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Chaucer's Collision Montage

Brandon Simmons
btsimmon@uno.edu

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Brandon Simmons

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Abstract

Sergei Eisenstein's theory of collision montage can be applied to *The Canterbury Tales* because Chaucer's writing is highly visual and often unconventional. This study analyzes several portraits and tales to demonstrate Chaucer's literary collision montage technique. The opening lines of the General Prologue present the juxtaposition of the tripartite plant and humans to suggest commoners' social immobility. The interruption of the Miller's Tale clashes with the Knight's to suggest the possibility of social mobility and to challenge traditional patriarchy. The latter half of the narrator's description in the Wife of Bath's portrait indicates a sexualized subtext through the juxtaposition of neutral images that undercuts her wealthy appearance. Chaucer's literary collision montage technique is used to suggest the possibility of social mobility, and to reflect the disruption of the social hierarchy in late fourteenth-century England.

Keywords: Chaucer, Sergei Eisenstein, effictio, collision montage

<u>Introduction</u>

      Sergei Eisenstein's theory of collision montage has yet to be applied to the study of Middle English literature. Eisenstein defines collision montage as the process by which new meaning is created from the juxtaposition of two neutral images; one concrete image followed by another creates abstract meaning. The static images "collide" and clash against each other to produce a *tertium quid* (third thing). The *tertium quid* becomes an embedded narrative which exists only because of the juxtaposed images. This collision in turn reflected contemporary social disruption in Russia. Eisenstein's theory of collision montage can be applied to *The Canterbury Tales* because Chaucer's writing is highly visual and often unconventional. Chaucer used a literary collision montage technique to suggest the possibility of social mobility, and to reflect the disruption of the social hierarchy in his time.

      The Canterbury Tales is highly concerned with social mobility because this was becoming more common in late fourteenth-century England, and Chaucer experienced this himself. Chaucer grew up in a prominent commoner's home, and because of this he was made a page for the Countess of Ulster in his late adolescence (Marti 212). Chaucer moved upward socially, from page to yeoman to squire, and in his later years he became a member of Parliament, making him a knight (Marti 213). Therefore, the depiction of social mobility in *The Canterbury Tales* naturally grew out of Chaucer's experience in moving from a commoner to a nobleman. Chaucer's own social mobility gave him a unique perspective which fueled the portrayal of social disruptions in the *Canterbury Tales*. In a 1998 essay, Lee Patterson observes:

> The current and virtually universally accepted interpretation of Chaucer's social position is that he stood between—and hence to some extent apart from—the two great cultural formations of his time, the court and the city. A bourgeois within the court, he was a royal official in the city—a complexity of allegiance that, it is

argued, freed him from any narrowly partisan commitments. According to Paul Strohm, [. . .] both within the court and the city, and in the transit between the two, Chaucer found himself negotiating a highly factionalized world that taught him that "process of understanding [was] less a matter of ranking alternatives on some vertical scale of moral choice, than of adding alternatives on a horizontal and less judgmental plane in order to reveal the full range of possibilities inherent in a subject." (83)

Another key factor that most likely influenced Chaucer's writing was the 1381 Peasants' Revolt. After the Black Death killed millions of people throughout Europe, there was a labor shortage in England. The pressures of inflation and higher taxes caused people of the lower estate (laborers and small land-owners for example) to revolt against Parliament. The strike led to official document burning, and the killing of several of England's leaders. Chaucer witnessed these social and political struggles, which is another reason social class is a major focus in the *Canterbury Tales*.

As I suggest what the collision montages in the *Canterbury Tales* may indicate, I do not claim to have any definitive interpretations of Chaucer's text. For my analysis of collision montage in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, I echo the words of Paul Strohm:

I reject the conception of the author as a hapless scribe or "reproducer" of ideology, subject to a material insertion over which he or she has no control. I view Chaucer not only as producing but as responding to the social implications of his material. Supported by personal exposure to multiple centers of textual and social authority, he enters not just into reproduction but into analysis, negotiation, and reconstrual of the materials he takes in hand. I hasten to assure the reader that

I will not parade Chaucer as an impresario of fully developed social solutions.

Much of our attraction to his texts involves their provisional and unfinished

qualities, their willingness to entertain alternatives without pressing for premature

resolution, their frankly exploratory approach to the utopian and the transcendent.

Chaucer's very success in opening his text to materials of varied ideological

implications is what persuades me to disagree with those critics who minimize the

possibility of escape from a single hegemonic or dominant ideology. (*Social*

Chaucer xii)

Chaucer's concern for the social transformations and political strife in late fourteenth century

England is evident in the *Canterbury Tales* because in it Chaucer creates a text that involves

"unresolved contention, of a a struggle between hegemony and counter-hegemony, of texts as

places crowded with many voices representing many centers of social authority" (Strohm xiii).

Chaucer "shows little impulse to put forward his pilgrims as persuasive representations either of

his society as a whole or of his particular social group" (Strohm *Social Chaucer* 68). "The

historicity of the pilgrim audience lies less in the fidelity of its social representations than in its

effectiveness as a constitutive strategy enabling Chaucer to produce a new kind of tale collection,

some of whose aesthetic features themselves bear an historical charge. The 'newness' of

Chaucer's collection is expressed in its unusual generic and stylistic diversity, a diversity that

departs emphatically from the precedent of previous medieval collections" (Strohm *Social*

Chaucer 68). "Detached as they might seem from history in the sense of immediate reception,

the aesthetic choices involved in launching this literary strategy nevertheless have an important

social aspect. For the apparently aesthetic choice of a tale collection varied in style and genre

gains social implication in the likelihood of its attractiveness to a particular social group"

(Strohm *Social Chaucer* 71).

Chaucer's portraits in the *Tales* break away from the convention of *effictio*, top-to-bottom

portraits (Haselmayer 313). Chaucer violates this convention either by inserting the narrator's

commentary in the middle of the portraits or by changing the traditional order of *effictio* within a

portrait. The narrator of the *Tales* creates a new narrative by jumping around to different sections

of the body and to different levels of the social hierarchy. Instead of simply describing the

pilgrims' appearances, he creates an effect similar to Eisenstein's collision montage. Just as

Eisenstein adapted the montage technique to expose the violent nature of political conflicts in the

Soviet social order, Chaucer's violation of *effictio* disrupts medieval convention in order to

expose contemporary hypocrisies and challenge feudal hierarchies and traditions. Chaucer lived

in a time of social transformation which brought the "emphasis on the voluntary and contractual

nature of the new association worked against the exclusivity of the vertical ties that bound a

person in service to his lord, and encouraged a new perception of horizontal ties of affinity to

those sharing one's own class, rank, and social objectives" (*Social Chaucer* 14). Strohm: "To say

that Chaucer excludes political references from the *Canterbury Tales*, and that he insulates his

audience against the most startling aspects of those references he does include, is not to declare

his work unhistorical. For history, suppressed at the level of allusion, is reintroduced at the level

of form. . . . The *Canterbury Tales* [does] contain indications of the sense in which mixed style is

proposed as an aesthetic figure for social heterogeneity. Chaucer's proposal of stylistic variety as

a figure for social difference relies on a rhetorical and literary connection between social levels

and levels of style already well established [. . .] within medieval tradition" (*Social Chaucer*

166).

