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Demonic Prosthesis and the Walking Dead: The Materiality of Chaucer's Green Yeoman

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At the beginning of his *Friar's Tale*, Chaucer offers a succinct yet challenging excursus on demonology, which raises the issue of how demons manifest themselves to human beings, in order to be seen, communicate with their victims, and generally pursue their mission of inflicting harm on humankind.¹ This understudied passage² is of significance for many reasons, not least because Chaucer raises the spectre (so to speak) of the walking dead, insisting on allowing space to the terrifying thought that the dead can rise from the grave, their bodies having been taken over by demons.³ Here is the stuff of what

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1 I see this as occupying lines 1375–1520 of *The Friar's Tale*, though subsequent passages do bear on the key issues. All Chaucer references are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. Larry Benson (Oxford, rept. 2008).

2 This is particularly surprising, given that it is the poet's only venture into demonology. The only two substantial discussions are by Pauline Aiken, 'Vincent of Beauvais and the Green Yeoman's Lecture on Demonology', *Studies in Philology* 35.1 (1938), 1–9, and Stephen Gordon, 'But whan us liketh we kan take us oon: Vain surfaces and walking corpses in Chaucer's *Friar's Tale*', being Chapter 5 of his *Supernatural Encounters: Demons and the Restless Dead in Medieval England, c.1050–1450* (London, 2020), 161–86. Gordon's account, which has raised research on Chaucerian demonology to a new level, rightly emphasizes 'the lack of certainty when it comes to discerning the ontology of supernatural entities' within the tale (168), which reflects larger uncertainties, and confusions, within the society of Chaucer's time.

3 Throughout this essay I usually use the word 'demon' to translate the Latin *demon*, as opposed to 'devil', as translating *diabolus*, simply because the

has become known as the 'ghost story' and/or 'horror fiction'. Further, and the focus of the present essay, is what the excursus reveals about late-medieval ideas and debates concerning what I shall call demonic 'prosthesis'.

Following the *Oxford English Dictionary*, I employ the term *prosthesis* to denote 'the replacement of defective or absent parts of the body by artificial substitutes'.⁴ This is a medical usage, which came into vogue

schoolmen on whom I draw extensively prefer that term in their demonological discussions. But, generally speaking, the terms were synonymous, except when *the devil* is referred to, designating Satan. See Alexander Murray, 'Demons as psychological abstractions', in *Angels in Medieval Philosophical Inquiry*, ed. Isabel Iribarren and Martin Lenz (Aldershot, 2008), 171–84 (176). In the Latin–Middle English lexicon, the *Medulla grammaticae*, *demon* is translated as 'a Devill'. 'Pepys MS 2002: *Medulla Grammaticae*, an edition', ed. Jeffrey F. Huntsman (Austin, TX, 1973), 184. The manuscript from which the text is transcribed, Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys Library, MS 2002, is dated c.1480, though the lexicon seems to have originated in the late fourteenth century.

4 *OED*, s.v. *prosthesis*, n., 2a. The term is also used (sense 2b) to designate the actual object of prosthesis, an artificial replacement for a part of the body. In recent years the term has become of considerable importance for Medical Humanities, Disability Studies, and Identity Politics. See particularly David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford, CA, 1995); Marquard Smith and Johanne Morra (eds), *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); Cassandra S. Crawford, *Phantom Limb. Amputation, Embodiment, and Prosthetic Technology* (New York, 2014); David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (eds), *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor, 2014). Within literary and cultural criticism, a paradigm-shifting contribution has recently been made by Peter Boxall, *The Prosthetic Imagination: A History of the Novel as Artificial Life* (Cambridge, 2020). As a counterpoint to *mimesis*, the imitation of external reality thought of as material (so brilliantly theorized by Erich Auerbach), Boxall opposes *prosthesis*, involving responsiveness to the prosthetic augmentations with which our given bodies extend into the world, creating reality as much as (or, in some instances, more than) imitating pre-existing stable forms. Within Medieval Studies, see Barbara Newman, 'Exchanging Hearts: A Medievalist Looks at Transplant Surgery', in *Rethinking the Medieval Legacy for Contemporary Theology*, ed. Anselm K. Min (Notre Dame, IA, 2014), 17–41; Margaret Healy, 'Wearing powerful words and objects: healing prosthetics', *Textual Practice* 30.7 (2016), 1233–51; Richard H. Godden, 'Prosthetic ecologies: Vulnerable bodies and the dismodern subject in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'; Katie L. Walter, 'Fragments for a medieval theory of prosthesis', *Textual Practice* 30.7 (2016), 1273–90 and 1345–63; and Alastair Minnis, *Phantom Pains and Prosthetic Narratives: From George Dedlow to Dante* (Cambridge, 2021).

in the early eighteenth century, following on from a much earlier grammatical denotation of the addition of a letter or syllable, usually at the beginning of a word (cf. the post-classical Latin term *prosthesis*, derived from the ancient Greek *πρόσθεσις*, meaning 'addition').⁵ Currently, the term is in widespread use in discussion of the making and fitting of substitutes for limbs lost through surgical amputation or which were lacking at birth.

Demons and angels (for demons are fallen angels) have never had human bodies; they do not know what it feels like to be human (and, being superior creatures in the chain of being, have neither any individual need to know nor any particular reason to want to know). Therefore their lack is total. Not just a single body part but an entire body is needed, must be added to their existing, purely spiritual, forms. Here is prosthesis conducted on a scale which is total, inclusive, enveloping – and those angels and demons are not only the subjects, the recipients, of enhancements and extensions but also their creators, practising self-prosthesis under the general management of the divine will. But what prosthetic material was available to those creatures? There were the elements, especially air. There was also the human cadaver. Spoiler alert: the former was generally regarded as the best prosthetic material to use (indeed, the best prosthetic material of all), the latter as quite the worst.

I. A demon speaks

Descendamus ad litteram. An unscrupulous summoner (i.e., a bailiff), going around collecting the money people owe for breaches of ecclesiastical law, encounters a 'gay yeman' (a 'handsomely-attired yeoman'), resplendent in a short green jacket and a hat with black fringes, and bearing a bow and arrows, looking for all the world like a forester (lines 1381–3. Hence he is sometimes called the 'Green Yeoman', and I shall follow that designation here). He turns out to be a demon on the prowl for souls. Impressed by how similar their predatory professions are, the summoner notes they are also similar in manly appearance. But, he asks, do demons have a definite or fixed form in hell, their usual habitat?

⁵ OED, s.v. *prosthesis*, n., 1.

'Ye han a mannes shap as wel as I;
 Han ye a figure thanne determinat
 In helle, ther ye been in youre estat?'

(III[D], 1458-60)

No, certainly not, replies this talkative demon. But we can take on a shape any time we like – or make it seem to you humans that we have a particular shape. Hence we can look like a man, an ape, or indeed an (unfallen) angel.

'Nay, certeinly', quod he, 'ther have we noon;
 But whan us liketh we kan take us oon,
 Or elles make yow seme we been shape;
 Somtyme lyk a man, or lyk an ape,
 Or lyk an angel kan I ryde or go.'

(lines 1461-5)

'The devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape', as Shakespeare's Hamlet once remarked,⁶ and St Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) acknowledged that when demons 'endeavour to deceive us' they 'transform themselves into angels of light', mimicking the caring behaviour of benevolent spirits.⁷ Unpleasing shapes can be assumed too. *The Prick of Conscience* (c.1350) speaks of how, in hell, dragons and adders, toads and 'wode bestes gryselly and grym' will with their teeth gnaw and bite on all the limbs that once took delight in sinful works; all of these types of vermin are in fact 'devels in vermyn lyknes', demons that have taken on such monstrous shapes in order to exacerbate the torments of the damned

6 *Hamlet*, act II, scene 2. Cf. 2 Corinthians 11.14. In a vivid passage in his *The Form of Living* Richard Rolle (d. 1349) warns of how the fiend tempts male and female solitaries, by transfiguring himself in the likeness of 'an angel of light'. A certain recluse he read about had the form of 'þe fairest body of woman þat might be' appear before her, purporting to be the Virgin Mary – but when she said 'Ave Maria' it vanished, thereby revealing its demonic origin. *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, ed. S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, EETS o.s. 293 (Oxford, 1988), 7.

7 *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia dei*, qu. 6, art. 7: *utrum angeli vel daemones possint corpus assumere*, resp., ed. and trans. by the English Dominican Fathers (Westminster, MD, 1932, rpt 1952), ed. Joseph Kenny online at <<https://isidore.co/aquinas/QDdePotentia6.htm#6:7>>.

(lines 6895–902, 6984–90).⁸ There's nothing wonderful about such shape-shifting, brags the Friar's demon. You humans are easily deceived, he remarks contemptuously. Why, you can be taken in even by an inept conjurer, and I've got more skill than someone like that!

The summoner, seemingly impervious to the danger he's in from the pleasing shape of the Green Yeoman,⁹ wants to know more. Why do you go around in various forms, and not always in one? In order to take our prey the more easily, explains the demon (lines 1470–2). But, persists the summoner, exactly how do you take on the bodies in which you appear? Whereupon the demon gets quite technical, and somewhat grisly.

'Yet tel me', quod the somonour, 'feithfully,
 Make ye yow newe bodies thus alway
 Of elementz?' The feend answerde, 'Nay.
 Somtyme we feyne, and somtyme we aryse
 With dede bodyes, in ful sondry wyse' (in very many ways)
 (lines 1504–8)

This passage is not easy to parse. Does it mean:

1. Are the bodies you adopt made from the elements? No, we don't use that method of manifestation at all.¹⁰ Instead, sometimes we 'feyne' and sometimes we arise with dead bodies.

Or:

8 All references are to *Richard Morris's Prick of Conscience*, ed. Ralph Hanna and Sarah Wood, EETS o.s. 342 (Oxford, 2013).

9 Gail Ivy Berlin has nicely contrasted the summoner's apparent lack of awareness with scenes from saints' lives where holy men talk to demons with a lot more circumspection than he can muster: 'Speaking to the devil: A New context for the *Friar's Tale*', *Philological Quarterly* 69.1 (1990), 1–12.

10 In this case, 'alwey' would be read, following *MED*, sense 5, to mean (a) In any event, at any rate; anyway, anyhow; (b) nevertheless, still. Cf. *Shipman's Tale* (*Canterbury Tales*, VII.396–8), 'Telle me alwey, er thus that I fro thee go, / If any dettour hath in myn absence / Ypayed thee'; and *Troilus and Criseyde*, line 1669: 'Twys, ye moste alweies arise!' Hence a literal translation of lines 1504–6 could run something like, 'Tell me truly, do you make new bodies for yourselves thus from elements, in any event? No, the fiend replied. We don't do that.'

2. Are the bodies you adopt *always* made from the elements? No, not always. Just sometimes. As well as doing that, sometimes we feign and sometimes we arise with dead bodies.¹¹

In sum, the interpretive options are: *either* rejecting totally the use of bodies made from elements *or* claiming the use of elemental bodies as one procedure, with two others being 'feigning' and manipulating corpses. On the latter interpretation, the underlying semantic structure is 'sometimes ... sometimes sometimes', with the making of new bodies from elements identified as an action undertaken on some occasions rather than 'always'. A 'newe' body (as opposed to an 'old' or dead body) is made and used when occasion demands.

I myself believe that the second reading of the Chaucer passage has to be the correct one, and presenting the evidence for this interpretation is the foundational objective of the present essay, what a medieval philosopher might have called its *causa propinqua*. Its broader purpose, the *causa remota* or ultimate final cause, is to place Chaucerian demonology within a wider intellectual and cultural context. Which means that, in addition to citing major theologians who predated Chaucer and contributed definitively to the complex of ideas current in his day, I shall also cast a glance beyond 1400, to see what became of those same ideas, how they continued to be used, with considerable expansion and redevelopment taking place. All of which is a measure of their potency and continuous challenge, as the quest to hunt down people allegedly engaged in congress with demons, sorcerers of both genders, and witches, gathered pace, marking a distinctive break with many of the policies and practices appertaining in Chaucer's day.¹² Hence I shall draw occasionally on the *Malleus maleficarum*, that voluminous 'hammer of witches', first published in 1486–7, which sought to raise sorcery to the criminal status of heresy.¹³ Indeed, the process of heretication had

¹¹ This may be reformulated as follows. Do you always do X? No, just sometimes. On other occasions we do Y and on yet others we do Z.

¹² For the intellectual transitions from the fourteenth into the fifteenth centuries and beyond, see the cogent discussions by Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham, 2007), esp. 105–92; and *Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies: The Boundaries of Superstition in Late Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 2013).

