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Founded in 1980 as *JRMMRA* (*The Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association*), the journal is published once a year. In 1998 the Association voted to change the journal's name to *Quidditas*, but retained the former title, *JRMMRA*, as a subtitle for that year of transition. The present volume for 2000 is thus the second volume published under the title *Quidditas*.

Scholars of the Middle Ages or Renaissance are cordially invited to submit essays (twenty to thirty double-spaced manuscript pages) that would appeal to readers of medieval and early modern disciplines. As always, submissions will be refereed.

Manuscripts dealing with medieval or Renaissance studies, regardless of field or nationality, should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* and be submitted without the author's name appearing therein. A cover letter containing the author's name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, and title of paper should accompany the submission. Please send four copies of the manuscript to:

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FROM THE EDITOR

The title of the journal has been changed from *JRMMRA* in order to reflect the national and international contributions included in each volume. Rather than remain a “regional” publication, with readers and articles drawn primarily from the Rocky Mountain states, the journal (as well as the Association itself) has expanded its focus and now seeks to publicize that change through this inaugural volume of *Quidditas*.

Quidditas. This is a Latin legal term that originally meant “the essential nature of a thing” and appeared in fourteenth-century French as “*quiddité*.” In the Renaissance, the English adaptation, “quiddity,” came to mean “logical subtleties” or “a captious nicety in argument” (OED) and is so used in *Hamlet* (“Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his *quiddities* now, his quilllets, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks?” 5.1.95–97). Thus, the original Latin meaning, together with the later implied notions of intense scrutiny, systematic reasoning, and witty wordplay, is well suited to the contents of the journal.

Cover design by Winston Vanderhoof, Truman State University designer. Original artwork by Onnaca Heron, based upon a woodcut of Mary in Egypt.

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ARTICLES

Montaigne and the Coherence of Memory

Douglas McFarland
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Among the many classical authorities to whom Montaigne refers either through direct reference or quotation, little attention has been paid to Lucan and to his contribution to the intellectual and rhetorical strategies of the *Essais*. Hugo Friedrich, for instance, in his chapter on Montaigne's intellectual inheritance from the classical world, does not even mention Lucan's name.¹ Although Virgil, Lucretius, Plutarch, and several others clearly have influenced both the style and content of the *Essais* in seemingly more direct and overt ways, Montaigne, nevertheless, turns to Lucan consistently and with regularity. The essayist directly alludes to Lucan on three occasions and quotes from his work in thirty-five separate instances. These quotations are evenly distributed throughout the *Essais* and represent a cross section of the *Pharsalia*, Lucan's unfinished epic poem depicting the war fought between Caesar and Pompey during the final years of the Roman Republic.² Upon reflection, Montaigne's interest in the *Pharsalia* should come as no surprise. Lucan vigorously portrays in his poem the horrific and grotesque consequences of internecine strife, a topic to which Montaigne frequently turns in the *Essais*. As Michael Regosin has put it, Montaigne condemns the "physical and moral hostility of the outside world, the dominance of wickedness, vice, self-interest...on the verge of self-destruction by those who claim to save

¹See Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, trans. Dawn Eng (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 31–92. A more recent study by Dorothy Coleman of the relationship between Montaigne and classical texts adds very little to the essayist's interest in Lucan. Coleman does point out, however, that Montaigne recognizes value in Lucan beyond "son style déclamatoire." She briefly examines a 1588 addition to 2.6 from bk. 8 of the *Pharsalia* and concludes that the quotation adds a "certain grandeur à sa prose," and that Montaigne "n'hésite pas à tirer profit de ses qualités telles que Quintilien les définit en l'appelant sententiis clarissimis." Dorothy Coleman, Montaigne, *Quelques Anciens et L'Ecriture des Essais* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995), 109. The purpose of my own study is to demonstrate that the *Pharsalia* provides Montaigne with more than a storehouse of stoic exempla.

²In 1.37, Montaigne ranks Lucan alongside Virgil and Ovid. In 2.8, he relates how Lucan supposedly died reciting lines from the *Pharsalia*. In 2.10, he asserts that he loves being in the company of Lucan. Eleven quotations from the *Pharsalia* appear in bk. 1, eleven in bk. 2, and thirteen in bk. 3. Nine of the ten books of Lucan's unfinished epic are represented with a majority (twenty-one) coming from bks. 1, 2, 4, and 5. The greatest concentration of quotations (ten) is drawn from bk. 1 of the *Pharsalia*.

her.”³ The following observation of the French civil wars from “De la phisionomie” (3.12) substantiates Regosin’s claim: “Monstrueuse guerre: les autres agissent au dehors; cette-cy encore contre soy se ronge et se desfaict par son propre venin. Elle est de nature si maligne et ruineuse qu’elle se ruine...et se deschire et desmembre de rage”⁴ [What a monstrosity this war is! Other wars are external and this one gnaws at itself and destroys itself with its own poison. Its nature, so malign and so destructive that it destroys itself...tearing itself limb from limb in its frenzy].⁵ Compare Montaigne’s outrage in tone and point of view with the opening invocation from the *Pharsalia*: “Bella per Emathios plus quam civilia campos, / Iusque datum sceleri canimus, populumque potentem / In sua victrici conversum viscera dextra” [Wars worse than civil, across Empathia’s plains we sing, justice given over to crime; a powerful people, its conquering hand turned to strike its own innards] (1.1–3).⁶ While Montaigne often draws upon other sources for the details of the Roman civil wars, it is Lucan who characterizes that conflict in ways which resonate with Montaigne’s own perception of the civil conflicts in France during the sixteenth century. More specifically, Montaigne is attracted to Lucan’s reworking of the Latin literary tradition, especially the conventions of Virgilian epic. In its most basic form epic poetry delineates cultural norms by focusing on a common enemy and a shared history. Lucan turns epic on its head by depicting a people’s self-destructive fury and thereby transforms the genre into a medium for cultural criticism not celebration. I have chosen for analysis three representative examples from the *Essais* in which Montaigne exploits this critical perspective for his own purposes. In each example, a passage from the *Pharsalia* provides the catalyst for creating greater com-

³Richard Regosin, *The Matter of My Book: Montaigne’s Essais as the Book of the Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 31–32. David Quint has recently argued that Montaigne’s ethics, especially his sense of mercy, is formed in part as a reaction to the French civil wars. See David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). Although Quint does not cite Lucan in this context, he has shown on other occasions how the *Pharsalia* provides others with an example for depicting the disintegration of political culture in the sixteenth century. In the introduction to his translation of the *Cinque Canti*, Quint argues, for instance, that Ariosto models the incomplete state of his own poem on the truncated ending of the *Pharsalia*. See David Quint, introduction to *Cinque Canti*, by Ludovico Ariosto (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 1–44.

⁴Pierre Villey, *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de la France, 1965), 1041. All citations are from this edition.

⁵M. A. Screech, *The Complete Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 1178. All translations are to this edition, though some may be slightly adapted.

⁶All quotations from the *Pharsalia* are from A. E. Houseman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1926). Quotations from Virgil and Horace not taken directly from the *Essais* are from *The Aeneid of Virgil*, ed. R.D. Williams (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), and *The Odes and Epodes of Horace*, ed. Paul Shorey (New York: Sanborn and Co., 1919). All Latin translations are my own.

plexities through its interaction with other quotations, syntax, and the voice of the essayist himself.⁷

I

“De l’oisiveté” (1.8) offers itself as an ostensibly striking example of its own subject matter: an unbridled mind set free by withdrawal from public duties. Montaigne announces in the essay his intention to retreat from the world and to care for his “*esprit*,” literally his life force, but here often taken to mean simply his inner life.⁸ He quickly discovers, however, that this inner force uncontrollably bolts off like a “*cheval eschappe*.” As if to illustrate this, the essay jumps quickly from one allusion to another. In the space of little more than a single page, Montaigne quotes Virgil, Horace, Martial, and Lucan.⁹ To these are added borrowings from Plutarch, Aristotle, and Plato. One senses less a piling up of references than a continuous movement in unpredictable directions.

The title of the essay is itself richly allusive. *Oisiveté* is cognate with the Latin *otium*, meaning freedom from work, relaxation, personal inactivity, or even civic peace. Virgil introduces the term early in the *First Eclogue* to describe the pastoral world threatened by the violent civil conflicts erupting around it: “*deus nobis haec otia fecit*” (1.5–6) [god has made this leisure for us]. In *Georgics* 4.564 he expands on this by suggesting that *otium* provides the imaginative landscape in which to compose verse. For Cicero and Seneca, *otium* represents the opportunity to retire from public life and to

⁷Mary McKinley’s work on the Latin quotations in the *Essais* remains the seminal study. My own work is deeply indebted to her. See Mary B. McKinley, *Words in a Corner: Studies in Montaigne’s Latin Quotations* (Lexington, Ky.: French Forum, 1981). I have been particularly influenced by her assertion that the original context of any particular quotation is critical to interpretation. Terence Cave has also acknowledged the importance of McKinley’s work while maintaining that the quotations contribute to the elusive play of the text and hence of the self that is being portrayed. Cave is helpful in finding a way to describe the complex interaction between authorial voice and quotation: “the cumulative effect [of the Latin quotations] is that of a dialogue of many voices, past and present; or of a series of windows opened on the not quite forgotten pages of Montaigne’s library.” Terence Cave, “Problems of Reading in the *Essais*,” in *Michel de Montaigne*, ed. Harold Bloom (1982; repr., New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 102. Richard Regosin has staked out a middle ground by acknowledging both the “closed medium of portraiture” and an “open-ended process of self-fashioning” at work in the *Essais*. The Latin quotations are Montaigne’s unruly children, both his own and not his own, both a representation of authorial intent and a “violent uprooting” of meaning and its subsequent fragmentation and distortion. Richard Regosin, *Montaigne’s Unruly Brood: Textual Engendering and the Challenge to Paternal Authority* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 81–85.

⁸See Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne in Motion*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 19–21.

⁹To add to this crowd, the quotation from Martial 7.78 is itself a quotation from Seneca *Epistle* 2.2.

pursue philosophy.¹⁰ *Otium* also has a negative connotation. In Poem 51, for instance, Catullus characterizes *otium* as “molestum” [troublesome]. Free time leads to luxury and corruption. With a similar negative connotation, *otium* directly enters Montaigne’s essay. Responding to his own inability to provide structure and coherency to his thoughts, the essayist quotes a line from the *Pharsalia*: “variam semper dant otia mentem” (4.704) [leisure always makes for a wandering of the mind]. This would seem to support Montaigne’s critique of his own leisure and reads out of context as if it might be an epigrammatic pronouncement, perhaps by the narrator of the poem, castigating Rome for the chaos into which it had fallen, something akin to the previously mentioned poem by Catullus or Sallust’s moralistic rebuke of Catiline. But the words are spoken by Curio, a commander of Caesar’s army in Africa, so his staff might arouse the lethargic troops. A closer reading of Curio’s pronouncement, as well as its relationship to a passage from the *Aeneid* added in 1588, suggests Montaigne’s intentions are more complex than simply to chide the vagaries of leisure time.

Curio’s speech comes near the end of book 4 of the *Pharsalia* in which Lucan describes the military engagement between the armies of Caesar and Pompey in North Africa. Curio has defeated all the forces loyal to Pompey with the exception of a single army under the command of a non-Roman North African leader. Before the final battle for control of the region begins, Lucan inserts the story of Hercules and Antaenus since the location of the battle is the site of Antaenus’s ancient kingdom. After narrating the familiar story of how Hercules defeated Antaenus by holding his body above the ground so that the earth might not resuscitate him, Lucan then specifically links Hercules’ exploits to the victory over that other African enemy of Rome, Hannibal.

These examples should, therefore, establish Curio as both the new Hercules and the new Scipio. But in a stunningly ironic perversion of that expectation, Curio emerges as the incarnation of Antaenus. He relishes the “fortuna locorum” (4.661) [fortune of the place] and pitches his tent on the “felicio loco” (4.663) [lucky place], drawing strength from the decayed and ruined rampart left by Scipio and in so doing transforming himself into Antaenus, whose strength is renewed by literal contact with

¹⁰See Cicero *De Officiis* 3.1–3 and Seneca *Epistulae ad Lucilium* 14. For a full-length study of Montaigne and leisure, see Michael O’Loughlin, *The Garlands of Repose* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). For a more recent analysis, see Myriam Petit, “Otium dans les *Essais*,” *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne* 8 no. 5–6 (1997): 41–61. Petit argues that Montaigne transforms the boredom of leisure into a “utile otium.” While the former results in strange and fantastic images, the latter provides Montaigne a context for shaping his being: “L’écriture de sa vie...intime est le produit de son otium...le fruit de cet otium”(60). To put it differently, Montaigne moves from a pastoral sense of leisure to one informed by cultivation; that is, from the *Eclogues* to the *Georgics*: “ce ne sera plus l’esprit qui ‘se travaille,’ mais ce sera un travail sur l’esprit” (56).

the earth. Curio has become the enemy of Rome, and with even deeper irony, is defeated by the African Iuba. Lucan's point, one that he repeatedly makes in the *Pharsalia*, is that both sides of this civil war are the enemies of Rome. Curio against Iuba is not Hercules against Antaenus, but Antaenus against Antaenus.

As I mentioned, the passage which Montaigne quotes comes as Curio gives orders to his generals to arouse the troops from their lethargy and to direct their energies against the army of Iuba. He frames this advice, however, with the most cynical of commentary. Curio points out that once the battle begins, rather than rely on a Herculean power of stoic self-control, the soldiers will be consumed by a passion for indiscriminate killing: "quis conferre duces meminit? Quis pendere causas? / qua stetit; inde favet...odere pares" (4.707–8) [who remembers [in battle] to compare leaders, to weigh reasons? Where he has stood, there it is favored...they hate whoever opposes]. The alternative to the scattered thoughts bred by inactivity is not public service but blind rage fueled by an instinct for survival. It would be difficult to imagine a more inappropriate quotation with which to point out the hazards of leisure. The violence and self-destruction which result from Curio's exhortations are precisely what Montaigne condemns throughout the *Essais*. The threat of *otium* seems rather innocent when contrasted to the slaughter that ensues. Moreover, Curio cynically exploits the association of *otium* with corruption and the avoidance of public responsibilities in order to further his own ends. Lucan repeatedly demonstrates that personal obsession rather than communal vision drove the Roman civil wars.

Montaigne assures that we consider the Lucan passage in a broader context by the insertion into the essay in 1588 of a quotation from the episode in the *Aeneid* which Lucan was consciously rewriting for his depiction of Curio. Montaigne quotes a simile from book 8 describing the scattered thoughts of Aeneas on the eve of battle against Turnus and his Latin troops. Aeneas's fragmented thoughts are given focus and direction by his retirement from the impending action of the war, up the Tiber River to the village of King Evander, a figurative journey back into time and space. Aeneas is fortified first by the land itself, which is the future site of Rome, and secondly by a feast in honor of Hercules. The story of the hero's violent destruction of Caecus and his lair teaches Aeneas how properly to use force and prepares him for his victory over Turnus. Retreat from the immediate demands of public service into mythological digression provides the means for eventual success in the public realm. *Otium* cures Aeneas of his distracted thoughts, and the episode ends with the conferring of the shield on which are etched the future victories of Rome, culminating in the climactic triumph of Octavius at Actium. Aeneas absorbs, in short, the teleological necessity of imperial rule.

Lucan attacks this Virgilian model from two directions. First, a traditional understanding of the dangers of leisure is used by Curio to exert his own will onto the world. He might just as easily have argued for the positive effects of *otium*, as Virgil does, if it had served his purposes. Secondly, Lucan openly mocks mythological digression, another form of *otium*, as hollow and jingoistic. The story of Hercules turns against Curio to suggest, as I argued earlier, that the Caesarean commander is as much Rome's enemy as its savior.