In my essay, I will provide first an explanation of Eisenstein's montage theory. Next, I will explain the nature and effect of the narrator's "gaze" in order to clarify Chaucer's use of collision montage in the *The Canterbury Tales*. Then, I will show how Chaucer uses collision montage to suggest a disruption of social hierarchies within the opening lines of the General Prologue, in the tales of the Knight and the Miller, and in the portraits of the Cook, the Wife of Bath, and Allisoun from the Miller's Tale. After analyzing these portraits by themselves, I will show the suggested connections between the portraits of the Wife of Bath and Allisoun in the Miller's Tale; though they are not juxtaposed, they are intended to be compared, as indicated by their shared name, their lecherous nature, and their manipulation of their husbands in order to gain wealth and move higher in social rank.

Eisenstein's theory of collision montage argues that abstract meaning is created from the juxtaposition of two unrelated images. This can occur when an image from a sequence is combined with a shot that is foreign to the scene. Collision montage also occurs when images or shots from the same scene or sequence still clash against each other to produce meaning that is separate from any meaning that can be discerned from each image or shot independently. The first method occurs when an image is taken from footage from another production (such as stock footage). One of the most famous uses of collision montage of juxtaposed images in film is in Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925). Collision montage occurs in a scene in which laborers on strike run away from the Russian army. While the laborers are being shot at by the army, the film crosscuts several times to images of bulls being slaughtered. The scene ends with a field full of dead laborers sprawled out, who look similar to the images of the lifeless bulls who lay on the slaughtering floor. The collision montage suggests that the laborers are utterly powerless against the government; the class struggle is emphasized by the juxtaposition of the graphic images of

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the bulls. Eisenstein limited collision montage to juxtaposition of shots and crosscutting between two separate scenes. The second method of collision montage occurs with shots from the same production. The concept of stock footage translates into literature because often writers borrow stock characters, familiar frame narratives, and genre conventions from each other. The author may quote from or allude to other sources, but the writing still belongs to the author. Therefore, in this essay, collision montage refers to the juxtaposition of images that exist inside and outside a single narrative.

Eisenstein's theory of montage was not limited to film. Eisenstein recognized the presence of montage in art forms other than film:

> Montage as a principle is not limited to cinema: it is found in literature, in theatre, in music, in painting, even in architecture. But it is in cinema that it finds its highest expression. Not only that, but it is through montage that cinema becomes the first art form to transcend the dichotomy [. . .] between the sphere of painting, which is spatial, and that of poetry, which is temporal. (Antoine-Dunne 5)

Eisenstein's montage theory was influenced primarily by D. W. Griffith's praxis. Eisenstein states: "From Dickens, from the Victorian novel, stem the first shoots of American film esthetic" ("Dickens" 195). Griffith admitted that his style was similar to that of Dickens. Griffith learned from Dickens's writing that he could jump from a character in one scene to a different character in another scene occurring at the same time without losing his audience. Dickens and Griffith created meaning through parallel actions, and Eisenstein was fascinated with this phenomenon of *cross-cutting*. Eisenstein explains that cinematic montage was created by "*juxtaposed detail-shots*, which in themselves are immutable and even unrelated, but from which is created the desired *image of the whole*" ("Dickens" 232). Eisenstein claims that cinematographic visions go

as far back as the Greeks ("Dickens" 233). Eisenstein's concept of collision montage can be applied to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* because visual narrative is central to medieval literature. Eisenstein considered film to be the greatest art form because the montage is spatial and temporal, but Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* deals with both the spatial and the temporal as well. Montage in film may be easier to detect initially because the images on the screen exist already for the spectator, but Chaucer's *Tales* is structured much like film.

Eisenstein believed that "the images projected on the screen would actually become the thoughts in the spectator's brain" (Nesbet 6). Eisenstein considered film editing to be a means of manipulating the audience, which occurs most effectively through collision montage. Leo Mur writes:

> The fundamental method used by Eisenstein he calls the montage of attractions. This name is not entirely correct. Eisenstein does not only edit the reel, but also the cells in the brain of the spectator. Montage not of attractions, but of associations. Montage not only on the screen of the movie theater, but also on the screen of the brain. . . .
>
> The spectator edits [. . .] the scenes in his brain the way Eisenstein wants him to. (qtd. in Nesbet 6)

Based on Eisenstein's assessment, it appears that he believed the images on the screen would seamlessly become the spectator's thoughts. He seems not to consider the possibility of the spectator becoming distracted by influences outside the screen (but in Eisenstein's defense, smart phones had yet to plague movie-goers' experience). Vsevolod Pudovkin agrees: "Montage is the forceful direction [. . .] of the spectator" (qtd. in Nesbet 6). Pudovkin's observation is exactly what attracts Eisenstein to collision montage: the mind of the spectator can be imposed upon—

and what better way to control the viewer's thoughts than to disrupt the logical sequence of shots with seemingly unrelated images? Just as Eisenstein's film editing manipulates spectators' thinking, Chaucer's word picture associations in *The Canterbury Tales* shape the reader's thinking—at least initially.

Eisenstein defines montage generally, as referring to film: "two film pieces of any kind, placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition" (*Film Sense* 4). Montage is not merely the juxtaposition of two images; they are not stagnant. Instead new meaning that is created from their placement. But Eisenstein affirms: "this is not in the least a circumstance peculiar to the cinema, but is a phenomenon invariably met with in all cases where we have to deal with juxtaposition of two facts, two phenomena, two objects" (4). Eisenstein is arguing that this happens in all fields, not solely in the fields of film and literature. In his analysis of film and literature Eisenstein claims that montage is superior in film because in film "the eye *cannot* discern the succession of the sequence of details in any other order than that established by him who determines the order of the montage" (30). This seems true because a reader can skim text, or skip pages altogether, but in film a viewer lacks the ability to experience the film (at least upon the first viewing of the film) in any other way other than linearally. There are exceptions to this rule: the viewer can become distracted by outside sources, thereby missing segments of a film. A viewer is not quite as forced as Eisenstein claims because a viewer can fall asleep and therefore miss the editor's intentions, the order in which the editor intended the film to be seen. But the viewer is prevented from seeing images ahead of the time in which they appear, and does not possess the ability to go back to a previous image (or shot or sequence) unless the narrative returns to such things. Of course Eisenstein is arguing this before the invention of home entertainment equipment when the only way to watch a film was

via projector, which of course lacks a rewind or fastforward button at the spectator's disposal. In spite of the fact that modern viewers can fastforward or rewind or skip chapters on a DVD, the cinematic text still cannot be viewed in a non-linear fashion. Therefore, cinematic montage has more control than literary montage over what the viewers see and the order in which they witness the unfolding of the narrative. Poetry and novels do not possess the same kind of force as film, but in order to understand the written text, readers still must read in the order in which the text is laid out. So literature still uses montage to create new meaning independent of the parts which make up the whole, reflecting the basic structure of language. Fragments of sounds are juxtaposed to create words, for example; as Eisenstein said, montage is found "in all cases where we have to deal with juxtaposition of two facts" (*Film Sense* 4). Film and literature both rely on montage for new ideas to merge and to be inferred.

