of its character and then discussed individually to trace its particular metamorphosis through Chaucer's and Lydgate's texts. For my brief introductions of the persona of the Roman gods, Morford, Lenardon and Sham's *Classical Mythology* will be my main source as it provides an excellent comprehensive overview of classical literature, and incorporates translated accounts of numerous different writers in composing the most accurate summaries of the Greek and Roman myths. For Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* I will use Charles Moseley's Penguin Masterstudies edition, which features the text in the original Middle English and also provides some historical background for the text, as well as critical notes and appendices. My research of the *Siege of Thebes* will be based upon Robert R. Edwards' edition. He has kept the Middle English intact, based on the 1430 Arundel 119 manuscript, and has made only minor spelling corrections. Furthermore, he has

provided the text with a useful introduction which discusses historical background and critical interpretations of Lydgate's work.

### III. The gods

#### *The auctoritas of Jupiter in selected classical texts.*

Jupiter, whose Greek name is Zeus, is the king of the gods. He is famous for his amorous conquests, and his offspring includes both gods and mortals. In later traditions, Zeus also becomes an upholder of high moral and ethical values, "a wrathful god of justice and virtue" (Morford et al. 114) and a protector of family and the state. In this tradition he is also seen as a more abstract being of philosophical and religious importance, referred to simply as God, spearheading a new monotheistic tradition. (idem 137)

As the supreme god, Jupiter is often associated with the creation of the world. There is no definitive classical creation myth, but several different accounts exist, for example by Hesiod<sup>19</sup>, Aristophanes<sup>20</sup>, and Ovid, which is the most relevant here. In the first book of *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes the beginning of the world as "Chaos" (I.7), a discord between all the elements, without any order or meaning to them; until at one point, "the god who is nature was kinder and brought this dispute to a settlement. He disentangled the elements, so as to set them free from the heap of darkness, then gave them their separate places and tied them down in peaceful concordat. . ." (I.21- 26) This god, who is furthermore

---

<sup>19</sup> Hesiod presents the classic Greek version, in which the Muses bring him the information from Zeus himself, which must therefore be correct. According to him, "Chaos came into being" and several other forces of nature spring from it: Gaia (earth), Eros (love), Tartarus (a region of the underworld), Erebus (the darkness in Tartarus) and Night. Day sprung from the union of Night and Erebus. (Morford et al. 56-7)

<sup>20</sup> Aristophanes in *Birds* recounts the existence Chaos, Night, Erebus and Tartarus. Night and Erebus bore Eros, who mingled with Chaos and resulting in the birth of Uranus (sky), Earth, Aether ("the lower atmosphere"), Oceanus, and the race of the gods. (Morford et al. 58-9)

referred to as “whichever one of the gods” (I.32) and “the creator” (I.57), is not given an explicit name. A few lines onward, Ovid recounts the creation of Man:

Maybe the great artificer made him of seed divine in a plan for a better universe.

Maybe the earth that was freshly formed and newly divorced from the heavenly ether retained some seeds of its kindred element – earth, which Prométheus, the son of Iápetus, sprinkled with raindrops and molded into the likeness of gods who govern the universe. (I.77-84)

Thus, the creation of the world and its inhabitants was a job split between several entities. The Creator organized the universe, but it remains unclear whether he also made the mortals, or whether it was Prometheus who made the mortals in the image of the gods. Ovid then recounts how after the creation of mankind the world went through Four Ages which progressively decreased in innocence and glory, and became more and more determined by violence and egotism. (I.87-150) Jupiter’s father, Saturn, presided over the Golden Age, which was without laws, battles and manual labour, but still maintained itself in peace and harmony. (I.88-112) When “Saturn was cast into murky Tártarus, Jupiter seized the throne of the universe” (I.113-114). Jupiter divided the year into four seasons, and the Silver Age began, followed by the Bronze Age (I.113-26) and the Iron Age, in which mankind hit its low point of wickedness and immorality. (I.128-131) This is the world Jupiter rules over. The distinction between ruler and Creator is muddled; he is referred to as “the Father omnipotent” (II.304), and “Almighty Father” (II.401), which implies that he is either Father of his people—mankind—or Father of all he has created. Jupiter is seen as part of the cosmic forces which created the universe, and thus a figure with *auctoritas* not only over people, but also over natural forces—hence his ability to flood the earth. However, I will next investigate

whether Jupiter's more human, rather than cosmic, characteristics actually constituted him as a respectable, traditional auctor in the eyes of the Romans. In *Metamorphoses*, Jupiter is a king who summons the gods to a council while sitting on a throne. (I.175-7) He is clearly the supreme being who rules over the other deities. Ovid refers to Olympus as "the place which, if I could muster the boldness to say it, I'd not be afraid to describe as the Pálatine Hill of the firmament." (I.174-6) In this way, the auctoritas of the Olympian gods and Jupiter's supremacy is translated into human terms, by comparing him to the emperor of Rome. Ovid's reverence for the emperor becomes clear through this favourable comparison, to whom Roman citizens ascribed ultimate auctoritas on matters of state. The gap between the auctoritas of the gods and men is actually quite narrow: Ovid tells us that while Jupiter rules over the heavens and other realms in the universe, Augustus rules over earth, and "each is ruler and father". (XV.859-60) However, in the light of Jupiter's more whimsical characteristics discussed below, we might wonder whether the comparison is so favourable to the emperor after all, and indeed whether Jupiter is the highest auctor: the worship of the emperor could be seen as a sign of religious decadence which implies that the gods are no longer considered very remote and powerful as before. Certainly they were still agents of divine, unpredictable power and benefaction, but so was the human emperor. (Fox)

Jupiter is characterized by an "Ovidian harshness" (Feeney 353); a god who is not hesitant to punish mortals if they have incurred his wrath. Certainly, during the Iron Age, Jupiter becomes angry at all the wicked human beings who cannot live in peace together, and decides to destroy them all by flooding the earth. (I.241-243) Some gods agree with this punishment, but some beg him to spare the mortals, for fear that there will be nobody left to sacrifice to them. (I.247-249). Disregarding their pleas, Jupiter destroys the entire human race, excepting only one man and one woman, who are tasked with repopulating the earth. Jupiter is not only portrayed as wrathful in the *Metamorphoses*, but also as mischievous and lustful.

Ovid frequently describes Jupiter's extramarital affairs—though the word “affair” would imply consent from both sides, whereas in many cases it simply comes down to rape. The rapes can be seen as conquests, by means of which Jupiter asserts his authority. Two of his victories that play a key role in the destruction of Thebes are the rapes of Europa and Semele. Europa was the sister of Cadmus, the founder of Thebes. To seduce her, Jupiter changed himself into a magnificent bull, and when she was no longer afraid to touch him, he carried her away on his back and raped her. (II.833-875) Cadmus was sent out to find her. When he tired of searching, he received an oracle that told him to follow a divinely sent cow and build a city, Thebes, wherever the cow laid down to rest. (III.1-25) Thus the rape of Europa was instrumental in the founding of the city. Semele, Cadmus' daughter, became pregnant with Jupiter's child. When Juno discovered this, she took her revenge on Semele by making her ask Jupiter to present himself to her in full deific splendour. When Jupiter did so, surrounded by clouds and lightning, Semele was killed by the impact in bed. The child in her belly survived and became the god Bacchus<sup>21</sup>. (III.273-310) “But who can detect Jove's thievish amours?” (III.6) Ovid asks us, emphasizing that what seriously harms his mortal victims matters little to Jupiter, as gods cannot measure themselves by standards of human suffering. This invulnerability allows them to indulge their divine license, to act without consequences to themselves. (Feeney 202) This divine licence constitutes Jupiter's *auctoritas* in the *Metamorphoses*. He meets with very little opposition, aside from Juno's, because of the divine power that underlies his commands and acts of persuasion.