Montaigne uses Lucan with sophistication and cunning. He recognizes Lucan's powerful drive to attack the authority of a traditional literature, which has become interwoven with a political will. By adding a quotation from the *Aeneid* which represents that tradition, Montaigne also demonstrates a far greater degree of control over his own materials than he claims in the essay. Rather than bolt off in random directions, in this instance Montaigne's allusions refer to one another and in their interaction raise questions of importance not only to this essay but to the *Essais* as a whole. Are all public obligations necessarily corrupt, as Lucan emphatically asserts? Can withdrawal from the immediate public sphere be used to create a general political peace as Virgil suggests? Do self-assertion and self-indulgence drive all violence? Or can force be used to create a meaningful order? Montaigne inserts Lucan's voice into the essay as a sardonic advocate of freedom, one who attacks and mocks Virgilian form and ideology, and yet ironically in the very act demonstrates his own considerable rhetorical control over his work. The tension between Virgil and Lucan replicates the tension for Montaigne between the will to create meaning and the hesitation to serve form implicit in the act of writing.

II

My second example comes from "Des plus excellens hommes" (2.36). Perhaps the most dramatic characteristic of the essay is a single sentence which runs for approximately one and a half pages. This constitutes a rather complex linguistic artifact and one which calls attention to itself as such. Its complexity is deepened by the insertion of two Latin quotations, one from Lucan's *Pharsalia* and another from the *Aeneid*. As he did earlier, Montaigne exploits Lucan's critical rewriting of Virgil. Here, however, he places the words of these poets within the context of a particularly demanding structure. The essayist combines a rhetoric of quotation with a rhetoric of syntax, and the one cannot be adequately understood without the other. Let me begin, therefore, with an analysis of the sentence itself.

Essay 2.36 begins with an opening hypothetical: "Si on me demandoit le choix de tous les hommes qui sont venus a ma connoissance, il me semble en trouver trois excellens au dessus de tous les autres" (751) [If I

were asked my pick of all the men who have come to my notice, I would find three I think who excel all others (850)]. These three are Homer, Alexander, and Epaminondas, and Montaigne divides the essay into three roughly equal parts in order to praise each man. The sentence in question forms the middle panel of this triptych, an apparent panegyric of Alexander the Great. Its unusual length suggests that it might offer a fine example of the baroque prose style, specifically that style termed libertine by Morris Croll in a series of seminal essays on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prose.¹¹ Characteristics of this style would include, under the general heading of asymmetry, disruption of logical word order, the separation of grammatically related words, the use of coordinating conjunctions and punctuation which less links thoughts together than allows the writer to move on quickly and freely to a new thought, and finally the use of absolute participles in place of relative subordinate clauses.¹² These techniques produce a style which emulates a mind in motion, a mind in the process of discovering and discarding ideas. This style emanates in part as a reaction to the carefully crafted architecture of the Ciceronian period. Implicit in this form is the notion that the writer knows precisely where the linguistic structure is headed. While the former style suggests a prejudice against a pre-established point of view, the latter uses grammatical forms to support the validity of an argument. Understandably, the so-called baroque prose style has its origins in the skepticism of Sallust and Seneca, as well as in the dense analytical style of Thucydides, while court room oratory, because of its need to persuade an audience of a particular point of view, provides the context for the Ciceronian style.

Turning to Montaigne's sentence, it would be a mistake, however, to ascribe what Croll has called the "grammatically chaotic" form of baroque prose to this long and apparently complex sentence praising Alexander.

¹¹See Morris W. Croll, *"Attic" and Baroque Prose Style: The Anti-Ciceronian Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 178–88. In some sense, the most significant alternative to this rhetorical reading of Montaigne's style is Terence Cave's understanding of the "cornucopian text." Instead of "libertine" or "curt," Cave calls the style of the *Essais* "liminary," informed by a "commitment to non-resolution, to the perpetual opening of a parenthesis." Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 273. More recently, R. A. Watson, building on the work of Barbara Bowen, has argued that Montaigne's prose constitutes a dialectic between self and world and represents a "purposeful intellectual process." Very much in the spirit of Croll, Watson points out Montaigne's aversion to Cicero and his development of a style marked by brevity and coherence. Watson does an excellent job of surveying past criticism. R. A. Watson, *Language and Human Action: Conceptual Language in the Essais of Montaigne* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 10. Also see André Tournon, "Une langue coupe...", *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne* 8, nos. 13–14 (1999): 45–52. Tournon demonstrates how upper case letters and punctuation contribute to the anti-Ciceronian "curt style" of the *Essais*. I am grateful to Tilde Sankovitch for reading and commenting on this section of my article.

¹²Croll, *"Attic" and Baroque Prose Style*, 219–22.

The structure of the sentence is, in fact, anything but chaotic, displaying an overarching form which is clearly Ciceronian. The transition from Homer to Alexander is indicated by a simple heading: "l'autre, Alexandre le grand." Montaigne then begins the sentence in question with an indefinite relative conditional clause in the future tense, "car qui considerera" (754) [for whoever will consider (854)]. He follows with a predictable series of four direct objects: Alexander's age, meager resources, authority, and favor. The conditional formula of the protasis, "qui considerera," holds sway for roughly an entire page until it is repeated verbatim in order to ensure the reader that the initial construction has not been abandoned. The sentence reaches its syntactic climax approximately one half page later with the apodosis of the conditional clearly stated: "il confessera" (755) [he will confess]. The main clause is given dramatic emphasis by its relatively short length of two lines. The overriding structural form, other than being unusually long, could not be more clear. It would be difficult to imagine a more apt example of the Ciceronian period in which materials are organized through the subordination of clauses in support of a dramatic main clause coming at the very end of the sentence. The structure aims at persuasion with an assemblage of subordinating evidence in support of a conclusion. If one, therefore, stands back to assess Montaigne's linguistic structure, one will clearly see an ostensibly straightforward example of the Latin period modeled on Cicero.

Within that structure, however, certain destabilizing forces are at work. I mentioned earlier that four direct objects appear immediately after the opening "qui considerera." Montaigne breaks up this list of attributes by the first of two Latin quotations inserted into the sentence. The first is from Lucan's *Pharsalia* and is followed one page later after the repetition of "qui considerera" with a passage from the *Aeneid*. Let me put off for a moment the analysis of the quotations and their relationship to the overriding sentence structure while I briefly discuss a different intrusion. After the quotation from Lucan, a series of noun clauses give the impression that Montaigne has begun to compile a list of accomplishments of Alexander. This is disrupted, however, by a parenthetical comment "car ses meurs semblent a la verite n'avoir aucun juste reproche" (754) [for his character seems to have justly been beyond reproach (854)]. Amidst praise of Alexander comes the hint of doubt over his moral character. A concession follows immediately in which are cited some of his particular acts, "rares et extraordinaires." Montaigne then glosses over any inconsistency by asserting, "mais il est impossible de conduire si grands mouvements avec les reigles de la justice; telles gen veulent estre jugez en gros par la maitresse fin de leurs actions" (754) [but it is not possible to head such movements and always act according to the rules of justice: men such as he need to be judged overall, by the dominant aim of their activities (854)]. A list

follows, but not of the great accomplishments we are expecting. Instead, we hear of those rare actions contrary to the rules of justice: the destruction of cities and the murder of prisoners and even of children. The disheveled syntax, suddenly dominant, reflects a point of view which is unraveling and exhibits less a mind in motion than a position collapsing under the weight of counterevidence. The weak justification, “tout ces choses me semblent pouvoir estre condonnees a son age and a le’ [C] estrange [A] prosperite de sa fourtune” (754) [that kind of thing seems pardonable to me in a man of his age and of his strangely prosperous fortune (854)], is followed by the previously mentioned repetition of the opening formula, “qui considerera,” as if the writer were reaffirming his praise by remembering his sentence structure. We are left with a voice not searching for truth by sifting through the remnants of historical data, but rather seeking to maintain a rhetorical point of view in the face of doubt and discrepancy. That these particularly awkward clauses were added in the 1588 edition presents another difficulty. We have two voices, the latter of which ironically subverts the former.¹³

The insertion of quotations into the sentence, also done in 1588, only deepens that subversion and leaves little doubt of Montaigne’s intentions. As I mentioned earlier, the first quotation comes from the *Pharsalia* and is placed immediately after a series of direct objects. The last of these is “la faveur extraordinaire dequoy fortune embrassa et favorisa tant de siens explits hazardeux, et a peu que je ne die temeraires” (754) [the extraordinary favor with which Fortune embraced him and favored his hazardous—I almost said rash—exploits (853)]. We would expect the quotation to ornament this “favor” but instead it opens up the fissure of the aside and comments on the rash quality of Alexander’s actions: “impellens quicquid sibi summa petenti / Obstaret, gaudensque viam fecisse ruina” (1.149) [driving whatever might stand in the way of him seeking the highest things, rejoicing to have made a path with ruin]. The passage celebrates not the attainment of a goal but the drive to power and the pleasure of destruction.

The quotation also undermines praise by its specific context in the *Pharsalia*. Lucan is contrasting Pompey and Caesar in a set of matching similes. Pompey is an old oak tree whose leafless trunk casts a dark shadow; Caesar is compared to a bolt of lightning. In the line immediately follow-

¹³See Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy*, 37–41, for an analysis of Montaigne’s attitude toward Alexander and the changes made in the B text. Quint argues that the negative image of Alexander at the beginning and ending of the *Essais* is a product of the B text [1588] and that a demotion of Alexander had already taken place in 2.36 of the A text where Alexander occupies a secondary position. My own analysis of the subversive quality of the Latin quotations inserted into 2.36 in the B text reinforces Quint’s argument. My purpose, however, is less to explore how Montaigne represents Alexander than it is to understand how he uses Lucan.

ing the quoted passage, Lucan calls Caesar a “fulmen” [lightning bolt]. Lucan is reworking a set of standard epic conventions of praise. The thunderbolt is associated with power and belongs to Zeus. When applied to heroes, it usually refers to their arms, especially the shield. Aeneas in book 12 “fulminat armis” [flashes in arms]. Earlier in book 9 “fulmina” [lightning bolts] flash from the shield of Turnus. Lucan mockingly surpasses his predecessors in epic praise by transforming Caesar himself into the bolt of lightning. In this instance, hyperbole undermines heroism. Caesar’s power is self-sustained, gathering back its strength once it has struck the earth, and bringing with it mindless destruction and terror. Lucan’s habit of distorting epic convention, of turning it back against itself, could not be better exemplified than by this simile.

Perhaps Montaigne was thinking of the simile when he added the second quotation in the sentence. He claims that Alexander was “flamoyant” [flushed with radiance], a word cognate with the Latin *flamma*, *fulgeo*, and *fulmen*. But while Alexander was earlier compared to the Caesarian lightning bolt, here he is compared via quotation to “lucifer” (the morning star): “Qualis ubi Oceani perfusus lucifer unda, / Quem Venus ante alios astrorum diligit ignes, / Extulit os sacrum caelo, tenebrasque resolvit” (8.589–91) [Shining like that morning star which Venus loves above all other when, bathed in ocean’s waves, it raises up its sacred face in the heaven and drives away the darkness]. Clearly the two passages stand in ironic juxtaposition to one another, the one describing the destructive light of a thunderbolt, and the second a redemptive light announcing the coming of day and the dispelling of darkness. But the irony is even more deeply felt when one considers the context of the passage from Virgil. The simile compares not Aeneas to the morning star but the doomed Pallas, the son of King Evander. In the same episode from book 8 which I discussed earlier, the hero journeys up the Tiber to be indoctrinated into the indigenous culture and to gather troops for the impending war with Turnus. Along with troops, King Evander entrusts his young son into the hands of Aeneas, and the simile describes Pallas as he leads a contingent of men back down the river to confront the Latin army. This marks a moment in the *Aeneid* of deeply ironic melancholy. Pallas has been cast into the role of Patroklos in Virgil’s version of the *Iliad* and he will die at the hands of Turnus in book 10. Although his youth does represent the promise of the next generation, it will not be fulfilled within his own short lifetime. His death will propel Aeneas into a blind Achilles-like rage. A sense of dark foreboding permeates the scene in book 8 with mothers weeping as their sons go off to war. Montaigne has chosen to allude to one of those moments in which Virgil himself seems to question the cost of a peace attained through force. To compare Alexander to Pallas is to compare him first of all to an inexperienced youth and secondly to

one doomed to die on the very first day of battle. The shining light of Pallas is not even that of a hero who dies young in a blaze of glory. Pallas oversteps himself in his brief and one-sided encounter with Turnus; his short life is more wasteful than heroic. Montaigne seems particularly intent to draw out the irony in the association of Alexander with Pallas since immediately after the quotation he speaks of the “duration and grandeur” of Alexander.

We are left with a linguistic structure complicated by its length, syntax, the inclusion of quotations from other linguistic artifacts, and additions made over the course of several years. Together these create another set of complexities, ones of voice and perspective. The insertion of ostensibly authoritative voices from the past does not in this case substantiate praise but rather undermines Montaigne’s own carefully crafted Ciceronian persona. It is ironic that many of the details of the sentence come from Plutarch’s biography of Alexander. Earlier in “Des livres,” Montaigne had asserted, “c’est mon homme...Plutarch” (416) [Plutarch is the man for me (467)] because he writes about lives not deeds and is, therefore, able to penetrate the surface of history to reveal the real man. In this case, however, we really learn nothing of the real man. In an almost Socratic manner, Montaigne uses quotation to dismantle a voice of certitude. In this single sentence Montaigne creates the complexities of dramatic interaction, driven by the play of multiple voices within his own intellect and memory over the course of time. As the essayist himself asserts in “De la phisonomie,” “Je dis pompeusement et opulemment l’ignorance, et dys la science megrement et piteusement; [C] accessoirement cette-cy ey accidentalement, celle la expressement et principalement” (1057) [I reveal my ignorance with copious pomp: I reveal my learning meagrely and pitifully—{C} the latter as an accessory, a by-product: the former, as explicit and primary (1198)]. It is the voice of Lucan which provides the primary catalyst to reveal in the praise of Alexander such ignorance.

III

My final example comes from “De la vanité” (3.9), in which Montaigne bemoans the deficiency of his own powers of memory, a deficiency which has resulted in the incoherent and rambling form of the essay itself. In a manner similar to that in “De l’oisiveté,” Montaigne confesses that the meandering course of his essay resembles that of a tottering drunk, vertiginous and lacking form, always on the point of collapse. This self-criticism speaks to the overlapping notions of vanity which are woven into the ostensibly motley fabric of the essay: the vanity of the proud and the vanity of the frivolous; the vanity of those who would strive for perfection in

themselves, in their estates, in their political institutions, and in their writing; and the vanity of those who would thumb their noses at the obligations of form and simply go about at their own irregular and foolish gait.¹⁴ The essay is itself guilty of both types of vanity. On the one hand it does move about freely and at times awkwardly with abrupt transitions and unfocused digressions, seemingly liberated from the obligations of formal composition; but at other times in the essay Montaigne proudly meets the obligations of formal coherence, through the purposeful arrangement and juxtaposition of quotations from the past. All things pass away, says the preacher, all is vanity, “there is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.” Montaigne clearly does not share this degree of skepticism expressed in Ecclesiastes. His commitment to cultural memory is made manifest, however, not in the copious stockpiling of exempla, but in the creation of subtle and complex conversations amongst the voices of the past. In “De la vanité,” Lucan once again serves Montaigne as the catalyst for such an exchange. In this final example of how Montaigne uses Lucan, words from the *Pharsalia* frame quotations from the *Aeneid* and Horace’s *Epode 13*.