Eisenstein compares poetry to shooting-scripts, the latter resemble the way the shots of a film will be structured in post-production. In both poetry and shooting-scripts the language tends to be either simplified or fragmented and therefore unlike everyday language. Eisenstein does not go into depth about how older texts use montage; he emphasizes the works of Charles Dickens because D. W. Griffith was influenced by his style of writing. But Eisenstein does give a few nods to older texts; he writes: "*Paradise Lost* itself is a first-rate school in which to study montage and audio-visual relationships" (58). Eisenstein is even clearer when he states:

> There is no inconsistency between the method whereby the poet writes, the method whereby the actor forms his creation within himself, the method whereby the same actor acts his role within the frame of a single shot, and that method whereby his actions and whole performance, as well as the actions surrounding him, forming his environment (or the whole material of a film) are made to flash

in the hands of the director through the agency of the montage exposition and

construction of the entire film. (64)

Clearly, if Eisenstein is correct in saying that montage appears wherever two objects are

juxtaposed, it follows that older texts can be read through the lens of cinematic montage, that

medieval texts can be understood in terms of the same principles that govern the way montage

works in film. While Eisenstein does not analyze any other author besides Dickens, he does

assert that "it is more exciting to turn back to the classics, because they belong to a period when

'montage' in this sense was not dreamt of" (63).

In Kristin Thompson's analysis of Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible* (1944) she explains

that the repetitive motifs throughout the film clash against the narrative rather than support the

film's aesthetic (qtd. in Nesbet 206). The repetition of motifs in *Ivan* "work to derail, rather than

reinforce, the film's narrative unity" (Nesbet 206); interruptions of characters by other characters

in *The Canterbury Tales* do likewise. Nesbet clarifies that "the key here would seem to be not the

object repeated, but the film's insistence on repetition" (206). In other words, in this case it is not

the repetition of motifs that creates discontinuity but the narrative's insistence that the repetition

is a key theme in the film. The interruption and discontinuity comes when the repetition becomes

more important than the overall film (Nesbet 206). The effectiveness of Chaucer's repeated

images is based on the mental processes of the human brain. Vladimir Lenin explains: "'Human

cognition is not (nor does it travel along) a straight line, but rather a curved line, endlessly

approaching a series of circles, a spiral'" (qtd. in Nesbet 209). Thinking can be linear at times,

but usually only when people are forcing themselves to think this way. The same can be said

about writing; the words may form logical sequences of sentences, but this happens only after

numerous revisions. The thinking process may begin logically and with smooth transitions from

one subject to the next, but this linear mode is soon interrupted by "random" thoughts. This is why James Joyce's *Ulysses* is difficult to follow, because the stream of consciousness does not flow the way organized sentences do. The reason writers tend to write in a linear fashion is to facilitate readers' understanding. Chaucer writes clearly so that the reader can understand what is being communicated, but he interrupts this linear mode with unconventional narrative styles. Chaucer would most likely agree with Eisenstein's view that "the most important aesthetic and philosophical ideas [do] not languish in some splendidly high-minded isolation; on the contrary, they were waiting to be discovered in the most unexpected places, even in the 'low' humor of a cartoon or a dirty joke" (Nesbet 214). Not only does Chaucer delight in placing great theological and scientific ideas within dirty jokes, he also makes his most important points by way of disruptions of medieval literary conventions, especially within the portraits.

Eisenstein states that mental projections (the inner eye) created when someone reads and interprets texts create "'visions' [which] have a positively film-like order—with camera-angles, set-ups at various distances, and rich montage material" (44). Eisenstein understands Dickens's writing style to depict images clearly and succinctly, and sees that the novelist's writing resembles film, or rather shares cinematic qualities and movements. The same applies to Chaucer's poetry in *The Canterbury Tales* because often in the poem his writing style gives the impression of zooming in on certain images, and presenting characters and scenes in ways that resemble camera set-ups. This is the case for many different aspects of the *Tales*, but it is most obvious in their character portraits. The narrators' depiction of the various pilgrims moves line by line the way their eyes would scan the appearance of the characters. Therefore, the narrators' textual gaze resembles the moving of a camera or the movement of film shots that are edited together.

Although the imagery in the *Tales* is first perceived during the act of reading, the reader then visualizes the images after the words are seen physically. Linda Tarte Holley explains that "the thought is inside the head; the creator employs words to give it shape" and that "the measuring eye reads the image the words have cast light on" (11). This process creates a mental screen onto which Chaucer's images may be projected. Chaucer's ordering of the portraits directs the reader's mental projection of the images, at least initially. Chaucer's character portraits most often break medieval conventions, disrupting the expectations of his contemporary audience. While the juxtaposition of images does not precisely dictate the thinking of the reader, it certainly determines an initial direction for the reader to follow. This direction is initially forced upon the reader, as Pudovkin phrases it.

Chaucer surpassed the Latin and French traditional use of *effictio* by applying it to people from all social classes, and creating realistic portrayals rather than artificial ones (Haselmayer 313). Louis A. Haselmayer states: "Structurally [*effictio*] was a rigid catalogue of physical features listed in strict succession from the head to the feet" and "it did not attain any elasticity of form or freedom of diction" (310). Chaucer breaks this convention in most of the portraits in *The Canterbury Tales*, whether by inserting commentary in the middle of a portrait (as he does in the Wife of Bath's portrait) or changing the traditional order of *effictio* within a portrait. Holley explains that "often, the hallmark of Chaucer's narrative style is the exploitation of a formulaic phrase, an old proverb, a familiar plot, or a conventional form"; therefore, readers "are required to step inside the prescribed boundaries to see taught truths complicated, modified, and sometimes clarified by experience" (50). Chaucer's act of breaking narrative conventions relies on readers first understanding the references to recognizable, classic tales. Once readers walk into the familiar narrative, Chaucer disorients their expectations. The result of Chaucer's

breaking away from conventions is that readers' expectations are violated. In the juxtaposition of the images readers expect and Chaucer's unconventional style new meaning is produced.

Collision montage is created from the contrast between the narrators' portrayals of the characters and the way the reader views them. The narrator's character descriptions in the General Prologue move the reader's eyes line by line usually at first from the character's head to foot, then Chaucer soon disrupts the linear narrative. This line-by-line narration of the characters' portraits serves as the reader's eyes. The narrator's "gaze" becomes the reader's also, at least initially. The clothing and physical descriptions in the characters' portraits suggest their personality and social class. The order in which the narrator describes the pilgrims suggests the way he thinks about them. However, the reader views the pilgrims differently because often the narrator undercuts the characters' positive qualities through odd ordering of the portraits. The juxtaposed images created by the narrator indicate a new narrative separate from the narrator's intentions, since he supposedly remains neutral which is indicated when he carefully explains in the General Prologue that he only writes what he has seen and heard on the pilgrimage to Canterbury. Also, the narrator's intentions on the surface are explicit since most often he describes a pilgrim by their physical appearance with added commentary in between. On the surface, if the narrator really is as naiive as he seems, his opinions about the pilgrims are clear in his commentary, separate from their physical descriptions. The narrator breaks convention by straying from the tradition of describing a character from head to foot. If the narrator simply described the characters in the linear fashion, from top to bottom, meaning would still be made, and the characters' personalities could still be partially determined based on their descriptions. But because the narrator shifts the order of descriptions abruptly throughout the portraits, a collision montage is created. Because Chaucer has created a naive narrator to guide the reader,

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the seeming randomness of the images creates a separate narrative from what the narrator may have intended. This visual narrative is most often separate from what the narrator intends because the collision montages in the portraits conflict with the narrator's opinion of certain characters. The images by themselves remain neutral, but it is the unconventional ordering of the characters' appearances that creates new meaning, an embedded narrative formed by collision montage. The unconventional ordering of the images (for example the departure from *effictio*) causes the images to collide, and thereby conflict, with each other, which results in the production of a new, visual narrative separate from the narrator's voice.