The *Thebaid* recounts the war between Polynices and his brother Eteocles. After their father Oedipus is no longer king, they agreed to each rule Thebes for one year and then switch places. However, Eteocles, who rules during the first year, does not want to give up the throne, upon which Polynices assembles an army of Greek allies and starts a war. The gods

---

<sup>21</sup> God of vegetation, especially the grape and the vine, and wine, intoxication, sex, irrationality, music, dancing and ecstasy. His Greek name is Dionysos. (Morford et al. 298; 820)

are the audience, but meddle very little with the proceedings. Statius amplifies Ovidian Jupiter's qualities. His Jupiter, too, is a king and his mere presence has the other gods quaking with fear; they only dare to sit down when Jupiter allows them to. Feeney says of Jupiter's personality that "in his self-indulgence, violence, and final indifference, he pushes to the limit the menacing side of his epic personality." (371) Jupiter's *auctoritas* is reinforced by his "menacing side". Before the war between the Greeks and the Thebans begins, Jupiter tells his fellow deities not to attest his judgment and actions or to fight amongst themselves about the outcome of the war, as this day has been destined for battle since the beginning of time. If the other gods do not allow him to punish the city and its inhabitants for crimes against the gods, he will tear Thebes down himself or flood it with rain. (III.239-252) At this point, Statian Jupiter's *auctoritas* is asserted in two ways. The first is the confirmation of his ultimate authority over men and gods; both are afraid of him. "He spoke and they were amazed at his ordinance. You might have thought them mortal hearts, so did they all hold voice and mind in check." (III.253-4) The second is Jupiter's superiority over Fate. Though Fate has decided that the war will take place on this day, Jupiter allows for the possibility that the other gods might intervene so that it does not take place after all; in which case, he will take matters into his own hands and destroy the city. "Jupiter does not seem to represent himself as Fate's executor. Rather, he presents the existence of Fate as simply an additional reason for carrying out his own intentions." (Davis 477) Thus, Jupiter's divine license is not obstructed by anything. An example of Jupiter's violence is the death of Capaneus, a blasphemous Greek warrior who does not believe in the power of the gods. "Valour is my deity, and the sword in my hand", he claims. (III.615-616) Capaneus leads an attack on Thebes, withstanding the rain of rocks that the Thebans pelt him with from on top of the walls, and then appeals to the heavens. (X.827-83)

‘Do none of you deities,’ he roars, ‘take stand for trembling Thebes? . . . It irks me to urge inferiors; come you rather, for who is worthier to meet me? . . . Come now, strive against me with all your flames, Jupiter! Or are you braver at alarming timid girls with your thunder and razing the towers of your bride’s father Cadmus?’ (X.837-905)

Capaneus makes a rare reference to Semele—the only earlier reference to Jupiter’s amorous nature is made by Juno (I.255)—which underlines that Jupiter’s promiscuous side is not given credence in the *Thebaid*. Whereas this aspect of his humanized the Ovidian Jupiter, Statian Jupiter is all the more severe without it. The other gods urge Jupiter to strike Capaneus down. “The sky-dwellers are ashamed to fear these things, but when they see the warrior stand in the mid whirl of the world demanding crazy battles, they wonder in silence and turn pale for the dubious thunderbolt.” (X.917-920) Jupiter flings a thunderbolt at Capaneus and burns him to the ground, displaying his almighty anger and his power to inflict serious mortal harm. Statius makes an example of Capaneus, and shows that Jupiter’s *auctoritas* is not to be disputed. Interestingly, Jupiter’s personal interest in the war decreases towards the end. As the final battle of the war is about to take place, in which Polynices and Eteocles finally confront one another, Jupiter decides that he does not want the gods to witness it.

‘Sky-dwellers. . . an unspeakable duel approaches, a fight unknown to the unhappy earth. Avert your eyes! Let them dare such things in the gods’ absence and hide from Jove. . . Earth, take heavy clouds and let the heavens withdraw. I am resolved to spare the world and my celestials.’ (XI.122-132)

The course of the battle is now in the hands of the humans themselves; the gods are not allowed to influence it. Jupiter's sudden abandoning of any *auctoritas* he exercises over the war and its participants is striking. According to him, the battle that is about to follow is worse than any other battle that has ever taken place, and too much for the gods. Apparently, humans are capable of breaking their own laws and committing such atrocities that even the gods cannot bear to witness it. As we have seen, the gods themselves do not scruple to kill mortals, but here Jupiter's involvement in the war is not more than human laws can comprehend: it is in fact checked by them, and deemed unable to quench the humans' thirst for blood. Jupiter's resolute removal from the battle, leaving the humans to clean up their own mess, as well as his violence and punishment for "crimes against the gods" while he himself has committed many crimes against mortals, i.e. his rapes, make him a questionable figure of moral superiority. (Feeney 355) At this point, the idea of the gods as magistrates rather than figures of absolute *auctoritas* gains credibility, because there is no ruling figure of *auctoritas* left in the world of the *Thebaid*, only gods who display their individual powers, among which is Jupiter's power to withdraw with all his fellow Olympians. It is telling that at the end of the tale, Theseus takes control of the battle. He is compared to Jupiter: "He spake, and hurling his spear dashed forth upon the road: as when Jupiter plants his cloudy footsteps upon the Hyperborean pole and makes the stars tremble at the oncoming of winter." (12.650-5) The ranking of Theseus, after his judgment is spoken, alongside Jupiter shows that they are on equal footing and that whatever they say is of equal importance; this, indeed, still shows that Jupiter's judgment is the highest and most important, but that a similar *auctoritas* can be approximated by a human being. It emphasises the humans' self-sufficiency from the *auctoritas* of the gods.

*The auctoritas of Jupiter in selected Middle English texts.*

Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, the first of the Canterbury Tale cycle, takes place after Thebes has been all but destroyed. The hero Theseus, who has killed the city's last tyrant, Creon, returns home to Athens victorious with his queen Ypolita and her sister Emelye. (I.1-146) He takes two Theban survivors, Palamon and Arcite, with him, and throws them in prison. (I.147-166) While imprisoned, both knights catch sight of Emelye in the garden and instantly fall in love with her, which leads them to fight. (I.175-253) Later, Arcite is released from prison—but exiled from Athens (I.265- 375). Unable to be apart from Emelye, he pretends to be someone else and becomes a squire at Theseus' court. Palamon, meanwhile, has escaped from prison and Arcite and Palamon run into each other outside the castle. They fight, and Theseus breaks them up. He organizes a tournament in which a hundred knights will fight alongside Arcite and a hundred alongside Palamon: the winner of this tournament gets to marry Emelye. (II.497-1022)

In the *Knight's Tale*, Jupiter is portrayed differently to the way we have seen him defined above. He is not referred to as a wrathful or promiscuous god, but he is still the leader of the gods. This is the first aspect of him we encounter when we are well into the story and afforded a glimpse into the heavens, to witness Venus and Mars quarrelling.