Montaigne’s first citation of Lucan in this essay appears predictably in the midst of lamentation over the civil wars in France. The essayist has

¹⁴A growing number of critics, influenced by Frances Yates, have been studying the effect of the classical arts of memory on literary form in the Renaissance. Some have found in the *Essais* structural patterns which reveal the work to be a theater of memory. Foremost amongst these are Daniel Martin, *L’Architecture des Essais de Montaigne: Mémoire artificielle et mythologie* (Paris: Nizet, 1992), and William Engel, *Mapping Morality: The Persistence of Memory in Early Modern England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 95–128. It is not simply that Montaigne draws his materials from his own mnemonically structured theater of memory but that he transforms the *Essais* itself into such a system. Engel ingeniously compares the sententiae and Latin quotations in the text to the stones within Montaigne’s own body. The composition of the *Essais* is a “result of his construction of an artificial and intertextual memory in (and as) a book that incorporated, and gave a textual presence to, his stones...which are likened to the disembodied voices of others lodged within the body of his text.” (9) See also Eric MacPhail “In the Wake of Solon: Memory and Modernity in the Essays of Montaigne,” *Modern Language Notes* 113, no. 4 (1998): 881–96. MacPhail analyzes three allusions to Solon’s visit to the Egyptian city of Sais in the *Essais* and concludes that they reveal a memory “that is both intertextual and personal and resiliently traditional,” an essentially humanist memory which exposes the “scandal of modernity,” its willful alienation from the past. Elsewhere, I have argued that the rhetorical arts of memory are less important to literary form in early modern culture than an Augustinian and hence Petrarchan notion of memory. See Douglas McFarland, “Space and Time in Spenser’s Marriage of the Rivers,” *Allegorica* (1992): 65–77. In the context of Montaigne’s interest in Lucan, I am arguing that the essayist purposefully arranges clusters of quotations to speak to one another, as well as to the reader. While the complexities of these relationships necessarily at some point escape the control of the essayist, since much depends, for instance, on the weakness or strength of the reader’s own cultural memory, Montaigne nevertheless creates rhetorical structures with intended effects. But my own intention here is not to arrive at a unified field theory of Montaigne’s use of Latin quotations, but rather to analyze his use of one particular source.

acknowledged a proclivity for travel and a taste for variation and change. The obligation of managing his estate is too draining and he seeks out the freedom of travel. But he would also travel simply for the sake of avoiding France's civil conflicts. The current state of political morality, he admonishes, is deplorable: "nostre police se porte mal" (960) [our polity is sick (1087)]. But Montaigne shifts perspectives at this point and becomes if not hopeful, then at least stoic. Other states have had the same sickness without dying. Rome, for instance, survived every shock imaginable and yet did not fall. Who could despair at the condition of France having seen this example. Rome, Montaigne argues, "la supporta et y dura, conservant non pas une monarchie resserree en ses limites, mais tant de nations si divers, si esloignees" (960) [endured it and survived it, preserving, not one single kingdom driven back to its frontiers, but such a great number of peoples, so diverse, so far scattered.... (1087)]. Montaigne follows with two lines from the invocation in book 1 of the *Pharsalia*, lines which seemingly support his observation: "nec gentibus ullis / Commodat in populum terrae pelagique potentem/ Invidiam Fortuna suam" (1.82–84) [Fortune does not bestow its hatred to any peoples against a nation powerful on land and sea]. The context of the passage, however, completely undermines Montaigne's optimism. Lucan is mocking, not celebrating Roman endurance; these lines which describe Rome's comparative strength are biting sarcasm. The very next words in the text are "Tu causa malorum" [you are the cause of your own evils]. Lucan, grandly and with epic embellishment turned against itself, tells Rome that only her own strength was great enough to destroy her. Civil war, not external attack, had the power to topple Rome. The passage echoes the very first lines of the poem in which Lucan proclaims with ringing sarcasm the subject matter of his poem as "populumque potentem / in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra" (1.2–3) [a powerful people, its conquering hand turned to strike its own innards].

But the naive voice of the essayist retains its hopeful guise and asserts, "Tout ce qui branle ne tombe pas" (960) [All that totters, does not fall (1088)], implying that although there might be a great deal of strife and commotion, the state will not necessarily collapse. Once more he cites Lucan for support: "nec iam validis radicibus haerens, pondere tuta suo est" (1.138) [and no longer clinging by means of its own roots, it is safe because of its own weight]. This comes only a few lines after the first quotation and is taken from the same set of similes contrasting Caesar and Pompey to which Montaigne referred in "Des plus excellens hommes." While he earlier cited the simile comparing Caesar to a bolt of lightning, here he quotes from the sardonic comparison of Pompey to an aged tree. Lucan mocks Pompey's age, weakness, and surely not to be missed by Montaigne, his vanity. The tree has been loaded down with trophies from

previous conquests, making it top-heavy and doomed to fall with the first south wind. Age has left the tree not only rootless, but also without leaves. It casts a shadow by means of its barren trunk alone. The simile looks forward to the end of book 1 in which the headless trunk of Pompey's body, his "deformis truncus" (1.685), is foreseen floating along the Nile. This is itself a refashioning of Virgil's graphic description of the slaying of Priam in book 2 of the *Aeneid*. Priam's headless body is an emblem of *nefas* (unspeakable evil): "iacet ingens litore truncus / avulsumque umeris caput et sine nomine corpus" (2.557–58) [the huge trunk lying on the shore, the head torn away from the shoulders and a body without a name]. In a reversal of Lucan's order, Virgil follows this description with a simile comparing Troy to a tree about to fall to ruin. Montaigne's citation rings out with irony. It is true, all that totters does not necessarily collapse, but the example of Pompey is an example of a figure doomed to collapse into a deformed and unspeakable mass. Montaigne mocks the vanity of his own hopeful assertions, as well as that of the naïve reader who might discover optimism in what Ralph Jonson has called the "angry, desperate wit" of Lucan's poem.¹⁵

The figure of the doomed hero is an epic convention, perhaps that part of epic which measures out not victory but loss, and Lucan's parodic version of that convention sets up the subsequent quotations made by Montaigne from Virgil and Horace. The essayist in a sense now provides the antecedents for Lucan's Pompey in Turnus and Achilles. Even more subtly, Montaigne suggests that Lucan's satiric hostility to the celebration of public heroes has evolved from the subdued melancholy of Virgil and the mannered detachment of Horace. Each of these Latin poets must deal with the same set of obligations to the public world over which Montaigne struggles in this essay.

The transition from Lucan to Virgil is set in motion by a shift in the essayist's perspective. Montaigne now seeks consolation for France's problems in the universality of ruin. All states eventually change, and what is happening to France has happened before and will happen again. Montaigne cites book 11 of the *Aeneid* for support: "et sua sunt illis incommoda, parque per omnes / tempestas" [there are to them also their own misfortunes and there are equal storms for all] (11.422–23). Montaigne purposely links this passage to the earlier quotation from the *Pharsalia* by changing "funera" in the original to "incommoda," simply the negation of the verb "commodat" in the first quotation. But as I have indicated, the passages are also linked by the common figure of the doomed hero. The words from the *Aeneid* are those of Turnus in the council scene in book 11. Like Pompey,

¹⁵W.R. Jonson, *Momentary Monsters: Lucan and His Heroes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), xii.

Turnus stands in opposition to the Caesarean juggernaut, coming in this case in the form of Aeneas and the inevitability of Roman rule.

The immediate context of Turnus's speech further erodes confidence in Montaigne's shifting consolation. At this point in the *Aeneid*, it is clear, even to those closest to him, that Turnus will fall. In his speech before the war council, Turnus argues for continued combat and boasts that the Latins are not yet defeated. His offer of hand-to-hand combat against Aeneas comes across more as bluster than courage. The voice of Turnus is undermined by its tone and by its Homeric model. Virgil has based Turnus's speech on one given by Hektor, the doomed hero of the *Iliad*. Moreover, the council scene is framed by the funeral of Pallas and the death of Camilla, two more doomed heroes of the *Aeneid*. The process now begins to pick up pace whereby Turnus will be singled out, isolated and then in the final lines of the poem killed. Turnus is doomed by his own vanity but he is also doomed by the necessity of history. As such he becomes increasingly tinged with a sense of hopelessness and loss, culminating in his bitter, albeit necessary execution. The lines immediately following the quoted passage add yet another layer of irony: "multa dies variique labor mutabilis aevi / retullit in melius, multos alterna revisens lusit et in solido rursus Fortuna locavit" (11.425–27) [many days and the changing labor of shifting time has returned things to a better state, variable Fortune has mocked many and then restored them to solid ground]. Turnus seeks hope in the understanding that all things get better, that the solid ground is the norm to which all returns. Montaigne at this point in the essay is suggesting the opposite: universal doom and the consolation that it happens to everyone.

Montaigne now moves on to a third in his series of ill-fated heroes. Almost as if he had been momentarily affected by Turnus's misplaced optimism, he cites Horace's thirteenth epode: "deus haec fortasse benigna / reducet in sedem vice" (13.7–8) [perhaps the gods will restore things to their former state by a kindly change]. The first line of the poem describing the storms in the sky "horrida tempestas caelum contraxit," is a thinly veiled reference to the calamities of the civil wars. Horace initially answers this threat with what seems a typical *carpe diem* response: "rapiamus, amice, occasionem de die" (3–4) [let us seize the occasion from the day]. While our knees are strong, he adds, let old age dissolve; bring forth wine and set aside speaking of those other things. The line which Montaigne quotes then follows. The indifference of its consolation is made clear by the final third of the poem, the words of the centaur Chiron to Achilles, the Greek hero fated to die at Troy. Just as Horace did earlier in the poem, the Centaur suggests that Achilles alleviate gloom with song and wine. Five of the seven lines of the consolation, however, are devoted to delineating that gloom. The Centaur addresses Achilles as "invicte" [uncon-

querable one], but immediately qualifies this with a second vocative which focuses on Achilles' imperfect form owing to his mixed parentage: "mortalis nate Thetide" [mortal one born from the goddess Thetis]. The threads of Achilles' life which the *Parcae* or fates will cut stand in stark contrast to the strings of the lyre cited earlier as a source of consolation. What emerges in Horace's poem is a deeper sense of the *carpe diem* theme, one closer perhaps to the spirit of Ecclesiastes. "To every thing there is a season, a season of life as well as a season of death." Achilles is fated to be a great hero, but he is doomed to die at Troy and forgo a homecoming. It is finally not so much that one need simply seize the day as that one should recognize with some detachment the vicissitudes and divisions which inform human process.

Montaigne, however, takes the lines of consolation with an exaggerated sense of optimism, almost trivializing its complications. Not only may things return to normal, but perhaps these troubles will purge us of evil and lead to an even healthier state. This giddiness lasts but for a single sentence, as Montaigne now falls back to the darkness of Lucan. What was unspoken in the first quotation, "Tu causa malorum," returns with force. What depresses me most, says Montaigne, is that it is our own disorder and lack of wisdom, not the heavens, which have caused our collapse. In the final revision of the essay, Montaigne's depression deepens, and he again invokes Lucan. He laments that the changes occurring are not isolated nor limited, but threaten the ultimate terror, "dissipation et divulsion" (962) [disintegration and tearing asunder]. The apocalyptic gloom echoes Lucan's own fear in the invocation to the *Pharsalia* which Montaigne has already quoted twice. "Totaque discors / machina divolsi turbabit foedera mundi. In se magna ruunt" (1.79–80) [the whole discordant machinery of a world torn apart will overturn its own laws... great things fall in on themselves]. Lucan's "divolsi," the participle of *divello* (to tear apart), appears in cognate form in Montaigne's "divulsion." Although Montaigne does not quote Lucan, he does return to the tone, diction, and meaning which surrounds the original citation from the *Pharsalia*.

As in the two previous examples, here Montaigne offers a complex set of quotations, carefully and purposefully placed together so they might interact both with one another and with the shifting attitudes of the essayist himself. Montaigne's ostensible optimism over the state of affairs in France is initially undercut, even mocked, by Lucan's sardonic portrait of the doomed Pompey. The darkness of Lucan is then mitigated by the figures of Turnus and Achilles. More importantly, the shaded melancholy of Virgil and the mannered withdrawal of Horace provide alternative responses to the demands and atrocities of civil war. But the voice of the essayist then absorbs the dark spirit of Lucan, taking on the language and point of view of the *Pharsalia*. Perhaps the final unspoken irony in this rich play of voices

is that Lucan himself represents the figure of the poet as doomed to fall. Like Pompey, Turnus, and Achilles he will suffer a violent death. Implicated in the assassination plot against Nero, Lucan was put to death in 65 C.E., leaving the *Pharsalia* unfinished and without a conclusion.

IV

Near the end of “De la vanité,” Montaigne comes forward and proclaims what is implicit in my own argument: “Le soing des morts nous est en recommandation. Or j’ay este nourry des mon enfance avec ceux icy; j’ay eu connoissance des affaires de Romme, long temps avant que je l’aye eue de ceux de ma maison” (996) [We are enjoined to care for the dead and since infancy I was brought up with those dead. I knew about the affairs of Rome before those of my family (1127)]. Through an animated engagement with the words of the past, Montaigne demonstrates his caring for the dead. That this engagement is ongoing and forever shifting speaks to its vitality. While Lucan does not occupy a central place in this process, neither does he occupy a peripheral one. Montaigne is drawn to Lucan, in part, because of the Latin poet’s own relationship to the “affaires de Romme.” Lucan comes after the great poets of the late republic and early empire, writes in their shadow, and occupies a position distant from their glory. Lucan is a silver age poet whose work comments on a golden age. Montaigne shares this sense of displacement and its concomitant attitude of irony. Moreover, one detects in Montaigne an attraction to Lucan’s fervent endorsement of freedom.¹⁶ Throughout “De la vanité” in particular, Montaigne has expressed a craving for freedom. The intensity of Lucan’s own craving is partially revealed near the end of book 1 of the *Pharsalia* when a prophet proclaims, “civile tantum iam libera bello” (1.672) [only in civil war will Rome be free]. Any formal structure backed by force strong enough to guarantee order and peace will necessarily undermine freedom. But surely Montaigne would balk at this exaggerated, wildly ironic assertion. Lucan serves Montaigne as a counter-ego, an inflated version of himself. Montaigne tempers that attraction with the obligation to a coherency of memory, an obligation fulfilled in each of the examples I have analyzed. It is finally in the space between the twin vanities of freedom and order, structure and free play, where Montaigne attempts to make his way.

¹⁶Frederick Ahl, “Form Empowered: Lucan’s *Pharsalia*,” in *Roman Epic*, ed. A. J. Boyle (London: Routledge, 1993), 125–42. See also his earlier full-length study of Lucan, *Lucan: An Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976). Ahl has been responsible for much of the current interest in Lucan through his research and teaching. The best current English edition of the *Pharsalia*, for instance, was translated by one of Ahl’s students: Lucan, *Pharsalia*, trans. Jane Wilson Joyce (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

The Lioness in the Text: Mary of Egypt as Immasculated Female Saint

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The oral legend of Saint Mary of Egypt, whose death is assigned the date of about A.D. 430, was first recorded in Greek by Sophronius, bishop of Jerusalem, in the mid-sixth century; roughly two centuries later, Paulus, the deacon of the church of holy Naples, translated Sophronius's text into Latin. While closely following his Greek source in the Latin translation, Paulus the deacon inserted a "Prologus auctoris," an introductory allusion to the blinding and healing of Tobit by the archangel Raphael.¹

This study will use the earliest known Anglo-Saxon version of the legend, "De Transitu Mariae Ægyptiace," which has been dated in the tenth century and closely follows the Latin source, including the introductory Tobit allusion found in Paulus's prologue. Although the Old English homily on the "Death of Saint Mary of Egypt" is found inserted between Aelfric's Homily XXIII, "De Septem Dormientium" [The Seven Sleepers] and his Homily XXIV "De Abdone et Senne" [Abdon and Sennes] in the Cotton Julius E. VII manuscript containing Aelfric's *Lives of Saints*, recent scholarship unanimously agrees that the Anglo-Saxon translation of *Sanctæ Mariae Ægyptiace* was not in fact translated by Aelfric, but rather that it was inserted into the *Lives* by a later, unknown translator.² This anonymous Anglo-Saxon version abounds with stylistically non-Aelfric Latinisms such as ablative absolute constructions and participial phrases (rather than the typical infinitive phrases found in Aelfric's style), and it exhibits "what is for the most part a fairly close translation of the Latin" uncharacteristic of other writings found in Aelfric's manuscript.³ The fact that the life of Saint Mary is not recognized in Aelfric's table of contents

¹The title of Sophronius's text is "Βίος Μαρίας Αἰγυπτίας τῆς ἀπὸ ἐταίριδων ὁσίως ἀσκησάσης κατὰ τὴν ἔρημον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου"; the title of the Latin version by Paulus, deacon of Naples, is "Vita S. Sanctae Mariae Ægyptiace quae Peccatrix appellatur, auctore Sophronio Ierosolymae Epsicopo: Interprete Paulo Diacono Sanctae Neapoleos ecclesiae."