The narrator's gaze manipulates the medieval audience's initial cognitive response. Brown cites Linda Tarte Holley's *Chaucer's Measuring Eye* (1990):

> Medieval optics [was] an intellectual context for Chaucer's work, its close affiliation with theories of cognition, its distinction between the conceptual work of the mind and the perceptual work of the eye, the self-conscious relativity of judgment it introduced into visual experience and its insistence on the limited capacity of sight and its proneness to deception. In looking at the spatial content of Chaucer's poetry she draws attention to the key function of the gaze, and to the extent to which Chaucer deliberately defines and designs space within his narratives (and allows his characters to do so) according to optical principles. (113)

Chaucer's interest in medieval optics suggests that his narrative is visual as much as it is dialogic. Chaucer's play with medieval optics and medieval theories of cognition helps create a sort of mental theater where series of images could be projected—manipulated by the poet or

narrator—in which the reader would then draw conclusions from the juxtapositions of the images. Chaucer guides the reader's vision through the narrative space he creates.

Medieval optical theories appear to have especially influenced *The Canterbury Tales*. Linda Tarte Holley observes that "Chaucer's verbal structures move the way the eye does—with a directed gaze that observes relationships, distances, and proportion in created space so that he evokes in his reader a feeling of spatial motion in the verbal image" (1). Chaucer's "directed gaze" is especially apparent in the *Tales*, for it is through the narrator's voice and gaze that we are engaged with the pilgrims' interactions and arguments, and their tales. Chaucer's "directed gaze" moves the reader to see relationships among the pilgrims and to see connections between the tales. This "directed gaze" acts in the same way the camera functions in film; the camera becomes the eyes of the spectator. Holley states that "framing elements operate in Chaucer according to geometrical, rather than linear, principles" (1). This suggests that, because Chaucer writes in geometric patterns rather than in linear modes, his narrative structure will have more moments for collision montage across different sections of the prologues and tales. Chaucer's framing devices can be understood as whole units that connect to each other geometrically, rather than in a linear fashion (Holley 1). Holley states that "pictures have syntax the way verbal forms do, and consequently the frame takes on 'semantic value'" (3). Holley's idea of pictorial syntax is the same as cinematic montage, which is what inspired Griffith as he studied Dickens's style. In other words, cinematic montage derives originally from literary montage. And while Chaucer's work came well before Dickens or film, medieval literature and modern cinema are not unrelated. Eisenstein's montage theory can be applied to medieval literature, especially because medieval writers were highly interested in time, space, and optics. Chaucer's narrative style can be read cinematically. Currently, there are not many film and television adaptations of

The Canterbury Tales, but this comparison suggests that Chaucer's work can be more easily adapted. Therefore, "once [these] optical principles and the strength of their influence in Chaucer's day become clear to [modern readers], [they] begin to see how those principles manifest themselves in Chaucer's rational methods for narrative strategy" (Holley 7). And these medieval optical principles are closely associated with filmic space, which means that a study of the two can be fruitful.

Familiar icons and images employed by Chaucer create implied collision montages. The familiar image or icon is often an allusion to Biblical or Classical texts, but it can also derive from contemporary texts or even be found within the same text. Collision montage is created because the story relies on the reader to recognize these allusions. Therefore the collision montage occurs when the expected image or action based on a familiar image or icon is disrupted with a new perspective (as Holley says); it becomes a dissonant depiction of a familiar object or framing narrative. This dissonance between the familiar allusion and the new expression clashes within the reader's mind. The reader's expectations are disturbed and perhaps even violated (as Eisenstein argues), and this is done intentionally by the writer to lead the reader into new realms of understanding and to challenge preconceived notions concerning the commonplace and well-established codes.

Eisenstein was dealing with the concrete images that appear on the screen in order to create abstract meaning. He did not discuss a concrete image juxtaposed to a familiar idea that is alluded to within the frame of the concrete image. But I add this to my analysis because the same principle applies to such an event. Allusions to key objects, icons, tropes, or frame narratives allow the reader (or viewer in the case of film) to draw from familiar information to make sense of the text or film. These familiar images and plots can be alluded to initiate comparison, or in

the case on which I am concentrating, to defamiliarize, to clash against, to deconstruct, to challenge unchallenged traditions and social norms. Whatever the critical approach, the phenomenon remains the same: a familiar image is alluded to and then contrasted with a new perspective. Collision montage involving the implied reference to a concrete image or action within the present text is universal, though collision montage may not occur in every text. But it is common; the phenomenon is seen in all forms of art. Artists borrow from each other and from older texts or artists they add new perspectives that rely on and challenge previous works. This often happens when a work produces an homage (which complements both present and previous works) or makes an allusion for either positive comparison or to contrast opposing ideas. And this occurs when a familiar image is conjured up within a text that prods the reader (or spectator) to remember these references for comparison. It is true that many readers or spectators will remember allusions to previous works of art differently so that the effects of the collision montage will vary from person to person. Therefore this study extends Eisenstein's theory of collision montage to include the process of creating new meaning by the juxtaposition of an image or action with an allusion to an image or action from a familiar, previous text.

Opening Lines of General Prologue

Before analyzing collision montage within the portraits of the *Canterbury Tales*, it is important to see collision montage in the very introduction of the *Tales*. The triadic structures of the plant and the humans in the opening lines of the General Prologue clash to suggest the average commoner's inability to move up into the higher estate in the social hierarchy of the late Middle Ages. The narrator's introduction serves as a key to understanding the "hidden" meaning in the poem. The imagery moves from the triadic simple structure of a single plant (*roote*, *veyne*,

and *flour*) to forests and fields (*holt* and *heeth*), birds, then to the triad of references to humans: "folk" interested in a pilgrimage, palmers, and a single saint or martyr, St. Thomas Becket. The imagery moves from simple organisms to complex ones, primarily from the single plant to humans. Birds (*smale foweles*) are placed between the plant and the humans. This hierarchy is structured similarly to the creation story in Genesis, in which God's creations are ordered as follows: Day and Night, separation of heaven and waters, dry land and seas, plants, sun and moon and stars, animals (including fowls), humans. The beginning of the General Prologue, starts with rain and dry land, plants, wind, sun, birds, and humans. But these other creations do not form a tripartite hierarchy the way the plant and the humans do. Just as April provides the means for dying plants to take up strength to grow and flower, so do the *folk* (who *longen* because they desire to follow Christ) walk out of obscurity and into pilgrimage in order to seek the saintly relics of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury (*hooly blisful martir*) to be healed of their maladies. The single plant grows from root to stem to flower; the plant reaches its full potential. But the people who desire to go on pilgrimage only have the capacity to become a pilgrim, and at best, a palmer, which is a pilgrim who has been to Jerusalem. It is highly unlikely for a pilgrim to become a saint or a martyr. Therefore, the hierarchy among the humans in the opening of the General Prologue, when juxtaposed with the tripartite plant, suggests that humans are largely limited socially; only a select few can be named a saint. The collision montage suggests that humans have an innate limitation. But this is odd because the first chapter of Genesis indicates that humans are God's greatest work. Therefore, there is also a collision montage by way of the allusion because the hierarchies in Genesis and the General Prologue conflict. The triadic structure of both plant and humans asks if a simple creature has the ability to grow to its full capacity, why would there be limits among humans? Chaucer seems to be commenting on social

hierarchies as well as the concept of free will, that humans possess the ability to choose how they will live, which in a religious context means that some people will choose to live virtuously and others will not. At any rate, the hierarchy of the humans in the opening of *The Canterbury Tales* is asyncronous with the beginning of the Bible.