Swich stryf ther is bigonne  
 . . . bitwixe Venus, the goddesse of love,  
 And Mars, the sterne god armipotente,  
 That Juppiter was bisy it to stente.  
 Til that pale Saturnus the colde,  
 That knew of so many adventures olde,

Foond in his olde experience an art  
 That he ful soone hath pleased every part. . .  
 Saturne anoon, to stynten stryf and drede,  
 Al be it that is agayn his kynde,  
 Of al this stryf he gan remedie fynde. (III. 1580-94)

As the supreme god, Jupiter still has the *auctoritas* to forbid his fellow deities to fight amongst themselves, and tries to pacify Venus and Mars; but his father Saturn then steps in and does the actual placating of the two deities. Saturn explains in a short speech how his powers of “vengeance and pleyn correccioun” are undisputed and that he has brought ruin and death to many. He says that he is the eldest of the gods and thus portrays himself as traditional and reliable to establish his *auctoritas*, and he assures Venus that her knight will win Emelye though Mars will do his best to help Arcite win. Saturn urges the two gods to obey his commands and make peace. (III.1595-1620) This display of Saturn’s *auctoritas* largely outshines Jupiter’s. According to Minnis, this makes Jupiter a “moral coward”, whose lacklustre attempt at reconciliation illustrates that he does not have such great authority over the pantheon after all. The squabbling and egotism of the gods show us their real nature, which is very much described in human terms, and remove the veil of glorified truth that Arcite and Palamon perceive the gods through. “Clearly, the pagans deserve better gods than the ones they worship”. (141) Though Jupiter is mentioned by name only at a fairly late point in the story, his presence can be sensed earlier. If we keep in mind classical Jupiter’s power to override Fate, the following passage is of interest. Theseus muses on the idea of Fate:

The destinee, minstre general,  
 That executeth in the world overal

The purveiaunce that God hath seyn biforn,  
 So strong it is that, thogh the world had sworn  
 The contrarie of a thing, by ye or nay,  
 Yet somtyme it shal fallen on a day  
 That falleth nat eft withinne a thousand yeer. (805-811)

Chaucer says here that destiny is an agent of God who ensures that what has been foreseen by God, Providence, takes place. The figure of God, then, also has the power to use Fate or destiny as he wishes. Destiny executes God's will, and that will is so strong that it can even make the unlikeliest things happen - things that will happen only once in a thousand years. We return to the idea of Fate at the end of the story, when Theseus makes a speech in which he contemplates the existence of a higher power, a stable and unchangeable mover who has brought order into the world and made all things mutable. Everything must die, human or not, and it is best to die well, when one is at their most excellent. (2129-99) In this speech, Jupiter is also recognized as Creator of the world. In the first part of his speech, Theseus says that "the firste moevere of the cause above" (2129) has used the force of love, Eros, as a means to bind the elements, "the fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond" together, "that they may nat flee" (2134-35). This is similar to the beginning of the world as described by Ovid: the binding together and ordering of the elements by an anonymous god, later also identified with Jupiter. Theseus goes on to say that this god has also created the notion of time and mutability; the fact that nothing can escape the number of days they have on earth. If we recall Jupiter, who, after having ousted Saturn from the heavenly throne, introduced the seasons and thus the idea of cyclical time, we may assume that Theseus here refers to Jupiter. "Ther needeth noon auctoritee to allege, for it is proved by experience; but that me list declaren my sentence." (2141-2144) Theseus takes this for a fact; he recognizes that there is a god who has given

everything on earth an expiration date, and the experience of seeing it unfold before his eyes is the only authority he needs. Then Theseus refers to Jupiter by name, “the only name [Chaucer] can allow Theseus to use for the First Mover.” (Moseley 207) However, as Jupiter has barely been mentioned before and certainly not in a recognizable classical way, e.g. surrounded by thunder and lightning, we can understand Moseley when he says that “Theseus as a figure of Classical Antiquity cannot with decorum ignore the ruler of Olympos in Classical times, but the sudden appearance of Jupiter is awkward to us”. (207) In his speech on creation and mutability, Theseus ascribes auctoritas to a higher figure. It is difficult to decide whom he means exactly; Theseus as a pagan could have ascribed it to Jupiter, but as a character that has been crafted by a Christian Middle English writer it is possible that Chaucer really had the auctoritas divina of the Christian God in mind, and inserted Jupiter’s name purely for historical correctness. The conflation of Jupiter and the Christian god takes place at the end of the speech.

‘What maketh this, but Juppiter the kyng?  
 That is prince and cause of alle thing,  
 Converting al unto his proper welle  
 From which it is derived, sooth to telle,  
 And heer agayns no creature on lyve,  
 Of no degree, availleth for to stryve.’ (III.2177-2182)

Here Theseus identifies Jupiter with the heretofore unnamed god as the ruler and creator of everything, who makes everything return to the source whence it originally came. No creature can escape this process, or fight against it. Minnis proposes that “the regal ‘Juppiter’ of Theseus’ speech does exist: he may be identified. . .with the one true God who is known more

fully to Christians.” (142) However, Minnis also points out that Chaucer withholds total identification with the Christian God, because

This type of insight into the transitoriness of the sublunary world and the vanity of human wishes is presented as the height of pagan wisdom, which Theseus is able to attain. . . Yet he fails to move from the notion of Jupiter, prince and primary cause, to the notion of a loving god who can intervene in the determined course of events and suspend the normal operation of secondary causes. (Minnis 128)

Minnis suggests that Theseus is not wholly able to identify Jupiter with the Christian god, who can change Fate as he pleases. Yet this seems to me contradictory to the text, which discusses the First Mover—later identified as Jupiter—who has the power to intervene in causes determined by Fate, and whom Theseus thanks for his grace (IV.2211). In the speech Arcite makes just before he dies, he wishes that Jupiter would look after his soul (IV.1934), implying a trust in a loving god who will take care of him both in life and in death.

A different aspect to Jupiter’s auctoritas in *The Knight’s Tale* is found in the character Theseus. According to Minnis, Theseus’ temperament is connected to Jupiter as a god and a planet: both are ‘jovial’ and benign, but strict and unyielding at times, and the influence of the planet Jupiter was thought to tone down the strife and fury caused by the planet Mars in astrological predictions. (116) Theseus is also portrayed as a god sitting on a throne (I.2528-9), which reminds us of the image of Jupiter at the beginning of the *Thebaid* and in *Metamorphoses*. Furthermore, Theseus is also all-powerful in the decisions he makes in the story—the imprisonment of Arcite and Palamon, the organizing of the tournament, and choosing the winner of the tournament—just as Jupiter’s will is unimpeachable. Not only is his power supreme, but his rule is seen as just and fair. Theseus, like Jupiter, is also the

peacemaker, as he breaks up Arcite and Palamon during their first duel and organizes a tournament to solve their quarrel. Thus both Jupiter's amiable and severe qualities are personified in Theseus; any harsh treatment of Palamon and Arcite in the beginning is more than made up for in kindness later on in the story. Just as he was at the end of the *Thebaid*, Theseus becomes the human representative or even the replacement of Jupiter on earth, as the mender of strife. Just before Palamon and Emelye get married, he recalls the death of Arcite and looks ahead towards more joyful times: "And loketh now, wher most sorwe is herinne, / Ther wol I first amenden and bigynne." (IV.2215-6) In the *Thebaid* Jupiter's strange refusal to resolve the conflict in peace warranted Theseus' involvement, and in the *Knight's Tale* Theseus is again the one who effects the final denouement of the tale. We can see a shift in auctoritas here. Theseus has the auctoritas to rule and be undisputed in his commands, whereas Jupiter is contested in his actions by other gods, like Venus, Mars, and Saturn.

