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Review Essay: Frese, Dolores Warwick. *An Ars Legendi for Chaucer's Canterbury Tales: Re-Constructive Reading*

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and armor, artillery, fortifications, and warships. Each item has been examined in relation to the development of numerous articles and devices from antiquity through the fifteenth century. The study is largely descriptive; DeVries enters into few scholarly controversies, aside from outlining the debate on Lynn White's theory that the advent of the stirrup was an important element in the creation of feudalism.

It is ambitious to attempt in a single volume to cover the entire form and function of armaments relating to medieval warfare, and the book suffers from several weaknesses. While many studies in foreign languages are available, the work relies almost exclusively on those in English. This limitation leads to an emphasis on England and France to the detriment of the rest of the continent. DeVries has not tapped numerous recent and very helpful classic enquiries. Such important studies as Guy Francis Laking's excellent five volumes on medieval armor and works by Charles Oman and Thomas Edward Lawrence on castles are neither cited nor referenced in the book.

The work also suffers from poor editing, and there are problems with contradictions, imprecise language, and illogical statements. In referring to Charlemagne's army, DeVries writes: 'The principal weapon, however, remained the spear and it was to be carried by both infantry and cavalry troops' (p 11). But later, alluding again to the same army, he states: 'In fact in many sources the sword is reported to be the cavalry soldier's primary weapon' (p 23). In describing a spear, DeVries explains: 'It was a particularly special weapon, . . . not only special in its design but also extremely special in its use in warfare' (p 10). Although overusing *special*, the author never clarifies what he means by the term. While outlining the development of the mace, DeVries argues: 'But beyond its evolutionary beginnings, little more can be determined about its origins' (p 25). Certainly its 'evolutionary beginnings' tell us something of its 'origins'.

Despite the book's deficiencies, DeVries presents an overview of medieval armaments in a single, convenient volume that will serve as a valuable reference.

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Frese, Dolores Warwick. *An Ars Legendi for Chaucer's Canterbury Tales: Re-Constructive Reading*. University of Florida Press, Gainesville 1991. x + 238 pp. \$34.95 / \$17.95.

This work — convoluted in style, organization, and argument — has two purposes: 'to demonstrate the originality and complexity of Chaucer's intertextual practice' and to defend the Ellesmere manuscript as reflecting 'Chaucer's final authorial intentions' (p 1) for ordering *The Canterbury Tales*. Although inventive, Frese's demonstration and defense will produce few converts.

In the first two chapters of *An Ars Legendi for Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, Frese introduces and illustrates Chaucer's inter-textual practice with an effort to show that echoes of the *Romance of the Rose* in Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale imply the necessity, first, of rereading both the Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun

portions of the *Romance of the Rose* and, second, reconstructing the resulting meanings. Beginning with the allusion to Jean's relics-testicles debate in the Pardoner's Tale, Frese comes to the intertextual conclusion that the Pardoner's 'long crystal stones' must be symbolic testicles. This equation then points to two additional intertextually mediated conclusions, namely that the two crystals in Narcissus's fountain in Guillaume's portion of the *Romance of the Rose* must also have symbolized testicles and that Narcissus's fountain contains a 'deeply concealed' (p 33) allegory of masturbation. This rereading then leads back to a genitalized reconstruction of the Pardoner's Tale and, more important, to a reconstruction of Guillaume's, Jean's, and Chaucer's *ars legendi*: a copulative and reproductive intertextuality/literacy as opposed to masturbatory and homosexual isolation/orality.

Frese's insistence on the importance of intertextuality and reconstructive rereading rather than oral performance becomes especially important in the defense of her remarkable proposition that Chaucer did not leave *The Canterbury Tales* in fragmentary and unrevised condition. Indeed, Frese argues that Chaucer, after a workshop disaster by his scribe Adam that resulted in the Hengwrt MS, commissioned the Ellesmere MS as his authorized version, even adding the Canon Yeoman's Tale to suggest, by punning (a Frese standby) on canon, that this manuscript represented the canonical version of his *Canterbury Tales*. Relying throughout on intertextual rereadings and reconstructions both from *The Canterbury Tales* and other Chaucerian and medieval sources, Frese argues that incomplete tales, disconnected fragments, and other signs of incompleteness are deliberate pointers to deeper coherence. Among her conclusions are these: the General Prologue was written last to be read first; the twenty-four partial or completed tales are designed to correspond to the hours in a day; the pilgrims, variously numbered from twenty-eight to thirty-one, are designed to suggest days in the month; the number of lines in the last poetic tale suggests days in a year; the seven pilgrims without tales reflect those persons removed from the 'new literacy' (p 110); the four incomplete tales, one from each of the three estates plus Chaucer the poet, are incomplete by design because each fails to achieve 'intertextually productive fusions' (p 111); three strategically placed astrological allusions indicate tale order; the return journey implied by the Prologue is a poetic indication of the necessity of reconstructive rereading.

Chaucerians of all persuasions can, with perseverance, find useful materials here, but not many will grant more than a few of the fervid and often farfetched reconstructions based on Frese's intertextual rereadings.

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Kiser, Lisa J. *Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry*. University Press of New England, Hanover, N.H. 1991. 201 pp. \$35.00.

Hill, John M. *Chaucerian Belief: The Poetics of Reverence and Delight*. Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn. 1991. 204 pp. \$27.50.