Moreover, while the opening lines of the General Prologue move in the direction from lesser beings to complex ones, the rhetoric moves in the opposite direction. It begins with a high style then the lines that depict the "hooly blisful martir" lose their rhetorical power in exchange for plain language. The first several lines create a periodic sentence. Chauncey Wood explains that part of the rhetorical power of the opening lines derives from "astronomical periphrasis, sometimes called *chronographia*, . . . in which the time of day, or time of year, is indicated by a circumlocution involving some reference to the motions of the heavens" (qtd. in Camargo "Time" 95). But the rhetorical power wanes as it reaches the last few sentences when the diction becomes highly monosyllabic and simple. It is curious that the narrator would choose to begin his prologue this way. It is likely that the reason behind this change in rhetorical style is to express that one way of understanding the true social ranking of the different pilgrims is indicated by their narrative skills. If the pilgrim tells his or her tale in a familiar, clichéd manner, then the pilgrim is likely to be more saint-like, but those who tell their tales with greater narrative complexity are more likely to be of a lower class, not in terms of economic status, but in terms of their spirituality. The base pilgrims tell raunchy stories, yet their tales are often well spoken and complex, while the nobler characters speak in a trite style. Regardless of what the reverse order of the rhetoric implies, the fact remains that the narrator is well aware of, and interested in, social hierarchy.

Collision montage is related to the contrast between the Knight's Tale and the Miller's Tale. Paul Strohm acknowledges the process of collision montage in other words: "again and again, Chaucer's poetry offers us an experience in which a hierarchy is postulated and then penetrated or otherwise qualified – as when [. . .] the drunken Miller of the *Canterbury Tales* will not abide Harry Bailey's intended order of tellers and introduces his own brand of comic 'harlotrie'" (16). The opening lines of the General Prologue indicate that there is supposed to be a specific order in which the tales are presented. Hierarchies were very important in the Middle Ages; therefore, it is quite jarring when the Miller abruptly changes the order of the pilgrims' telling by he speaking right after the Knight finishes his tale. The Host invites the Monk to tell his tale after the Knight, and not only is he interrupted by the Miller, but by two other pilgrims of lower social class: the Reeve and the Cook. The Miller's disruption of the prescribed order works to challenge traditional partriarchy in the sense that the Knight represents England's nobility and the Monk represents England's clergy: Church and State. Therefore, the Miller's interruption, and his claim he can best the Knight's Tale, creates a collision montage which suggests that the intelligence of the Miller may be equal to or greater than that of the Knight. Because the Miller tells his story to outdo the Knight's Tale, there are many comparable elements between the two tales. On the surface, it appears that the Knight's Tale is superior because it is written in the high style, which is indicated by the references to classic gods and goddesses, its romance genre, and its examination of idealistic courtly love. Yet the Knight's Tale errs because it is long-winded and displays rhetorical weaknesses such as its misuse of *occupatio* (this is used poorly because the Knight spends more time explaining what he will not say instead of just saying it). The Miller's Tale seems inferior to the Knight's Tale at first because it is told by a drunken churl, is a

fabliau, and contains raunchy jokes. But the Miller's Tale is a more sophisticated, unique story because it expands the fabliau genre (by creating complex characters) and is far more succinct. This collision montage also disrupts the medieval social order, which keeps men of lower social rank from sharing an equal voice with the ruling class. John M. Bowers explains:

> The basic operation of any tradition involves transmitting something to the next generation, and this process enlists that power of patriarchal succession, literally from father to son, with heavy obligation imposed upon each new generation to respect what was handed down. Chaucer himself had an almost instinctive response to this structure of social regulation. The two pilgrims placed prominently at the beginning of his General Prologue are the Knight and the Squire, father and son, who graphically represent the social mechanism by which power and status are transmitted linearly. Near the conclusion of the Knight's Tale, Duke Theseus imposes his own authoritative sense of well-regulated succession ordained by the First Mover. Central to this orderly worldview is the somber reminder that all things progressively decay from their original integrity— 'Descendyng so til it be corrumpable' (*CT*, I, 3010)—so that the best, the strongest, and the most authoritative 'thyng' is located at the beginning of the sequence. True greatness resides in firstness. (6)

Chaucer may move the General Prologue according to medieval social rank, which begins with the portraits of the Knight and the Squire, and the tales starts with the Knight's, but the Miller's interruption challenges the idea that "true greatness resides in firstness," largely because his tale is arguably superior in style. The order of the tales, which Harry Bailey intends to follow the traditional social hierarchy, is disrupted by three successive tales from the Miller, Reeve, and

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Cook—who are all lower class. The Miller's fabliau is far more complex than the traditional French genre, but the Knight's Tale is less original; the Knight tells a familiar story from Boccaccio and Statius. However, the Knight's Tale does depict the superfluous nature of courtly love through the frivolous struggle between Palamon and Arcite for Emelye's love. The Miller's Tale is low-brow because of the vulgar humor. However, it is likely that Chaucer uses a drunken buffoon—although a clever one—to develop his unconventional ideas concerning class and partriarchy in order to protect himself as an artist in a time when censorship and orthodoxy governed the arts. Also, in this instance the unconventional ideas are not placed in the dialogue are not placed in the dialogue as is done by Shakespeare, but instead reside in the interruption of the Miller's Tale:

> 'Now telleth ye, sir Monk, if that ye konne,
>
> Somwhat to quite with the Knyghtes tale.'
>
> The Millere, that for dronken was al pale,
>
> So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,
>
> He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,
>
> Ne abyde no man for his curtesie,
>
> But in Pilates voys he gan to crie,
>
> And swoor, 'By armes, and by blood and bones,
>
> I kan a noble tale for the nones,
>
> With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale.' (3118-3127)

The collision montage involving the Knight's Tale and the Miller's Tale is complex, in that there is more than one collision. One of the textual collisions exists between the Host's invitation to the Monk to tell his tale and the narrator's description of the Miller prior to his proclamation. It

occurs between the Host's words "Knyghtes tale" and the narration just after "The Millere." This particular collision montage is simple yet startling—startling in the sense that it disrupts the narrative and the reader's expectations. This simple montage is a catalyst to other collision montages within the Knight's Tale and the Miller's Tale, where deeper meanings emerge by way of juxtapositions. Paul Strohm recognizes the social implications of the Miller's interruption:

Harry Bailly recognizes the socially insurrectionary element of the Miller's behavior, speaking familiarly and condescendingly to him as "my leeve brother" and suggesting that a "bettre man" first tell a tale. In an attractive underscoring of the social dimension of the Miller's self-insertion, Alfred David has characterized his tale as "a literary Peasants' Rebellion." (The Miller is of course no peasant, but this fact need not concern us, in the light of research suggesting that participants in the Peasants' Revolt included many yeomen, artisans, and craftsmen). David's compact phrase is true to the social dynamism of the Miller's intervention, and—in its emphasis on the self-consciously literary nature of his revolt—additionally alert to the rapidity with which the Miller's social revolt is transmuted into a matter of style (with his requital transferred from the Knight himself to the Knight's *tale*). . . .