¹³ The authorship of the *Malleus* has been much disputed. Mackay has argued exhaustively for the involvement of both Henricus Institoris (Heinrich Kramer) and Jacobus Sprenger: *Malleus maleficarum*, ed./trans. Christopher S. Mackay,

as a hunter blowing a horn. (The possible comparison with Chaucer's demon-forester, bearing bow and arrows, is tantalizing).²¹

A major *locus classicus* for discussion of the issue of animal manifestation was afforded by Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, book 18, chapters 17–18, where the saint had sought to explain what actually had happened in the case of tales like Circe's transformation of Ulysses' companions into beasts, and the fate of certain Arcadians who, having swum across a mysterious lake, were changed into wolves. Further, he had heard an Italian tale about how female innkeepers, having administered drugs on pieces of cheese (!) to hapless travelers, turned them into beasts of burden; only after they had finished their tasks were they returned to their original form.²² Then again, after the destruction of Troy Diomedes was prevented from returning to his own people, with his companions being turned into birds – an incident narrated by both Virgil and Ovid.²³ Augustine's discussion of the first three of these yarns is not as clear as it might be, though the crucial point seems to be that, due to diabolic agency, deceitful fantasies are created in men's minds. Aquinas was in no doubt about what his predecessor had meant: 'imaginary apparitions rather than real things accounted for the aforementioned

21 The lordly behaviour of abbots and high-ranking monks, including an inappropriate love of hunting, was often the butt of criticism. See Martin Heale, 'The Monk', in *Historians on Chaucer: The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen H. Rigby with Alastair Minnis (Oxford, 2014), 137–55 (149). A measure of ambiguity surrounds Chaucer's portrayal of the Monk in the *Canterbury Tales*, as Heale brings out well. But, quite rightly I believe, he concludes that Chaucer's Monk is 'more interested in enjoying the world than serving it' (150), with his 'lust' of 'venerie' being a major aspect of that.

22 This cheesy yarn is quoted in, for instance, Ralph Higden's *Speculum curatorum* (last revised c.1350), where we are assured that 'it is as feasible for a demon to appear in the actual form of money or dishes as in the form of a man or an animal'; indeed, on one occasion the devil made a silver dish appear before St Anthony: *Speculum Curatorum, A Mirror for Curates, Book I: The Commandments*, ed./trans. Eugene Crook and Margaret Jennings (Leuven, 2012), 129. Higden probably got the silver dish story from William of Auvergne, *De universo*, II.iii.23, in *Guillelmi Alverni opera omnia*, 2 vols (Paris, 1674; repr. Frankfurt, 1963), 1:1066.

23 All these fables are recounted by Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, xviii, 16–17. *De civitate Dei*, ed. Emanuel Hoffman, CSEL 40:1–2, 2 vols (Vienna, 1899–1900), 2:287–9; trans. R. W. Dyson, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (Cambridge, 1998), 842–3. Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 11.252ff. and Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 14.455ff.

transformations'.²⁴ But Diomedes's birds were different. In this instance Augustine was totally clear, stating that real birds had secretly been brought by demons 'from other parts of the earth where this kind of bird is found, and straightaway substituted' for Diomedes' companions, who had been 'destroyed by avenging evil angels'. Aquinas concurred. This 'involved more than an imaginary apparition'; those men had actually drowned, and 'demons procured birds to substitute' for them, a far cry from men having been turned into birds, contrary to the laws of nature.²⁵

The *Malleus maleficarum* has much to say on this matter, following Aquinas and his fellow-Dominican Saint Antoninus of Florence (1389–1459),²⁶ who had embroidered on Aquinas's relevant discussion; the sequence of influence is clear. To the Augustinian narratives quoted above is added a diatribe against certain women who, 'being led astray by the demons' illusions and fantastical images, believe and proclaim that during the hours of the night they rise on certain beasts with Diana, a goddess of the pagans, or with Herodias and with a countless multitude of women and pass over great stretches of the earth during the silence of the dead of night'.²⁷ The *Malleus* also recounts a well-known tale from

24 *De malo*, qu. 16, art. 9, ad 3; ed./trans. Regan and Davies, 931.

25 *Ibid.*

26 The relevant work by St Antoninus is his *Summa theologica moralis* (printed in 1477). On his life, work and cult see David Spencer Peterson, 'Archbishop Antoninus: Florence and the Church in the Earlier Fifteenth Century' (unpubl. Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1985); Lorenzo Polizzotto, 'The Making of a Saint: The Canonization of St. Antonino, 1516–1523', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22.3 (1992), 353–81; and Sally Cornelison, *Art and the Relic Cult of St. Antoninus in Renaissance Florence* (Farnham, 2012).

27 296 *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:323–4; 2:155–6. This passage is of considerable importance in witchcraft studies. Generally speaking, 'educated men viewed all such beliefs as illusions caused by the devil', argues Brian P. Levack. This conviction was supported by the ninth-century Canon *Episcopi*, which spoke of 'wicked women, perverted by the Devil, seduced by illusions and phantasms of demons', who 'believe and profess themselves in the hours of the night to ride upon certain beasts with Diana, [...] and 'traverse great spaces of earth'. But change came when the schoolmen attributed to the devil 'extraordinary powers over local motion' – then his ability to move people through the air, in reality rather than in dreams, easily followed. *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 4th edn (Abingdon, 2016), 45–8. Given the authority of canon law, the *Malleus* authors cannot deny that some witches were transported only in their imaginations; that is the point they are affirming here, at great length. But previously in the *Malleus* another reaction to *Episcopi* was offered: 'who is so unintelligent

the *Vitae patrum* of how a young woman who sought to escape from an unwanted suitor was, apparently, changed into a horse: 'this change existed not in terms of reality but in terms of the trickery of a demon who changed the fantasy and the sense of perception of the woman herself and of those who looked at her, so that while really a woman, she was seen as a filly'.²⁸ Due to his holiness, St Macharius was not party to this mass illusion; he saw the woman for what she really was, and freed her through his prayers. Indeed, demonic influence and control over the human imagination can be so invasive that a husband may be rendered incapable of seeing his true wife, and vice versa; a beloved person can appear as 'something hateful and horrible'.²⁹

How can demons possibly get inside the bodies and heads of humans, thereby gaining possession of them? Bonaventure explains that 'just as a light penetrates the air', so demoniacal spirits – due to their subtle³⁰ and spiritual nature – 'can penetrate any bodies whatsoever and subsist in them without any obstacle and impediment', moving and vexing them unless 'expelled by an agent of greater power'.³¹ Here he is drawing on what was for late-medieval Western Europe the most substantive treatment of demonology until Aquinas wrote the final *quaestio* of his *De malo*, namely Augustine's *De divinatione daemonum*: 'The fine, rarified nature of their bodies enables them to penetrate the bodies of human beings unperceived, unfelt, and to mix themselves into their

that he would conclude [from the Canon] that they cannot *also* be transported bodily?' (My italics.) Why, sorceresses have very often remained unpunished by those who believe they 'do no harm since these are merely matters relating to an illusion in the imagination'. But, continues the *Malleus*, it would be stupid to affirm from the Canon 'that all the acts of sorcery and harm committed by sorcerers are figments of fantasy and imagination, when the opposite is clear to everyone's senses'. In sum, the *Malleus* authors want it both ways – transvection both in the imagination and in real life. *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:403–4, 409–11; 2:245, 251–3. Here we go beyond the scope and specifics of the doctrine available to Chaucer.

²⁸ *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:324; 2:156–7.

²⁹ *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:325; 2:157.

³⁰ Here this word bears the technical denotation of the fineness and purity of their spiritual bodies, which in themselves are unencumbered by matter.

³¹ Bonaventure, *In II Sent.* dist. viii, pars 2, art. sole, qu.1: *utrum daemones habitare possint in corporibus humanis*, resp. (*Bonaventurae opera*, 2:225).

thoughts, whether they are asleep or awake, through visions intruded into their imaginations'.³²

But would demonic intrusion not damage 'the internal faculties and forces'? The *Malleus* sees no problem here; a demon can indeed 'take possession of the head and faculties themselves as the source' of some illusion.³³ When demons 'throw into confusion the internal faculties and those of fantasy (*fantasias et interiores potentias*), they are in fact there, i.e., effectively inside the human body. They can 'glide into'³⁴ our bodies with God's permission, smoothly and with ease, bringing (for example) a phantasm of a horse from 'the memory, which is at the back of the head', into 'the middle part of the head', where the *virtus imaginativa* resides, 'and then in sequence up to the common sense of perception, whose seat is in the front part of the head', so that the victim thinks they are seeing with external vision an actual horse.³⁵ All of this moving around is done, the *Malleus* assures us, 'without causing pain in the head'. The human organs remain unharmed – it is not as if the demon was trying

32 *De divinatione daemonum*, 5.9, PL 40:586; trans. Edmund Hill in *Augustine: On Christian Belief*, ed. Boniface Ramsey (New York, 2005), 210. On this crucially important treatise, the most substantive treatment of demonology until Aquinas wrote the final *quaestio* of his *De malo*, see Valerie Flint, Richard Gordon, et al., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (London, 1999), 317–19; Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1991), 57, 147–9, 161–2; Karin Schlapbach, 'De divinatione daemonum', in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. K. Pollmann and W. Otten (Oxford, 2013), 1:132–4; and J. Pépin, 'Augustin sur la divination, les démons et les signes', in *Signum. IX Colloquio internazionale Roma, 8-10 gennaio 1998*, ed. M. L. Bianchi (Florence, 1999), 67–78. For broader implications see Robert A. Markus, 'Augustine on magic: A neglected semiotic theory', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 40 (1994), 375–88.

33 *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:438; 2:286–7. The Aquinas sources here are *In II Librum sententiarum*, dist. 8, qu. 1 art. 5 and the *De malo*, qu. 16, art. 11 (ed./trans. Regan and Davies, 938–51). I have used the text of Aquinas's *Sentences* commentary in *Thomae Aquinatis opera omnia*, 25 vols (Parma, 1852–72), online at <corpusthomicum.org/snp2016.html>. The *Malleus* authors have also drawn on St Antoninus's *Summa*, 1a pars, tit. 2, cap. 6: *de phantasia seu imaginativa* (Venice, 1582), unfol.

34 The verb used here is *illabor*, meaning to flow, glide or sink into. The *Malleus* envisages an act of gentle, painless penetration.

35 304 *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:439; 2:288.

to force some organ of its own into one's head. Its penetration is subtle, but highly effective.³⁶

A fact of which Chaucer was fully aware. In *The Physician's Tale* we read of how the lustful Apius became possessed by 'the feend' that 'into his herte ran', teaching him 'sodeynly' how he by 'slyghte' could bend the maiden Virginia to his will (VI(C) 130-2). In *The Summoner's Tale* a secular lord wonders aloud how a mere churl could possibly have put to the outraged friar such an academically difficult problem – how *can* a fart possibly be divided into twelve equal parts? Why, the man must be a 'demonyak' (2240), possessed by some demon!

'How hadde this cherl ymaginacioun
To shewe swich a problem to the frere? [...]
I trowe the devel put it in his mynde'

(III[D] 2218-21)

Demons, it was believed, are very clever creatures, because during their time as angels they enjoyed the divine infusion of vast resources of knowledge, and even after their downfall they retained their superlative powers of reasoning (if in a somewhat debased form). Therefore one of them must have put the idea into the uneducated man's head – he himself could not have come up with something so profound.

The mind-bending tricks of demons were well-attested; the testimony of Chaucer's demon rings true in terms of traditional doctrine. Creating the appearance of a man, an ape or an angel in order to mess with a person's head would be easy for creatures who are highly skilled at 'feigning', the making of mental fictions which have no basis in the outside world.

III. *Demonic bodies made 'of elementz': aerial prosthesis*

But this is not the main bone of contention in interpretation of *The Friar's Tale*, lines 1504-8. What is primarily at issue is the ability of demons (and angels) to create bodies from elements. To adopt the first reading

³⁶ Sometimes the bodies of holy men triumphantly resisted such invasion; women's bodies were deemed to be, in general, more vulnerable. See Nancy Caciola, 'Breath, heart, guts: The body and spirits in the Middle Ages', in *Communicating with the Spirits*, ed. Pócs and Klaniczay, 21-39.

presented in section I above is tantamount to saying that Chaucer was flying in the face of substantial and consistent scholastic advocacy of the element of air as the primary and pre-eminent prosthetic material for the bodies whereby spiritual creatures make themselves known to human perception.³⁷

Here we encounter a tradition of long standing, as attested for example by the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville (d. 636). Discussing the nature of the pagan gods (demons who are identified here as fallen angels), Isidore explains that they 'flourish in accordance with the nature of aerial bodies'.³⁸ The idea became a staple of late-medieval demonology. An 'angel can assume a body from any element, as well as from several elements mixed together', says Thomas Aquinas, but air is the best one to use, since it 'condenses easily so as to take and retain shape and reflect various colours from other bodies, as may be seen in the clouds'.³⁹ Air 'can be condensed in one part more, in another less, in another least of all, thereby being shaped like nerve, bone and flesh', Bonaventure explains; 'it can in one part intercept more light, in another less, in another least of all, thereby displaying diverse colours: thus in every way conforming to a human body'.⁴⁰ And, indeed, looking wonderfully beautiful, as the rich tradition of angelic iconography in medieval art can attest. While not as visually striking as, say, one of Fra Angelico's sublime angels,⁴¹ Chaucer's 'gay yeman' cuts quite a dash with his short green jacket and black-fringed hat.

37 See Alastair Minnis, *Hellish Imaginations from Augustine to Dante: An Essay in Metaphor and Materiality*. Medium Ævum Monographs n.s. 37 (Oxford, 2020), 96–101, 117–19, 133, 139–47.

38 *Etymologiae*, VIII.xi.16–17; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford, 1911), unpag; trans. Stephen A. Barney et al., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, 2006), 184. Cf. *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De proprietatibus rerum*, ed. M. C. Seymour et al., 3 vols (Oxford, 1975–88), 1:86. See also Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum naturale*, 1.79; *Speculum doctrinale*, 9.117 (*Speculum maius*, 4 vols [Douai, 1624], 1:72–3; 2:84–50).