We have seen that in classical texts Jupiter reinforces his auctoritas over men and gods mostly by his intimidating behaviour and his questionable morals. His absence in Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* is perhaps unsurprising. Chaucer showed us that appropriating Jupiter and the Christian God could work, as he did not focus on the demotion of paganism and the supremacy of the Christian faith, but saw these two gods as equals. In the *Siege of Thebes*, however, Lydgate draws a clear distinction between the Christian God and Jupiter; no identification between the two takes place. The only reference to the latter as a god, rather than a planet (I.10-1) is found in the beginning of the story, when king Laius of Thebes prays to all the gods that his wife may get pregnant, and also to "Jubiter that hath so gret a myght" (I.346). Jupiter's "gret might" is not elaborated upon, and we may assume that Lydgate did not consider his auctoritas as great as that of the Christian god. Lydgate is "surprisingly benevolent" (Pearsall 154) in handling the pagan deities in this work, though his comments on pagan customs and rites are harsh. For example, the seer Amphiarus is swallowed up by the

ground for giving false counsel, and is chastised by Lydgate: “Lo, here the mede<sup>22</sup> of ydolatrie, / of rytys old and fals mawmetrye<sup>23</sup>.” (III.4047-8) Due to a clear aversion for any pagan customs or rites, the *Siege of Thebes* is a good example of being permeated with auctoritas divina of the Christian god. This is the main difference with Chaucer, who describes pagan customs more objectively and with reverence to the original classical literature: “Two fyres on the auter<sup>24</sup> gan she beete, / And dide hir thynges, as men may biholde / In Stace of Thebes, and thise bokes olde” (1434-6) and thus ascribes auctoritas to the pagan gods, who must be pacified with sacrifice lest they become wrathful. Jupiter’s absence, then, can be clarified. Lydgate’s handling of the story of Thebes results in a very different product than the *Thebaid*: where Lydgate advocates pacifism and prays to a loving god, the *Thebaid* centres around the virtues and vices of war and the deities who advocate them. (Battles 14) Jupiter’s auctoritas divina does not serve Lydgate’s purpose. This makes any identification with the Christian god in *Siege of Thebes* impossible. Not only do the gods in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Thebaid* possess a “characterful anthropomorphism” (Feeney 232), while the Christian god has no such persona, but their notion of auctoritas is very different. The pagan gods in the classical texts impose their will on their believers, and a large part of the respect they receive from their worshippers depends upon their different manifestations, in full deific regalia or in things that are sacred to them, the violation of which incurs their anger. The Christian god’s auctoritas, in Lydgate’s view, does not make itself known in such a material way. Furthermore, Statian Jupiter purposely gives up his auctoritas over mortals; in his indifference he hides himself behind the clouds, whereas Lydgate’s God “seeth everything / Right as it is, for ther may be may be no cloude / Toform his sight trouthe forto shrowde.” (II.1760-2) Jupiter does not use his auctoritas to establish peace and a resolution of the conflict, like God does at the end of the *Siege of Thebes*:

---

<sup>22</sup> Reward.

<sup>23</sup> Idolatry

<sup>24</sup> Altar.

And He that is both on and two and thre,  
 Ek thre in on and sovereyn lord of pes,  
 Which in this exil for our sake ches,  
 For love only our troubles to termyne<sup>25</sup>. . . (III.4704-7)

Lydgate above describes the divine auctoritas of the Christian god, the sovereign lord of peace, who acts according to the universal laws of love and morality and saves his believers from their troubles. Ovidian Jupiter would have been too vulgar for Lydgate. For example, at Oedipus' wedding to his own mother, Jocasta, Lydgate ensures us that "tofor God [it] is neither feire ne good / Nor acceptable blood to touch blood" (I.787-8). The reference to incest shows a clear departure from what we saw in the classical legends: Jupiter married his own sister and had affairs with numerous mortals who were in some way descended from him. Thus, we can perceive a clear shift between the auctoritas divina in classical texts—where Jupiter had power over humans and gods, but also exhibited such human characteristics as made him a questionable moral figure to his believers—the auctoritas divina in *Siege of Thebes* purports universal moral truths for all believers to live by. Where auctoritas of the gods in classical times gave them license to commit sins and never meet with the consequences (Feeney 222), auctoritas in medieval times means the execution of will of the Christian god, which is checked by human boundaries to show what is right and what is wrong. Accordingly, Lydgate describes the events that take place in the *Thebaid* and provides moral glosses for the erroneous behaviour of the characters, which includes paganism. For example, the incident from the *Thebaid* where Jupiter struck Capaneus down for insulting the

---

<sup>25</sup> End.

gods is, strikingly, reduced to a few lines, allowing Capaneus to die a natural, less eventful death.

Campaneus was on the wallys slayn;  
 With cast of ston he was so overlade,  
 For whom Adrastus such a sorowe made  
 That no man might reles hym of his peyne. (III.4546-4549)

The uniqueness of Capaneus' act of rebellion against the gods, in which he challenged their auctoritas and immediately received proof of its existence, becomes meaningless. Given Lydgate's low opinion of paganism, he would have ascribed no auctoritas to the pagan gods, and any challenge of this authority would therefore not be of interest to him.

Lydgate imitates Chaucer by including a speech on the notion of Fate. He stresses that "whan the wheel of kynde<sup>26</sup> cometh aboute / And naturely has his cours yronne" (I.728-9), men of all stations must accept their death, when the Fates have snapped their lifelines.<sup>27</sup> (I.731-5) The only thing men should complain of is being too prudent to vex the ordinance of the gods: "Best is, as semeth unto me, / No man gruch<sup>28</sup> but of high prudence / The sonde<sup>29</sup> of goddis tak in pacience." (III.3433-44) Lydgate through the voice of his pagan character Adrastus<sup>30</sup> warns against volition towards the decrees of Fate and the auctoritas of the gods. It is possible that he means only the Christian god, however, because in the overall story it is apparent that both the gods and Fate do not have the same auctoritas as the Christian god.

Lydgate joins them up with Fortune, which can be fickle and wicked, and which is therefore

---

<sup>26</sup> Nature.

<sup>27</sup> Fate was sometimes also portrayed as three old women, goddesses who are responsible for the destiny of mortals. Clotho spins the thread of life, Lachesis measures the thread, and Atropos cuts it off when life is due to end. (Morford et al. 130)

<sup>28</sup> Complain.

<sup>29</sup> Ordinance.

