

“Tempest Thee Noght:” Meteorologically Inflected Observations on Chaucer, Dunbar and Henryson

The power of a literary trope is to be seen in the apparently widely accepted assumption that when poets, especially medieval ones, write about the weather, they write about the changeable, but predominantly good, weather of spring. How far Chaucer’s famous April showers heralding the start of *The Canterbury Tales* or Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter’s influential literary study, *Landscapes and Seasons*, may be held responsible is a moot point. Perhaps the cause is simply our enduring fascination with the concept of the May hunt complete with the connotations of nobility and love found in many a medieval romance. Whatever its origin, and despite its persistence, it is not actually the case that the writers of the medieval period ignored all other seasons and weather conditions. Nicholas Jacob’s study of the storm motif, and Albrecht Classen’s or Michael George’s more recent surveys of bad weather in a range of texts, amply demonstrate that writers were as likely to write about the cold, the wet and the stormy, as they were about soft showers, pleasant sunshine and warming days.¹

To an extent this piece is a further contribution to these counterweight studies, but with a slightly different intention. Where Jacobs, George and Classen offer studies of how the weather is used to the literary ends of drama, allegory, or simply narrative progression, this piece is something of an experiment in the simple art of observation, inspired by Chaucer’s use of the verb “tempest” which gives this piece its title. The study of literature and the study of

¹ See Nicholas Jacobs, “Alliterative Storms: A Topos in Middle English,” *Speculum* 47:1 (1972), 695-719; Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* (London: Paul Elek, 1973) and Albrecht Classen, “Consequences of Bad Weather in Medieval Literature from *Apollonius of Tyre* to Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron*,” *Arcadia* 45:1 (2010), 3-20. Michael George’s article, “Adversarial Relationships between Humans and Weather in Medieval English Literature,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 30 (2015), 67-82, provides further counterweight to the widespread immediate assumption that medieval texts feature good weather only.

weather both rely on the careful scrutiny of details. Just as the core principle for meteorology is the attentive and meticulous recording of climate conditions, so literary analysis must rest upon attention to words and the context (climate) in which they are used. Observations give rise to remarks, and those remarks may in turn lead to prognostications of what might (or not) follow. The patterns detected may shift and reform with subsequent readings, or different patterns be seen by different observers, much as is the case when cloud-watching, and, as with cloud-watching, while expertise and knowledge may allow one to understand the conditions giving rise to the clouds, the patterns any individual observer is likely to see in them are less open to forecast. Yet much delight lies in spotting those patterns. The point of this essay is thus to demonstrate what may be gained by exercising attentive observation and meticulous record: it is there that the practices of literary analysis and meteorology may be said to meet. Along the way we will encounter several examples of how we humans are affected by the prevailing weather, and while the repeated advice may be not to let adverse conditions disturb us unduly, the cumulative and overall outlook is rather less benign.

Good counsel

Truth, Chaucer's "Ballade of Bon Conseyll", provides the title for this piece and also something of its spirit, for this is a lyric offering both truthful insight into human powerlessness in the face of adversity and good counsel as to how to respond to it.² Here, as elsewhere, the natural world seems to be simply a back-drop to human concerns, so much so indeed that actual weather conditions are subsumed into a metaphor for human emotion, with the meteorological analogy being contained entirely within the second stanza. The process begins with the opening of that second stanza: "Tempest thee noight al croked to redresse" (8). This line runs

² The short poem now commonly titled *Truth* is also categorised in *The Riverside Chaucer* as a moral ballade and given the sub-title "Balade de Bon Conseyll," following the authority of two of the twenty-three extant MSS in particular. See *The Riverside Chaucer*, eds. Larry Benson et al. (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 1084 (explanatory notes) and 1189 (textual notes). All quotations from works by Chaucer are taken from this edition.