39 *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia dei*, qu. VI, art. 7, ad 7.

40 *In II Sent.*, dist. 8, pars 1, art. 2, qu. 2, resp. (*Bonaventurae opera*, 2:217). Bonaventure also states that the admixture of earthy or watery vapour helps with 'the variety of condensation' and 'the multiformity of colour' (2:218). There is a difference in the air quality on offer to the different spiritual creatures: angels assume their bodies from the superior part, demons from the inferior.

41 On which see especially Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago, 1995).

This enthusiasm for air as a prosthetic material was inherited by the *Malleus* authors. 'Air is especially capable of being transformed and changed into anything at all, a sign of which is the fact that when certain men have endeavoured to cut or pierce a body assumed by a demon with a sword, they were unable to achieve this because when air is divided, the parts immediately become continuous again.'⁴² Indeed, so taken are they with the efficacy of the element that they return to the question of how an illusion was played (*illudere*) in the case of Diomedes' companions being transformed into birds, to seek an explanation with reference to it. It was not by presenting sensible species 'to the force of imagination but by flying as birds in assumed bodies that they showed themselves to the eyes of the viewers.'⁴³ Here the *Malleus* parts company with both Augustine and Aquinas who, as noted above, supposed that in this case demons had made use of real birds, not aerial fabrications.

Assumed aerial bodies were regarded as temporary creations, in use only for the duration of a particular manifestation to humans by some angel or devil.⁴⁴ So, then, those bodies were 'newe' in contrast with existing human bodies (and those of the dead were obviously old bodies), but also new in the sense of being fresh every time, crafted as and when occasion demanded and discarded immediately afterwards. In his *Libri sententiarum*, the premier theological textbook of the later Middle Ages, Peter Lombard sums up the matter succinctly: 'At God's disposition, at times they [i.e., demons] take on bodies in order to perform a service commanded to them by God, and they set them aside when their service is completed. It was in such bodies that they appeared and spoke to men.'⁴⁵ As Bartholomew the Englishman's *De proprietatibus rerum* puts it (in John Trevisa's translation of 1399), 'an angel whan he

42 *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:411; 2:255. Aquinas uses the same image at *In II Sent.*, dist. 8, qu. 1 art. 3, co.

43 *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:437; 2:285.

44 This emphasis on the temporary creation of aerial bodies contrasts with the earlier, widely held belief that demons had permanent bodies of air. See Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1999), 128–34. On the properties and agencies of demons as envisaged within Neoplatonism, see especially the magisterial essay collection *Neoplatonic Demons and Angels*, ed. Luc Brisson, Seamus O'Neill, and Andrei Timotin (Leiden, 2018).

45 Peter Lombard, *II Sent.*, dist. 8, ch. 1 (43), 3; *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, Spicilegium Bonaventurianum, 4-5, 2 vols (Grottaferrata, 1971–81), 1:341; trans. Giulio Silano, 4 vols (Toronto, 2007–10), 2:34–5.

wole takeþ a body conuenabil to his worching, þat he may be iseye; and whanne he hath ido his office, he leueþ þat body that was itake'.⁴⁶

The schoolmen drew a firm distinction between these one-use-only bodies and two other types of mobile body: animated bodies and possessed bodies.⁴⁷ Animated bodies are ensouled human bodies, with souls giving them life and governing their movements. Possessed bodies are human (or indeed, animal) bodies which demons have taken over in some way, either by 'gliding into them' (in the manner described above) while they were alive or by raising them up when they were dead. In his *Summa quoniam homines* Alan of Lille (1125/30–1203) says that demons move cadavers in a way which may seem similar to the way that human souls move the bodies attached to them. But there is a major difference.⁴⁸ Demonic intrusion is nothing like the union between the body and the soul; it is *per applicationem* rather than *per unionem*. A demon cannot enter substantially (*substantialiter*) its victim's body, but merely manipulate its external functions, as when Satan moved the tongue of the serpent to deceive Eve (Genesis 3), which Alan compares to the way an angel spoke through Balaam's ass (Numbers 22.28–30). A demon assumes (the verb *assumere* is used), puts on, a dead body like some cloak or tunic, he explains.

Such academic treatment of cadaver prosthesis was quite rare in the twelfth century and became even more so in the thirteenth, as the schoolmen concentrated on contrasting the union of body and soul with the relationship between an aerial body and the spiritual creature (whether angel or demon) which assumes it. Quite crucially, this temporary body is a shell without life as we know it. To quote Bartholomew again, 'þey an angel take a body for eny nedeful doinge, he makeþ it nozt liue, neþer zeueþ þerto lif, but onliche he meueþ it'.⁴⁹

46 *De proprietatibus rerum*, 2.19, ed. Seymour et al., 1:86.

47 Followed, and nicely summarized, by the *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:413–4; 2:256–7.

48 *Summa quoniam homines*, lib. 2, tract. 1, paras. 135–7, ed. P. Glorieux, 'La Somme "Quoniam homines" d'Alain de Lille', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 28 (1953), 113–364 (273–5). Cf. Maaïke van der Lugt, 'La personne manquée. Démons, cadavres et *opera vitae* du début du XIIe siècle à saint Thomas', *Micrologus* 7 (1999), 205–21 (208–10).

49 *De proprietatibus rerum*, 2.18, ed. Seymour et al., 1:84. Aquinas answers the question, 'can demons cause the local movement of material substances?' in the affirmative, this being a typical scholastic response. *De malo*, qu. 16, art. 10, resp.; ed./trans. Regan and Davies, 937.

An angel or demon merely moves around its aerial construction – as if it were ‘a sailor in a ship that he has moved’, to use a metaphor from the *Malleus*.⁵⁰ And because no aerial body can be animated, it cannot experience sense perception, since it lacks the necessary corporeal organs.⁵¹ Bonaventure emphasizes that angels do not exercise the activities associated with the senses (*actus sentiendi*) through an assumed body, even though that body may possess all the human organs, crafted out of air – all of them have to be present and correct, because any lack would not manifest the perfection and completeness associated with an angelic spirit, as well as being startling to the observing human, who otherwise could be faced with something that looked quite monstrous.⁵² Although those organs may be accurate facsimiles they are there not to enable sensing (*ad organorum sensificationem*) but rather for the purpose of the angel’s self-manifestation (*ad sui ipsius ostensionem*). Hence the ‘eye’ in such a body may be so-called only in an ‘equivocal’ sense, because it is not used for the purpose of seeing.⁵³ The *Malleus* concurs: ‘an angel, whether good or bad, in no way sees through the eyes of the assumed body.’ ‘Hence their eyes are painted eyes (*oculi depicti*).’⁵⁴

What, then, of speech? The Friar’s demon boasts that he and his cohort can ‘speke as renably and faire and wel’ as the ‘Phitonissa’ did to Samuel (lines 1509–10). The encounter of Samuel and the Witch of Endor shall be discussed in section VI. Assuming for now that the Green Yeoman is an aerial body, how exactly is he able to communicate with his human interlocutor? When speech is ascribed to angels, Aquinas explains, this is ‘not really natural speech but an imitation thereof by producing a like effect’, something which just looks and sounds like the real thing.⁵⁵ Angels merely ‘imitate speech (*aliquid simile locutioni*), forming sounds in the air corresponding to human words.’⁵⁶ There was a long-standing grammatical tradition that, as Donatus put it,

50 *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:412; 2:255.

51 *De malo*, qu. 16, art. 7, ad 12; ed./trans. Regan and Davies, 908–9.

52 *In II Sent.*, dist. 8, pars 1, art. 3, qu. 2: *utrum angeli in corporibus assumtis exerceant operationes convenientes potentiae sensitivae* (*Bonaventurae opera*, 2:221–3).

53 Cf. Aquinas, *In II Sent.*, dist. 8, qu. 1, art. 4, qc. 3, especially the *conclusio*.

54 *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:414; 2:258.

55 *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia dei*, qu. VI, art. 8, resp.

56 *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 51, art. 3, ad 4. All *Summa theologiae* references are to the Blackfriars edn, 61 vols (London, 1964–81). Cf. Aquinas’s discussion at *In II Sent.*, dist. 8, qu. 1, art. 4, qc. 5.

'speech sound (*vox*) is struck air perceptible to hearing'; Priscian cites the definition of 'the philosophers' of 'spoken utterance (*vox*) as very thin struck air or its property which is perceptible to hearing, that is, what properly strikes the ears'.⁵⁷ Chaucer himself notes, in his *House of Fame*, that 'Soun ys noight but eyr ybroken' (line 765).⁵⁸ But could a spiritual creature, in an assumed body itself made of air, break the air in this way, achieve the necessary percussion? The *Malleus* is particularly interested in this subject.⁵⁹ In the case of human beings, who possess lungs and tongue as corporeal organs, the tongue strikes (*percutit*) air which is naturally inhaled 'in an instrument and vessel cast by God and naturally alive'. Demons lack those material organs of speech. However, 'by art they can create and show a tongue, as well as teeth and lips', a convincing appearance being brought about by artful aerial prosthesis. Yet they cannot talk in the true sense of the term and in their own right. What humans produce is called *vox* ('voice'), but in the case of bodies without a soul mere *sonus* ('sound') is produced. 'When demons wish to express the understanding of their mind' this is done not *per voces* but *per sonos*, those *sonos* having a certain similarity to human *vores* but most certainly not being of the same nature as them. In order to produce the necessary percussive effect, they strike 'air that has not been drawn in through inhaling, as in the case of humans, but has been held within an assumed body, and then they release it in an articulate way to the air outside up to the ears of the listener': a listener such as Chaucer's gullibly inquisitive summoner.⁶⁰

'Like Pygmalion sculpting Galatea' an angel or demon could work 'on a lump of unformed, unmeaning material, coaxing that material into a human shape, according it a human meaning and expression'.⁶¹ Unlike Pygmalion, those immaterial artists had a material to hand which was supremely supple, flexible – and capable of occupation, so through it they could mimic human movements and sounds. The schoolmen entered a remarkably consistent vote of confidence in air as

57 Donatus, *Ars grammatica*, and Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae*, in *Grammatici latini*, ed. Henry Keil, 8 vols (Hildesheim, 1961), 4:367 and 2:5.

58 For discussion see Martin Irvine, 'Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's *House of Fame*', *Speculum* 60 (1985), 850–76.

59 *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:413–4; 2:256–7.

60 *Ibid.* When a demon uses the speech organs of a human body to make sounds, the effect is different and less lifelike. See section IV below.

61 Here I borrow, and re-contextualize, a statement from Boxall, *Prosthetic Imagination*, 3.

the best prosthetic material available. True, we can find the occasional demurrer. William of Auvergne (c.1180–1249, elected Bishop of Paris in 1228) opined that aerial bodies would not be fit for purpose, being insufficiently robust and far too open to attack: ‘if their bodies were airy, they would be the most mortal of all animals, and greatly liable to all wounds and hurts because of the vulnerability of their bodies, which you can clearly observe in air.’⁶² Where William saw vulnerability, Aquinas *cum suis* saw flexibility, and extraordinary ease of movement from one location to the next. Indeed, Augustine, who held that the aerial body is the ‘finest, nimblest kind of body there is,’⁶³ had extolled the sensitivity of the demons’ aerial bodies as easily surpassing that of earthly comparators; because of their superior mobility they ‘incomparably outclass in speed not only the most fleet-footed of men or beasts but even the flight of birds.’⁶⁴

Besides, William of Auvergne comes down vehemently against the idea of cadavers (primarily those not yet rotted away!) returning from their graves. No premature resurrections of this kind are possible, he asserts; souls suffering punishments in the afterlife would not have the freedom to return to this world, ‘even with the assistance of evil spirits.’⁶⁵ Chaucer’s demon, however, seems to want to hold out at least the possibility that he and his familiars can rise with dead bodies.

62 *De universo*, II.iii.24 (1:1065). Cf. Thomas de Mayo, ‘William of Auvergne and Popular Demonology’, *Quidditas* 28 (2007), 61–88 (84); reiterated in his monograph, *The Demonology of William of Auvergne: By Fire and Sword* (Lewiston, NY, 2007). William goes on to say that ‘such a form (*figura*) could neither have this kind of body nor such a fixed magnitude, because, as you learned from Aristotle, anything wet, especially air, is badly suited to that end’. (Here I follow de Mayo’s translation.) Against that, and following the relevant angelology of Bonaventure and Aquinas, it could be argued that this moisture enables airy bodies to refract colours effectively.

63 *De divinatione daemonum*, 4.6; *PL* 40:585–6, trans. Hill, 210.

64 *De divinatione daemonum*, 3.7; *PL* 40:584; trans. Hill, 207.

65 *De universo*, II.iii.24 (1:1069). This expresses a widely held ecclesiastical view that ‘the resurrection is the inverse’ of the phenomenon of a ‘possessed corpse: a glorious return of the human spirit, as opposed to an unclean spirit slipping inside it’. Here I borrow phrasing from Nancy Caciola, ‘Wraiths, revenants and ritual in medieval culture’, *Past & Present* 152 (1996), 3–45 (12).