Relevant to the Miller's interruption and ultimate social integration is Turner's description of the several stages of social conflict, beginning with a breach of a norm regulating social intercourse, passing through crisis and redressive action, resulting either in reintegration or in irreparable schism. Here, as in most such instances in the *Canterbury Tales*, the consequence of the Miller's intervention is obviously reintegration. Most crucially, the Miller's penetration of

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the intended hierarchy is successfully accomplished, not only in the sense that he

completes his own tale but that tale telling "bi ordre" will be supplanted by an

entirely new and nonhierarchal set of criteria, with tellers either self-nominated or

chosen according to the new perspectives or departures promised by their

vocation or demeanor. (*Social Chaucer* 153-154)

Collision montage facilitates this notion of a commoners' revolt against the higher estate

indicated by the Miller's interruption.

The Knight's Tale includes as major themes courtly love, "gentilesse," "moralitee," and

"hoolynesse" (3179-3180). In spite of the Miller's claim that he will tell a tale superior to the

Knight's, the Miller does not address these topics the way the Knight does. The Miller mocks the

courtly love tradition as well as the concept of ideal marriage. The Miller is direct in telling the

party that his story is about adultery and cuckoldry. The narrator warns the reader that the

Miller's Tale is a vulgar story and should not be taken seriously. This is likely Chaucer's way of

shifting blame (twice removed) of unorthodox views and scatological humor to the drunken

churl. The mocking of courtly love and fidelity in marriage is more than a mere joke; it contains

challenging ideas which are implied in the juxtaposition of the tales of the Knight and the Miller.

By shifting controversial ideas, or at least oppositonal ideas, to the Miller through the narrator,

Chaucer is safe as an artist since Langland's *Piers Plowman* was used in the 1381 Peasants'

Revolt to support the laborers' cause. In this particular case, collision montage is employed to

discuss controversial topics at a safe distance. Bowers suggests the possibility that Chaucer's

Canterbury Tales remained unfinished not because he did not have enough time to complete his

work, but because of the pressures of political strifes—the fragmented work may result from

Chaucer choosing to be silent to avoid criticism and imprisonment (161). Bowers explains:

Chaucer's own principles of exclusion responded to the immediate field of

competing social energies during the period when he worked on the *Canterbury*

Tales. The act of writing meant grounding his poem in the world, and Chaucer's

own rewritings [. . .] meant grounding the poem in a political landscape that was

rapidly shifting. Topics that seemed open mockery in 1390 became too sensitive

as the decade proceeded and the political scene grew increasingly unstable.

Intolerance of the Wycliffites escalated during the crisis of 1395 when the *Twelve*

conclusions of the Lollards were posted on the door of Parliament and St. Paul's

as some kind of publicity stunt, more to attack the clergy than arouse the knights

and gentry to actual reform, and the king himself returned from Ireland partly due

to alarm over the possibility of a second English Rising. (160)

This is likely why Chaucer placed unorthodox opinions in the mouths of the irreverent

characters: to avoid persecution and criminal charges. Chaucer also chooses to insert opposing

views through collision montage for the same reason. Bowers explains:

But less critical attention has been paid to the heated controversies surrounding

the actual practice of pilgrimage during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth

centuries, especially pilgrimages to the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury. Far

from universally accepted, the practices were condemned as a waste of money as

well as the occasion for drunkenness and lechery, and these condemnations

became fiercely voiced by the lay and clerical dissidents increasingly identified as

Lollards. (175)

Regardless of Chaucer's opinions of the practice of pilgrimage, he does include many characters

who regard the pilgrimage as an opportunity for revelry and lasciviousness, such as the Miller

and the Wife of Bath. Bowers sees the Pardoner as more than a comedic character, but as a "satire against Canterbury relics," on which the frame narrative of the *Canterbury Tales* rests (181). Among the many social commentaries this work makes, it is possible one of them is the uselessness of seeking such relics as an acceptable, practical method of religious devotion, especially since very little is discussed by the pilgrims about the relics. Even though the narrator explains why St. Thomas of Beckett's relics are sought after, the rest of the poem entertains numerous topics while neglecting the reason for their pilgrimage. The text suggests that such pilgrimages are irrelevant and that there are weightier matters to discuss. It also may have been intentional on Chaucer's part to leave the *Tales* unfinished to further show the frivolous nature of pilgrimages. The frame narrative may be pilgrims having a competition to pass the time on their journey, but the rest of the text discusses and often challenges social and religious topics.

Besides the collision montage of the Knight and the Miller as dissonant characters to each other, the collision montage moves further as the second tale contrasts with the Knight's. The Miller's story is a parody of the Knight's Tale because the Miller, of a lower social rank, pokes fun at the Knight's codes of chivalry and the naiveté of courtly love. The Miller's Tale depicts three key characters that mirror the three main characters from the Knight's Tale. Just as Palamon and Arcite fight for the love Emelye, so do Nicholas and Absolon seek Allisoun's love in different ways. Absolon's failed attempt to woo Allisoun at the window becomes a parody of courtly love. On the other hand, Nicholas is the opposite of courtly because he grabs Allisoun's "queynte" (3276). While Palamon's nobler character is rewarded in the end, Absolon remains empty-handed: the Miller's Tale mocks courtly love, indicating that such traditions are frivolous and unrealistic. Also, John the carpenter inverts Theseus. While Theseus represents a classical depiction of nobility and authority, John is of lower class, ignorant and foolish. And instead of

being like Emelye in terms of chastity and purity, Allisoun is quite the opposite. Palamon and Arcite have almost an equal chance with Emelye, in spite of her lack of interest in either of them, because they are both knights of equal wit. Nicholas and Absolon are both clerks, but Nicholas is far more conniving than Absolon.

Portraits

Chaucer's technique of unconventional medieval character portraits is similar to Eisenstein's theory of montage. The images depicted in *The Canterbury Tales* are more subjective than those in modern film, however, because the reader creates his or her own mental projection based on what is written, whereas the viewer of a film is not required to create an image in his or her mind. This means that the reader's mental images vary from reader to reader, but the overall idea of the images described in *The Canterbury Tales* is still agreeable to a general audience. For example, readers may disagree about what a character's sword looks like, but the overall idea of the sword remains. Each reader will be affected differently by the collision montage, but the unconventional ordering within the portraits will conflict with the reader's expectations. The experience of collision montage in the reader's mind varies from person to person, but the effect of abstract meaning created from the juxtapositions within the portraits in the *Tales* remain constant.