into the next, diverting our attention immediately from the tempest created by restless attempts to correct injustices, to the reminder that Fortune herself (unnamed, but clearly active in the poem) rolls like a ball. “Tempest”, acting as a verb here, is particularly effective, but it is worth pondering why. One consequence of this lexical choice is that the crookedness which has apparently led to our presumed individual troubled state is not a small, personal wrong, but the larger sense of everything being out of kilter signalled by that small but significant word “al”. It is this lack of specificity that lends the lyric its power. The poem’s opening sentiments are easy to apply to almost any situation, from personal disappointment to political indignation, or even anxiety on a global scale. In each case, the power of actual tempests rage sub-textually, churning up associations and reminding us of meteorological forces that come together according to their own laws and seemingly beyond our control, creating weather effects which echo and write large not just any personal emotional turmoil within us, but also the apprehension that those forces are apparently beyond our control. Affect and effect combine here, but it is not in fact the beyond-human power of storms that is invoked, but the under-used human power of self-control that could be deployed to prevent us becoming tempestuous ourselves. It is here that readers in the twenty-first century may hear something that those of the fourteenth did not. For we cannot say now that tempests are purely non-human phenomena which may affect the human spirit, but are not caused by human action; now we must acknowledge that human actions have had an effect on storms. Further, having accepted this, we might find the advice offered in the following lines still holds good. “Gret reste” we are told, comes from “litel besinesse” (10) and indeed a little less business both in terms of commerce and consequent activity and interference on the part of the human species might well do a great deal to bring about greater calm across the planet as a whole. But we must be aware that rest is not the same as inaction. We must be prepared to change our own habits, “daunte” ourselves, as well as seek to change the deeds of others (13).

Such a response to Chaucer's lyric may be open to the charge of anachronism, but it offers a sense of how thoroughly we assimilate associations with particular weather conditions, to the extent that they not only indicate, but actually create, emotional states and may even spur us on to specific actions. Those associations are deep-rooted and literature has played a large part in consolidating certain sets of response with specific weather conditions.³ Some of those responses remain intact over centuries, others change, or are forgotten, while new ones are added, as our twenty-first century anxieties about climate change reveal. What remains constant is the depth of affect and reach of response. From the examples discussed here, and indeed from others which doubtless spring to mind and have been thoroughly discussed elsewhere (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* being only the most obvious of these) comes proof that suggestions for a different attitude towards the non-human world from the prevailing norm has been signalled within the very texts that have contributed to make our current attitudes so secure and, many would argue, so sorely in need of revision. It may well be that we ought not to "tempest" ourselves to redress *all* crookedness, but that does not mean we should take no action at all.

"Weather plotting"

"Disaster," Alexandra Harris tells us, "set in with the rains of autumn 1314" and the start of the "Little Ice Age" which according to some ended only in 1850.⁴ It meant adjustment of agricultural practices, but not, Harris observes, of representations of the seasons. Thus, in literature we have "weather plotting" such as that found in the storm that brings Dido and

³ Michael George explores a set of reactions to specific weather conditions, while Albrecht Classen provides several examples of the close correlation between weather and action across a range of medieval texts. See "Adversarial Relationships" and "Consequences of Bad Weather," respectively.

⁴ Alexandra Harris, *Weatherland: Writers and Artists Under English Skies* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 65.

Aeneas together.⁵ In Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* what begins as rain soon becomes a spectacular tempest complete with thunder, hail, sleet and lightening:

Among al this to rombelen gan the hevene;
The thunder rored with a grisely stevene;
Doun cam the reyn, with hayl and slet so faste,
With hevenes fyr, that hit so sore agaste
This noble quene, and also hire meyne,
That ech of hem was glad away to fle.
And shortly, from the tempest hire to save,
She fledde hireself into a litel cave,
And with hire wente this Eneas also;
I not, with hem if ther wente any mo;
The autour maketh of it no menciou. n.
And here began the depe affeccoun
Betwixe hem two; this was the firste morwe
Of her gladnesse, and gynning of hire sorwe.