²Caroline White, *Aelfric: A New Study of His Life and Writing* (Hamden: Archon, 1974), 129.

³Hugh Magennis, "Contrasting Features in the Non-Aelfrician Lives in the Old English *Lives of Saints*," *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie* 104 (1986): 333.

further suggests that the Old English text was transcribed from the Latin by an anonymous translator. Labelling the legend “Homily XXIIIB,” Walter Skeat concludes that it “does not really belong to the set” because “the style varies so much from that of the other Homilies, that it clearly was not written by Aelfric.”⁴

The following summary of the earliest Greek version of Saint Mary of Egypt’s story is adapted from Peter Dembowski’s interpretation of the legend: Zosimus, a member of a Palestinian monastery, believes that he has reached the summit of monastic perfection after fifty-three years of an ascetic life. Forever searching out spiritual perfection, however, he decides to leave his monastery for another; there, the monks traditionally spend Lent in the desert beyond the River Jordan. During his first solitary sojourn in the desert, Zosimus encounters and then chases an old woman so ragged, hardened, and blackened by the elements and the sun that he initially takes her for a wild animal or an evil spirit. The woman flees the monk, who pursues her for some distance. She finally stops, gesturing for him to give her his cloak to hide her nudity. The two enter conversation, and the woman tells Zosimus her life story. Born in Egypt into a rich Christian family, Mary abandons them at the age of twelve to lead the life of a prostitute in Alexandria. After seventeen years of this debauched life, Mary leaves the city with a group of Christians on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to view the holy Rood. Her conversion takes place when, blocked by a mysterious force, she realizes that she cannot enter the church housing the holy Rood. Contemplating the depth of her sins, Mary turns towards an image of the Virgin Mary outside of the temple, prays for forgiveness for her debauched life, and promises to expiate it until her death. Only then may she enter the temple and worship the cross. After leaving the temple, Mary departs for the monastery of Saint John the Baptist; the following day, she crosses over the River Jordan and into the desert equipped with three loaves of bread. She lives in the desert for forty-seven years, eating the three loaves, herbs, and desert roots for the first seventeen years, and surviving without the need to eat nor drink for the remaining years.

Finished with her story, Mary forbids the monk to speak of their encounter but invites Zosimus to return to the banks of the Jordan the following year to administer to her the rites of the Holy Communion. The year runs its course—with the monk keeping his vow of silence—until Zosimus journeys to the Jordan to give the old woman the Holy Communion. Although Saint Mary asks the monk to return in another year, this second meeting in the desert will be their last encounter. For the following year, Zosimus returns to the desert’s interior, the place of their first encounter, and finds her dead body, the corpse intact. Near the body he

⁴Magennis, “Contrasting Features in the Non-Aelfrician Lives,” 446.

sees an inscription by which he learns that the saintly woman is named Mary and that she died the same night of her communion. He also learns that she has miraculously covered the distance between the locale where she received communion (on the banks of the River Jordan) and that of their first encounter—a distance of twenty days' march—in a single day. The narrative ends with a description of Mary's funeral; a lion suddenly appears, comes to the aid ("vient à l'aide") of Zosimus and digs the holy woman's grave.⁵

As Dembowski's summary shows, Mary of Egypt's story is related through the narration of a fifty-three-year-old Palestinian monk, Zosimus, who supposing himself "on eallum þingum fulfremed" [perfected in all things],⁶ wanders across the Jordan into the desert where he hears her story. Perhaps in part due to the Zosimus narrative framework of Mary's life, standard critical interpretations of the legend often focus mainly on the lesson learned by the holy monk who witnesses her several miracles (including her burial) rather than on the exemplum offered by Mary of Egypt herself. By concentrating on the moral of humiliation learned by the previously self-satisfied monk, standard interpretations tend to ignore the powerful message and extraordinary exemplum offered by Saint Mary in isolation. While much may be learned about both figures when Zosimus remains the center of the myth's moral, Mary reveals herself most clearly through her own words and actions. By investigating Mary's "oral" text—the story she verbally relates to the monk—in conjunction with the "education of Zosimus" narrative framework, readers may not only liberate themselves from the constrictions inherent in traditional interpretations of the myth, but they may also more thoroughly understand both the richness of the saint's exemplum and the extraordinary gender dynamics permeating the myth. Perhaps more importantly, such a reading promotes a recognition of Zosimus's emasculated status on the one hand, and Mary's role as immasculated woman on the other.

In considering the saint's sinful life prior to her conversion to asceticism, readers should first acknowledge how Mary delineates for herself an unconventional gender space long before she sees the Marian vision. After having rejected the love of her family, she spends five years as an *unpaid* whore in Alexandria and then decides to leave for Jerusalem in search of new partners to satisfy her nymphomania. By promising to pay the sailors with her sexual favors, she obtains a sea passage and then impulsively

⁵Peter F. Dembowski, ed., *La Vie de Sainte Marie l'Egyptienne: Versions en Ancien et en Moyen Français* (Geneva, 1977), 13–14.

⁶Walter Skeat, ed., *Aelfric's Lives of Saints: Edited from Manuscript Julius E. VII in the Cottonian Collection*, vol. 2 (London: Trubner, 1890), line 49. For each citation of the Old English text, I use this edition and give Skeat's modern English translation. Where line numbers from the Old to modern English do not coincide in Skeat's side-by-side text, I give both.

throws away her spindle: “Ic þa sona þa swingle me fram awearþ. þe ic seldon gewunode on handa to hæbbenne” [Thereupon I soon cast from me the flax-stick {*better*, spindle} which I was seldom wont to have in my hands].⁷ After discarding the spindle, Mary runs to the sea and ogles the ten young men standing together—sailors whom she lasciviously judges suitable for her “lichaman luste” [bodily lust]⁸—and resolves to join them on the journey.

Both Mary’s decision to leave Alexandria and her rejection of the spindle—which, by the way, she seems not to have used regularly—constitute actions which scorn conventional ideas of medieval women. One critic argues that, in discarding her spindle, Mary also throws away “her livelihood,” for virgins, married women, and widows were all supposed to weave cloth to support themselves.⁹ However, considering the fact that Mary uses her sexuality to pay for her passage, it may be argued that she thus creates her own sexualized form of economic exchange which exists not only outside conventional roles designated for medieval women, but also exterior to the normal paradigm of prostitution. She consistently avoids accepting money for sexual favors, instead emphasizes her own lust, and energetically seeks partners strictly for her own pleasure. Thus, Mary rejects the conventional (if sinful) paradigm of economic gain through prostitution by steadfastly refusing monetary payment. If prostitution is her trade, she values it only insofar as it promises her more sexual partners, both on the voyage from Alexandria and once in Jerusalem.

In paying her sea-passage with her sexuality, Mary creates her own virile and sexualized form of economic exchange, which exists outside of the (male-designated) “honest” and “dishonest” occupations for women: weaving and prostitution. It is perhaps for this reason that the Egyptian Mary becomes a threatening figure not only to the Church fathers but also to the medieval social order. Were she a real (i.e. paid) whore, she would perhaps have been less threatening; but because she sleeps with men for the sheer pleasure of it, she buttresses what Jane Stevenson has called “male paranoia about women” and “contemporary views of women’s sexuality,” which equated licentiousness with a lack of female rational capacity in the Middle Ages.¹⁰

Judith Weiss connects the Egyptian Mary with Stevenson’s hypothesis in her essay, “The Metaphor of Madness in the Anglo-Norman Lives of St. Mary the Egyptian.” In her discussion of the late-twelfth- and thirteenth-

⁷Skeat, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 367–68, 388–90.

⁸Skeat, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 371.

⁹Jane Stevenson, “The Holy Sinner: The Life of Mary of Egypt,” in *The Legend of Mary of Egypt in Medieval Insular Hagiography*, ed. Erich Poppe and Bianca Ross (Portland: Four Courts Press, 1996), 27.

¹⁰Stevenson, “The Holy Sinner,” 26.

century metaphor of madness or “folie” connected with female sexuality, Weiss asserts that in the Middle Ages “first, the clerical view of women held them to be more prone to folly than men and, secondly, that licentious sexual behavior was called *folie* (as in *faire folie* and *fole femme*). [For the Church fathers] Mary’s chosen occupation of prostitute obviously makes her a madwoman.”¹¹ Weiss shows how the blame for Mary’s sin in medieval Anglo-Norse regions is shifted from the realm of economics or personal choice to that of madness. But Mary’s focused, deliberate decisions and actions may be the result of a strong will or the consequence of an independent spirit keenly aware of her desires, and not of mental illness. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century Church fathers’ insistence on explaining away her immoral behavior with a plea of insanity suggests a Western resistance to Mary’s very threatening status as a virile woman who makes her own decisions and who finds her own original—if rebellious and licentious—lifestyle and means of economic exchange.

The implications of the discarded spindle stretch far beyond economic considerations, however, for they also challenge the very base from which medieval women were expected to act. In leaving for Alexandria, Mary not only reinforces medieval “misogynist assumptions about women’s restlessness and lack of capacity for making reasoned decisions,”¹² but she also contradicts Saint Jerome’s pedagogical model for the female “honest occupation” in the middle ages: “Discat et lanam facere, tenere colum, ponere in gremio calatum, rotare fusum, stamina pollice ducere” [Let her also learn to make wool, to hold the distaff, to put the basket in her lap, to turn the spindle, to shape the thread with her thumb].¹³ The “menlich wif” [manly woman] Mary thus subverts the normal gender-specific social roles and spheres of action in feudal society symbolized “by the male sword—‘swert’—and the female spindle—‘spille.’”¹⁴ While some historians and critics have pointed out that this distinction has its exceptions—as with, for example, instances of Viking women who were buried with such “male” objects as weapons instead of the conventional “female” spinning implements¹⁵—Mary’s rejection of the spindle clearly contradicts the conventional medieval exempla offered by Biblical models, beginning with Eve, of women as weavers and producers of cloth, and by classical figures

¹¹Stevenson, “The Holy Sinner,” 164. See also Alison Adams, “The Metaphor of *Folie* in Thomas’ *Tristan*,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 17 (1981): 88–89.

¹²Stevenson, “The Holy Sinner,” 27.

¹³F. A. Wright, trans., *Selected Letters of St. Jerome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 360–61.

¹⁴Stephanie B. Pafenberg, “The Spindle and the Sword: Gender, Sex, and Heroism in the *Nibelungenlied* and *Kudrun*,” *Germanic Review* 70 (1995): 108, 106.

¹⁵Carol J. Clover, “Regardless of Sex: Men Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe,” *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 68 (1993): 365.

such as Penelope, who patiently weaves her tapestry while awaiting Ulysses' return.

Despite Mary's show of economic insouciance and social independence before her conversion, however, it is not until she repents and reforms that she attains the full, true status of a masculinized female. While trying to accompany the other Egyptians to the holy site, an invisible spiritual force renders Mary impotent and bars her from the shrine which contains relics of Christ's Rood. Initially, Alexandrian Mary attributes her inability to cross the threshold to her "wiflican unmihte" [womanly want of strength].¹⁶ Soon, however, she realizes that the vengeance of God bars the door to her because of her hitherto sinful life. Only once she repents and receives the Virgin's grace may Mary of Egypt enter the shrine.

Perhaps more importantly, once she renounces her former licentious life and heads for the desert, Mary becomes aligned with several powerful male Biblical figures. For instance, the three loaves of bread she takes on her journey—food which will magically sustain her for seventeen years—suggest both an affiliation with the prophet Elijah¹⁷ and an evident allusion to the miracle of the loaves and fishes. The levitation scene similarly recalls Christ's ascension, and her walk across the River Jordan constitutes a symbol of baptism which parallels Saint Mary both with Christ, who walks across the sea to the boat carrying his apostles, and with John the Baptist.

In addition to these aspects of the legend which align Mary with the male prophet/savior figure on a spiritual level, her body itself seems to have become physically immasculated. When Zosimus pursues Mary during their first encounter, he even seems to fall in love with her; but this eroticized romantic tension does not stem from physical attraction. Although the monk sees Mary naked, her once gorgeous body is now extremely unattractive, and the Old English text describes how the desert sun has rendered her complexion dry and swarthy and how her sun-bleached, white hair barely reaches her neck:

swiðe sweartes lichaman heo waes for þære sunnan haeto. and þa loccas hire heafdes waeron swa hwite swa wull. and þa na sidðran þonne oþ þone swuran [she was very swart of body by reason of the sun's heat, and the locks of her head were as white as wool, and they {reached} no farther than to the neck].¹⁸

¹⁶Skeat, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 411.

¹⁷Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 33.

¹⁸Skeat, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 175–77, 183–85.

The saint's short, white hair, her "sweartēs" body, and her emaciated frame all lend her the literal, material aspect of a man or of a manly woman. Furthermore, after her death, Mary's lifeless body seems confused with or transformed into a shining sun, the "scinende sunne" which Zosimus sees upon approaching her corpse.¹⁹ Here, Mary's body becomes nonfeminine and degendered into an immaterial, spiritual, and neutered shining light.

With the exception of the three loaves, Zosimus witnesses all of the miracles performed by the saint—the levitation, the stroll across the Jordan, the transformation of Mary's body in death to a shining sun, and the mysterious, divinely inspired intellectual gifts which allow her to know the scriptures, Zosimus's name, and the history of his monastery, as well as how to write instructions regarding her burial despite her presumable lack of education—and each plays a significant role in rendering the monk more humble and less self-righteous. While these miracles tend to immasculate Mary, they also serve to emasculate and even feminize the monk and place him in a subservient position to the female saint. For instance, when Zosimus first sees Mary levitate in prayer, he fears she is an evil spirit and makes the sign of the cross all around himself for protection; once he realizes that this spiritually superior person is a holy ascetic, he worships her by washing her feet with his tears on four separate occasions.²⁰ Biblical instances of one person's bowing to, kissing, or washing another's feet indicate the "subjugation" of the subject who humbles himself to the object of reverence.²¹ Here Zosimus's ablution of Mary's feet also aligns her, once again, with Christ, whose feet are cleansed by Mary Magdalene's tears.

The ablution allusion to Mary Magdalene is also significant because it is she, and not the (male) apostles, who is chosen to witness and report Christ's resurrection.²² Even so, Mary Magdalene traditionally represents the "spiritual dependence upon Christ which can live without his visible presence,"²³ an aspect of faith which Mary of Egypt has mastered but which Zosimus still clearly lacks. Like Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt sees with "the eyes of [her] heart," proclaiming, "Symle ic witodlice minre heortan eagan [...] ahof" [Verily I continually raised the eyes of my heart].²⁴

In contrast, Zosimus constantly relies on the literal *vision* of Mary during his three visits to the desert. On the second visit, for instance, the

¹⁹Skeat, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 741.