<sup>30</sup> The king of Argos who supports Polynices with an army in his battle against Eteocles; one of the Seven against Thebes.

not to be trusted. (I.887-94) These are rather forces that work together to accomplish something, while none of them has absolute power like the First Mover we saw in the *Knight's Tale*. When the knights Tydeus and Polynices arrive in Greece, the king Adrastus praises their arrival, which has been affected by “'goddys ordynaunce, / And after next thorgh fatys purveaunce, / And be workyng of Fortune's hond'” (II.1571-3). Lydgate lumps together several of the classical authorities that determine the course of a mortal's life, in keeping with his historical setting and to illustrate the pagan's ignorant belief in the auctoritas of any other than God. It is God who ultimately restores peace to all. Because the guidance of the pagan gods is lacking in *Siege of Thebes*, the course of the war is the responsibility of the humans themselves—the gods are ascribed no auctoritas throughout the story, not just at the ending as in the *Thebaid*.

We have seen Jupiter's auctoritas in the classical texts, where he is the supreme god who wields divine power over gods and men: all obey his commands and very few dare to contest him. I believe that he commands respect mainly through intimidation of mortals and immortals, but that his actions can be amoral. Both in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Thebaid* we saw that mortal men like the Roman emperors and Duke Theseus can aspire to the same auctoritas as that of the king of the gods, making it seem as though they share the power to rule with Jupiter. Theseus also shows a certain autonomy from the auctoritas of the gods, meaning that he does not necessarily obey them, for example when they take leave in the *Thebaid*. As Jupiter is brought on par with earthly rulers, I believe he is too much like a human being in his actions to have the ultimate moral high ground, but he is still the highest auctor to whom his believers pray. There is a definite shift from this auctoritas divina to the one applied to the Christian god in the Middle English texts. As Jupiter is conflated with the Christian god in the *Knight's Tale*, we see that this notion of auctoritas is constituted by the power over Fate and over human beings, but at the same time Jupiter's auctoritas can be

contested by the other prominent gods in the tale. Here we are beginning to see that Jupiter does not have the highest *auctoritas* of all the gods, as in the classical texts. In *Siege of Thebes* the *auctoritas divina* of the Christian god is clearly the norm, and no conflation with Jupiter takes place.

*The auctoritas of Mars in selected classical texts.*

Mars, whose Greek name is Ares, is the god of war and a child of Jupiter and Juno. He represents the grimness, wastefulness and madness of war, leaving the strategic, moral aspects of war for other deities to preside over. The Greeks often portrayed him as “little more than a butcher.” Mars does have a soft spot, however: his relationship with Venus, the goddess of love. (Morford et al. 128-9) The Romans also called him *Gradivus*, which means “the Marcher”. Before and after battle he received sacrifices from them, as well as part of their spoils of war. In Roman literature, Mars is usually accompanied by some lesser deities and personifications, the most famous of these being the war goddess Bellona, who is sometimes his charioteer. Furthermore, the wolf is associated with Mars. (idem 655)

In the *Metamorphoses*, Mars plays an important part in the founding of Thebes and the house of Cadmus. While looking for water for ritual cleansing before sacrificing to Jupiter, Cadmus’ men encounter a dragon sacred to Mars, and are killed by it. (III.26-34) Cadmus follows later on and discovers the dragon and the bodies of his comrades. He kills the dragon with a spear. (III.51-95) Immediately after that, a voice from the heavens tells him that he “shall also live as a snake to be gazed on” (III.98-9)—as Mars has just been wronged, the voice is likely his. Cadmus then sows the teeth of the dragon, from which an army springs. These men fight amongst each other until all but five are dead, and these five warriors help Cadmus found Thebes. (III.101-130) Mars’ prophecy comes true when Cadmus and his wife

Harmonia, the daughter of Venus and Mars, come to the realization that their family must have been cursed by the gods for killing the sacred dragon. They are then transformed into snakes themselves: “Perhaps I provoked the wrath of the gods and this is their certain revenge. If so, let me also be changed into a long-bellied serpent!” (IV.571-602). Mortals’ fear of the wrath of the gods, Mars’ in this case, is indicative of the divine *auctoritas* of the gods, who are particularly concerned about honour and sacrifices. This is an example of one of the ways in which the *auctoritas divina* of the pagan gods is manifested: in animals, but often also in trees, springs, fields or other elements of nature that were sacred to a particular god.

Mars in the *Thebaid* still has *auctoritas* over the battle field, but he appears to be in danger of having his function usurped, as we shall see later on. The first description of Mars that Statius gives us, is when Mars is summoned by Jupiter.

The sire of the stars. . . bids Gradivus be summoned in haste. He had ravaged the raging Bistones and the Getic towns with carnage. Wildly he was urging his chariot to the heavenly citadel, brandishing the splendour of his bolt-crested helm and shield somber in gold, alive with monsters’ fearsome forms. The sky thunders with his wheels and his buckler’s light blushes blood red, its orb striking the sun in distant challenge. (III.218-26)

Certainly, this image of Mars arriving in all his splendour is impressive. Jupiter sends him out on an errand, to rouse the lust for battle in the Greeks: “Let them drive out sluggish restraints and, hating all things, crave you, dedicate lives and hands to you headlong. Sweep them on if they falter. Confound treaties. . . to you ‘tis lawful to set the very hosts of heaven aflame with

war.” (III.232-5) Mars obeys him. When we return to Mars a few books later, however, Jupiter is unsatisfied with the results; he complains that Mars has been taking a break from the war, leaving the Greeks to languish in their camps. He sends Mercury<sup>31</sup> to summon Mars, whom he traces to his dark and terrible dwelling. When he sees Mars appear, covered in blood, Mercury “grew stiff with terror at the sight, and cast down his eyes: ay, even the Father himself would feel awe, were he present, and would forgo his threats nor command so sternly.” (VII.74-5) Statius here makes Mars aesthetically recognizable as the god of war, a full-fledged deity who has the respect of the other gods and of whom even Jupiter stands in awe. However, his appearance is not enough, and we have reason to doubt Mars’ *auctoritas* as his only function in the *Thebaid* is to execute Jupiter’s orders and act on his whims. Jupiter chides Mars for not doing his job properly:

‘Is this your rage, Gradivus?. . .if he himself has the frenzy, the wild delight in battle that he is so proud of, he will ruthlessly give guiltless cities to ash with steel and fire and strew peoples on the ground. . .But now he is mild in warfare and my anger relaxes him. . .I threaten nothing cruel; let him be a gentle, kindly deity, let his wild ways slacken into peace, let him give me back horses and sword, nor any more shall he have power over blood. I shall look upon the earth and order universal peace.