Collision montage works in the Cook's portrait to suggest that the entreprenuers who hired the Cook are not as well off as they appear. These "wealthy" commoners (Haberdasshere, Carpenter, Webbe, Dyere, and Tapycer) appear successful because they have the money to hire their own cook for their pilgrimage. However, the Cook's portrait implies that they have hired a cook with poor hygiene and health. The Cook's portrait in the General Prologue is perhaps the

strangest in the *Tales*. The Cook's physical appearance is not mentioned, except for the ulcer on

his leg. Instead of having a catalogue of the Cook's physical features in the literary tradition of

effictio (portraits of characters described strictly from the head to the foot), the narrator gives the

reader a catalogue of recipes the Cook is known for:

> To boille the chiknes with the marybones,
>
> And poudre-marchant tart and galyngale.
>
> Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale.
>
> He koude rooste, and seethe, and broille, and frye,
>
> Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye.
>
> But greet harm was it, as it thought me,
>
> That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.
>
> For blankmanger, that made he with the beste. (380-387)

The narrator lists these culinary skills in order, starting with that which is easiest to cook. The

narrator then violates the *effictio* convention by interrupting the list with a comment about the

Cook's ulcer. The narrator may be clueless about the effect on the reader of the juxtaposition of

the leg ulcer and the blankmanger. The *OED* defines blankmanger (or blancmange) as "a dish

composed usually of fowl, but also of other meat, minced with cream, rice, almonds, sugar, eggs,

etc" (1a.). Blankmanger is associated with ulcers and boils, because it is thick and white, like the

discharge from these lesions, and the juxtaposition found in the Cook's portrait suggests this

nauseating similarity. While the narrator may or may not be oblivious to the effect on his

audience, the narrative suggests that the Cook has poor hygiene and that his cooking is

unsanitary. Instead of the Cook being characterized by his physical features through traditional

effictio, he is reduced to his unimpressive culinary skills and his poor health. The Cook's

grotesque appearance, which is summed up with the boil on his leg, undercuts the wealthy status of the entrepeneurs who hired him.

Collision montage is used in the Wife of Bath's portrait to suggest that people who do not follow the social mores still have the ability to move upward in social status. Her portrait in the General Prologue and her self-portrait reveal that she has received great wealth because of her many marriages to rich men. This is also indicated by the fact that the Wife of Bath owns her own cloth-making shop, and that the quality of her fabric surpasses that from Gaunt. The narrator depicts the Wife of Bath in two sections. The first section describes the Wife of Bath according to *effictio*, but has some narration in between the lines of her description concerning her many marriages and numerous pilgrimages across Europe and to Jerusalem. The first section ends when the narrator describes her many previous pilgrimages. The second section of the Wife's portrait breaks away from *effictio* by describing different parts of her head in reverse order, and it is also interrupted with a line about her ability to ride a horse astride.

The narrator's gaze at the Wife of Bath in the General Prologue directs the reader's attention in an unconventional way. The narrator's gaze starts at the top of her head, but instead of traveling down in order, his focus becomes jumbled. The narrator begins the physical description of the Wife of Bath conventionally:

>Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground;
>
>I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
>
>That on a Sonday weren upon hir heed.
>
>Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
>
>Ful streite yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe.
>
>Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.

. . . .

Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye.

Upon an amblere esily she sat,

Ywympled wel, and on hir heed an hat

As brood as is a bokeler or a targe;

A foot-mantel aboute hir hipes large,

And on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe. (453-458, 468-473)

The narrator begins the first section by describing the Wife's head coverings, which gives the

reader the impression that this portrait is patterned after the standard *effictio* (except for the

narrator's commentary about her head coverings). He mocks her by saying that the cover chiefs

seemed to weigh ten pounds, implying that she wears far more than usual (or that they are made

of lavish fabric). It is odd that he does not mention her large hat until towards the end of her

physical portrait because he says it is as large as a target. After mentioning her head coverings,

he moves his eyes down to her red stockings, then her shoes. The narrator depicts her face first in

the second section. Traditionally, her large hat would come before her head coverings and

wimple, then her gap-teeth, apron and hips, and spurs. Instead, the narrator jumps from her head

to her legs and feet, then back to her head. After this initial description he talks about her past

pilgrimages. Then he mentions her gap-teeth, wimple, hat, apron, large hips, spurs.

The Wife of Bath's respectability is undercut by the latter, sexualized section. The second

description moves more in the traditional sense because the narrator describes her features from

her head to her midsection, then to her feet. But what is odd about the second description is that

the lines detailing her head move backwards: teeth, wimple, hat. Sexual innuendo is signalled by

the first word that begins the second description: "Gat-tothed." Gapped teeth in the Middle Ages

"indicated an envious, irreverent, luxurious, bold, faithless, and suspicious nature" (Hillary), and some scholars read this to mean a person is lecherous. It is no secret that the Wife of Bath has a strong libido; the text is filled with references to her interest in sex. Not only does "gat-tothed" signal its sexual connotation, it sets the stage for a vulgar mockery of the Wife of Bath. The reverse juxtaposition of the three images of her head in the second part of her portrait begins with a stretch. The gap or widening of her teeth juxtaposed to the image of the Wife of Bath easily riding a horse astride together create a third image of her legs spread far for sex. To ride a horse astride means that the rider's legs are stretched far apart, and for the novice rider the position makes the legs sore even after a short ride. Therefore, the fact that the Wife of Bath rides easily this way adds to the idea that she is a loose woman, she is used to having her legs spread apart. The lines just before the second description, where it is said that she has made at least seven pilgrimages, and therefore traveled long distances, carry the same implication. Also, an "ambeler" is a pacing horse that lifts both legs on one side with each stride as it runs; "hence, to move at a smooth or easy pace" (*OED* "amble, v." 1). The specificity of the pacing horse may indicate the Wife of Bath is sexually *experienced*, therefore having stamina rather than speed. The juxtaposed images so far described—"gat-tothed," a pacing horse, riding astride easily— furthers the idea of the Wife of Bath's strong sexuality. The Wife of Bath's lecherous nature is alluded to before this second description, which is implied by the aposiopesis: "Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve, / Withouten oother compaignye in youthe— / But therof nedeth nat to speke as nowthe" (460-462). The bowed legs while riding a horse does not carry any sexual implications when this image is isolated. Therefore, the juxtaposition of the gapped teeth and the horse riding pulls the readers eyes and imagination to create the *tertium quid*, which is in this case sexual innuendo. And the narrator keeps going with the innuendo, even though it is already

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clear what he is getting at. After the wimple her hat is mentioned, which is described to be as large as a shield ("targe"). A buckler is usually small, but "in England the buckler was usually carried by a handle at the back, and 'used not so much for a shield as for a warder to catch the blow of an adversary' (Fairholt, at Buckler), but sometimes it was larger, and fastened by straps to the arm" (*OED* "buckler, n.2," 1.). Her hat is compared to an object associated with war and defense. The "targe" is "a light shield or buckler, borne instead of the heavy shield, esp. by footmen and archers" (*OED* "targe" 1a.). It is curious that her hat is compared to a "targe" just before her foot-mantel is mentioned. This juxtaposition may imply or add to the notion of the Wife of Bath as a warrior; her foot-mantel is compared to a footman's armor. This suggests the Wife of Bath is not passive, but assertive and aggressive. And in its context of sexual innuendo, it indicates that she is aggressive, perhaps even dominating in bed. It is also important to note that these two separate descriptions follow bits about her past (another deviation from the traditional *effictio*). The odd structure of the Wife of Bath's portrait depicts her as the opposite of the ideal woman. The sexual innuendos eclipse her wealthy appearance.

Just as collision montage is found within individual portraits in the *Tales*, it can also be discovered when a pair of portraits is juxtaposed. The portrait of Allisoun in the Miller's Tale resembles but also contrasts with the portrait of the Wife of Bath in the General Prologue. Because *The Canterbury Tales* is fragmented and unfinished, it is difficult (if not impossible) to know exactly where the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale would have been placed in the text. Regardless of where Chaucer intended it to be placed, Allisoun's portrait in the Miller's Tale is connected to the Wife of Bath's portrait from the General Prologue, partly because both characters have the same name (Allisoun), are highly sexualized, and are unfaithful to their

husbands. It is not until after Fragment I that the reader finds out that the Wife of Bath's name is Allisoun, but the connection is made by memory or rereading.