(1218-1231)

The description of the storm takes up only the first three and a half lines of the section quoted here, with the word “tempest” delayed for a further three, finally appearing in the middle of line 1224. The storm’s function as a plot device is instantly clear, but alert now to how Chaucer uses tempests, we may also read the storm from which Dido flees as less the rage of the meteorological elements and more the emotional turmoil and tragedy in which she is already, unwittingly, embroiled. The poem deftly reminds us that the dawn of her happiness is also the start of her final despair. Importantly, Dido herself does nothing wrong here. In this version of the tale there is no suggestion that Dido opportunistically suggests that Aeneas share her shelter; rather it is made clear that Dido is unaware that she is accompanied—she “fledde

⁵ Harris, *Weatherland*, 75.

hireself”—and her sole motivation is to seek refuge from the storm. There is no sense that she ought to have taken more notice of the prevailing conditions and acted differently, as there is, Classen notes, when Tristan fails to consider that fresh snow offers the ideal conditions for leaving clear footprints.⁶ No such mitigation is provided for Eneas, who “with hire went” and thus implicitly takes advantage of both the storm and Dido. Here, Chaucer presents us with weather not just contributing to plot, but as plot—this tempest is Dido’s tragedy.

This is not the only occasion on which Chaucer tells Dido’s story. It is also present in *The House of Fame* where it forms part of the larger narrative of Troy, depicted on the glass walls of Venus’s temple, seen in a dream experienced, significantly for the current discussion, in December. This is a re-telling of the whole of Aeneas’s story, of which the time spent in Carthage with Dido is only a part, so it is no surprise to find the account of their affair is somewhat abridged. What may be more surprising is to find that such abridgement results in no mention of the tempest that provides the pretext, if not the cover, for the private encounter in the cave that signals the start of the partnership. Tempests do figure elsewhere though, each time as a storm at sea, resulting in Aeneas losing his men either temporarily or permanently. Neither storm attracts much attention from the narrative (these are not examples of the extended topos explored by Jacobs) but each is designated a “tempest,” and each both invites and suppresses the links with the kind of emotional turmoil we have already seen to be connected to Chaucer’s use of the word. The first instance comes in lines 198-211 where the narrator addresses Juno directly, calling her “cruel” (198) and accusing her of ingrained hatred of all Trojans. She is depicted as crazed, “wood” (202) in her desire to ensure them ill and specifically in this case in her determination to prevent Eneas reaching Italy and begging Eolus, god of winds, to blow up a tempest of unnatural proportions, designed to drown people of all degree, with no survivors (203-208). At this point we are reminded that the tempest is

⁶ Classen, “Consequences of Bad Weather,” 14

depicted on a wall, but the lines that remind us of this also assert that no-one could see such a depiction without being suitably appalled:

Ther saugh I such tempeste aryse
That every herte might agryse
To see hyt peynted on the wal.
(209-11)

Whereas in the later *Legend of Good Women* the emotional storm is that of the protagonist, here it is the dreamer-narrator and, by extension, we the reader, who is stirred up by the action of the winds. It is not so much the progress of the plot that is being secured here, as the sympathy of the reader for Eneas, whose ship survives only because his mother, Venus, begs Jove to intervene. Jove's reassurance calms both Venus's emotional appeal and the stormy seas in two lines which each contain the word "tempest:" "And graunted of the tempest lysse. / Ther saugh I how the tempest stente" (220-21). The repetition of the term and the use of "saugh," itself repeated from line 219, serves to ensure that, while in this tempest actual seas and emotional waves are tightly knit, it is the depiction of the literal storm that holds the attention.