IV. Demons and 'dede bodyes': cadaver prosthesis

Medieval theologians experienced some difficulty, and indeed were somewhat reticent, when it came to offering answers to the questions raised by such thinking.⁶⁶ The twelfth-century pseudo-Augustinian treatise *De spiritu et anima* says that 'a dead man can [...] be whisked away to the world of the living through divine power rather than through the nature of the dead person. However, I do not dare to assert whether these things happen through their actual presence or through angels taking on their person.'⁶⁷ So, on this reckoning, it is unclear whether actual bodies rise or whether we are dealing simply with appearances. In any event, continues the anonymous author, God almighty, who is present everywhere, 'uses the widely-diffused services of the angels to provide the living with the consolations which he deems they need in this life's tribulations'. The implication is that apparent visits from the dead could be explained in this manner. Thomas Aquinas spoke for many theologians in offering as an attractive solution the theory that mere appearances are involved, suggesting that apparitions of dead people 'happen through the activity of good or bad angels, even without the knowledge of the dead themselves.'⁶⁸ One thing they were adamant about was that manifestations of this kind are possible only with the ultimate permission of God (a fact fully admitted by Chaucer's demon, lines 1482–8), who always has some special purpose in mind. Such rationalization may be seen as evidence of the church's efforts to suit subversive 'ghost stories' to its own ends, placing them within an economy of salvation that envisages souls in purgatory undergoing penance and purification – hence, quite understandably, some of those souls might wish to return to the earth in order to complete unfinished business, and obtain absolution for sins previously unshriven.

This issue is well addressed in the *Festial* of John Mirk (fl. c.1382–c.1414), which became the most widely read English sermon-cycle of the fifteenth century. 'Þer beth many þat walkuth aftur þat ben beryet in holy place', the Austin canon declares, which may not be 'of vexing of þe fende but of grace of God for to geton ham helpon of some synne þat

66 A point brought out well by R. N. Swanson, 'Ghosts and ghostbusters in the Middle Ages', in *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul*, ed. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon. *Studies in Church History* 45 (Saffron Walden, 2009), 143–73.

67 *De spiritu et anima*, 29, in *PL* 40:779–800; trans. Bernard McGinn, *Three Treatises on Man: A Cistercian Anthropology* (Kalamazoo, 1977), 225.

68 *Summa theologica*, 1a, qu. 89, art. 8, ad 2.

pei ben gylty inne'.⁶⁹ They may have no rest until they get spiritual help from a willing cleric. Mirk tells the story of how the *spyrite* (apparition) of an unshriven thief from Lilleshall asks a parish priest, named as Thomas Wodward, for such assistance. The pair are to go to the abbot of Lilleshall (the revenant was one of three thieves who had stolen an ox from that abbot!), and Thomas must ensure the thief is absolved – otherwise his unquiet soul can have no peace. All of this is done and, following absolution, the body lies at rest.⁷⁰ Posthumous absolutions are also recorded in six of the twelve ghost stories associated with Byland Abbey. In the sixth, a canon of Newburgh who had stolen and concealed silver spoons begs a living man to recover them and take them to the prior; this having been done, 'after absolution the ghost henceforth rested in peace'.⁷¹ In the ninth, a ghost confesses that 'he had been excommunicated for a certain matter of sixpence'. But 'after absolution and satisfaction he rested in peace'.⁷²

In these cases the unhappy dead stay in their graves once they have taken care of sacramental business they had failed to complete during their lives; their needs are precise, their desires practical and lacking in mystery. Such stories contrast sharply with the many tales of malevolent and trouble-making revenants, which have a long Germanic pre-history.⁷³ Take for instance the tale of 'The Berwick Ghost', as

69 *John Mirk's Festial*, ed. Susan Powell, EETS o.s. 334–5, 2 vols (Oxford, 2009–2011), 2:252. In his poem *Saint Austin at Compton*, John Lydgate (d. 1449/50?) recounts how a long-dead knight who had failed to pay his tithes, and accordingly been excommunicated, rises out of his tomb when St Augustine of Canterbury gets to the part of the mass where the excommunicated are bidden to leave the church. Augustine responds by resurrecting the priest who had excommunicated the knight, so that he may absolve him. This having been done, the knight is reburied. See Gina Mary Hurley, 'The Practice of Tithing and the Resurrection of Clerical Authority in Lydgate's *Saint Austin at Compton*', *Medium Ævum* 90.1 (2021), 70–91.

70 However, elsewhere Mirk asserts that demons can occupy unabsolved corpses and move them around; as Gordon points out, he is 'able to alternate between a demonic and non-demonic causation for revenants depending on the specific pastoral message he was trying to convey'. *Supernatural Encounters*, 172. One way to reconcile the two would be to say that God can command demons to carry out his higher purposes, bringing about good despite themselves.

71 'Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories', ed. James, 419; trans. Grant, 371.

72 'Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories', ed. James, 420; trans. Grant, 372.

73 On which see William Sayers, 'The Alien and Alienated as Unquiet Dead in the Sagas of the Icelanders', in *Monster Theory*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

recounted by William of Newburgh in the *Historia rerum Anglicarum* which he wrote c.1198.⁷⁴ A wealthy man who dies suddenly, having led a sinful life, has his 'pestiferous corpse' borne from its tomb by Satan. It terrorizes the town, 'spreading chaos and discontent', roaming around with a pack of barking dogs in pursuit. Fearing that this revenant will spread contagion (demon-breath can cause plague, it seems), the residents task ten bold young men with digging up, dismembering and cremating the suspect corpse. Whereupon 'the nightly perturbations cease'. But the damage has been done; a pestilence furiously ravages the town, carrying off the greater portion of its population.

Demonic agency is also said to be at work in the case of the cadaver of the 'hound-priest', whose unflattering nickname reflects his love of hunting and other pursuits more suited to noble layfolk.⁷⁵ Having been occupied by the devil (as his 'chosen vessel') it rises from the grave in Melrose Abbey's cemetery every night 'with loud groans and horrible murmurs', and makes a nuisance of itself outside the bedchamber of the immoral priest's former mistress. Finally the corpse is exhumed, carried beyond the monastery's walls, and burned. The final incident recorded by William occurred in 1196 at 'Anantis Castle' (=Alnwick Castle in Northumberland?). Through the work of Satan, a wicked sprite, angry and unshriven, emerges from its grave every night, corrupting the air with his breath, so that plague breaks out and many die. When the corpse is exhumed, beheaded and burned – the locals are taking no chances – the epidemic ends. They fare better than the sorry inhabitants of Berwick, even though in both cases the same grisly remedial action was followed. What makes the last of William's tales different from the previous two is its inclusion of the statement that the 'monster' had died devoid of grace, without having made a proper confession and

(Minneapolis, 1996), 242–63.

74 William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, 5.23, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. Richard Howlett. Rolls Series 82, 4 vols (London, 1884–9), 2:476–7. I have drawn on Joseph Stevenson's translations in *The Church Historians of England, volume IV, part II* (London, 1861), online at <<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/williamofnewburgh-five.asp#23>> See further Stephen Gordon's fine article, 'Social monsters and the walking dead in William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum Anglicarum*', *Journal of Medieval History* 41.4 (2015), 446–65; revised and expanded as Chapter 2 of his *Supernatural Encounters*.

75 *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, 5.24, in *Chronicles*, ed. Howlett, 12:478–82. Cf. note 21 above, re inappropriate love of hunting among men of religion.

received the Eucharist, hence Christian burial availed him not. This is reminiscent of John Mirk's tales, though in those the dead do not walk to cause diabolic vexations – whereas in William's narratives Satan is hard at work, raising up and mobilizing corpses.⁷⁶

The 'unfinished business' explanation for unquiet graves, together with the (literal) demonization of those 'nightly perturbations', amounts to a twin-pronged attempt by the church authorities, and church doctrine, to exercise control over the phenomenon of cadaver prosthesis. Describing the way in which such ghost stories display an assimilation of 'the folkloric' and 'the ecclesiastical perception of ghosts', Maik Hildebrandt has suggested that '[i]n this process, the nature of these apparitions was changed fundamentally: the aggressive, ruthless and violent behaviour of their predecessors [...] is transformed into ghosts that, although they are still physical and capable of wounding the living, actually seek help and absolution.'⁷⁷ Examining this process of adaptation and appropriation, Nancy Caciola has proposed that we can read certain ecclesiastical sources 'against the grain', in seeking to separate the churchmen's 'interpretations' from 'the basic "cultural facts" of the story'. By 'cultural facts' Caciola means 'the most minimal description of what actions are reported to have occurred (hence "facts") and were held as true by the communities that circulated the report (hence "cultural")'.⁷⁸ Belief within certain communities that the dead could walk, and make physical contact with the living, was a 'cultural fact' of considerable importance, which resisted 'translation' into the different 'semantic' system that the church brought to bear.⁷⁹ In many medieval ghost stories, including those summarized above, the 'aggressive, ruthless and violent behavior' of visitors from beyond the grave (or indeed, from the grave) is barely contained; inconvenient truths resist exorcism.⁸⁰

76 But *not* 'animating' them in the strict sense of that term, in the way in which the soul (*anima*) moves the human body to which it is fully united. See section III above.

77 Maik Hildebrandt, 'Medieval Ghosts: The Stories of the Monk of Byland', in *Ghosts – or the (Nearly) Invisible: Spectral Phenomena in Literature and the Media*, ed. Maria Fleischhack and Elmar Schenkel (Frankfurt-am-Main, 2016), 13–23 (19, 21).

78 'Wraiths, revenants and ritual', 10.

79 *Ibid.*, 12.

80 On which see further Edeltraud Aspöck, 'What Actually is a "Deviant Burial"? Comparing German-Language and Anglophone Research on "Deviant Burials"', in *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record*, ed. Eileen M. Murphy

Even in accounts of cadaver prosthesis wherein the church did manage to accommodate and repurpose troubling 'cultural facts' with a large measure of success, the physical (as opposed to the aerial) materiality of those bodies is regularly emphasized. Rarely is this more evident than in the latter part of a miracle story which enjoyed a very wide circulation, involving a certain Peter of Grenoble.⁸¹ Having lost a leg through what seems to have been ergot poisoning, the unfortunate Peter has it restored thanks to the intervention of the Virgin Mary and the martyr St Hippolytus. In what seems to be the earliest account of this extraordinary event, Guibert of Nogent (1053–1124) recounts what happened next, as follows. The devil, angered at the demonstration of divine power and the privileged position Peter is enjoying as a result of the miracle, seeks to destroy his reputation. So he sends to his bed the shape of a naked woman. 'Shamelessly displaying not only other parts of her body' to Peter 'but also especially the pudenda, she strove with blandishments to entice him to unseemly actions'. Night after night this

(Oxford, 2008), 17–34; John Blair, "The dangerous dead in early medieval England," in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stephen Baxter, Catherine Karkov et al. (Farnham, 2009), 539–59; Nancy Caciola, "Night is conceded to the dead": Revenant Congregations in the Middle Ages," in *Contesting Orthodoxy in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Heresy, Magic and Witchcraft*, ed. Louise Nyholm Kallestrup and Raisa Maria Toivo (Cham, 2017), 17–33. The evidence collected here reveals dark and dangerous worlds in which a church can be taken over at night by a congregation of the dead (the priest who tries to stop them being burned to a cinder on its altar). Bodies are buried, sometimes upside down, with hearts pierced and legs tied or broken, to ensure they stay put. If they refuse to remain underground and became night-walkers, terrifying or inflicting physical harm on the living, they may be disinterred and dismembered, then reburied; or their remains can be cremated and scattered to the winds.

81 Many versions of this story are usefully collected together in an extraordinary publication by Douglas B. Price and Neil J. Twombly, *The Phantom Limb Phenomenon: A Medical, Folkloric, and Historical Study: Texts and Translations of 10th to 20th century accounts of the miraculous restoration of lost body parts* (Washington, DC, 1978), 9–87. Their central claim is that they have discovered telling similarities between accounts of miraculously restored limbs and the symptomology of 'phantom limb syndrome', whereby patients lacking a limb or some other body-part (perhaps due to amputation) perceive it as being still present, and a source of sensations, particularly pain. Whilst maintaining much respect for this venture, the result of study both deep and broad, I find its methodology unconvincing and its thesis unproved. See Minnis, *Phantom Pains*, 7, 10–12.

happens, but finally Peter manages to strangle the 'baleful creature'. The body of a 'very huge old woman (*anus*)' is subsequently extracted from the building. Given the stench which emanates from it, no-one doubted 'that it had been the corpse of some very base woman in which the devil had clothed himself' (*diabolus induisset*. The verb *induo* means 'to dress in', 'assume'. We may recall Alan of Lille's remark [section III above] that a demon assumes a cadaver like putting on some cloak or tunic).⁸² Supporting evidence was afforded by the discovery of 'torn and decayed rags', presumably the remains of a winding sheet which this 'most impure corpse' once had wrapped around it. The retelling by Vincent of Beauvais (d. 1264), though shorter, is similar in terms of the vocabulary used, including the idea of the devil having clothed himself (*induisset*) in 'the corpse of some very base woman'.⁸³ In that most popular of all late-medieval collections of saints' lives, the *Legenda aurea* of Jacob of Vorazze (d. 1298), the narrative ends with the statement: 'soon the devil went away and a rotten corpse remained, and from it such a stench emanated that no one who saw this doubted that it was the body of some dead woman, which the devil assumed (*assumsit*)'.⁸⁴

Very occasionally, we find an attempt to describe the actual dynamic of the prosthesis, the physical mechanism involved. The Dominican hagiographer and encyclopaedist Thomas of Cantimpré (d. 1272) says that since the organic structure of a body remains after death, 'just as a man can [use] a corporeal structure (*corpus organisatum*) like a garment (*vestem*), so the devil can sneak into it and can mould the mouth to voices and words again, and recall the tendons to the movements of its

82 Price and Twombly, *Phantom Limb*, 13–14, 19–20. But how could this disgusting cadaver possibly function as an instrument of sexual temptation? I shall discuss that puzzle in section V below.