²⁰Skeat, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 661, 744, 768, 815.

²¹Charles Randall Barnes, *The People's Bible Encyclopedia* (Chicago: People's Publication Society, 1924), 380.

²²John 20:11–18.

²³Barnes, *Bible Encyclopedia*, 686.

²⁴Skeat, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 581, 559–60.

monk, who at least initially seems to seek spiritual guidance by “his eagen up to þam heofone hæbbende” (lifting his eyes up to heaven),²⁵ nonetheless calls on God in desperation and repeatedly begs Him not to deny him his scopophilic pleasure. That is, he still relies on the strictly physical vision of the Egyptian Mary in the arena of her desert home on that second visit:

ne fremda þu drihten þære gesihðe þe þu me ærest æteowdest. þæt ic huru ídel heonone ne hwyrfe. mine synna on-þreagunge berende; Ðus he mid tearum biddende. him eft oþer geþanc on befeoll þus cweðende. and hu nu gif heo cymð. hu sceall heo þas ea ofer-faran nu her nan scip nys þæt heo to me unwurðan becu-man mæge; Eala me ungesæligan swa rihtwislicre gesihðe afremdad me

[“O Lord, do not banish the vision that Thou didst before shew me, that I may not at any rate return hence in vain, bearing the reproach of my sins.” As he was praying thus with tears, again another thought came into his mind: “And how now if she cometh? How shall she cross over the river, now that there is no ship wherein she may come to me, who am unworthy? Ah! me miserable! me, who am banished from a vision so righteous!”]²⁶

Perhaps due to his feelings of what Benedicta Ward terms “love and adoration” for the Egyptian Mary,²⁷ Zosimus seems incapable of escaping the sexually charged (male) voyeuristic act of looking which, paradoxically, allows for no physical contact with the object of desire.²⁸ In this way, Zosimus becomes an impotent viewer in his strictly visual pursuit of the erotically/spiritually desired object. In contrast, Mary’s power—her inner vision—comes not only from her spirituality but also, at least after her repentance, “from her transcendence of sexuality, centered on virginity and chastity.”²⁹

The reference to Tobit, first introduced as an authorial preface to the legend by Pilaus the deacon, also emphasizes the sense of sight, or lack thereof, suggested by Zosimus’s “visual” attraction vis-à-vis Mary. Initially introduced into the Latin version by Paulus in the eighth century, the Tobit allusion was maintained in the subsequent Old English translations and again suggests the sense of sight while warranting the poet’s retelling

²⁵Skeat, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 669, 691.

²⁶Skeat, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 670–76, 692–99.

²⁷Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 33.

²⁸A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xii.

²⁹Clare A. Lees, “Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages,” review of *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance, *Journal of English and German Philology* 97 (1998): 24.

of Mary's conversion from a life of sin to one of chastity. For, like Tobit's story, Mary of Egypt's tale advertises God's glory:

Verily it is read, that Raphael the archangel was speaking to Tobit, after the loss of his eyes, and again after their glorious enlightenment, and after the past dangers from which he was delivered, thus saying: "Truly it is very harmful that the secrets of mankind be revealed; and again it is a great disgrace for the soul that one should conceal the glorious works of God." For these reasons I will in no wise be silent concerning the holy records. He hath made known to me that I may fall into the disgraceful sentence of the slothful servant, who hid the talent received from his Lord, without increase, in the earth; but let no man be too unbelieving in me, when writing about those things, which I have heard and learnt by enquiry in this wise; may it never be that I should falsify the holy narratives or keep silence from speech.³⁰

Since the Book of Tobit was not as yet banished to the obscure reputation of the Apocryphal texts but remained canonized in the Middle Ages, medieval readers of the Latin and Old English versions of the legend of Saint Mary of Egypt certainly enjoyed some familiarity with Tobit's story; they probably understood the allusion as connecting the righteous Old Testament figure, Tobit, and his daughter-in-law, the chaste Sarah, with their respective holy sixth-century counterparts, Zosimus and Mary of Egypt. An extremely pious man who performed many acts of mercy by burying the dead according to God's—and in direct defiance of King Sennacherib's—orders, Tobit is tried when God denies him his sense of sight. In the following passage we see how God means to test pious Tobit's patience with physical blindness:

Contigit autem ut quadam die fatigatus a sepultura veniens domum iactasset se iuxta parietem et obdormisset. Ex nido hirundinum dormienti illi calida stercora insiderent super oculos eius fieretque caecus. Hanc autem temptationem ideo permisit Dominus evenire illi ut posteris daretur exemplum patientiae eius sicut et sancti Iob.

[Now it happened one day, that being wearied with burying, he {Tobit} came to his house, and cast himself down by the wall and slept. And as he was sleeping, hot dung out of a swallow's nest fell upon his eyes and he was made blind. Now this trial the Lord therefore permitted to happen to him, that an example might be given to posterity of his patience, as also of holy Job.]³¹

³⁰Skeat, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 6–18.

³¹Tobias 2:10–12, *Vulgate*.

After losing his sight, Tobit relies on his wife Anna's weaving and other work for the economic survival of his family: "Anna vero uxor eius ibat ad textinum opus cotidie et de labore manuum suarum victum quem consequi poterat deferebat" [Now Anna his wife went daily to weaving work, and she brought home what she could get for their living by the labour of her hands].³² It is only years later that Tobit regains his sight through the intervention of his son Tobias, who will marry the chaste Sarah, a woman despairing because her first seven husbands have been killed by a devil as they tried to come to her on their wedding nights. Significantly, the fates of blind Tobit and chaste Sarah, both of whom hope for death in their awful dilemmas, are intertwined because their prayers are heard simultaneously in the glorious presence of God:

in illo tempore exaudita sunt preces amborum in conspectu gloriae summi Dei et missus est angelus Domini sanctus Rafahel ut curaret ambos quorum uno tempore fuerat oratio in conspectu Domini recitata.

[At that time the prayers of {both Tobit and Sarah} were heard in the sight of the glory of the most high God: and the holy angel of the Lord, Raphael, was sent to heal them both, whose prayers at one time were rehearsed in the sight of the Lord].³³

Hearing both prayers at the same time, God sends Raphael to heal both Tobit and Sarah in their afflictions. Disguised as a man, Raphael enters Tobit's home to begin the redemption of both Tobit's and Sarah's intertwined fates. That is, Raphael succeeds in motivating Tobias (Tobit's son) to take a journey that will ultimately result not only in a happy and fruitful marriage for Sarah but also in the healing of Tobit's eyes. On the journey, Raphael advises Tobias to save for medicine the gall, heart, and liver of a giant fish he catches, and also to marry Sarah. Tobias, adverse to marrying the virgin bride for fear of suffering the same fate as her previous bridegrooms, nonetheless follows the archangel Raphael's advice, marries her, but does not consummate the marriage for three nights. Again following the archangel's advice, Tobias lays the liver of a magic fish on the fire for the duration of the three nights to drive the devil away; when Tobias eventually departs with his bride to return to his parents' home, he also takes the gall of the fish per Raphael's instructions, which will be used to heal Tobit's eyes.

The Tobit allusion pertains to our consideration of Mary's legend for two reasons: it suggests an alignment between Tobit and Zosimus, on the one hand, and a parallel between Sarah and Mary on the other. Namely,

³²Tobiae 2:19.

³³Tobiae 3.24–25.

the allusion aligns Tobit and Zosimus through the themes of blindness, of symbolic emasculation, and of burial. Like the physically blinded and powerless Tobit, Zosimus, too, lacks vision, but his blindness remains a spiritual rather than a physical one. Like Tobit who finds himself emasculated by his blindness and unable to care for his family without the aid of his wife's weaving work (not to mention his future daughter-in-law's prayers), Zosimus finds himself emasculated by a spiritual blindness which depends upon the chaste and virginal Mary of Egypt for remediation. And just as Tobit (before his blindness) gives proper burial to the Israelites slain by King Sennacherib, so must Zosimus bury Mary of Egypt on his third visit to the desert. In fact, the burial scene takes place at the very end of the legend and seems to create a circular narrative; it sends readers back to the introduction, which mentions Tobit and alludes to the Old Testament figure famous for his burial of the slaughtered Israelites. Thus the end of the legend again suggests that readers connect the two instances of burial: those of Tobit's fellow Israelites and that of Zosimus's Egyptian Mary.

Just as the Tobit allusion suggests these parallels between Tobit and Zosimus, Sarah and Mary of Egypt become parallel figures who assist the powerless and symbolically emasculated Tobit and Zosimus in their respective stories. That is, the Old Testament allusion aligns the two women as helpers to the men suffering from real or symbolic blindness, a lack of vision that may only be overcome with the assistance of chaste, female "virgin" figures. For the core of Sarah's power stems from her status as a faithful and chaste woman, and her virginity is associated with her influence on God. For instance, in the prayer that helps her to gain her husband—a prayer also connected with the restoration of her future father-in-law's sight since God hears both this and Tobit's prayer simultaneously—Sarah emphasizes her unwavering concentration on God, her chaste nature which has never known lust, and her virginity. Sarah prays to God,

ad te Domine faciem meam converto ad te oculos meos converto
[...] tu scis Domine quia numquam concupivi virum et mundam
servavi animam meam ab omni concupiscentia numquam cum
ludentibus miscui me neque cum his qui in levitate ambulant par-
ticipem me prabui.

[To thee, O Lord, I turn my face, to thee I direct my eyes {...}
Thou knowest, O Lord, that I never coveted a husband, and have
kept my soul clean from all lust. Never have I joined myself with
them that play: neither have I made myself partaker with them
that walk in lightness].³⁴

³⁴Tobiae 3:14–17.

Like Sarah, Mary of Egypt gains power through her chastity, her prayer, and her spiritual vision; after having renounced sexual pleasure, she becomes so empowered that she may enter the shrine containing Christ's Rood, levitate, walk across water, and survive in the desert without substantial nourishment. A hedonistic and lascivious creature before her repentance and conversion, Mary is now able to resist and eventually to renounce all desire for the pleasures of the physical world. She is also pivotal in aiding the monk Zosimus to realize his self-righteous and imperfect spiritual state when they encounter one another in the desert. Thus the Tobit allusion parallels Mary and Sarah as empowered and chaste women who help to heal the blindness (whether spiritual or real) of the "wounded" men in their respective stories.

Sarah's feminine, virginal power in the Tobit story echoes similar instances or allusions in Saint Mary's legend. The Marian vision seen by Mary of Egypt reminds the reader of the Virgin's power to heal with her grace; the allusion to the Magdalene through the foot-ablution scene recalls her superior status to the (male) apostles who, unlike herself, were not honored with seeing (and, at least initially, believing in) the image of the resurrected Christ; and, finally, Mary of Egypt herself acts as a powerful, sight-giving, and chaste "virgin" for the spiritually blinded Zosimus. While, in the medieval mind, Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt are figurative rather than real virgins, their former association with sex—coupled with their chaste lives as penitents and as "born-again" virgins who no longer enjoy sensual pleasures—may actually strengthen their influence over men through the medieval "association of sex with knowledge."³⁵ Perhaps more importantly, regardless of their "real" status as virgins, Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene serve as examples of powerful women who aid other human beings of the male sex. Similarly, Sarah and the Egyptian Mary each heal blind, impotent, and emasculated males in the figures of Tobit and Zosimus. Thus the Tobit allusion not only anticipates a parallel between Tobit's literal blindness and Zosimus's spiritual blindness, but it also reminds readers of the connection between chastity and female power by linking Sarah and the Marys.

While the Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon versions of the Mary of Egypt myth all contain allusions to immasculated females (the three Marys), and while the latter two texts suggest emasculated males (Tobit and Zosimus) as well as the powerful exemplum of the chaste Sarah through the Tobit introduction, there exists one deviation in the Old English text which specifically emphasizes the shifting gender dynamics already permeating the several renditions of the legend. During Zosimus's third and final visit to the desert when Mary is already dead, the frustrated

³⁵Lees, "Gender and Text," 17.

and exhausted monk finds himself incapable of penetrating the hardened desert sands to accomplish her last wish for burial; in a desert wasteland where no such life forms have been espied by Mary or the monk for decades, a lion suddenly and strangely appears as a kind of *deus ex machina* to dig the deceased Mary's grave. Looking up with a heavy heart from the seemingly impossible task of digging the saint's grave, Zosimus spies the beast, one described grammatically in all three (the Greek, the Latin, and, at least initially, the Old English) versions of the legend as a *male* animal.

ὁρᾷ λέοντα μέγαν τῷ λείψανῳ τῆς Ὁσίας παρεστῶτα, καὶ τὰ ἱχνη αὐτῆς ἀναλείχοντα.³⁶

Et respiciens, vidit ingentis formae *leonem* juxta corpus sanctae stantem, et ejus plantas lambentem.³⁷

þa he [Zosimus] hine beseah þa geseah he unmaettre micelnysse *leon* wið þære halgan lichaman standan. and *hit* his fot-lastes lic-code [when he {Zosimus} looked around him, he saw a *lion* of exceeding bigness stand beside the holy body; and *it* licked the traces of its {the body's} feet].³⁸

Since feminine forms of the noun “lion” existed both in Greek and in Latin long before the earliest written versions of the Mary of Egypt legend, we might here assume that both Sophronius in the sixth century and Paulus the deacon in the eighth century consciously wished to indicate a *male* animal—a lion, and not a lioness—in their respective texts. For the feminine form “lioness” is used neither in the Greek, where it is recorded as first being used by Heroditus in the fifth century B.C.E.,³⁹ nor in the Latin, where the feminine form was used as early as the first century B.C.E.⁴⁰ Thus the status of the lion as a male animal is clearly indicated in the original Greek and Latin texts by the declension of the nouns in masculine form: “λέοντα” in the Greek and “leonem” in the Latin.

The case of the word “lion” in Anglo-Saxon is somewhat more complex to determine; the Old English noun for “lion,” “leo, leon,” is a strong masculine noun which may indicate a lion of either the male or the female sex.⁴¹ To complicate the actual gender of the animal further, when it first appears in the Old English text, the anonymous translator uses the

³⁶J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca*, vol. 87 part 3 (Paris: Garnier, 1878–1904), col. 3724, cap. 39.

³⁷J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina*, vol. 73 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1963), col. 688, cap. 26, emphasis added.

³⁸Skeat, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints, 772–73, 799–801*, emphasis added.

³⁹Liddel Scott, s.v.

⁴⁰Oxford Latin Dictionary, s.v.