The image of Allisoun in the Miller's Tale is assembled differently from the traditional, medieval style of the top to bottom portrait. The Miller begins with her overall image, describing it as "fair," and then moves immediately to her midsection:

> Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
>
> As any wezele hir body gent and smal.
>
> A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk,
>
> A barmcloth as whit as morne milk
>
> Upon her lendes, ful of many a goore. (3233-3237)

The order in which the Miller presents Allisoun's appearance reveals his own "likerous ye" (3244). Because the Miller describes the fictional Allisoun in a sexual manner, it is possible he is imagining how the Wife of Bath may have once looked, or that he is mocking her older, uglier appearance. The Miller explains first that Allisoun is beautiful, young, and has a great body ("fair," "gent," and "small"). After praising the overall appearance of Allisoun in the introductory lines of her portrait, the Miller turns his eyes to her midsection. Instead of beginning at Allisoun's cap, the Miller begins with her "ceynt" (belt or girdle). The Miller's eyes are upon Allisoun's belt and apron before any other part of her body. In the Middle Ages, women were portrayed either as virtuous or immoral (Alexander 193). If an idealized female character was portrayed to be virtuous she was then beautiful, and if immoral then she was ugly (Alexander 193). Allisoun's portrait describes her to be young and beautiful initially, but the depiction of her changes when her loins are juxtaposed to the Miller's initial comments about her body.

Allisoun's portrait in the Miller's Tale breaks convention because she is beautiful and lecherous—which to the drunken churl is the ideal woman.

It is curious that the Miller chooses a weasel in his comparison. The *OED* states the weasel is known for "its slender body," "ferocity," and "bloodthirstiness" (1a). As these lines are read for the first time, the reader most likely will not make a clear connection among these characteristics until Allisoun's character is revealed in the Miller's Tale. The comparison to a weasel is an odd choice because the weasel is not associated with sexuality, but is instead a ferocious creature. While the image of a weasel is jarring, it fits Allisoun's character well: she is beautiful and ferocious (as seen in her actions such as playing the cruel joke on Absolon). The image pulls the reader away from seeing Allisoun as the ideal woman because the image of the weasel clashes with the image of the ideal woman. Allisoun is compared to several other animals, such as a swallow, kid, calf, and colt. She is also compared to vegetation: a young pear tree, primrose, and pig's eye. These images suggest Allisoun is more animal and plant-like than human, which implies she is of a baser nature.

After the connection is made between the Wife of Bath and Allisoun in the Miller's Tale, several new thoughts about these characters emerge. One interpretation may be that the Miller imagines how the Wife of Bath looked when she was young, or he may be mocking her because of her claim that she was once beautiful and sexy but now is old and overweight. Also, the comparison between the two Allisouns may shed more light on the Wife of Bath, debunking her claim to having control over her husbands because Allisoun from the Miller's Tale depends on Nicholas for romance (it is not her plan that tricks John), and in the end, still does not have any more control over her own life than before her infidelity. The only reason the Wife of Bath has wealth is because she has tricked her husbands, allowing herself to live a secret lecherous life

while securing a wealthy widowhood via religious matrimony. Or the Wife of Bath's Prologue may indicate how Allisoun from the Miller's Tale will develop eventually into a woman who deceives in order to move upward in social rank. When these two women are compared it shows that a medieval woman must rely on a husband for financial security.

The Wife of Bath's portrait in the General Prologue prepares for further collision montage in the comparison of the portraits of Allisoun in the Miller's Tale and Emelye from the Knight's Tale. While the Miller presents Allisoun in a highly sexualized manner, which reveals his idea of the perfect woman, the Knight's depiction of Emelye reflects his idea of the ideal woman. The Knight says of Emelye:

> Emeyle, that fairer was to sene
>
> Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene,
>
> And fressher than the May with floures newe —
>
> For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe,
>
> I not which was the fyner of hem two —
>
> . . . .
>
> Yclothed was she fressh, for to devyse:
>
> Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse
>
> Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse. (1035-1039, 1048-1050)

The Knight's description of Emelye is mostly vague because instead of showing his audience why she is more beautiful than flowers in the springtime, he expects his audience to take his word for it. The Knight gives few details of her appearance: her overall beauty, her red complexion, her clean clothes, and her blonde, braided hair. Emelye's portrait is less convincing because the Knight does not use enough details to make her stand out; instead she becomes a

forgettable stock character. Emelye's portrait also exposes the Knight's inferior rhetorical skills. Not only does he present an uninteresting description of Emelye, but his use of *effictio* is underwhelmed by the previous catalogue of portraits in the General Prologue. The Knight breaks convention since he does not describe Emelye head to foot without interruption, and he moves from her complexion to her clothes to her hair. The Knight uses two metaphors to describe her overall beauty and her red complexion, but the metaphors are quite vague. Her clothes are quickly summed up as "fressh," but he does not detail the colors, purity, and newness of her garb. Emelye's hair is the only part that is mentioned in great detail, but as soon as the Knight improves on her portrait when describing her braided hair he diminishes it with "I gesse." The Knight adds "I gesse" to follow the rhyme scheme, but what kind of storyteller describes a fictional character with an unassertive closing remark? The Knight has free rein to portray Emelye any way he pleases, so his end remark is poorly chosen. The narrator uses the same phrase ("I gesse") after describing the Yeoman, and it too undercuts his intelligence because he should know the Yeoman is a forester by his clothing (keep in mind this is being told after the fact, so the narrator has had enough time to realize the yeoman's trade). The collision montage of the juxtaposition of Emelye's portrait and Allisoun's exposes the Knight's poor storytelling skills and makes Allisoun's portrait superior by contrast, despite Allisoun's low class.

William C. Wees states: "Pictorial imagery and its organization—photography and montage—are at the heart of cinema, of course, but I would like to argue that they also constitute a *common ground* shared by literature and film" (267). Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* shares common ground with film through the application of Eisenstein's collision montage theory. This suggests that Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* can be read visually as well as textually. Chaucer wants to place the reader within the created narrative space and he then (initially) dictates what

the reader sees, or in what order the reader is introduced to a character. Chaucer's narrative style is similar to film editing because both are visual narrative created by the juxtaposition of images (often unrelated) that exist outside other aspects of the text, such as dialogue. Medieval literature is especially similar to film in terms of imagery and organization. Great medieval works such as Dante's *Divina Commedia*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are obsessed with structure, time, space, and imagery. Though medieval works such as these rely heavily on dialogue to drive the plot, they also are fixated on visual narrative. Medieval literature can be considered "cinematic," even though it existed well before the invention of the camera and the concept of montage. Although there is no direct influence between film and medieval literature, the two are quite comparable and Eisenstein's montage theory can be applied to both. As Strohm indicates: "Chaucer's bold juxtaposition of personal and literary styles may take some liberties with the facts of personal behavior and literary preference in his day;" however, "these stylistic juxtapositions offer an apt analogue to the complicated, varied, and dynamic social situation in which Chaucer lived and worked" (Strohm 16-17). While the phrase "collision montage" would not be coined until Eisenstein, Chaucer used this technique to reflect the social disruptions which he witnessed in late fourteenth-century England.

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Vita

The author was born in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in film production at the University of New Orleans in 2011.