83 Price and Twombly, *Phantom Limb*, 37, 40. Both Guibert and Vincent say that the body removed from the house is of an old woman (*anus*); Jacob of Vorazze, and those who followed his *Legenda aurea*, do not specify her age.

84 *Ibid.*, 26, 27. With the gross physical details provided here may be compared the account, in the fifth of the Byland Abbey narratives, of how 'a certain woman laid hold of a ghost and carried him on her back into a certain house in presence of some men, one of whom reported that he saw the hands of the woman sink deeply into the flesh of the ghost as though the flesh were rotten and not solid but phantom flesh' ('quasi caro spiritus esset putrida et non solida sed fantastica'). 'Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories', ed. James, 418–9; trans. Grant, 371.

members.⁸⁵ Thomas immediately adds that a corpse cannot be used in this way for very long, due to the corruption of the body in the absence of the soul. Likewise, Raoul Ardent (d. c.1200) insisted that a cadaver must be very fresh in order to serve a demon's purpose.⁸⁶ In the case of Peter of Grenoble's brazen and baleful temptress, decay seems to have set in. As a prosthetic material, a cadaver has very obvious limitations, including flexibility issues and a firm use-by date. If spiritual creatures felt demeaned by taking on bodies of air, how much more so would they have done, in assuming cadavers – grisly puppets which move in an 'uncoordinated, stiff and unnatural' manner?⁸⁷

Discussing *living* human bodies possessed by the devil,⁸⁸ the English Benedictine Ralph Higden (d. 1364) cites expert opinion as holding that the sound produced through the agency of the possessing demon

85 *Bonum universale de apibus*, II.49.7; *Thomae Cantimpratani Bonum universale de apibus* (Douai, 1627), 448. I have drawn on the translation by Caciola, 'Wraiths, revenants and ritual', 14. Cf. the metaphor of putting on a garment as cited in sections III and IV above.

86 Van der Lugt, 'La personne manquée', 206.

87 Caciola, 'Wraiths, revenants and ritual', 12–13; she observes the church's insistence that a 'corpse itself does not come to life: it is mere dross moved by the demon'. However, narratives of revenants seeking to fulfil outstanding sacramental obligations run abrasively counter to the common clerical belief that 'the dead are not able to rise again on earth or return to bodies'; 'It is clear that souls do not fashion such things in our sight; demons do': Ralph Higden, *Speculum curatorum*, ed./trans. Crook and Jennings, 131 (influenced by William of Auvergne, *De universo*, II.iii.24 [1:1070]). One might speculatively suggest that where souls desire to fulfil outstanding sacramental obligations, God mercifully orders demons to animate their bodies to achieve this (cf. note 70 above). The fourteenth-century ME poem *St Erkenwald* recounts the miraculous (non-demonic) preservation and animation of a pagan corpse seeking baptism. Cf. note 69 above.

88 The topic of demonic possession of living (as opposed to dead) bodies is beyond the scope of the present article. Belief in the phenomenon was, of course, encouraged by several Gospel accounts; see Matthew 17.14–20, Mark 5.1–20 and Luke 4.33–6. See further Simon Kemp and Kevin Williams, 'Demonic possession and mental disorder in medieval and early modern Europe', *Psychological Medicine* 17 (1987), 21–9; Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2003); and Carlos Espí Forcén and Fernando Espí Forcén, 'Demonic possessions and mental illness: Discussion of selected cases in late medieval hagiographical literature', *Early Science in Medicine* 19 (2014), 258–79.

is 'rather hoarse', in contrast with the man's own 'clearer' voice.⁸⁹ This phenomenon is hardly surprising, Hilton continues, 'because it is more fitting and agreeable that the human soul use its own organs than that the worthless spirit use another's which he usurps against nature. In like manner, we use our natural feet more expeditiously than the wooden feet we employ to substitute for the lack of something natural'. Here Higden, yet again, is following William of Auvergne: 'We use the feet which are naturally ours far better than feet of wood, and other devices which we obtain and adapt to remedy the lack of our natural limbs'.⁹⁰ In other words, a person who employs wooden feet as a primitive prosthesis finds them more awkward to move than feet joined to him naturally, those corporeal organs which are smoothly and efficiently controlled by the soul. A demon who possesses a human body, whether living or (though Higden does not go there) dead, will experience a similar clumsiness, as it attempts to move the alien organs it has usurped.

But medieval theologians were hardly interested in the prosthetic problems faced by demons – whilst not being slow to enumerate the painful punishments they experienced in hell.

V. *Testing the materiality of Chaucer's demon*

Applying all of this to Chaucer's Green Yeoman, we may proceed to test the sort of demonic prosthesis which is in play. Has the demon borrowed a human body and is using its physical structure, or are we dealing with a case of aerial appearance? On the face of it, the former theory seems improbable, given the grisliness of the risen bodies usually described in medieval revenant narratives, which seem quite different from the well-clad and totally presentable figure who engages in (at least superficially) patient and polite conversation with a naïve human. He wants to encourage the summoner's sense of false security, not frighten him off. The summoner does not know he is talking to a demon until that same demon reveals itself as such, and the creature seems calmly scrupulous as it pursues its present business, only taking things which are 'sent to the devil' when the speaker truly wants that to happen. (The summoner has no such scruples, being a figure without compassion or conscience: 'Stomak ne conscience ne knowe I noon', line 1441. Indeed,

89 *Speculum curatorum*, ed./trans. Crook and Jennings, 128-9.

90 *De universo*, II.iii.13 (1:1042).

this morally abhorrent character is presented as more of a demon than the demon itself.)⁹¹ Here is a marked contrast with the indiscriminating, clumsy antics of, for instance, the Berwick Ghost and the hound-priest.

Stephen Gordon, who advances 'the hypothesis that the devil's body is more a reanimated corpse than airy shell', admits that there is an obvious problem with it.⁹² 'A rotting cadaver would provoke a sense of alarm in even the most oblivious or greedy church agent' (172). Indeed! Gordon rises to the challenge by citing monastic *exempla* which affirm the 'belief that evil spirits could overlay material things with false material forms' (172), a belief supported by Aquinas's (annoyingly brief) statement that, when it comes to creating apparitions that exist outside the mind, a demon can 'clothe any material thing in a material form so that it appears in the guise of the latter'.⁹³ The Cistercian prior Caesarius of Heisterbach (c.1180–c. 1240) tells tales that illustrate how, when demons which have occupied bodies that look perfectly fine on the outside are cast out from them, those shells instantly decay and crumble⁹⁴ – a staple

91 On the notion that unjust acquirers are worse than devils, see Przemyslaw Mroczkowski, 'The Friar's Tale and its pulpit background', in *Chaucer to Chesterton, English Classics from Polish Perspective*. Prace Wydziału Historyczno-Filologicznego, 69 (Lublin, 1996), 77–94 (87).

92 *Supernatural Encounters*, 167. In support of this position, Gordon argues that line 1462 ('But whan us liketh we kan take us oon') encourages 'multiple interpretations' (*Supernatural Encounters*, 170). In his view *take* has 'strong connotations of physicality': 'a much more aggressive (and possessive) mode of action than the Latin *assumere* (meaning "to receive"; "to accept")', as used by Aquinas and Vincent of Beauvais in their accounts of how angels and demons take on aerial bodies; Gordon believes this distinction is reiterated in lines 1507–8 (170). However, in translations of such accounts, *taken* is used for *assumere*: e.g., John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomew the Englishman: 'Item, corpus pro suo beneplacito operationi sue congruum vt appareat *assumit*, et pacto suo officio idem corpus *assumptum* deponit': 'Also an angel whan he wole *takeþ* a body conuenabil to his worchinge, þat he may be iseye; and whanne he hath ido his office, he leueþ þat body that was *itake*' (my italics): *De proprietatibus rerum*, ed. Seymour et al., 1. 84. Cf. the Wycliffite Bible's rendering of Tamar's taking (*adsumpsit*) a veil, as '*toke to a roket*' (Genesis 38.14; my italics). In the *Medulla grammaticæ*, *assumo* is glossed as 'to take to' (ed. Huntsman, 70). Conversely, the *MED*, s.v. *taken*, 10a, has 'to put on a garment, vestments, etc.; to take to wear something', etc. Positing a crucial distinction between the semantic ranges of those words seems unsupportable.

93 *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 114, art. 4, ad 2.

94 *Dialogus miraculorum*, dist. 12, chs 2–4, in *Caesarii Heisterbacensis [...]* *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange, 2 vols (Cologne, 1851), 2:317–18; cf.

of many a modern horror film. This kind of narrative had considerable currency, and, however much the learned schoolmen wished to distance themselves from the monastic *Zeitgeist*, they could not control or stem the circulation of stories that seemed to involve cadaver prosthesis. There were plenty of them around, to judge by William of Newburgh's comment: 'It would not be easy to believe that the corpses of the dead should sally (I know not by what agency) from their graves, and should wander about to the terror or destruction of the living, and again return to the tomb, which of its own accord spontaneously opened to receive them, did not frequent examples, occurring in our own times, suffice to establish this fact, to the truth of which there is abundant testimony'.⁹⁵ The stories he has recorded are examples only, William emphasizes; he has ascertained plenty more 'amazing and horrible' instances – so many, that to record all of them 'would be beyond measure laborious and troublesome'.

However, it is quite a leap from here to the notion that the outer appearance of Chaucer's dapper, green-clad forester is 'a second, airy skin', 'an airy "mask" concealing a putrid cadaver' (a possibility which Gordon raises).⁹⁶ That seems like an excess of corporeality – overkill, one might say. Two forms of embodiment are allegedly involved when one would be quite sufficient. 'A demon can fabricate (*possit formare*) a body out of air',⁹⁷ and a straightforward and singular aerial body could enable the demon in Chaucer's narrative to do everything it wants to.

But is this interpretive problem not reminiscent of the puzzle presented by the devil's attempt to lead Peter of Grenoble into sexual temptation? How could a rotten, smelly cadaver present itself to Peter in a sexually enticing form? A shape (*species*) or accurate effigy (*vera effigies*) of a naked woman has been sent to him, we are told. Given the physical tussle which ensues, this cannot be a *species in imaginatione* (cf. section II above), a mental image induced by the devil. Might some kind of aerial prosthesis be involved? After all, it was believed that an aerial body was a sufficiently material vessel to allow an incubus to transport the sperm it had obtained from sexual intercourse with a man to the woman it would then proceed to lie with. (Assuming one and the same demon was involved. Alternatively, an incubus and a succubus could

Gordon, *Supernatural Encounters*, 172.

95 *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, 5.24, in *Chronicles*, ed. Howlett, 12:477.

96 Gordon, *Supernatural Encounters*, 172, 162.

97 Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 114, art. 4.

work as a team, to achieve a devilish impregnation.) Here we may return to the enthusiasm expressed by the *Malleus maleficarum* for air as a prosthetic material, this being vitally important for the treatise's postulation of demons being capable of materialization to the extent that they can 'practise the most revolting sexual acts, not for the sake of pleasure but in order to taint the soul and body of those under or on whom they lie'.⁹⁸ That statement occurs in a chapter about how sorceresses associate (in every possible way) with incubi demons. In assumed, aerial bodies 'demons can [...] speak with sorceresses, see them, hear them, eat with them and beget with them'.⁹⁹ Here we go beyond the specifics of the demonology current in Chaucer's time; I quote this passage to dramatize how important the concept of aerial prosthesis has been within the long history of demonic interaction with sorceresses, witches and other undesirables. By the end of the fourteenth century its essential aspects had been well established.

However, a different kind of materiality seems to be involved in Peter of Grenoble's temptation. For a start, witnesses look through the window of his little cell to observe his conflict with the temptress. Then, following Peter's victory, the old woman's remains are drawn out from the building by means of the roof being uncovered and a rope 'fastened to her gullet'.¹⁰⁰ (A little sleuthing on Peter's part reveals that she must have gained access through the closet hole of a latrine, a fittingly disgusting means of entry for a disgusting creature.)¹⁰¹ This very physical

98 *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:254; 2:84. The belief that demons did not experience any pleasure in such acts is well described by Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 52–3. Demons 'only assumed appropriately sexed bodies in order to seduce and corrupt humans'. Elliott proceeds to quote William of Auvergne as making the good point that 'were demons actually capable of feeling lust, they would hardly resort to mortals, since they could assume much more beautiful forms in accordance with their angelic nature'. See further Maaïke van der Lugt, 'The Incubus in Scholastic Debate: Medicine, Theology and Popular Belief', in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler (York, 2001), 175–200.

99 *Malleus*, ed. Mackay, 1:414; 2:256.

100 Guibert of Nogent's account; in Price and Twombly, *Phantom Limb*, 13–14, 19.

101 Perhaps this was not simply a matter of gaining access. William of Auvergne refers to the Goddess Cloacina ('that is, the goddess of sewers') as being 'the lowest and basest' of demons, 'because sewers seem to be the vilest things in human dwellings'. *De universo*, II.iii.11 (1:1036–7). Earlier, William had spoken about how the foulest sewers are temples for certain kinds of demon, to

object is taken out of the town and burned. Here, then, is the base matter with which the devil deigned to clothe himself. We seem very far from aerial prosthesis.