⁴¹I.e., “leo, g. leon, m.f. A lion or lioness”: Joseph Bosworth, and T. Northcote Toller, eds., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 629.

neuter form of the personal pronoun “hit” (it) in line 773. The instance of the pronoun “hit,” however, may have more to do with both the animal’s status as a nonhuman life form than with its sex, for male or female animals or pets may logically be called “it” rather than “he” or “she,” respectively. Similarly, the translator’s description of the beast as a neuter “wildeor” in line 774⁴² may have had an influence on the use of the neuter pronoun “hit” in the lines immediately preceding it: “þa wearð he gefyrht mid ege þaes unmaetan wildeores” [Then was he affrighted, for fear of the huge wild beast].⁴³

Frightened by the unexpected apparition of the huge and ferocious-looking animal and hoping for divine protection, Zosimus makes the sign of the cross all around himself (a gesture he also made upon first seeing Mary of Egypt as she levitated in prayer) and begs the lion to help him dig the grave. It is at that moment in the Old English translation that the masculine lion *shifts gender* and changes from a masculine lion or neuter wild beast *into a lioness*, even though the animal consistently remains of the male sex both in the Greek version and, perhaps more importantly, in the Latin text by Paulus from which the tenth-century Old English translator worked:

ὁ δὲ ἰδὼν τὸ θηρίον, σύντρομος γέγονεν φοβούμενος, μάλιστα μνησθεὶς τῶν ῥημάτων Μαρίας, εἰπούσης ὅτι οὐδέποτε θηρίον ἐθεάσατο. τῷ δὲ σημείῳ τοῦ σταυροῦ σφραγισάμενος, ἐπίστευσεν ὥς ἀβλαβῇ φυλάξει τοῦτον τῆς κειμένης ἡ δύναμις. ὁ δὲ λέων ἤρξατο προσσαίνειν τῷ γέροντι, οὐχὶ τοῦτον τοῖς κινήμασι μόνον ἀσπαζόμενος, ἀλλὰ καὶ προθέσει [...]. εὖθυσ δὲ ἅμα τῷ ῥηματι τοῖς ἐμπροσθοῖς ποσὶν ὄρυγμα ἐποίησεν [ὁ λέων], ὅσον ἤρκει τῷ σώματι θαπτόμενον.⁴⁴

Videns autem, contremuit prae pavore grandissimae ferae illius, praecipue quia audierat sanctam feminam illam dicentem quia nunquam aliquam feram viderat. Signo autem se crucis confirmavit undique credens quia illaesum custodire valet eum virtus jacentis. *Leo* autem coepit innuere seni, blandis eum nutibus salutans [...] *leo* cum brachiis fecit ipse foveam, quanta ad sepeliendum sanctae corpusculum sufficere posset.⁴⁵

þa wearð he gefyrht mid ege þaes unmaetan wildeores. and ealre swiðost for-þon þe þoet halige wif him aer to cwoeð. þoet heo þaer naenig wildeor ne gesawe. ac he hine sona aeghwanon mid þaere

⁴²“wildeor, es; n. A wild animal, wild beast”: Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 1223.

⁴³Skeat, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 773–74, 801–2.

⁴⁴Minge, *Patrologiae Graeca*, cols. 3724–25, cap. 39.

⁴⁵Migne, *Patrologiae Latina*, cols. 688–89, caps. 26–27, emphasis added.

rode-tacne gewaepnode. and mid [maegene] þære licgendan. þa ongan *seo leo* faegnian wið þæs ealdan weard. and hine mid his leoðum styrgendum grette [...] *seo leo* mid *hire* clifrum. earmum scræf geworhte. swa micel swa genihtsumode þære halgan to byrgenne [Then was he affrighted, for fear of the huge wild beast; and most of all, because the holy woman had before said to him, that she had never seen a wild beast there. But he soon protected himself on every side by the sign of the cross, and by the power of her who lay there. Then began the *lion* to fawn upon the old man, and greeted him with its moving limbs {...} the *lioness*, by means of *her* claws, wrought a grave with *her* arms, as great as sufficed to bury the saint in].⁴⁶

The translator's use of the nominative feminine singular adjective "seo" in lines 777 and 787 indicates grammatically that the animal *must* be female. A review of Mitchell and Robinson's paradigm for the Anglo-Saxon demonstrative definite article "se" (the, that) shows that the adjective "seo" can *only* accompany a *feminine* singular nominative noun:⁴⁷

<i>Nom.</i>	<i>Singular Masc.</i>	<i>Singular Neut.</i>	<i>Singular Fem.</i>	<i>Plural genders</i>
	se	þæt	<i>seo, sio</i>	þa

Similarly, the translator's use of the third-person feminine singular adjective "hire" in the dative construction "mid *hire* clifrum. earmum" (emphasis added) in line 787 can only indicate a singular feminine subject, in this case a female lion who digs the grave "with her claws [and her] arms":⁴⁸

<i>Dat.</i>	<i>Singular Masc.</i>	<i>Singular Neut.</i>	<i>Singular Fem.</i>	<i>Plural genders</i>
	him	him	<i>hire</i>	him, heom

In point of fact, the anonymous scribe's or translator's use of "hit" ("it") rather than "heo" or "hio" (the third-person nominative forms for "she") here but "hire clifrum" (for "*her* claws") later on in the burial scene marks an inconsistency which demands our attention. The grammatical shift unambiguously indicates an alteration from the masculine lion ("leon")

⁴⁶Skeat, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 773–88, 801–16, emphasis added.

⁴⁷Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, 5th ed. (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 18, emphasis added.

⁴⁸Mitchell and Robinson, *Guide to Old English*, 18, emphasis added.

and neuter wild animal (“hit” and “wildeor”) to a female lioness (“seo leo”). The deviation in the Old English text poses a pressing question: is the change of gender indicative of a different reception of the legend? How might the change from a neuter lion to a female or feminine lioness alter the meaning of the legend as a whole?

Before addressing these questions let us first consider the context in which the gender alteration is found. The neuter lion (“hit”) suddenly becomes a lioness (“seo”) immediately after Zosimus has botched an attempt to dig Mary’s grave because the desert sand is too dry and hard. The monk miserably fails to penetrate “seo eorðe” (the feminine “mother earth”) with his randomly obtained stick.

þa he þus on his heortan digollice spræc. þa geseah he þær swile
hwugu treow licgende and þæt *lytel*. ongan þa þær mid delfan.
witodlice swiðe georne. and [seo eorðe] wæs swiðe heard and ne
mihte heo adelfan for-þon he wæs swiðe gewæced ægðer ge mid
fæstene ge on þam langan geswince.

[Whilst he thus spake secretly in his heart, he saw there as it were
a *piece of wood* lying, and that but a *little one*. Therewith he began
to dig very diligently; and {the earth} was very hard, and he could
not dig into it, because he was much weakened, both by fasting
and by long toil.]⁴⁹

It is only after he addresses the (neuter) “wildeor” and requests its help that the lion is described as a lioness: “‘But do thou now perform this work, at the divine behest, with thy claws, until that we two enclose this holy body in the earth.’ Immediately after his words, the lioness, by means of her claws, wrought a grave with her arms.”⁵⁰ In repetition of the legend’s recurrent motif in which the emasculated male receives aid from the immasculated or empowered female, Zosimus here finds himself incapable of completing the task which a *female* animal, the lioness, accomplishes. The contrast between the competency of the lioness’s claws and the inefficiency of the monk’s stick clearly delineates itself.

The piece of wood Zosimus has found lying on the ground not only proves useless for grave digging, but it may also signify the monk’s emasculation by echoing Mary’s discarded wooden spindle. That is, in picking up the spindle-like stick, Zosimus seems to switch gender roles by adopting the feminine symbol which Mary had discarded before her departure from Alexandria earlier on in the story. Just as the lion seems to change genders by being transformed into a lioness, Zosimus here seems to have

⁴⁹Skeat, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 765–770, 793–97, emphasis added.

⁵⁰Skeat, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 814–15.

been transformed into a womanly man by grasping the “womanly” tool for weaving, the symbolic spindle suggested by the digging stick.

At the same time, the lioness seems “masculine” due to the superior muscular strength in *her* claws and arms; her power is only underscored by the helpless monk’s “hwugu treow.” His “lytel” piece of wood may signal the masculine phallus; but instead of being a symbol of agency, strength, or fertility, here the phallic stick represents the humiliated Zosimus’s impotency. With his body “much weakened,” the monk has completely failed to begin, let alone complete his task, the digging of the grave. On the one hand, then, Zosimus has become effeminized by adopting a symbolic object recalling the feminine spindle; on the other hand, if the piece of wood is viewed as a fruitless phallic symbol, it produces his emasculation by rendering him a symbolically impotent male. In either case, the rather odd apparition of the stick in the middle of an uninhabited, barren desert demands the reader’s attention by suggesting Zosimus’s, like the lion’s, wavering gender.

While the appearance of the piece of wood near Mary’s body may strike readers as abnormal or strange, this coincidence is less extraordinary than the apparition of the lion itself. The text explicitly states three times that neither Mary nor Zosimus has ever seen human, bird, or other animal life forms in their singular wanderings through the sandy wilderness.⁵¹ Consequently, the remarkable presence of the lion, like Zosimus’s stick, acts as a signal which demands the reader’s scrutiny. Since the beast changes gender from the time Zosimus first sees “hit” to the time “heo” digs Mary’s grave with “hire” claws, the lioness begs readers to focus their attention on changing gender roles in the legend, an aspect of the story which has generally been ignored.

Perhaps because her life offered a novel and controversial gender paradigm, Mary of Egypt did not enjoy any great popularity in medieval Europe before the tenth century, and the Church fathers did not care to deal with this problematic female saint until the end of the twelfth century.⁵² In her 1997 work, Julie W. De Sherbinin suggests that the Egyptian Mary’s relative absence in the pre-tenth-century West—as opposed to her popularity in the Orthodox Church throughout the centuries—may stem from the European medieval and Renaissance male taste for feminine voluptuousness. Focusing on the “two Marys” (the “virginal” Mary, Mother of God, on the one hand, and the “sinful” Mary of Egypt on the other), De Sherbinin shows how these two prototypes helped to define female sexuality from medieval times down to the present day and then points out how Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene have often been “two

⁵¹Skeat, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 190, 612, 803.

⁵²Julie W. De Sherbinin, *Chekhov and Russian Religious Culture: The Poetics of the Marian Paradigm* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 13–14.

harlots fused into a single symbol” in Western art and hagiography.⁵³ Interestingly, the Egyptian’s status as a prostitute seems to have been gradually projected onto the Magdalene who is cured of “seven devils,” but who is never specifically called a prostitute.⁵⁴ In fact, the mention of the seven demons expelled from the Magdalene more readily suggests the correction of a physical, and not a moral or behavioral, disorder. As De Sherbinin shows, the tendency to confuse the two sinful Marys prevails in Western hagiographical art, while in the Orthodox world Mary of Egypt is distinguished from the Magdalene by the former’s androgynized incarnation and the latter’s more feminine and alluring appearance.⁵⁵

If the licentious Egyptian Mary has been collapsed onto the Magdalene by rendering her a whore, the Magdalene’s long hair has conversely been projected onto the unpaid prostitute from Alexandria. Despite unambiguous descriptions of the Egyptian’s short bleached hair, the Magdalene’s long locks suddenly sprouted into late medieval textual and artistic renditions of the legend when hair literally grew not only out of Mary of Egypt’s head, but also onto her entire body. For late medieval versions of the legend describe how Mary actually grows a coat of hair to cover her nakedness, something instead accomplished by Zosimus’s cloak in the earliest versions of the text. While it is not clear exactly when or how the two Marys merged into one symbol, the confusion appears in late medieval Anglo-Norman, French, and Iberian peninsular texts, as we see, for example, in Caxton’s 1483 *Golden Legende*.⁵⁶

As for the Egyptian, the ostensible reason for the scribes’ and artists’ covering her body with a hair shift was to symbolize the saint’s humility and chaste spirit. However, a modern audience can quickly recognize how the long hair as sexual fetish actually eroticizes Mary and lends her a sexual, feminized charge. The robe of hair covering the once licentious saint seems to invite an audience into a kind of peep-show situation in which the mind’s eye imagines the seductive body behind the curtain of hair. In the cases of some artistic depictions of Saint Mary of Egypt, such as that

⁵³Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 234, cited in De Sherbinin, *Chekhov and Russian Religious Culture*, 25.

⁵⁴Luke 8:2.

⁵⁵See, for example, De Sherbinin, *Chekhov and Russian Religious Culture*, chaps. 1–3; De Sherbinin also includes several illustrations of Mary of Egypt in Orthodox iconography at the end of chapter 3.

⁵⁶For a discussion on depictions of Mary of Egypt in Western medieval art, see Ilse E. Friesen, “Saints as Helpers in Dying: The Hairy Holy Women Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt, and Wilgefortis in the Iconography of the Later Middle Ages,” *Death and Dying in the Middle Ages*, ed. Edelgard E. DuBruck (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 239–56; and Lynn Rice Cortina, “The Aesthetics of Morality: Two Portraits of Mary of Egypt in the *Vida de Santa Maria Egipcíaca*,” *Hispanic Journal* 2 (1980): 41–45. For a compilation of Western sculptures and paintings from the middle ages and the early modern period, see Manuel Alvar, ed., *Vida de Santa Maria Egipcíaca*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Clasicos Hispanicos, 1970).

seen in the “Encounter with Zosimus” woodcut by Jean Du Pré for the 1489 edition of Jacques de Voragine’s *Legende Dorée* (see figure 1), very



Figure 1

little imagination need be used to view Mary’s sexualized and sensuous body. Such illustrations—ones which greatly deviate from the seminal texts of the legend—suggest a strictly Western resistance to Mary’s status as an empowered, immasculated, and virile female saint. Unlike the image suggested in the woodcut, the earliest texts nowhere describe Mary as beautiful, and nowhere are we told that she has long hair. When Zosimus meets the Egyptian she is an old, black, hardened woman with unattractive, short white hair. While Orthodox iconography more faithfully portrays Mary in her hoary, elderly, and androgynous state, these aspects of the woman’s appearance are virtually erased in Western art of the Middle Ages.

Returning to the Old English text, readers might not only challenge simplified or biased interpretations which focus mainly on what Zosimus gains from Mary as he “learns humility and gains a clearer sense of self,”⁵⁷ but they should also be wary of critical misinterpretations and artistic mis-

⁵⁷Simon Lavery, “The Story of Mary the Egyptian in Medieval England,” in *The Legend of Mary of Egypt in Medieval Insular Hagiography*, ed. Erich Poppe and Bianca Ross (Portland: Four Courts Press, 1996), 129.

representations of Saint Mary and of her legend. For instance, commentaries which cite Zosimus's active role in Mary's burial are not only misleading, but they are also inaccurate.⁵⁸ In point of fact, Zosimus does nothing to produce the grave which the lion—or rather the *lioness*—completes with ease. Moreover, the monk has been in many ways secondary and subservient to Mary throughout the myth; her repentance and spiritual vision, I argue, is much more significant than his religious blindness and eventual enlightenment. For critical studies which focus on Zosimus's education diminish Mary's spiritual superiority and fail to do justice to her as well as to the rich levels of meaning in the text itself. Mary's life constitutes more than a list of "actions which of themselves merely create an emptiness in her";⁵⁹ the saint remains connected to the Christian community through her prayers for others, including Zosimus. Clearly, the message of the legend of Saint Mary of Egypt does not center solely around the enlightenment experienced by the monk Zosimus. As we have seen, an argument may also be made for the legend as an exemplum of feminine empowerment. Especially in the Old English translation, the lioness in the text demands that readers reconsider Mary's status as former sinner turned immasculated female saint to be just as important as, if not more important than, the lesson learned by the once spiritually blinded Zosimus.

⁵⁸For example Rosenthal's claim, "with the aid of a lioness, he dug her grave," *The "Vitae Patrum" in Old and Middle English Literature* (Folcroft: Folcroft Library Editions, 1974), 24.

⁵⁹Colin Chase, "Source Study as a Trick with Mirrors: Annihilation of Meaning in the Old English 'Mary of Egypt,'" *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1986), 31.

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Dreams at Conception in the French Lancelot-Grail Romances (Thirteenth Century)

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The Lancelot-Grail romances offer problematic instances of rewriting in their treatment of dreams: a *songe* or a vision recounted to an adult character about himself in the Vulgate *Lancelot* proper (ca. 1215–20) appears “prewritten” in a later composed romance as his mother’s or father’s dream in an enactment of the scene at or near his conception. In the cases under study, Queen Elaine’s dream the night Lancelot was conceived in the Vulgate *Story of Merlin* (*L’istoire de Merlin*, after 1230) and Arthur’s dream soon after Mordret’s conception in the post-Vulgate *Merlin Continuation* (*La suite du roman de Merlin*, ca. 1235–40) resituate, or “presituate,” from the *Lancelot* an oneiric reference in a narrative present preceding that of the *Lancelot*. Thus, the first occurrence of a father’s or mother’s dream in the chronological unfolding of the cycles, in a Merlin romance, passes itself off as the originating fiction, while it is actually the offspring, so to speak, of a text composed earlier. The rewritings examined here, which we will call retrowritings, are predictive narratives that use animal symbolism to elaborate on the *Lancelot*’s enigmatic dreams or visions also cast in beast symbols. One of the objectives of this essay is to address the question why the authors of the *Merlin* and *Merlin Continuation* produced very different versions of significant oneiric passages from the *Lancelot*. Each of the retrowritings attempts to cover up its imposture of textual paternity through the strategy of relocating, in the narrative present, its variation on the *Lancelot* in a specific context that promises authenticity and certainty of a pseudoscientific sort for a medieval readership: the moment of origin, conception, of the character to whom the dream refers. Another objective is to identify several strategic moves whereby the retrowritings try to establish their own authority at least on a par with the *Lancelot*’s narration. These include the move towards voices of superior credibility in the retrowritings, transparency of meaning in their treatment of enigmatic *songes*, and notable adjustments in conformity with literary conventions.