Likewise, when Eneas deserts Dido and makes his second attempt to sail to Italy, Chaucer again deploys the word "tempest" to first suggest and then suppress the emotional turmoil we might wish to associate with his action. The poet of *The House of Fame* is in no doubt that Eneas's actions are despicable ("For he to hir a traytour was," 267) even if he has some excuse in the shape of an order from the gods, specifically Mercury (427-32). It is after these four lines of somewhat ambivalent mitigation that we once again encounter a tempest, one that hurls the helmsman overboard (435-39), a detail that focuses our attention on the literal world of storms at sea, preventing it veering off into speculation on Eneas's emotional state as he leaves Africa and Dido at Mercury's command. Where the first tempest, conjured up at Juno's behest and calmed at Venus's, is directly connected to the powerfully felt feelings

of hatred amounting to vendetta on Juno's part and distraught maternal love on Venus's, this second tempest seems to have a more coincidental connection between emotion and weather. No goddess is required to demand its arrival or plea for its dispersal; it simply arises and, we presume, passes. Any parallels that might be drawn between it and Eneas's presumed state of mind are left for us to draw, but it is also possible to conclude the narrative is more simply reminding us that literal storms do happen and have actual consequences.

Correspondence and equivalence: spring showers in Henryson's northern climes

Perhaps the most famous example of weather as prompt for a narrative, or rather a series of narratives, is the "shoures soote" that preface *The Canterbury Tales*, a correspondence that is echoed in the opening of Henryson's *Testament of Crisseid*, complete with the kind of distortion an echo tends to create. This opening may not be as familiar as that of *The General Prologue*, but it works with the same concept of an almost visceral link between weather, mood and literary inspiration. However, where Chaucer offers generalised and fictional experience, for Henryson it's personal:

Ane doolie sessoun to ane cairfull dyte
Suld correspond and be equivalent:
Richt sa it wes quhen I began to wryte
This tragedie; the wedder richt fervent,
Quhen Aries, in middis of the Lent,
Schouris of haill gart fra the north descend,
That scantlie fra the cauld I micht defend.⁷

(1-7)

The assertion "richt sa" (right so) authenticates the weather and the association of climate and composition. It also authenticates Henryson as a writer. Not only ought the prevailing

⁷ Robert Henryson, *The Testament of Crisseid* in *Selected Poems of Henryson and Dunbar*, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt and Felicity Riddy (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1992), 99-122. All quotations are taken from this edition.

conditions match the kind of story being told, but in very fact he is suffering physical discomfort as he writes. Scarcely able to protect himself from the cold, he stands watching the hail descend from the north. This seems poor weather for writing, and yet these conditions are in their way as conducive to literary production as those softer showers of Chaucer's April. Henryson's word is "fervent," which offers connotations of fiery heat as well as bitter cold; both "burn," a point underlined by the presence of the intensifier "richt."

These conditions are a sharp contrast to those of *The Canterbury Tales*, but they occur at the same time of year and are introduced with a similar sentence construction: "Quhen Aries, in middis of the Lent" (5). Once again we are in April, or possibly March, as the zodiacal month of Aries runs across March into April, a calendar marker also used by Chaucer. In Henryson's case, though, the showers are of hail (6), not sweet rain, surely an ironic nod to Chaucer's more clement conditions and London location, which might experience milder springs than Henryson's native Scotland. Walter Scheps points out this "overtly Caledonian setting" of Henryson's poem and details how the *Testament* is both an extension to, and a relocation of, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.⁸ In recasting the tale from comedy (Troilus's, in that he is finally redeemed and inhabits the heavenly sphere) to tragedy (Cresseid's, who has leprosy inflicted upon her by the gods and so dies) Henryson demonstrates literary decorum, Scheps argues. Just as "a Caledonian spring of first extreme heat and then penetrating cold" is a far remove from the milder April which clothes the meadow with "newe grene" in Chaucer's *Troilus* (I.156), so Henryson offers a more extreme and bleaker reading of the Troilus and Criseyde story and with it, in his opening lines, a covert riposte to the London spring of *The Canterbury Tales*. By retaining our focus on the weather, we can take Scheps's comments further, and find in the opening to the *Testament* a wry parallel to *The General Prologue* in which Henryson's presentation of the weather and its effects is literal, where

⁸ See Walter Scheps, "A Climatological Reading of Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 15:1 (1980): 81-87.

Chaucer's is only literary. The generic references to the effects on people's spirits and inclinations to be out and travelling in *The General Prologue* are matched in *Testament* by the individual and actual experience of standing in a window, watching the sun set and Venus rise as the temperature drops and the wind becomes so icy it forces the poet to move further indoors. The whole describes a rather more direct effect of elements on the physical human body than the wanderlust that is inspired by the onset of spring in London.