But how could such a repellent creature possibly 'kindle [Peter] to base licentiousness'?¹⁰² The assumption must be that, when she appeared naked before him, she looked at least superficially attractive. How so? Might we be dealing in this case with 'an airy "mask" concealing a putrid cadaver', to apply what Gordon has offered as one possible explanation for the Green Yeoman of *The Friar's Tale*?

I think not. For, once again, we would be faced with what I previously called an excess of corporeality – that is to say, an unnecessary doubling up of different forms of corporeality. Maaïke van der Lugt has argued that, by the 1250s, the schoolmen who were faced with two possible kinds of demonic prosthesis had reached a compromise. 'According to this, demons could sleep with women by temporarily taking on an artificial body made from air or a human corpse'.¹⁰³ Here is an 'either ... or' as opposed to a 'both ... and' situation. In the case of cadaver prosthesis, making huge old women seem sexually alluring would present no difficulties for demons who were skilled at getting inside the human head. We may recall Bonaventure's account of how fiends can easily trick our senses, 'either by showing to be present what is not, or by showing something to be otherwise than it is, or by hiding away what is present'.¹⁰⁴ The eroticizing of Peter of Grenoble's night-time intruder is a clear instance of 'showing something to be otherwise than it is'. If a person can be mistaken for a nanny-goat or a donkey, then making a

whom 'the filth of sewage has become [so] pleasing' that 'they are unhappy being anywhere else'. '[T]hey receive the turds of defecators like welcome gifts and offerings, so that to those with dysentery and diarrhea they are more propitious than to healthy persons, and not without reason do they count them among their most devout worshippers. [...] From which it follows that they are gravely offended by those with constipation or who are unable to hurry. Further: of necessity, they are extremely hostile towards the water carriers, by whom the latrines are cleaned out'. *De universo*, II.iii.6 (1:1027). I am grateful to Richard Firth Green for drawing my attention to these passages, and providing a lively translation. Peter of Grenoble's demon does not seem to have been thought of as a perpetual sewer-dweller – but maybe as a creature that gained some pleasure from passing through one.

102 Price and Twombly, *Phantom Limb*, 13, 19.

103 'The Incubus in Scholastic Debate', 179.

104 See section II above.

vetula appear like a vamp is hardly difficult. A beloved person can appear as 'something hateful and horrible', laments the *Malleus*.¹⁰⁵ By the same token, something 'hateful and horrible' can appear as highly attractive. And that is possible even if there are witnesses present, as is illustrated by the tale involving St Macharius and a woman who was made to look like a horse. Demons are adept at the production of mass illusion.

Ockham's razor may be wielded here; complexity should not be multiplied beyond necessity. In the case of Peter of Grenoble's visitation, it can easily be argued that a cadaver provided the prosthetic material needed to enable a spiritual creature, itself lacking in matter, to manifest itself physically in the world and interact with a human being, with some mind-bending tricks providing the necessary cosmetics. But, in contrast, an aerial prosthesis seems the most obvious explanation for the materialization of Chaucer's Green Yeoman. There simply is no need for the fiend to engage in cadaver prosthesis. Taking from its grave the body of a freshly dead forester, and enhancing its appearance with mental manipulation, seems an unnecessarily elaborate way of getting what he wants: possession of the summoner's soul. That result is achieved in a quite cerebral manner, through careful attention being paid to words and the underlying intentions which give them their true meaning. We are very far from the knockabout encounter of Peter of Grenoble wrestling with, and strangling, the disgusting outer garment which a demon has worn. Admittedly, at the end of Chaucer's tale the demon is referred to as a 'foule feend' (line 1639), but no evidence of physical foulness may be found at any point during the narrative. No glimpse is afforded of a putrid cadaver behind an airy mask – probably because air is all there's meant to be, robustly serving as the singular prosthetic material.

VI. Demons and the Witch of Endor

We may now focus on lines 1509–12, where the Green Yeoman boasts that demons can

speke as renably and faire and wel	(readily)
As to the Phitonissa dide Samuel.	(Pythoness)
(And yet wol som men seye it was nat he;	
I do no fors of youre dyvynytee.)	(put no store in)

105 Ibid.

Arguably, speaking 'renably and faire and wel' would involve the use of aerial prosthesis, rather than the greatly inferior manipulation of usurped physical organs from a human body whether dead or alive, which – according to Ralph Higden – resulted in hoarse sounds clumsily articulated.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, Caesarius of Heisterbach reports the case of a cleric with a beautiful singing voice which was delightful to hear – too delightful, for a deceitful demon was manipulating a cadaver.¹⁰⁷ One should not be confidently dismissive of demonic vocal dexterity. (Unlike Higden, Caesarius is uninterested in the physical difficulties such voice-production poses.) That said, aerial prosthesis was the form of materialization used by well-spoken angels, who would not demean themselves by occupying cadavers.¹⁰⁸ So, for a fourteenth-century thinker, with the intellectual legacies of Bonaventure and Aquinas behind him, the use 'of elementz' was probably the most likely way to account for devilish vocalization. In any case, in the Green Yeoman's estimation demonic speech can be as eloquent as what transpired when 'Samuel' spoke to the Pythoness – the (very obvious) irony being that this may well have been demonic speech.¹⁰⁹

'Phitonissa' and its Medieval Latin cognates ultimately derive from the name ('Pythia') bestowed on the high priestess of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, who also presided as the oracle there, so it intimates powers of divination and prophecy of a pagan kind which were highly suspect to Christians.¹¹⁰ Chaucer is referencing an infamous

106 See above, 139–40.

107 *Dialogus miraculorum*, dist. 12, ch. 3 (2:317–18).

108 As Van der Lugt remarks, the schoolmen seem to have assumed, without actually spelling it out, that only demons wore cadavers like garments, angels being unwilling to abase themselves in such morbid activities: 'La personne manquée', 207.

109 Hence I cannot agree with Gordon's suggestion that the demon 'takes the spirit of Samuel at face value'; *Supernatural Encounters*, 174. Whatever the specific intent may be, the demon is not speaking in a straightforward manner. Perhaps Chaucer meant his readers to detect a sly and superior humour: the demon knows full well who or what was speaking in the appearance of Samuel, but is teasing his audience with their lack of certainty in this matter.

110 For the terminology used here cf. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, VIII. ix.7–31: 'Necromancers are those by whose incantations the dead, brought back to life, seem to prophesy'. This and comparable magic arts are 'to be avoided by a Christian, and entirely repudiated and condemned with every curse'. 'Pythonesses are named from Pythian Apollo, because he was the inventor of divination'. The Pythoness of I Kings 28 is cited as an example. She 'called up the

Old Testament narrative involving King Saul, the seer and military leader Samuel, and an unnamed female medium, which Jean-Claude Schmitt has deemed 'the only true biblical ghost tale'.¹¹¹ The medium or necromancer, popularly known as the Witch of Endor, has been well described by Stephen Gordon as 'the preeminent Biblical precedent for exploring the question of supernatural identity'.¹¹² Chaucer's demon could not have chosen a more challenging and troubling Bible story.¹¹³ But, then, he is quite a tease: never giving full answers, speaking ambiguously, and ridiculing human efforts in 'dyvynytee' while not offering any correctives. Just what one would expect from a (medieval) demon.

spirit of the prophet Samuel from the recesses of the lower region and presented him to the view of the living – if, however, we believe that this was the spirit of the prophet and not some fantastic illusion created by the deception of Satan': *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, tr. Barney et al., 181–3. These are the standard medieval definitions. Vincent of Beauvais reiterates them in his *Speculum doctrinale*, X, cap. 120; cited by Aiken, 'Vincent of Beauvais and the Green Yeoman's Lecture', 7. In her discussion of this pythoness Caciola seeks to avoid the negative associations of terms like 'necromancer' and 'witch', preferring the more morally neutral word 'medium': *Afterlives: The Return of the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2016), 272–3.

111 Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 15. The episode enjoyed a long iconographical tradition, on which see Schmitt, 16–17, and Charles Zika, 'The Witch of Endor Before the Witch Trials', in *Contesting Orthodoxy*, ed. Kallestrup and Toivo, 167–91. Zika has published several other relevant studies, including 'The Witch of Endor. Transformations of a Biblical Necromancer in Early Modern Europe', in *Rituals, Images and Words. Varieties of Cultural Expression in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. F. W. Kent and C. Zika (Turnhout, 2005), 235–59; 'Recasting Images of Witchcraft in the Later Seventeenth Century: The Witch of Endor as Ritual Magician', in *Gender and Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Destroying Order, Structuring Disorder*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Farnham, 2015), 147–74.

112 *Supernatural Encounters*, 173.

113 Robert M. Correale has suggested that the specific source for Chaucer's iteration of the story was Nicholas Trevet's Anglo-French *Cronicles*, a work definitely known to the poet since it is the primary source of his *Man of Law's Tale*: 'Chaucer's Manuscript of Nicholas Trevet's *Les Cronicles*', *Chaucer Review* 25.3 (1991), 238–65 (255–6). While this is an attractive suggestion, the few details Chaucer provides were common within the Bible-story's reception-history, in large measure due to the influence of Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, on which see below, and cf. the statement in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* quoted in note 109 above. The assertion of doubt that Samuel himself appeared seems to have been commonplace.

At 1 Kings (=1 Samuel) 28 the narrative unfolds as follows. Saul, faced with a large Philistine army, and previously having banished all the magicians and soothsayers from the land, realizes he has need of one now – because God has not answered his request for information about the outcome of the battle, ‘neither by dreams, nor by priests, nor by prophets’. His servants find him ‘a woman with a divining spirit’ (*pythonem*) at Endor. Disguising himself, he consults her, demanding that she should summon up Samuel – whereupon an old man, ‘covered with a mantle’, appears, and ‘Saul understood (*intellexit*) that it was Samuel’. (Intriguingly, the Vulgate Latin Bible’s text does not say it *was* Samuel, only that Saul *thought* so.) ‘Why hast thou disturbed my rest?’ this figure asks. Saul explains that he is in great peril, threatened by the Philistine army. Samuel (if indeed it is he) offers no comfort: because of his disobedience to God, Saul shall lose the battle, and ‘the Lord will deliver the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines’. This indeed comes to pass; Saul’s army having been decimated and his sons killed, he falls on his sword.¹¹⁴

This story provoked a mixed response, for obvious reasons: the prophecy proved to be true, yet Saul had acted falsely, been unfaithful to his god in consulting a medium, on top of other sins. In the *Historia scholastica* which he wrote between 1169 and 1173, Peter Comestor offers four possible exegetical choices:

De hac suscitatione dicitur a quibusdam quod spiritus malignus apparuit in specie Samuelis, vel phantastice imago ejus ibi apparuit, quae dicta est Samuel. Tradunt quidam quod, Deo permittente, anima ipsius tantum consilii corpore induta apparuit ibi. Alii vero, quod corpus tantum suscitatum est cum spiritu vivifico, anima in loco suo manente, et quiescente.

(On the subject of this evocation some say that the evil spirit appeared looking like Samuel,¹¹⁵ or that it was his fantastic image that appeared there, which was called ‘Samuel’. Others say that with God’s permission it was indeed the soul of Samuel, covered by a body, that appeared, but for

114 I Paralipomenon (=I Chronicles) 10.13–14 emphasizes Saul’s wrongdoing here: he ‘died for his iniquities, because he transgressed the commandment of the Lord, which he had commanded, and kept it not: and moreover consulted a witch, and trusted not in the Lord: wherefore he slew him’.

115 Richard Kieckhefer notes that the theory that Samuel’s image was a demon appears as early as Hippolytus (c.170–c.236): *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 33.

others it was a body that was resuscitated and received the life of a spirit, while Samuel's soul remained in its resting place).¹¹⁶

To sum up: we could be dealing with (1) a demon that took on Samuel's appearance, or (2) merely a fantastic image or imaginary shape (presumably the work of a demon), or (3) the actual soul of Samuel, covered in some material form, or (4) a resuscitated body (presumably Samuel's own) inhabited by a spirit, Solomon's soul not being present.¹¹⁷ The first, second and possibly the fourth possibilities may be reflected in the Green Yeoman's statement, 'som men seye it was nat he'.

Augustine, who 'was sure that the only "spirits" that ensured a mediation between the hereafter and the here-and-now were angels (among them, the evil angels, demons)',¹¹⁸ brought two of the above-mentioned exegetical choices into play. The real Samuel did indeed appear for Saul's benefit, but this was effected through a special divine dispensation rather than on account of the diviner's dubious magic.¹¹⁹ 'Or else,' Augustine continues, 'the spirit of Samuel was not in reality aroused from his rest, but some kind of phantom or imaginary illusion (*aliquod phantasma, et imaginariam illusionem*) formed by the machinations of the devil, and styled by Scripture under the name of Samuel'.¹²⁰ Augustine strongly favours the latter theory.¹²¹ Aquinas quotes those two explanations in his *Summa theologiae* when treating the question of 'whether divination practised by invoking demons is unlawful'.¹²² Later in the *Summa* he states that the revelation involved here was performed by the power of God, even though it 'is stated to have been brought about by the demons' art.¹²³ It is unclear whether Aquinas thinks that the soul of Samuel, covered with a body, showed up here, or a body that

116 *Historia scholastica*, Historia libri I Regum, cap. 26; PL 198:1321C. I have drawn on the cogent translation in Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 15.