The record of a parent’s dream or other signs near the conception or birth of a great man is an ancient literary convention. For example, in his

biography of Augustus, Suetonius reports a portent in the case of Augustus's mother near the time of his conception; he also records enigmatic dreams that both parents had before the birth.¹ In Western Europe before the mid-thirteenth century, numerous writings, particularly Latin translations of Arabic, Persian, and Greek works on optics, medicine, and astrology-astronomy, provided pseudoscientific bases for attributing far-reaching significance to the formative moment of conception, which could be determined, it was thought, from the time of birth. In their broadest lines, astrological and related pseudosciences propound that at conception, celestial influences impress an image, or character, upon the person being formed. Steven Kruger notes that some medieval authorities considered celestial movements to be a cause of dreams.² Thus, the Vulgate and post-Vulgate romances' *songes* of the parents at the conception of their child are especially important, for they coincide with the making of the impression or character that marks and will guide the yet unborn throughout life, or the romance cycles. It is easy to imagine, then, why later writers appropriated specific dreams or visions from the *Lancelot*, where they had been situated long after or even outside the conceptional event, and repositioned them to appear as the originating fiction at the scene of conception. The retrowritings not only illustrate recycling of story material but also attempt to memorialize—e.g., through immediately recognizable beast symbols as a memory aid—the destinies of two characters, Lancelot and Mordret, who rank among those closest to Arthur and, at the same time, covet his queen and contribute the most to his ruin.

In his *Commentary on the "Dream of Scipio,"* Macrobius (fl. ca. A.D. 400) cites among meaningful dreams—that is, not false or useless for prediction—oracular ones in which a relative reveals the future.³ In the Lancelot-Grail romances, instances of the appearance of a relative in a dream abound. A major problem with dream narratives, one especially delicate in romance fiction, is their credibility. Eileen Gardiner has drawn attention in pious medieval accounts of otherworldly visions to conventions used to persuade readers that a narrated vision, often a dream, reports truth, not fancy; such conventions "establish a connection between what was seen in the otherworld and something concrete in this world."⁴ Similar concerns and conventions of verification regarding dreams or visions are evident in

¹Suetonius, *with an English Translation*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (1951), 2.94.4

²Steven Kruger, "Medical and Moral Authority in the Late Medieval Dream," in *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Brown and intro. A. C. Spearing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 60–61.

³Macrobius, *Commentary on the "Dream of Scipio,"* trans. William Harris Stahl, *Records of Western Civilization* (1952; repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 1.3.8.

⁴Eileen Gardiner, ed., *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante* (New York: Italica Press, 1989), xxiv.

the Vulgate and post-Vulgate romances.⁵ We might note in the *Lancelot* a readable, authenticating impression that accompanies a parent's dreamlike vision about relatives and offspring. Soon before her death, Queen Evaine, the mother of Bors and Lionel, has an ecstatic vision ("li avint une avision; et ele fu ausi com endormie, et lors fu ravis ses esperis," 19a.5) in which an unknown youth appears with two boys who, she guesses, are her sons. When she awakens, she sees written on her right hand her sons' names and that of her nephew Lancelot. In the conception dreams under study, it is as if one or both parents see and read, though less clearly than in Evaine's case, the impression formed at that moment.

An external image formed after a dream or vision might also serve a memorializing function. The transformation of a dream as a mental image to an external visual one is effected in the reference to Arthur's *songe* at Mordret's conception in the *Lancelot*. The king subsequently has painted on a church wall the dream's main symbolic figure so that he will remember it (96.25). In the retrowritings at Lancelot's and Mordret's conception scenes in the *Merlin* and *Merlin Continuation*, the symbolic dream becomes more detailed, and the interpretation of its symbols is much clearer, less veiled in mystery than in the *Lancelot*'s representations.

The dream of Queen Elaine, wife of Ban of Benoïc, the night she conceived in *The Story of Merlin* rewrites and recontextualizes an enigmatic vision from the *Lancelot* that is not her own. Moreover, the *Lancelot*'s vision is not related to the hero's conception. Thus, long after *The Story of Merlin*'s conception dream, readers discover in the next Vulgate romance, *Lancelot*, which begins with the title character's childhood, a vision that resembles Elaine's *songe*; they must wonder at this point which of the two versions is the original. At *Lancelot* 4.21–22, the diviner Bonifaces li Romain attempts to interpret two dreams of Prince Galehout by reporting to him and his companion Lancelot an *avision* that he saw during his divination. He introduces his relation with the formulaic "il me fu avis que," a stylistic constant of oneiric narration in the Vulgate romances.⁶ He proceeds to tell how a company of beasts led by an uncrowned lion fights a smaller company headed by a crowned lion. The latter has the worse of it until a leopard joins its forces and drives back its opponents. The uncrowned lion then receives the leopard joyfully and submits to the crowned one. Readers know whom and what this initial part of the diviner's *avision* represents, as the animal figures simply reenact a key epi-

⁵For example, at *Lancelot. Roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha, 9 vols., Textes Littéraires Français (Paris and Geneva: Droz, 1978–83), 89.4–5. All subsequent references are to this edition. Christ makes several revelations to the sleeping Elyezer, and to prove that the vision is true, he transports Elyezer's son in body from a great distance so that the father sees him when he awakens.

⁶Gérard Moignet, "La grammaire des songes dans *La quête del Saint Graal*," *Langue française* 40 (1978): 114, 118.

sode recounted at length earlier in the romance. It is a retelling of the war between Arthur and Galehout, in which Lancelot first turned the tide of battle in Arthur's favor and then won the prince's friendship and his submission to the king. However, neither Bonifaces nor seven other diviners who report having seen the same *avision* know what it means. After summarizing past *aventures*, the eight diviners' common vision continues the somewhat carnivalesque masquerade of noble animals in the narrative present and future. The *Lancelot* plays out a scene here in which the eight attempt, without complete success, to decrypt animal symbols that are obvious to the reader. The diviners' inability to pierce the very thin veil of mystification does not speak well for their authority as readers. The authoritative reading comes, finally, in the voice of the tenth diviner, Helie de Toulouse, a supermagus who bases his identification—the leopard is Lancelot etc.—on some obscure prophecies in symbolic form, presumably written, of the long-gone Merlin (4.34–44).⁷

The eight diviners' *avision* reappears in *The Story of Merlin* as Elaine's dream with several major changes tending towards "improved" authority, authenticity, and transparent meaning.⁸ First, their vision, which has nothing of a conception dream, is wholly recontextualized as such. According to astrological science, the timing of Elaine's dream, paired with a different *songe* of her husband, on the night she conceived places it at the defining moment of Lancelot's origin that marks his fate. It is also the moment that corresponds, in conformity with literary convention, to the proper place and setting of such a dream in a biographical narrative. In the *Lancelot*, the first part of the diviners' vision is somewhat unusual in that it summarizes the title character's past *aventures*. It is most often the case in Old French epic and adventure romance that oneiric visions serve a predictive, if enigmatic, function. The *Merlin* recasts the complete *avision* as a predictive dream with respect to Lancelot and, so, brings it in line with what one might consider conventional expectations of romance readers. Further, the shift from the voice of the first eight diviners to that of Elaine in the *Merlin* is, in effect, a transfer of the message—the vision itself—

⁷According to the *Lancelot* 4.24, Petrones, the eighth diviner in this scene, put Merlin's prophecies in writing. Elspeth Kennedy compares different versions of Galehout's dreams and their interpretation in the cyclic and so-called noncyclic, or precyclic, *Lancelot* romances: Elspeth Kennedy, "Who Is to Be Believed? Conflicting Presentations of Events in the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle," in *The Medieval "Opus": Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition, Proceedings of the Symposium Held at the Institute for Research in the Humanities, October 5–7, 1995, The University of Wisconsin–Madison*, ed. Douglas Kelly, Faux Titre (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), 174–76.

⁸*The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances Edited from Manuscripts in the British Museum*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1908–16), 2:277–80; *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, trans. Carol J. Chase, Rupert T. Pickens, et al., Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (New York and London: Garland, 1993–96), 1:320–22.

from the diviners' uncertain authority to the sure testimony of a queen and mother. Indeed, ancient and medieval dream theory generally accords truth-status to relatives' and rulers' visions (e.g., in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* and Macrobius).⁹

There is likewise an important shift from a drawn-out scene of mystification and puzzlement on the characters' part in the *Lancelot* to immediately transparent meaning in the *Merlin*. While she is dreaming, the queen recognizes that the valiant leopard is the future issue of her loins, but the first eight diviners, despite their knowledge of magical arts and, presumably, of Lancelot's past role in the Arthur-Galahout conflict, could not identify the beast. Another move from obscurity to clarity takes place in the characterization of Merlin. He passes from an enigmatic, physically absent sayer/seer in the *Lancelot*, where the interpreter Helie gives a second- or thirdhand report of his cryptic prophecies, to the *Merlin*'s "straight-talking" character, who explains in person to Elaine and Ban the meaning of their dreams in brief, unequivocal terms.¹⁰ Finally, the narration of Elaine's dream is considerably longer and more detailed than the diviners' *avision*. Among new elements that her *songe* introduces are several hundred bulls bound together about the neck which eat hay from a rack and, because of pride and envy, fight some of the uncrowned lion's beasts for their feeding ground. This prophetic encryption refers to the *Lancelot*'s war between Arthur and Galahout, but it is lifted from Gauvain's dream of the bulls, the rack, and their fighting in the Vulgate *Quest of the Holy Grail* (ca. 1220–25).¹¹ Gauvain's dream signifies the Round Table knights' internecine combats long after Galahout's death. For readers who do not know the dates of composition of the different romances, the *Merlin*'s recycling of *The Quest of the Holy Grail*'s oneiric bovine signs with a complete change of referents and the wholesale borrowing from the diviners' *avision* in the *Lancelot* are far from self-evident. Further, the *Merlin*'s precedence in a chronological reading of the Vulgate cycle makes its version appear to be the "mother" narrative from which the others descend.

Since the animals are usually mute in the cycles' symbolic dreams and visions, the beast constructions most often require the voice of a human character who relates the animals and their actions to other characters and the story line. With the two dreams common to the *Merlin* and *The Quest of the Holy Grail* just discussed, an explicator's follow-up is absolutely essential, given the arbitrary meaning of signs within the cycle: the self-

⁹See also Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 57.

¹⁰*Vulgate Version*, 2:279–80; *Lancelot-Grail*, 1:322.

¹¹*La quête del Saint Graal. Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Albert Pauphilet, Les Classiques Français du Moyen Âge (Paris: Champion, 1923), 149.

same animals and acts in both versions point to different referents and periods!

In the post-Vulgate *Merlin Continuation*, the revision of a short secondhand report from the *Lancelot* attempts, in much the same manner as the *Merlin*, to produce what would seem to be the original account of a parent's conception dream. The *Merlin Continuation's* retrowriting involves strategic moves to voices of greater authority than those in the *Lancelot*, the enactment of the dream near the time of origination, and repeated readings. At *Lancelot* 96.23–25, an unnamed religious hermit tells the adult Mordret that he will cause the Round Table's destruction and that he and his true father, whom the recluse does not name, will slay each other. He recounts briefly Mordret's father's dream on the night he impregnated King Loth of Orkanie's wife: the father bears a serpent which destroys all his domain and knights; he slays it but dies from its venom. The hermit identifies the serpent as Mordret and adds that his true father had its image painted in a church in Camelot so that he would remember the dream forever. As Beryl Rowland notes, beast symbols serve a memorializing function especially with respect to a medieval audience, for they provide moral instruction in a way likely to be remembered.¹² In the *Lancelot*, however, Mordret does not find out that his uncle Arthur is also his father, nor does Arthur seem to know at this time that the serpent he had painted represents Mordret.¹³ In the Vulgate *Death of King Arthur* (ca. 1225–30), when the king learns that in his absence Mordret had himself crowned and is attempting to seize and marry Guinevere, he recalls the serpent and only then realizes that it signifies Mordret, his son.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is not the church painting that jogs his memory, since he is in Gaul at the time.

The dream message that Arthur receives is, at first, meaningless, but it acquires meanings through successive stages of transmission. Arthur first

¹²Beryl Rowland, "The Art of Memory and the Bestiary," in *Beasts and Birds in the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy*, ed. Willene B. Clark and Meradith T. McMin, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 12.

¹³M. Victoria Guerin, *The Fall of Kings and Princes: Structure and Destruction in Arthurian Tragedy*, *Figuræ* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), presumes that in the *Lancelot*, Arthur knows that Mordret is his son "but gives no sign of his knowledge" (33). I do not believe that the *Lancelot* allows one to assume as much, and surely Mordret does not know the truth. In the *Merlin Continuation's* version of Arthur's dream, the king does not seem to know, even though Merlin gives him all the information needed for inferring the relationship and the reptile's identity: *La suite du roman de Merlin*, ed. Gilles Roussineau, 2 vols., Textes Littéraires Français (Geneva: Droz, 1996).

¹⁴*La mort le roi Artu. Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Jean Frappier, 3d ed., Textes Littéraires Français (Geneva and Paris: Droz and M. J. Minard, 1964), § 164. But earlier, at § 135, a false letter composed by Mordret under Arthur's name proclaims, without further clarification, that Mordret is not his nephew. Also, at § 141 Guinevere tells her cousin, the knight Labor, in confidence that Mordret is Arthur's son. Did she learn this from her lover, who learned it from the dead hermit's letter in the *Lancelot* 96.28?

comprehends and retains only its specific forms. The hermit, in transmitting these forms to Mordret, adds the identification of the serpent. Mordret then slays the hermit, but the latter transmits more information posthumously, in a letter that Lancelot finds in the dead man's hand: Arthur is Mordret's father. This brief passage illustrates, in concentrated form, a sort of oneiric narration, sometimes developed at length in the *Lancelot*, wherein an initial dream passes through successive retransmissions and reformulations that offer only partial meanings and postpone, till the final moment, complete understanding. Thus, meaning is not *in* the dream itself, but meanings emerge through retellings. The development of Galehout's two dreams and their interpretation beginning at *Lancelot* 2.10 is an extreme case: his troubling *songes* are retold and reformulated in other visions nearly a dozen times before they become wholly meaningful.¹⁵ In this, the *Lancelot's* dreams as sequences of retransmissions reveal fuller meaning the farther the narration moves beyond the original dreamer's account. The retrowritings under study form a second sequence of retransmissions of the *Lancelot's* dreams and add to their significance, for example, by articulating them through voices of superior authority.