That is not to say that Henryson's poem is without its metaphorical referents; it is more that, unlike Chaucer, he does not allow the metaphor to replace the actual. We have already seen Chaucer's habit of using meteorological conditions primarily for rhetorical colour in *Truth*, and in the Proem to Book Two of *Troilus* we find him again quickly deflecting attention from weather described to mood or literary genre. Events are about to move on for Troilus from the comparatively static state of love-lorn supplicant to accepted lover, and the weather foreshadows this: "Owt of this blake wawes for to saylle, / O wynde, o wynde, the weder gynneth clere" (1-2). In case we have missed that this wintery weather signifies Troilus' inner turmoil, the poet makes it clear: "This see clepe I the tempestous matere / Of disespier that Troilus was inne" (II.5-6). In doing so he ensures we focus entirely on the protagonist, not the winds and waves of stormy seas which exist only in simile. So where Chaucer's weather is at the service of narrative, in Henryson it is a condition to be physically endured as well as a spur to writing.

Dunbar's dark and clouded days

Further evidence that bad weather serves literary purposes beyond that of mere plot device is provided by Dunbar, here recoiling at winter and forlornly recalling summer.

Into thir dirk and drublie dayis
Quhone sabill all the hevin arrayis

With mystie vapouris, cluddis, and skyis,
Nature all curage me denyis
Of sangis, ballattis, and of playis.

Quhone that the nycht dois lenthin houris
With wind, with haill, and havy schouris,
My dule spreit dois lurk for schoir;
My hairt for langour dois forloir
For laik of Symmer with his flouris.⁹

(1-10)

The poem goes on to describe sleepless, doubt-filled nights of pointless walking or tossing and turning that mount a challenge to the concept of weather plotting. These sable clouds and hail storms prevent action rather than engender it as they sap the poet's energy for lyrics, ballads or plays and encourage the morbid thoughts that dominate the poem's following six stanzas (of ten). However, this is a meditation,¹⁰ not a tale or an allegory, so plot is replaced by reflection, a process that needs no series of events, but will still take us from one mental place to another, if we are fortunate. Dunbar himself ends on a note of hope rather than certainty, as he looks forward to the shorter nights and flowers of summer:

Yit quhone the nycht begynniss to schort,
It dois my spreit sum pairt confort
Of thocht oppressit with the schowris.
Cum, lustie Symmer, with thi flowris,
That I may leif in sum disport.

(46-50)

⁹ William Dunbar, "Into thir dirk and drublie dayis," in *Selected Poems of Henryson and Dunbar*, 151-53.

¹⁰ This particular poem is often found under the title *Meditation in Time of Winter*, but, as Priscilla Bawcutt reminds us, all such titles are editorial. She also observes that Dunbar does not use the word "winter" and comments that this poem takes the weather as its starting-point. Priscilla Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 158.

Where the sudden shower that sent Dido running for shelter began at least a period of joy (even if one leading inevitably to tragedy), the showers of Dunbar's verse have no such benign aspect. In Dunbar's world all showers oppress thought and are part of winter's adversity rather than integral elements of a welcome spring, and so Dunbar must look beyond spring to summer for some relief. It is tempting to perceive here a suggestion of the "Scottish Chaucerian" Dunbar feeling born down upon by the April showers and poetic language of his famous English predecessor, but to do so is to commit the crime of allowing our attention to drift not only into retrospective interpretation, but also away from actual meteorological conditions to a human referent of a supposed metaphor. Better, surely, to admire the veracity that brings together the details of scudding clouds, misty vapours and depressed spirits to describe the real experience of winter as a season when wind and hail render us both physically uneasy and mentally immobile.