117 I am avoiding using the word 'reanimated' here, given the schoolmen's utter rejection of the idea that an angel or demon may join itself to a body in the way in which the soul, the *anima*, is joined to the body. Cf. note 76 and section III above.

118 Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 27, cf. 21-2.

119 *De diversis quaestionibus ad simplicianum libri duo*, II, qu. 3, 1; PL 40:142.

120 *De diversis quaestionibus ad simplicianum libri duo*, II, qu. 3, 2; PL 40:142-3.

121 As is affirmed by Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 18-20, 54-5, 215, 227.

122 *Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, qu. 95, art. 4, ad 2.

123 *Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, qu. 174, art. 5, ad 4.

was moved by a spirit (Samuel himself not being present).¹²⁴ But then he clearly goes negative with a version of the 'demonic impersonation' theory. The authority of the Book of Ecclesiasticus may be questioned, and this (on Aquinas's thinking) leads to the suggestion that the soul of Samuel did not appear, but rather a demon. Under discussion here is Ecclesiasticus 46.23, where we read that Samuel slept (i.e., died) but subsequently addressed King Saul, 'and shewed him the end of his life, and he lifted up his voice from the earth in prophecy to blot out the wickedness of the nation.'

Quite how the apocryphal status of Ecclesiasticus bears on the issue is unclear. Maybe Aquinas's point is that a claim that Samuel rightly prophesied against the sinful Saul is likely to be dubious (and indeed, the work of a demon) if it appears in a book which has inferior authoritative status, and therefore is less than completely trustworthy.¹²⁵ This move on Aquinas's part is unsatisfactory for many reasons, but particularly because two other biblical books with greater authority – 1 Kings and 1 Paralipomenon – include versions of the story, with the former offering a certain amount of evidence for a positive, respectful reading of the vision. At any rate, Aquinas goes on to suggest that the apparition was believed to be Samuel simply 'in accordance with the thoughts of Saul and the bystanders who were of this opinion'; i.e., Samuel was expected to appear and therefore it was easy for the witnesses to assume that he had done so.

Aquinas's treatment of the perplexing issue of the walking dead is disappointing – superficial and merely repetitive. It is also quite typical of the scholasticism of his time. Even William of Auvergne, who often is highly informative about 'cultural facts' because he draws on the folklore

124 In yet another passage of the *Summa theologiae* a little elaboration may be found: 'The fact that the dead appear, in whatever way it may be, to the living happens either because by special dispensation of God the souls of the dead interfere in the affairs of the living' (this being a divine miracle), 'or else such apparitions occur through the activity of good or bad angels, the individuals themselves not participating in what's going on. *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 89, art. 8, ad 2.

125 Aquinas makes the same move at *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 89, art. 8, ad 2, without providing any clarifying details: 'Or else – if the authority of Ecclesiasticus is not accepted because it was not included among the canonical Scriptures by the Hebrews – [it can be said] that the apparition was brought about by demons.'

of south-central France, where he was brought up, has little to say.¹²⁶ Samuel could not possibly have returned bodily, William concludes, since only God can perform a genuine resurrection; a demon must have posed as the prophet.¹²⁷ We are faced with an information deficit here. Although a large number of ghost stories have survived from the Middle Ages, the issue of just what was materializing and/or quite how the materialization took place received scant attention. 'Formal Catholic doctrine was silent' on the subject of spirit mediums, as Nancy Caciola remarks,¹²⁸ and the same is true of most aspects of demonic prosthesis. In similar vein, Stephen Gordon states that, although the notion that 'the devil can invade the body-fortress' was widely accepted, as far as 'the logical extension to this line of thinking' is concerned, i.e., that demons can invade cadavers and use them as corporeal puppets, there is 'tantamount silence'.¹²⁹ The theory was there, all worked out – angels and demons could move matter from place to place, as was manifest by their ability to shape and shift around aerial replicas of any creature, including human beings. One need not look further than Augustine to find an account of how demons, those 'perverse and unclean' creators of aerial bodies, can exploit 'the potentialities of the element of air' by 'working on a great many visible bodies, moving, changing, twisting and turning them as they please'.¹³⁰ Applying such powers of mobilization and manipulation to cadavers would seem to be a logical step. But the professional theologians seem reluctant to take it. Where they *were* to apply such mobilization theory – this being essentially a fifteenth-century development – was in relation to physical transvection, the doctrine that the devil could propel witches, animals and physical objects through the air.¹³¹

Alan of Lille's discussion (cited in section III) is, as already remarked, a rarity – but even it is rather skeletal, so to speak. And yet: just about everything the thirteenth-century university masters said about the conjunction of angels/demons with aerial bodies being totally different from the unitary relationship of the human soul with its body could

126 Richard Firth Green, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church* (Philadelphia, 2016), 6.

127 *De universo*, II.iii.24 (1:1069). Cf. de Mayo, 'William of Auvergne and Popular Demonology', 74–5.

128 Caciola, *Afterlives*, 272.

129 Gordon, *Supernatural Encounters*, 171.

130 *De divinatione daemonum*, 4.8; PL 40:586.

131 See n. 27 above.

also be said about the conjunction of demons and cadavers. Both aerial prostheses and cadaver prostheses were *assumptiones per applicationem* and not *per unionem* (to use Alan's vocabulary). Therefore, intellectual difficulty was no inhibiting factor (here as elsewhere). Could it be that the schoolmen felt the point was just too obvious to make, the inference too easy to draw? But elsewhere, such a feeling did not hold them back from making a mountain out of a molehill. Perhaps the Aristotelianism which permeated late-medieval academic discourse (after Alan's time), with its insistence on the soul as the form of the human body along with a higher valuation of that body, inhibited discussion of any version of the relationship between matter and its motivating force which was alien to the thought of *the* philosopher, as Aristotle was honorifically called.

Whatever the reason, the physiology of the walking dead seems to have been of marginal concern to the professional theologians,¹³² despite being a major feature of what may advisedly be called medieval popular culture. Several caveats must be entered here. We must resist the temptation to make a simple distinction between the theological attitudes held by an educated elite and/or the clergy in general and the 'folkloric' attitudes held by certain layfolk (including a supposedly credulous and superstitious underclass). The complexity and richness of the available evidence simply cannot be reduced to such binary terms; rather, the existence of a 'multiplicity of overlapping religious epistemologies' must be recognized.¹³³ Talking of the ghost stories recounted by William of Newburgh, together with those associated with Byland Abbey, Jacqueline Simpson has judged that 'these texts display an ongoing medieval debate in which neither clerics nor the laity spoke

132 Generally speaking, academics did not talk about them (at least, not much), while investing heavily in the 'aerial prosthesis' solution to demonic manifestation - which became one of the foundational doctrines of the *Malleus maleficarum* and other treatments of witchcraft. Caciola remarks that 'this-worldly dead folk were allowed to persist without objection in the interstices of medieval culture': 'Night is conceded to the dead', 19. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that beliefs concerning the walking dead were allowed to occupy space within those capacious 'interstices' without concerted challenge from the authorities and without heretication. The notion that the pope, and his subordinates, may tolerate certain activities which they do not specifically authorize or explicitly permit was deeply rooted. Such an understanding may have driven responses, or rather the lack of them, to the scenario of cadaver prosthesis.

133 Caciola, 'Night is conceded to the dead', 30.

with a single voice'.¹³⁴ That measured conclusion has wide resonance. 'Neither the theology nor the folklore is uniform'¹³⁵ in those texts and in many others – though it is remarkable how thoroughly all the versions of the miracle story concerning Peter of Grenoble (as collected by Price and Twombly) were encased in ecclesiastical rites and pious rituals. That particular narrative was wrapped up very tightly.

Popular/demotic religion existed in a complicated relationship with academic theology on the one hand and quotidian parish practice on the other, and what the élite knew or wanted to know was interwoven with lay knowledge and intellectual aspiration. 'People from a variety of backgrounds participated at a variety of levels on different occasions', as Carl Watkins puts it.¹³⁶ That learned layman Geoffrey Chaucer reveals a considerable awareness of the official theological position on demonic apparition: the making of 'newe' bodies (out of air – new every time); the 'feigning' of apparitions (through mental manipulation); the role of demons as divine instruments who have no power apart from what God allows them; the belief that on occasion they have served as the mere servants of men,¹³⁷ and so forth. Chaucer certainly had regard ('fors') for such 'dyvynytee',¹³⁸ and set considerable store by that theology, unlike his dismissive demon. There is nothing to compare with Chaucer's demonological excursus in any of the many European analogues to his version of the story of 'the devil and the advocate'; in this context, it may be deemed unique.¹³⁹ But Chaucer also participated on another level, by moving beyond the limits of that same 'dyvynytee' to involve the folkloric iteration of the walking dead, thereby responding to views which enjoyed considerable currency in popular culture.

134 Jacqueline Simpson, 'Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England', *Folklore* 114 (2003), 389–402 (389).

135 Ibid.

136 "Folklore" and "Popular Religion" in Britain during the Middle Ages, *Folklore* 115 (2004), 140–50 (140).

137 On which see especially Gordon, *Supernatural Encounters*, 167–8; Sister Mary Immaculata, 'Fiends as "Servant unto man" in the *Friar's Tale*', *Philological Quarterly* 221.22 (1942), 240–4; and, more generally, David Raybin, "'Goddess Instrumentz": Devils and Free Will in the *Friar's* and *Summoner's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review* 46.1–2 (2011), 93–110.

138 Here I repurpose phrasing from the demon's contemptuous dismissal of human theology, 'I do no fors of youre dyvynytee' (line 1512).

139 On which see *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert M. Correale with Mary Hamel, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2002–5), 1:87–99.

This was not the first time that Chaucer had shown such an interest. We may recall the singular way he told the sad story of Ceyx and Alcyone within his early poem, *The Book of the Duchess*. King Ceyx having been lost at sea, the gods reward his wife's loyalty by not keeping her in ignorance of his death – though their revelation is made in a quite shocking manner. Morpheus, who in Chaucer's poem is identified as the god of sleep, bears the actual 'dreynte body' to appear at the foot of the queen's bed. 'I am but ded', it declares; 'Ye shul me never on lyve yse' (lines 195–209). In Chaucer's source, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (11.410–750), the god of sleep had instructed one of his many sons, Morpheus, who is 'a cunning imitator of the human form', to 'take the face and form of Ceyx, wan like the dead'. Standing 'naked before the couch of the hapless wife', he speaks as if he were actually her husband. For some reason or other, Chaucer preferred to have Alcyone faced with a cadaver rather than with a simulacrum, a likeness constructed of air (quite easily explicable with reference to the standard doctrine of aerial prosthesis as summarized above).¹⁴⁰

In *The Friar's Tale* a demon replaces Morpheus as the (possible) manipulator of a cadaver, this being identified as one of three methods whereby a spiritual creature can make itself perceptible to humans. And in noting that method, Chaucer allies himself with the likes of William of Newburgh, Caesarius of Heisterbach, and the monk who, around 1400, wrote tales of phantoms associated with Byland Abbey in the blank pages of a twelfth-century manuscript, all of whom regarded stories of the walking dead as worthy of record. Within 'the supernatural world constructed by local communities', which often displayed a certain independence from the categories imposed by the doctors of divinity, 'the human body [was seen] as a possible repository for displaced human

140 There is an interesting contrast here with what happens in Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, when the German emperor asks Faustus to raise 'from hollow vaults below' Alexander the Great and his paramour. Faustus explains that it is not in his 'abilitie to present before your eyes the true substantiall bodies of those two deceased princes which long since are consumed to dust'. Rather, 'such spirites as can liuely resemble' them 'shal appeare', 'in that manner that they best liu'd in, in their most flourishing estate': *The Tragicall history of D. Faustus, As it hath bene acted by the right honorable the Earle of Nottingham his seruants* (London, 1604), STC 17429 (no pagination). It seems that Marlowe's 'spirites', being unable to do anything with mere dust, have resorted to aerial prosthesis. But Chaucer's Morpheus has a fresh corpse to possess and manipulate.

souls' and for mischief-making demons.¹⁴¹ Chaucer was influenced by both types of source, aware of some of the things being said in 'scholes of clergy' (to deploy a phrase from the Friar's own prologue, line 1277) but also responsive to those 'cultural facts' that circulated at the level of popular/demotic religion, within the purview of parish Catholicism.

Hence my belief that, of the two possible interpretations of *The Friar's Tale*, lines 1504–8 as offered in section I above, the second one is by far the more plausible and likely. Sometimes demons make 'new bodies [...] / Of elementz', which basically means that they use the element of air as their primary prosthetic material. Sometimes they 'feyne', making use of elaborate mind-tricks which convince their victims that some presence is before their eyes which in reality is not there. Sometimes, and here Chaucer gets quite controversial, they rise up 'with dede bodyes' in very many ways. Those are the three options for the performance of demonological power, as vouched for by different types of source, a range of witnesses both learned and unlettered. The simple fact of the matter is that the official theology 'did not go far', certainly not far enough to cope with 'the experiences of the non-theological classes', the pressing 'intellectual perplexities occasioned by demons in the lives of millions'.¹⁴² Chaucer's demonological excursus indicates that he was sensitive to those perplexities.

VII. 'I am a feend; my dwelling is in helle'

At the end of *The Friar's Tale* the summoner's inquiry takes a dramatic turn, when the demon bears him off to hell, joking that soon he will learn the truth of all the matters he had asked about, such as what

¹⁴¹ Nancy Caciola, 'Spirits seeking bodies: death, possession and communal memory in the Middle Ages', in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, 2000), 66–86 (84).