Tritonia<sup>32</sup> shall cope with the Ogygian war.” (VII.10-33)

Jupiter’s satirical threat to denounce Mars as the god of war if he does not obey his orders speedily is worse than physical punishment. Jupiter says that if Mars does not perform his duties as the god of war he might as well order universal peace—provided that it lies in his

---

<sup>31</sup> The messenger of the gods who can travel between realms. He is also the god of trickery, cleverness and thievery. His Greek name is Hermes. (Morford et al., 287-9)

<sup>32</sup> Pallas Athena.

auctoritas to do so. Mars is deemed useless—and, even worse, Pallas, who is also a goddess of battle<sup>33</sup>, is mentioned as his replacement to be the leading force in the Greek-Theban war. Nor is this the first time that these two deities are compared to each other. A prayer to Pallas mentioned earlier in the story begins thus: “Fierce goddess, glory and wit of your great father, mighty in war, on whose cheeks sits the grim helm in fearful beauty, as the blood-bespattered Gorgon glowers (nor would Mars and Bellona spear-armed for battle rouse more fiery trumpet blasts). . .” (II.715-9) Mars and Pallas have equal auctoritas over the battlefield, and are both able to instigate the lust for battle in people and so to influence the process of the war. A further threat to Mars’ auctoritas is formed by the personifications which travel with him. “Madness and Wrath [who] arrange his plume” and “Panic, his squire” (III.424-5), to name but a few, are not merely Mars’ strengths, but tangible agents who share his and fulfil their designated parts of Mars’ job. When Mars is on his way to the Greeks, he orders Panic to go before his horses, as there is “none more skilled than he” at spreading terror and stealing courage from mortals: an all-persuasive monster who can assume any guise and has innumerable voices and hands. (VII.107-12) Statius describes Panic as an allegory more capable than Mars in his field, as Mars in this myth at least is not endowed with shape-shifting capabilities. Feeney proposes that Statius’ Mars lacks definitive behaviour and an “epic personality”, which makes Mars merely another personification alongside those mentioned above, rather than the definitive, authoritative God of War. (368) However, it seems to me that due to numerous allusions to Mars in the text regarding his appearance, his relationship with the other gods, his dwelling, and his offspring, he is still a concrete figure and not a mere personification; he does hold the command over all these lower allegories, after all. It does seem to me that Statius creates the impression that Mars’ duties can for the most part be outsourced to other entities than himself, and I agree with Feeney’s argument

---

<sup>33</sup> As well as of military, political and domestic skills, such as weaving. She was also renowned for her cunning and her wisdom. (Morford et al. 180)

that Mars' *auctoritas* is largely reduced to its essence—inciting lust for war—without needing a motive; he simply performs this task when Jupiter, or the Fates, want him to. (367) This overall impression of Mars in the *Thebaid* is apprehended by Venus, who confronts him when he is about to go to the Greeks. She asks him whether he has forgotten his ties with Thebes—the city of his daughter Harmonia's husband—and, as Feeney suggests, thus reminds him of his own mythology, his divine heritage. (368) Mars, softened by her appeal, says that he is forced to aid the Greeks when Jupiter and the Fates command him to, but that they cannot forbid him to take Thebes' side during battle. (III.296-316) As decisive as this sounds, however, we later find “the Lord of War” standing in the centre of the battlefield, “his spearhead still dry” and his allegiance divided, as he “turns his shield now on these, now on those, arousing arms, effacing homes, wives, children.” (VIII.383-5) From this I believe it is apparent that in the *Thebaid*, Mars, though he is the embodiment of war and mortals pay their respects to him when they go to war, does not have ultimate *auctoritas*, but is rather like the magistrate (Pollmann 170) who still answers to a higher authority; namely, Jupiter.

*The portrayal of Mars in selected Middle English texts.*

Mars plays an important role in the *Knight's Tale*. He is portrayed as the patron of warriors, with Duke Theseus as his main disciple. When Theseus performs his knightly duties, “the rede statue of Mars with spere and targe, / So shyneth in his white baner large, / That alle the feeldes gliteren up and doun.” (I.117-9) ‘Red’ Mars is carried around on a flag like the universal symbol for battle. Theseus also swears by Mars when he breaks up the fight between Arcite and Palamon. “Na moore, up peyne of lesyng of youre heed! / By myghty Mars, he shal anon be deed / That smyteth any strook that I may seen!” (II.849-51) Moseley suggests that the connection between Theseus and Mars is a particular Chaucerian addition

(85): it is an interesting one, as we have seen before that Theseus can also be linked to Jupiter in the text. Bearing the allegiance to different gods in mind, we turn to Theseus hunting in the forest.

In his hunting hath he swich delit  
 That it is al his joye and appetit  
 To been himself the grete hertes bane;  
 For after Mars he serveth now Diane. (II.821-4)

Rather than worshipping all the gods, it seems as though Theseus leaves off worshipping one god, Mars, when the battle is over, and begins to serve Diana, the goddess of hunting, when he decides to pursue the particular activity that is characteristic to her. This is an interesting example of the gods as the particular patrons of mortals. The main difference with classical worship is that one might have one god as their particular patron, but would still have to worship the other gods for fear of being rebuked by an angry deity for receiving less attention than other deities. (Fox) This suggests that the classical view of the *auctoritas* of each pagan god, like Mars, Diana or Jupiter was universal for all believers—because the wrath of the gods establishes their power and ability to punish if they are ignored or otherwise insulted—but no one god, not even Jupiter, has a final, overarching *auctoritas*. In the medieval view that Chaucer puts forth, the believers can pick and choose their patron god—Arcite picks Mars, Palamon picks Venus, Emelye picks Diana—but the gods do not become angry at the lack of worship from the other characters. Rather, they endorse their mortals in a competition against the other gods. This shows a shift in *auctoritas divina* from the classical texts to the Middle English text: it can be selective, rather than all-encompassing of its subjects. Mars' appearance does not initially seem very impressive: when we witness the quarrel between “Venus, the goddesse of love” (II.1582) and “Mars, the sterne god armipotente” (II.1583),

these descriptions are but pale suggestions of the splendour we have seen surrounding Mars before. However, Mars is characterised more fully in the description of his temple. It is made of steel, populated with atrocious allegories, and has the murders of several Roman emperors painted on the walls. (III.1124-8) A very similar description of Mars' temple is given in the *Thebaid*; but where in the *Knight's Tale* the overall picture is of agony, death and horror, Mars' temple in the *Thebaid* also displays war trophies weapons from conquered enemies, thus showing the more alluring side of war. Both temples are occupied by entities like "felonye" (II.1138), "cruel ire" (II.1139) and "woodnesse, laughing in his rage" (II.1153), but also "Fear" (VII.49) and "Valour" (VII.51). Like in the *Thebaid*, Mars is accompanied by these allegories which represent many different aspects of war and strife. There is also a statue of him, which constitutes almost as physical an appearance as we have seen in the classical texts.

Armed, and loked grym as he were wood. . .  
 This god of armes was arrayed thus.  
 A wolf ther stood bifore hym at his feet  
 With eyen reed, and of a man he eet.  
 With subtil pencil was depeynted this storie  
 In redoutynge of Mars and of his glorie. (II.1184-92)

Mars is depicted as a "bellicose" man (McCall 110); armed and angry-looking, he is an image many warriors can identify themselves with. The wolf accompanies Mars on his search for subjects to prey on (idem 111) and represents his blood-thirst. We can understand why glorious Mars is depicted on Theseus' banner, but the mad and cruel aspects of war that accompany him seem more unlikely to be associated with virtuous Theseus. Mars' auctoritas

over both the glorious and terrible sides of war becomes manifest in the temple and in the statue. Chaucer knew Mars as the furious instigator of the Theban strife (idem 16), and it is therefore interesting that Mars is not only linked to Theseus as a patron god, but also to Arcite, for whose woe he is responsible through his curse on Cadmus. Arcite mentions Mars alongside Juno when he laments the injustice done to the Thebans by the gods: ““Allas! Thou felle Mars! Allas! Juno, / Thus hath youre ire oure lynage al fordo, / Save oonly me and wrecched Palamoun.”” (II.701-3) Thus Arcite is aware of Mars’ input in the destruction of Thebes. However, he does not hold it against the god of war, as he later clearly recognizes Mars’ auctoritas to bring him victory in the battle against Palamon. ““Do that I tomorwe have victorie, / Myn be the travaille, and thyn be the glorie!”” he prays. Arcite’s desire for victory links him in temperament to the god of war. ““Yif me victorie, I aske thee namoore”” (III.1562), is his plea to Mars. By contrast, Palamon asks his patron, Venus, not just for victory, but for Emelye herself: ““Yif me my love, thow blissful lady deere”” (III.1402). When he grants Arcite’s prayer, Mars actually appears to be present in the temple:

The statue of Mars bigan his hauberk rynge  
 And, with that soun, her herde a murmurynge,  
 Full owe and dym, and seyde thus: ‘Victorie!’  
 For which he yaf Mars honour and glorie. (II.1573-5)

Arcite pledges to serve only Mars for eternity if his prayer is granted, an “almost feudal” promise (Benson 110) which gives Mars auctoritas as Arcite’s patron. As Mars is Arcite’s patron in the *Knight’s Tale*, he is also the one who must take care of Arcite when he dies: ““Arcite is coold, ther Mars his soule gye!””<sup>34</sup> (IV.1957) We see here that the auctoritas divina

---

<sup>34</sup> “May Mars take care of his soul.”

of Mars has expanded, so that he also presides over what happens to his particular believers as they die; a task normally reserved for different deities, such as Pluto.<sup>35</sup> We see the approximation of other duties also in Venus, who supports Mars' rival Palamon. As Mars, the god of war, supports Arcite and his hundred knights during the final battle, so does Venus support Palamon, though she is normally associated with love and seduction. Palamon prays to Venus: "For though so be that Mars is god of armes, / Youre vertu is so greet in hevne above / That if yow list, I shal wel have my love." (III.1390-2) Palamon suggests that the goddess of love has *auctoritas* even over the god of war. We have already seen in the *Thebaid* that Mars can be swayed in his decisions by Venus. No longer is Mars the universal spirit of war who inspires everybody to fight; Venus can fulfil this function for Palamon. Mars' influence on the battle itself is minimal. He plays along with the course of the battle when it is determined by Saturn (Benson 110), but he is not 'set loose' as is done by Jupiter in the *Thebaid*. As seen earlier,<sup>36</sup> Mars has no actual power when it comes to fulfilling Arcite's prayer: the ultimate decision is in the hands of Saturn. Just as Arcite emerges as the winner of Emelye's affections, Saturn sends a Fury to earth who startles Arcite's horse; the horse throws Arcite off, and he dies soon after. (IV.1810-41) Thus, just as we saw in the chapter on Jupiter, Saturn has the *auctoritas* to fulfil prayers and he has the last say on all matters divine.

Mars is frequently mentioned in the *Siege of Thebes*. He is listed alongside inhabitants of Hades such as Cerberus and the Furies and a large number of personifications, such as "Drede and Fraude and Fals Trecherie", as an attendant of Oedipus' cursed wedding. (I.853-74) According to a prophecy, Oedipus would slay his own father, Laius; but when he encountered Laius on the road, he did not know it was his father and killed him in a duel. When Oedipus arrived in Thebes, which was then without a king, he married Laius' wife—his own mother—and became king of Thebes. (I.580-874) At this unlucky wedding, Mars is

---

<sup>35</sup> Pluto, the god of the underworld and brother of Jupiter. In Greek, he and his realm are called Hades. (Morford et al. 375)

<sup>36</sup> See pg. 15

present as one of the hateful influences that Lydgate invents to foreshadow Oedipus' terrible Fate. It is an example of the allegorization of pagan myth by a Middle English Christian writer. Mars' auctoritas over amoral people and actions has become the antithesis of the Christian god's divine auctoritas, which lays down the moral laws of Christianity for its believers. We see this at the beginning as well as at the end of the poem, where Mars is equated with the forces of evil:

The venym and the violence  
 Of strif, of were, of contek, and debat. . .  
 Shal be proscript and voided out of place,  
 Martys swerd shall no more manace,  
 Nor his sper grievous to sustene  
 Shall now no mor whettyd be so kene  
 Nor he no mor shal his hauberk shake. (III.4690-7)

More positively, Mars is still the patron of knights. He is linked both to the valorous Greek Tydeus, who enters Thebes and is "markyd ful wel in many mannys sight, / Lich Mars hymself, in stiel armed bright" (II.1881-2). Furthermore, Theseus remains Mars' servant. When he has slain Creon, he returns to Athens "with laurer crownyd in signe of victorye / And the palme of conquest and of glorye, / [And does] his honour duely to Marte." (III.4595-9) Like the Romans in classical times, Theseus sacrifices to Mars after having won a battle, a sign that Mars still has auctoritas over the processions of war, and that his believers still

honour him for it. This description of Theseus emphasises the more glorious aspects of war. Furthermore, as in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Knight's Tale*, Lydgate identifies Mars as the origin of hate which corrupted Thebes:

O cruel Mars ful of malencolye,  
 . . .What was cause that thow were so wroth  
 With hem of Thebes, thorgh whoos fervent ire  
 The cite brent and was sette afire,  
 As books olde wel reherce konne,  
 Of cruel hate rooted and begunne  
 And engendred, the story maketh mynde,  
 Only of blood corrupt and unkynde,  
 Causyng a stryf dredful and mortal,  
 Of which the meschief thorgh al Grece ran? (III.2553-67)

Mars is identified as the instigator of strife which runs through “al Grece”. In this light, I believe the passage below suggests a parallel with the *Metamorphoses*:

The whiche serpent hath the cokkyl sowe  
 Thorgh al eth of envye and debat,  
 That unnethys is ther non estat

Withoute stryf can lyve in charité. (III.4668-71)

Lydgate refers to Lucifer, who was disguised as the serpent in the book of Genesis. He was responsible for the Original Sin and thus corrupted the human race. However, in view of the Theban legend and the curse that has rested upon Cadmus' race from the beginning, we could also see this serpent as the one slain by Cadmus, which insulted Mars' honour and made him angry. As a result, the bloodbaths that permeate the history of Thebes are also proof of a state which cannot live without strife, and "ther is non estat / Withoute stryf" points to Mars' auctoritas as a god of strife whose influence stretches all over the world.

We have seen that Mars' auctoritas in all four texts is mainly constituted by the sacrifices and honour that his believers give to him. He is identified with both the gruesome and the glorious aspects of war. However, in both the *Thebaid* and the *Knight's Tale* we saw that Mars' actions are ultimately dependent on the final judgment of a higher deity, either Jupiter or Saturn, who have the power to unleash Mars upon the battlefield or to deny him that. Furthermore, there is the presence of allegories in *Thebaid*, the *Knight's Tale* and *Siege of Thebes* which suggest that Mars' function is not one that only he can perform: sometimes he is solely the embodiment of war, but he is more often surrounded by war's virtues and vices, who help him perform his duties. In the *Siege of Thebes*, Mars is identified with war and strife and becomes part of the opposing forces to the ruling, moral, Christian auctoritas. As such, I would say that Mars himself is not an auctor, but rather a magistrate: one who is leading in his own field, but does not have the highest power.