Rescue from this frozen state comes in the form of seasonal progression which ends both Dunbar's poem and the depression of winter. It is a hesitant, moderate relief, "sum pairt confort" (47) that Dunbar offers, reliant on the knowledge that seasons must pass and be replaced by the next in line. This direct connection between wintry weather and time passing is in keeping with the definition of storm (*tempestatas*) provided by Isidore of Seville:

Storm (*tempestatas*, also meaning "period of time") is named either for "season" (*tempus*), just as historians are always using it when they say, "in that tempestatas"—or it is named from the condition (*status*) of the sky, because due to its size, a storm brews for many days. Spring and autumn are the seasons when the biggest storms occur, when it is not full summer and not full winter. Hence storms are created out of a confluence of opposing airs at the midpoint and change of these two seasons. (XIII.11.20)¹¹

¹¹ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney et al (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 2006) 275-7. Book 13 of Isidore's work is devoted to consideration of "The Cosmos and Its Parts," section eleven of which is on winds.

Tempests thus suit narrative not only as plot devices but because they themselves are the result of conflict and confluences, much as stories are. Seasons of change (spring, autumn) are thus times of action; those of settled conditions, whether of sun or rain (summer, winter), prompt reflection. However, all may result in composition, and all such compositions are affected, if not indeed effected, by the weather they invoke.

Turmoil (tempest) is only an extreme form of the sense of unease that accompanies any moment of uncertainty, from the most straightforward choice to the most difficult state of upheaval. As shown over the course of this series of observations, while lack of certainty is something humans as a whole seem to find disconcerting, it has the benefit of prompting action or, in these cases, poetic composition. Nevertheless, the upset of a tempest is less desirable, less comfortable, than softer winds accompanying sunshine. As with tempests, it is one thing to experience this directly ourselves, and another to observe the effects of the process upon others, particularly in fictional texts. This is perhaps why Chaucer's "bon conseyle" is addressed to a friend, not himself: "tempest *thee* noght" are his words (emphasis added), with the implication that tempestuousness is not a desirable condition for a human. Leave that to the elements.

Return to *Truth*

Having begun with Chaucer's lyric, we have now returned to it and with it the advice against seeking "al croked to redresse" (8). Normally when dealing with a sentiment like this we focus on the desire to right injustice, perhaps commenting on the unspoken preference for order inherent in the concept of straightness, and the urge to realign or correct things that are deemed to be crooked. However, we should not overlook that simple, metaphorical use of "tempest" which begins the line and which is so comprehensible as to be instantly familiar, recognisable, and ignored. The word invokes our knowledge of severe weather and the metaphor goes

beyond being stirred; it implies being stirred-up, beyond control. This is a tempest we are avoiding, not merely the wind getting up resulting in being wound up, fraught or furious, to employ a lexicon which both storms and emotions share.

At this point editorial aesthetics enter the picture. The reading “tempest thee nocht” is witnessed by six of the twenty-six copies of the poem from which *The Riverside Chaucer* derives its text. Numerically, the dominant reading is “Peyne thee night,” but the manuscript which provides the *Riverside* text reads “tempest,” which is duly reproduced. As the *Riverside* has become so widely adopted as the preferred edition for the study of Chaucer at university level, it is this version of the lyric that now predominates. Fortunately, there is support for this choice of word in Chaucer’s own translation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* (Chaucer’s *Boece*). In Book 2, Prose 4, Philosophy comments on the progress being made by Boethius in coming to terms with his downfall, noting that at least he is no longer focusing entirely on his loss of worldly standing. At this point Chaucer added the gloss “As who seith, I have somewhat confortid the, so that thou tempeste the nat thus with al thy fortune, syn thou has yit thy beste thynges” (*Boece* 2, pr. 4, 66-69). Here, as in *Truth*, we see “tempest” being used to denote inner turmoil. Tempests themselves appear earlier in Book 2 when Philosophy, adopting the voice of Fortune, remarks that “The see hath eek his right to ben somtyme calm and blaundysshing with smothe watir, and somtyme to ben horrible with wawes and with tempestes” (*Boece* 2, pr. 2, 43-46). This analogy reveals our inveterate habit of judging everything as it affects us. To call the sea “blaundysshing” betrays a sense that smooth waters flatter us, lulling us into a false sense of security, being merely a front for the “horrible” waves and tempests that appear at other times and are, by implication, the sea’s true character. “Blaundyssing” personifies, but so does “tempestes,” even though these tempests are nouns identifying weather conditions, not verbs indicating inner turmoil, as used later in *Boece* and in *Truth*. As already mentioned, these tempests, whether literal or metaphorical, noun or verb,