¹⁴² Here I deploy phrases from Alexander Murray's review of some thousand relevant *exempla* collected by Caesarius of Heisterbach and Thomas of Cantimpré, which concludes that their pastoral profession dragged them into 'a range of perplexities with a different centre-of-gravity from those which occupied fulltime theologians'. They had to expend considerable effort in digesting 'the experiences of the non-theological classes': 'Demons as psychological abstractions', 173.

shape demons take on there.¹⁴³ Having seen their 'privetee' (secrets) directly he will know more than any master of divinity (lines 1637–8), be better informed even 'than Virgile, while he was on lyve, Or Dant also' (lines 1519–20), and therefore well able to lecture on the subject like some university professor seated in his official chair (line 1518). Virgil and Dante had claimed that they had visited the underworld whilst still alive. But that was the stuff of fiction, as devised in the *Aeneid* and *Divine Comedy*. The summoner is about to encounter the real thing, and learn – the hard way – by his own immediate experience. The learning curve will be sharp and painful, and particularly so since the summoner seems to be headed not to purgatory but to hell (the narrator of this tale, the Friar, being more than happy to send any summoner to the worst of all fates).

'Thou shalt with me to helle yet tonight' (line 1636), the Green Yeoman tells his recently vowed 'brother'. Earlier he had declared, 'I am a feend; my dwellyng is in helle' (line 1448). Further, the summoner seems convinced that his companion's 'estat' is 'in helle' (line 1460). In his concluding remarks, the Friar says that not even a thousand winters (years) would suffice to describe 'The peynes of thilke cursed hous of hell' (lines 1651–2). To judge by those statements, the demon is unequivocally a creature of hell. Hell as opposed to purgatory?

Takami Matsuda's comprehensive examination of Middle English didactic poetry and homiletic treatises has brought out clearly that 'purgatorial punishment' is generally presented as being 'little different from hell in terms of severity'.¹⁴⁴ Following its consolidation and elabo-

143 A matter in which the summoner seems especially interested. But in *The Friar's Tale* itself he never gets an answer to his question, does a demon take on 'a figure [...] determinat / In helle, ther ye been in youre estat?' (lines 1458–60). As already mentioned (in section I) *The Prick of Conscience* imagines that, in hell, demons will assume many kinds of grisly and grim shapes, including those of adders, toads and grisly and grim wild beasts. But this is done in order to torment men; none of those manifestations is a 'determinat' shape. The basic answer would seem to be: demons (and angels) do not have any definitive shape at all, certainly not of a kind perceptible by the human senses, since in themselves they are immaterial creatures. So, it could be said that the summoner is asking about something that does not exist – thereby revealing his ignorance, indeed naivety, concerning the dark matters he seeks to learn about from a demon.

144 *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry* (Cambridge, 1997), 93.

ration as a place of torment in the twelfth century, purgatory 'was received into the dualism of heaven and hell as a useful addition which could provide a practical and apparently wider path to salvation for sinners, without seriously disturbing the existing dichotomy, rather than as a third region requiring a complete restructuring of the geography of the afterlife.'¹⁴⁵ Many texts aimed at non-academic audiences failed to distinguish between purgatory and hell, even as they often blurred together hell as it exists at present (where disembodied souls are being tormented) and hell as it will exist following the General Resurrection (where souls in their restored bodies shall be tormented). A similar lack of discrimination often occurs in visual art: 'an original iconography of Purgatory' failed to develop, with painters and sculptors not being scrupulous about differentiating between purgatory and hell.¹⁴⁶ Pain-inflicting demons regularly appear in both places.

Such representation ran counter to a common academic argument that demons did not participate in the torments of purgatory, only in those of hell. In his treatment of the matter, Aquinas first remarks that it seems plausible that the same demons who tempt us to sin should also punish us for them, in purgatory.¹⁴⁷ Further, since the just can be cleansed of their sins in this life (presumably he has in mind the forum of the confessional), this process can continue in the next, in purgatory, where demons shall perform this purgative function, preparing souls for eventual entry into heaven. Against this, is the argument that those in purgatory have already resisted demonic temptation in large measure: had they not done so, they would be among the damned in hell. It would be quite unfair for them to be punished, in purgatory, by the same forces over which they had triumphed in life.

Therefore, tormenting demons are denizens of hell alone.¹⁴⁸ That claim might have surprised the legions of medieval holy women who frequently visualized demons practising their sensational tortures in that very place – women who exercised power and won respect by fast-tracking souls through purgatory. However, some of them seem to have shared the common academic opinion that purgatory was a place

145 Ibid., 112.

146 Ibid., 103–7.

147 Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, dist. 21, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 5, co.

148 A similar conclusion was reached by Bonaventure; well discussed by Jacques le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1984), 251–2.

of hope, in contrast to hell, from which there is no escape.¹⁴⁹ Further, Dante's purgatory exists 'unequivocally' as 'a place of hope and a means of ascent towards heaven', to quote Eamon Duffy,¹⁵⁰ a somewhat ameliorating statement given the frequent affirmations by schoolmen and *mulieres sancti* alike of the intensity of the pains of purgatory. At least it is free of the punishing demons who ply their terrible trade in hell.

Perhaps that is how Chaucer also saw the matter: the dwelling of his demon definitely being in hell, and the ultimate destiny of that unredeemable sinner, the Friar's summoner, being to suffer torment in a place of no hope. Here, indeed, is 'scole-matere' of 'greet difficulte' (cf. *The Friar's Prologue*, line 1272). But it is possible that the poet had some knowledge of it. Even as he knew something of what was said in the 'scholes of clergy' about how demons could slip into humans' heads and cunningly manipulate their powers of imagination, and how those spiritual creatures, when they needed to materialize in order to communicate with some poor unfortunate, made new bodies from elements, with air as the best possible prosthetic material.

* * *

Prosthesis goes back a long way. 'If we go back far enough', wrote Freud, 'we find that the first acts of civilization were the use of tools'. 'With every tool man is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or is removing the limits to their functioning'. For example, 'By means of spectacles he corrects defects in the lens of his own eye'. Writing may also be seen as having a prosthetic function, being 'in its origin the voice of an absent person'. He concludes:

Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times.¹⁵¹

149 Cf. Minnis, *Hellish Imaginations*, 26–7.

150 *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580*, 2nd edn (New Haven, 2005), 343. Similarly, Le Goff declares that, for Dante, purgatory is 'a place of hope, of initiation into joy, of gradual emergence into the light', and also points out that both Bonaventure and Aquinas supposed that hope existed in purgatory, a marked improvement on hell: *The Birth of Purgatory*, 251, 273, 346.

151 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere (London, 1963), 27–9.

To consider the case of medieval knighthood for a moment: a warrior's armour, shield, weapons, and even his reputation, may be seen as technologies of chivalry which serve as prostheses that aid in shaping and fashioning the chivalric subject.¹⁵² However, in the sphere of angelology and demonology, late-medieval prosthetic thought saw artificial additions not as tools for perfecting the organs of those creatures – for they lacked physical organs – but rather as temporary acquisitions necessary for the performance of whatever God had delegated. Extension certainly took place, as aerial bodies enabled angels and demons to appear and communicate in the world of men. This was actually a diminution of their perfection, given the natural superiority they enjoyed in the order of being. The dignity of an angel 'pre-excels the nobility of every body', as Bonaventure explains;¹⁵³ an elemental body 'is not an appropriate dwelling for an angel as regards the excellence of his own dignity', but rather 'as regards the neediness of human infirmity'.¹⁵⁴ The bodies these purely spiritual creatures put on give them no pleasure, but at the very least restrict and hamper their movements, and, even worse, may be an affront to their dignity, particularly when demons have to use the organs of some rotting cadaver as tools for carrying out their nefarious task.

Considered thus, this sort of prosthesis is the opposite or indeed the inverse of what the present-day prosthetics industry is promising: auxiliary organs far superior to those they augment or replace.¹⁵⁵ Science fiction, which is rapidly becoming scientific fact, has conceived of cyborg technology, through which 'physical tolerances or capabilities are extended beyond normal human limitations by a machine or other external agency that modifies the body's functioning; an integrated man-machine system'.¹⁵⁶ In the medieval testimonies discussed above, the only fully integrated system is the soul-body relationship. Aerial bodies cannot be animated, given life through ensoulment. However, when an angel presents itself in all the colours of the rainbow, that putting on of auxiliary organs renders it truly magnificent to the human gaze – and every aspect of that appearance has some message to convey,

152 Such is the analysis offered by Godden, 'Prosthetic ecologies'.

153 *In II Sent.*, dist. 8, pars 1, art. 2, qu. 2, resp. (*Bonaventurae opera*, 2:218).

154 *In II Sent.*, dist. 8, pars 1, art. 2, qu. 2, ad 3 (2:218).

155 Crawford has described how these products are hyped with the promise of 'technologically achieved corporeal enhancement, self-actualization, aesthetic individuation, moral transcendence, and much more': *Phantom Limb*, 3.

156 *OED*, s.v. cyborg.

as when (for instance) vivid wings represent heavenly aspiration, and manly shape signifies the power of an intelligence focused on the higher things.¹⁵⁷ In sharp and shocking contrast, corpses forced to rise and move through space, as cumbersome machines operated by demons, were 'mere dross',¹⁵⁸ their imposition on spiritual creatures being at once an insult and a form of punishment.

Here, then, is where the difference lies – and what a difference it is. Even though an angel gains no particular pleasure from the body it assumes, this self-prosthesis is an act of loving and willing service to God, carried out in the secure knowledge that it is serving the good, and hence generative of spiritual pleasure of a kind which is appropriate to such a noble creature. For a demon, it is an act performed in the knowledge that any agency it seems to have is actually and ultimately controlled by God, who may restrain it at any moment. A demon may move around '[i]n sondry shap, and nat alwey in oon' (line 1470), as occasion demands, in order to take its prey. But this is no cause for rejoicing, given that it is indicative of an existence of demeaning servitude. 'Demons could derive pleasure [...] from the prospect of humanity's ruin', as Dyan Elliott says,¹⁵⁹ but in practice the amount of harm they could cause was strictly limited, because it was part and parcel of the elaborate economy of divine punishment and reward. Without God's compliance they had no power at all, as Chaucer's demon accepts at some length.

157 Here I echo the heavily influential *The Celestial Hierarchies* of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, (fl. late fifth / early sixth centuries). See the discussion as rendered by Thomas Gallus (d. 1246), trans. in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100–c.1375: The Commentary Tradition*, ed. Alastair Minnis and A. B. Scott with David Wallace, rev. edn (Oxford, 1991), 184–7.

158 Echoing Caciola's idiom; 'Wraiths, revenants and ritual', 12–13; cf. note 87 above. One may recall the comparison made in the *Malleus* with how a ship is operated by a sailor (cited in section III above). The metaphor is an apposite one, since a construction like a ship has no organic connection with the human being tasked with guiding its ponderous bulk. Cf. the difficulties encountered by the corpse of a huge old woman which was assumed by the devil in his vain attempt to debase Peter of Grenoble. As already noted, access to Peter's bedchamber was gained through the closet hole of a latrine; the aperture must have been of a reasonable size to let this cumbersome body squeeze through. Of course, in its natural spiritual form the demon could have penetrated the walls of the building with ease, but it needs to wear flesh in order to tempt Peter.

159 Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 135.

[S]omtyme we been Goddes instrumentz
 And meenes to doon his comandementz,
 Whan that hym list, upon his creatures,
 In divers art and in diverse figures.
 Withouten hym we have no myght, certayn,
 If that hym list to stonden ther-agayn.

(lines 1483–8)

That assertion is utterly on-message, exactly the kind of thing one would expect a relatively well-educated friar of the poet's time to say, as a means of calming fears that 'the aggressive, ruthless and violent behavior' of certain mysterious visitors was beyond the church's control and resistant to theological rationalization.¹⁶⁰ One of the sinful activities singled out for punishment by the archdeacon for whom the summoner works was 'wicchecraft' (1305), and so he has got his script off pat. In this reassuring passage, troubling 'cultural facts' are placed within a larger, and normalizing, interpretive perspective. At least, for the moment.

In the treatise against all forbidden arts which he wrote for the edification of Margrave Johann of Brandenburg-Kulmbach in 1456, Johannes Hartlieb, himself a layman, asserted that '[s]hedding light on such matters is a great concern among doctors of divine Scripture, who bring enlightenment to holy Christendom.'¹⁶¹ The attention of current doctors of divine Scripture being elsewhere, it has been left to me to offer some possibilities, indeed some probabilities, concerning the meaning of Chaucer's demonological excursus, viewed within its intellectual and social contexts. Inevitably, speculation will continue. To return to Freud, and adopt the quotation with which Jean-Claude Schmitt ends his masterly treatment of medieval ghosts: 'A thing that has not been understood inevitably reappears, like an unlaidd ghost; it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell broken.'¹⁶²

160 Here I return to a phrasing of Hildebrand's, as quoted in section IV above.

161 *Hazards of the Dark Arts: Advice for Medieval Princes on Witchcraft and Magic*, trans. Richard Kieckhefer (University Park, PA, 2017), 23.

162 Freud, 'Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old-Boy: Little Hans', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, translated from the German*, general ed. James Strachey, 24 vols (London, 1953–74), 10:122; Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 227.