## IV. Conclusion

Firstly, there are clear differences in the way *auctoritas divina* functions in the classical texts and in the Middle English texts, and secondly in the way this concept can be applied to Jupiter and Mars. In the classical texts, the *auctoritas* of a god is largely manifested in the material respect the mortals pay to him: by sacrifice and by worship of statues or other objects that are sacred to the god they establish their fear of angering the god or insulting his honour. These humane characteristics of the gods bring them down to the level of mortals in the way that their *auctoritas* is still the highest, but their believers could attach just as much respect to the *auctoritas* of a mortal emperor. The god's *auctoritas* extends to all believers of the pagan cult, and each god has *auctoritas* in his own field, which is not to be neglected in worship by the believers. We have seen in the *Knight's Tale* that gods can be inferior to one another in their duties and their *auctoritas*, that a certain god's *auctoritas* can apply to only a select group of believers who see him/her as their patron god. Their believers still honour and worship the gods, but the gods do not feel slighted by a lack of attention from other believers. The notion of divine *auctoritas* in the Middle Ages then comes to be identified with the Christian god, in whose case *auctoritas* means guardianship of religion and mortals. Classical divine *auctoritas* mainly comes down to subduing the believers and inspiring them with fear and awe, whereas Christian divine *auctoritas* focuses on the conduct of its believers and gives them a moral code to follow. In the *Siege of Thebes* the highest *auctoritas* is that of the Christian god, and Lydgate does not credit the pagan gods he mentions with any *auctoritas*: any allegiance to the pagan gods he condemns as wicked and amoral.

Jupiter and Mars differ in the way their *auctoritas* influences their believers. Jupiter as the supreme god holds *auctoritas* over gods, men, and Fate, but he does not possess a moral high ground; it is therefore questionable whether the comparison of a mortal's *auctoritas* with

Jupiter's is a favourable one. In the *Thebaid* and the *Knight's Tale* we saw how Jupiter's auctoritas became progressively less influential, until it could be overridden by Saturn. Jupiter's identification with the Christian god, ultimately, cannot be legitimised, as their respective notions of auctoritas are very different. However, by his believers, e.g. Theseus, Jupiter is still recognised as the highest, most powerful god. Mars as the god of war is always ultimately subjected to Jupiter's auctoritas, which makes Mars a magistrate rather than an auctor. Though he has auctoritas of his own on the battlefield and his believers sacrifice to him, he shares his powers with allegories of war and even other gods, as we have seen in the *Thebaid* and in the *Knight's Tale*. In *Siege of Thebes* Mars is grouped with the dark side, in the light of the Christian god's auctoritas that promotes virtuosity among its believers.

## V. References

### Cover and index illustrations.

Detail of miniature from Burney 257 f. 9. Publius Papinius Statius - *Thebais*, with the *argumenta antiqua and Achilleis*; originates from Central France (Paris); dated 1st quarter of the 15th century (possibly c. 1405). Published by The British Library. Web. <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=8515>>

Detail of miniature from Burney 257 f. 108. Publius Papinius Statius - *Thebais*, with the *argumenta antiqua and Achilleis*; originates from Central France (Paris); dated 1st quarter of the 15th century (possibly c. 1405). Published by The British Library. Web. <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=8574>>

### Literature.

—. *From the Norman Conquest to the Black Death: An Anthology of Writings from England*. Ed. Douglas Gray. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.

Battles, Dominique. "The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in the OF Roman de Thèbes, Boccaccio, Chaucer and Lydgate". *Studies in Medieval History and Culture*, vol. 26. Ed. Francis G. Gentry. Routledge: New York, 2004. Web.

- Benson, David C. "The 'Knight's Tale' as History". *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 3.2. Pennsylvania State University Press: 1968. Web.
- Brown, Peter and Andrew Butcher. *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in the Canterbury Tales*. Basil Blackwell: 1991. Print.
- Carter, April. *Authority and Democracy*. London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kenan Paul, 1979. Web.
- Davis, P.J. – "The fabric of history in Statius' *Thebaid*" in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* vol. 7 (Brussels, 1994) 464-483
- Feeney, D. C. *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition*. Oxford University Press: New York, 1991. Print.
- Fox, Robin L. *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Penguin Group, 1986. Web.
- Fyler, John M. *Chaucer and Ovid*. Yale University Press: 1979. Print.
- Guidry, Mark S. "The Parliament of Gods and Men in *The Knight's Tale*". *The Chaucer Review*. Vol. 43, nr. 2. Penn State University Press: 2008. Web.
- Huntington Fletcher, Robert. *A History of English Literature*. Boston: R. G. Bader, 1916. Web.
- Kurose, Tamotsu. "Rhetorical use of 'Jupiter' in Medieval and Elizabethan Literature". *Anglica*: 1964. Web.
- Lydgate, John. *The Siege of Thebes*. Ed. Robert R. Edwards. Medieval Institute Publications: Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2001. Print.
- McCall, John. *Chaucer Among the Gods: The Poetics of Classical Myth*. Pennsylvania University Press: 1979. Print.
- Minnis, A.J. *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*. D.S. Brewer: Cambridge, 1982. Print.
- Minnis, A.J. *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. Pennsylvania University Press: 2011. Web.
- Morford, Mark P.O., Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham. *Classical Mythology*. 9th ed. Oxford University Press: New York, Oxford, 2011. Print.
- Moseley, Charles. *The Knight's Tale: A Critical Study*. Penguin Press: London, 1987. Print.
- Nolan, Barbara. *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press: 2008. Print.
- North, J.D. *Chaucer's Universe*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1988. Print.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Transl. David Raeburn. Penguin Books: London, 2004. Print.

- Patch, Howard R. *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature*. Harvard University Press: 1927. Print.
- Pollard, A.W. "Geoffrey Chaucer." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. 6. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1910. Web.
- Pollmann, Karla. "Christianity and Authority in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of the Concept of Auctoritas." *Being Christian in Late Antiquity: A Festschrift for Gillian Clark*. Eds. Harrison, Humfress & Sandwell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Web.
- Renoir, Alain. *The Poetry of John Lydgate*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967. Print.
- Rivers, Isabel. *Classical and Christian Ideas in Renaissance Poetry: A Students' Guide*. 2nd ed. Routledge: New York, 1994. Print.
- Schirmer, Walter F. *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century*. Transl. Ann E. Keep. London: Methuen & Co, 1979. Print.
- Scinlon, Larry. *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Web.
- Seznec, Jean. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*. Transl. Barbara F. Sessions. Princeton University Press; 1953. Web.
- Statius. *Thebaid, Books 1-7*. Transl. and ed. D.R. Shackleton Bailey. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: 2003. Print.
- Statius. *Thebaid, Books 8-12; Achilleis*. Transl. Ed. D.R. Shackleton Bailey. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: 2003. Print.
- Tinkle, Theresa. *Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, & English Poetry*. Stanford Press: 1996. Print.
- Tristram, Philippa. *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 1976. Print.
- Tuve, Rosemond. *Seasons and Months: Studies in a Tradition of Middle English Poetry*. Rowman and Littlefield: 1974. Print.