weather or mental state, are “horrible” because we cannot control them, but also because we cannot control ourselves when caught up in them, and this is true of both metaphorical and actual storms. Yet when, with Henryson, we observe tempests from a position of safety (either indoors or in literature) we can regard them as not only awe-inspiring demonstrations of natural forces but as necessary and inevitable natural events.

Coda

This series of observations has traced some of the movements across the uses and representations of weather in English literature in the late 1300s and early 1400s, many of which are familiar and still in play today. The immediate, small aim of this discussion was to track back along those associations, trying to refocus attention away from the literary, often allegorical, human meaning of the words and onto the material world behind the metaphors and scene-setting. Thus the impetus behind these observations was to ponder the literary processes at work and remark upon the anthropocentrism which apparently drives them, with a view to highlighting the paradox surrounding that anthropocentrism: should we embrace it, on the grounds that the only way humans seem capable of giving due care and attention to anything is if it has direct effect on us, or resist it, as our relentless habit of seeing things only as they have immediate bearing upon us makes us blind to wider concerns, which, in truth, ought to be our concerns also? However, as the examples assembled here came together they seemed to offer evidence that our habit of pressing the natural world into the service of our collective, human psychomachia exists alongside an impulse to observe the world around us closely. That impulse is expressed and developed to a greater or lesser extent in texts, as in individuals, but it seems to exist, regardless. Indeed, in this sample, where Henryson and Dunbar offer the natural world a chance to be acknowledged without having to become symbolic, Chaucer emerges as a writer for whom the human is of prime significance; in his texts no depiction of the natural

world, however passing, is without accompanying human referent, even if the link is left latent, as in the case of the storms in *The House of Fame*.

Notwithstanding Chaucer's powerful influence, (indeed, perhaps sharing something of Henryson and Dunbar's resistance to it) this gathering of tempestuous examples has demonstrated how, time and again, literature aids and abets our habit of diverting attention away from actual, physical, meteorological phenomena and towards our self-absorbed human apprehension and appropriation of the world around us. Yet it has also shown how literature may be used to train our attention not on the affect of climate on human spirit, but on the effect of human action on climate. Kelly Sulzbach has attested the importance of bringing together different kinds of story from properly diverse sources as a way to equip us to "see" the changes wrought in the world around us through due attention to the words available to describe it: "What humanities scholars say about all of these stories is increasingly important not necessarily for when they were written or whether they favour our own ideologies, but how they reveal the social phenomena and choices we have made, as well as the futures we foresee."¹² Sulzbach references Harris's "keen synthesis" of medieval calendar illustrations and railway posters in *Weatherland* as work that "enlivens [her] sense for seasonal change" (6), and seasonal change has been something of a leitmotif in this current discussion. As the pilgrims set out to Canterbury or Henryson retreats from the icy draft at the window, there is a sense of relief in the knowledge that seasons and the weather must change. As he gathers his waning spirits by trusting only hesitantly to the coming summer, Dunbar may seem most in tune with Sulzbach's caution against misleading optimism, yet even in Chaucer we may hear a less buoyant note. As the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* tells us, folk seek the blessed martyr who helped them when they were sick. Their pilgrimage is both giving thanks for help past and seeking assurance of help future, for whatever the immediate forecast maybe, we know that

¹² Kelly Sultzbach, "How can Scholarly Work Be Meaningful in an Era of Lost Causes?," *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 23:1 (2019): 19-38 at 24.

bad weather and sickness will come again, and once again we will call upon powers greater than ourselves to save us.