The Story of Merlin dramatizes the mating first mentioned in the *Lancelot* of Arthur, now a young squire, and Loth's wife, Arthur's half sister ("une des serors le roy Artu de par sa mere"); but it does not tell of a conception dream.¹⁶ The *Merlin Continuation*, however, opens with the newly crowned Arthur's dream shortly after he impregnates his sister ("serour germainne," § 11). As in Elaine's case, his dream is reported several times. First the narrator recounts it as if reading the sleeping king's mind, then Merlin and Arthur repeat it, and, finally, Merlin deciphers it. The repetitions underline the dream for the reader, or rereader, and provide a "memory" of the future event, the Arthurian *eschaton* or end of time, in symbolic and decoded messages. Arthur's *songe* in the *Merlin Continuation* is different from the hermit's relation. The king on his throne sees a great number of what he thinks at first to be birds flying overhead. Then, a flying dragon or serpent and a large company of griffins burn Logres's castles and kill his men. He slays the dragon-serpent but receives a mortal wound (§ 3). In this version, the parts of the *Lancelot's* report where Arthur saw the serpent issue from himself and had its image painted are absent. Although Merlin, formerly responsible for Arthur's own conception, tells him that the being just conceived incestuously will be the cause of great evil (§ 11), the king seems not to realize that the dragon-serpent represents his yet unborn son. At any rate, the *Merlin*

¹⁵See Reginald Hyatte, "Dream-Engendering Dreams in the Old French *Lancelot*," *Medievalia* 22 (1999): 343–58.

¹⁶*Vulgate Version*, 2:128–29; *Lancelot-Grail*, 1:237.

Continuation aims at authenticity and originality in enacting the father's dream very near the time of conception. Moreover, the dream's recitation by Arthur, father and king, confirms its authority, and the interpretation by the prophetic authority Merlin in person, rather than the nameless hermit, tends towards that same end. Here one might compare the execution of another strategy of confirmation on a much larger scale in the Vulgate *Story of the Holy Grail* (*L'estoire del Saint Graal*, after 1230), a fiction presented as Christ's word.

It cannot be said, however, that the *Merlin Continuation's* version of Arthur's *songe* and its decryption presents meaning transparently to the king who seeks to understand. Even though Merlin refuses to name Arthur's future mortal enemy, the full significance of the dream through Merlin's interpretation, which supplies abundant revelations about the king's past and future, is transparent to readers. Yet Arthur, like Mordret upon hearing the hermit's revelations in the *Lancelot*, does not grasp it all; and later, in order to avert the predicted misfortunes, he does not concentrate on eliminating Loth's wife's newborn son but has all the other boys recently born in Logres set adrift in a boat. The narrative situation in which readers understand an enigmatic dream much more clearly and fully than characters who seek to understand it resembles the eight diviners' imperfect comprehension of the visions they attempted to interpret.

Let us return to the original form of Arthur's dream in the *Lancelot*—the father gives birth to a serpent, and they slay each other—and examine its problematic variation on “moralized” bestiary figures. For a medieval readership, the king's dream might call to mind the well-known figure of the newborn serpent brood killing its parent that is found, for example, in the Latin *Physiologus* and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*.¹⁷ The *Lancelot's* dream probably derives from these “father” texts of types, the former of which interprets the different serpents allegorically as the Pharisees, Christ, and the Mother Church. Nevertheless, the *Lancelot's* beast allegory in this instance points away from the sacred typological exegesis illustrated in the *Physiologus* and the romance's own reading of a lion-as-Christ symbol (49a.32–34) to distinctly secular interpretation: the fall of Arthur and the kingdom's ruin. It must be noted, too, that the bestiary-style formulation of Arthur's dream is, in itself, apparently defective, for its serpent is born not of a serpent, as in the bestiaries, but of a man. Still, the *Lancelot* supplies a missing beast parent—a snake-Arthur—in an earlier episode. In a nocturnal vision or illusion at Corbenic, Gauvain sees a giant serpent give birth to a hundred or so serpents; they slay their parent which slays them

¹⁷*Physiologus*, trans. Michael J. Curley (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1979), 15–16. Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis (1911; repr., Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 12.4.10–11.

(66.19–21).¹⁸ A hermit explains to Gauvain that the great serpent represents Arthur, and the brood, his knights and relatives (66.36–37). So, when Arthur is said later to have dreamt that he gave birth to a serpent (96.23–25), readers might possibly understand that the king has taken the place in person here of the snake which stood for him previously! And a comparison of the differing explications of the offspring as Mordret in one case and the Round Table knights and Arthur's relatives in another shows the *Lancelot's* symbolic system to be somewhat arbitrary with respect to referents.

Then there is, clearly, a gender problem in the *Lancelot's* representations of snake-bearing: the maternal part in birth is supplanted by that of a father. One might ask where the bestiaries' female serpent figure is.¹⁹ The *Physiologus* and Isidore of Seville note that while mating, the female serpent castrates the male or bites off his head. A castrating or male-slaying female figure is lacking in Arthur's dream and the visions at Corbenic. But the *Lancelot* supplies this gendered bestiary type in the earlier, seemingly unrelated sequence of Galehout's terrifying dreams and their interpretation by Arthur's ten diviners. Galehout, Lancelot's loving mate, dreams that the fire-breathing serpent Guinevere burns off half his limbs (2.10), and in a prophecy of Merlin reported at the end of the sequence, the serpent queen's actions are in part responsible for the death of the prince, who is figured as a dragon (4.43–44). It would appear that the *Lancelot's* narrator (or narrators) took the father/mother/offspring triad, the complete "naturalist" description of serpents according to the *Physiologus* and Isidore, and fragmented its elements in several different dreams, visions, and a prophecy. One serpent represents Arthur, another Mordret, others the king's knights and relatives, and another Guinevere, a party with the dragon-prince to an odd love triangle. These figures do not in themselves form or point to a coherent, single Arthurian story line but branch off in various parts of the Vulgate: Arthur and Mordret's slaying each other at the conclusion to *The Death of King Arthur*, the Round Table's interne-cine fighting throughout *The Quest of the Holy Grail* and *The Death of King Arthur*, and Galehout's death for which Guinevere is partly responsible in the *Lancelot*. Yet in spite of the rather arbitrary system of signs and radical displacement in gender, the *Lancelot's* many scattered snake-type fragments can be abstracted and reformed along the lines of the bestiary model, wherein the female snake kills the male, and the offspring mortally assail the parent. The perverse serpent triad, contextualized imperfectly in

¹⁸Cf. a similar vision in the same place at 98.35–38.

¹⁹Mireille Demaules, "Écriture et imaginaire du rêve dans le *Lancelot en prose*," *Médiévales* 3 (1983), supposes the serpent figure to be androgynous, and she concludes with respect to Arthur's dream in the *Lancelot*: "Ainsi le caractère traditionnellement androgyne du serpent permet au texte d'*absenter* la mère" (24).

the *Lancelot*'s conception dream, epitomizes, as a moral metaphor, the self-destructive nature of the Arthurian world.

The development of these bestiary-style figures in the *Lancelot* is as complex and, perhaps, puzzling as that in many of the cryptic and sometimes oddly interpreted dreams and visions in *The Quest of the Holy Grail*. The version of Arthur's dream in the *Merlin Continuation* avoids, however, the complexity and problems associated with moralized bestiaries' serpent-bearing. It does not tell of the birth of the reptilian Mordret or his monstrous companions which appear out of the blue. This instance seems, therefore, to favor a representational mode, largely independent of the didactic bestiaries, that is found commonly in epic and romance dream narration. Namely, animals representing human characters act out not a bestiary script—e.g., serpent-like mating or parturition—but only those characters' particular roles in the fiction, as with the two lions at war discussed earlier.

In the *Merlin Continuation*, Arthur's dream begins with what he perceives to be birds flying above his head. A fire-spitting bird appears in a similar context near the close of the long version of the prose *Tristan*, which according to G. Roussineau probably antedates the *Merlin Continuation*.²⁰ Tristan dreams that a marvelous bird slays him after invading Logres, destroying all with fire, and almost defeating Arthur (vol. 7, § 132). He interprets this dream and another himself: the incendiary bird is King Marc (§ 175). Tristan's dream conforms to the conventional mode of the premonitory *songe* near the dreamer's demise, as with Galehout at *Lancelot* 30.3 and Arthur in *The Death of King Arthur* (§ 176). Possibly the prose *Tristan* fathered the *Merlin Continuation*'s flying dream figure. In spite of the fact that it has nothing to do with conception, Tristan's premonition is marked morphologically as a common lineal descendant with the *Merlin Continuation*'s conception dream from Arthur's in the *Lancelot*.

Elaine's and Arthur's dreams and their interpretations in the *Merlin* and *Merlin Continuation* make clear for readers paternal relationships that characters will question later. They draw attention to the crucial problem addressed time and again in the Lancelot-Grail romances of the identity of a male character's parent(s). In the *Lancelot*, Mordret is so enraged when the hermit denies his descent from Loth that he slays him on the spot. Lancelot, during his upbringing under the Lady of the Lake's direction, is unable to name his father, and the lady does not hesitate to humble the overproud youth by denying his royal birth (*Lancelot* 9a.13–21). And the

²⁰Gilles Roussineau, "Remarques sur les relations entre *La suite du roman de Merlin* et sa continuation et le *Tristan en prose*," in *Miscellanea Mediævalia: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard*, ed. Jean-Claude Faucon, Alain Labbé, and Danielle Quérueu, Nouvelle Bibliothèque du Moyen Âge (Paris: Champion, 1998), 2:1149–62.

young Arthur is mistaken about his parents' identity before he becomes king—e.g., in the early prose version (beginning of the thirteenth century) of Robert de Boron's *Merlin*.²¹ As for Merlin and Galahad, whose conceptions, like Arthur's, involve magic or supernatural influence, other characters wonder who their fathers are. The *Merlin's* and *Merlin Continuation's* conception dreams placed near the beginning of Arthur's reign suggest, further, a major theme of the romances about the twilight of his rule: a reciprocal father-son quest. Lancelot and Galahad's reunion and reconciliation near the end of the Vulgate and post-Vulgate *Quest of the Holy Grail* and Mordret and Arthur's mortal combat in *The Death of King Arthur* offer radically contrasting conclusions to the thematic quest.

In closing, we might consider an idea about subversive rewriting suggested by P. V. Rockwell's *Rewriting Resemblance in Medieval French Romance*.²² Readers of the Lancelot-Grail romances cannot help noting resemblances between variant versions of dreams, despite the great distances of time and text that separate them. Nevertheless, they will also recognize considerable differences between them. For instance, the mother's dream at Lancelot's conception in the *Merlin* looks ahead to the hero's feats of arms, but the corresponding visions in the *Lancelot* look back on them. Given the obvious differences between two versions that resemble each other, readers might ask which is authentic and which dissembles, that is, rewrites so as to resemble. It would seem that the authors of Elaine's dream in the *Merlin* and Arthur's in the *Merlin Continuation* were aware of this critical problem, the relative value that readers might attribute to competing fictions. Indeed, the differences that the "resembling" remakes introduce tend towards furnishing proof of their own authenticity, authority, and witness to the moment of origin. Do the retro-writings aim simply to adapt and, perhaps, improve on the *Lancelot* through supplementary information, anterior positioning, at-the-scene enactment, voices of superior authority, and conventionalization? Or do they attempt to supplant the "father" narratives which they resemble by persuading the reader that they themselves provide the true, original version? Following Rockwell's suggestion, one could say that the retro-writings in question put the authenticity of the *Lancelot's* accounts in doubt. Or if one takes the idea further, they tend to reduce the status of these two oneiric narratives in the *Lancelot* to that of imperfectly conceived imitations of themselves.

²¹Robert de Boron, *Merlin. Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha, Textes Littéraires Français (Geneva: Droz, 1979), §§ 86–87.

²²Paul Vincent Rockwell, *Rewriting Resemblance in Medieval French Romance: Ceci n'est pas un graal*, Garland Studies in Medieval Literature (New York and London: Garland, 1995).

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The Repudiation of the Marvelous: Jonson's *The Alchemist* and the Limits of Satire

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Our present conception of alchemy is, at best, shadowy and confused. As Charles Nicholl states in *The Chemical Theatre*, "The modern image...tends in two directions: one scientific, the other magical. The first defines alchemy simply and chronologically as early chemistry...out of which modern chemistry began to emerge during the seventeenth century."¹ On the other hand, "alchemy is popularly defined as one of the 'occult arts'.... To us, the alchemist's avowed quest for miraculous substances—the Philosopher's Stone which converts all to gold, the Elixir Vitae which confers immortality—belongs to the realm of magic rather than science."² Nevertheless, to consider Renaissance attitudes towards alchemy, we have to recognize that in certain circles the magical viewpoint, the one we are now so quick to dismiss, was held in veneration, there being yet no clear distinction between magic and science. Frances Yates, reminding us of this more reputable tradition, asserts that

Alchemy as the Hermetic art par excellence belongs to the Hermetic tradition.... With the advent of Paracelsus, a reformed, renaissance type of alchemy came into being, and to this tradition John Dee made his contribution. The triple strand of "Magia, Cabala, and Alchymia" runs through the Rosicrucian manifestos, typifying their inclusion of alchemy with Hermetic-Cabalist tradition.³

However, if we ask ourselves the question, what specifically is Ben Jonson's attitude toward alchemy, most readers and commentators would agree with Anne Barton's assessment, that "Jonson was unequivocal in his contempt for the real-life promises and activities of the alchemists. He addressed them scornfully in his epigram 'To Alchymists': 'If all you boast

¹Charles Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 1.

²Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre*, 2.

³Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 194.

of your great art be true; / Sure, willing povertie lives most in you” (*Epig.* vi); in his masque *Mercury Vindicated From the Alchemists at Court* alchemy “is used to express that deplorable flight from Nature which Jonson thought he saw in the literature and society of his time.”⁴ While such an attitude seems clearly upheld in the raucous satire of *The Alchemist*, Elizabeth Cook has more recently countered that, while Jonson’s great comedy has often been described as a satire which exposes the fraudulence of alchemy, the play “is neither exposure nor celebration of alchemy per se: Subtle and Face, the two central characters, though sufficiently learned in alchemical lore to awe their clients, are not alchemists but con men.”⁵ To this it might be replied that Jonson likely envisaged all alchemists as belonging to the Subtle and Face variety; in fact Stanton J. Linden, probably more familiar with the alchemical tradition than any other literary critic, states categorically, “There is every reason to believe that [Jonson’s] view of the art coincided with that of the satirical writers and that in his mind it was equivalent to the confidence games practiced by Face, Subtle and Dol.”⁶ The historical allusions to contemporary practitioners would seem to support this supposition, since both John Dee and Edward Kelley fall within the orbit of the play’s satirical condemnations: Dee is implicitly ridiculed in the specious rebus that Subtle concocts for Druggier, and Mammon ludicrously describes Subtle as more courted by kings than Kelley. Yet, consistent with Cook’s suggestions, Robert M. Schuler considers a series of critical readings which assume, rightly in his opinion, that “Jonson, like Shakespeare and Donne, saw alchemy as both a legitimate pursuit (and therefore as a source of ‘positive’ metaphor) and as a vehicle for charlatans (and therefore as a source of ‘negative’ metaphor and as an object of ridicule).”⁷ Whatever Jonson’s attitudes towards the protoscientific endeavors of his day, he clearly deploys alchemy metaphorically in *The Alchemist*, so that the main theme of the play emerges as one of failed transformations, not of base metals into gold, but of (base) people into their wildest imaginings. As Barton crucially asserts, “gradually alchemy is redefined, liberated from stills and ferments, until it comes to seem like an essential way of talking about the self in relation to society, still somewhat suspect, but answering a human need, and possessed of its own covert value.”⁸

⁴Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 136.

⁵Elizabeth Cook, “Introduction,” *The Alchemist*, 2d ed., New Mermaids (London: A & C Black, 1991), xiii. All quotations of the play are from this edition.

⁶Stanton J. Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 119.

⁷Robert M. Schuler, “Jonson’s Alchemists, Epicures, and Puritans,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 2 (1985): 203 n. 2.

⁸Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, 137.

I consider Barton's reading crucial because it makes a claim that, while extremely attractive, requires careful reconsideration: *is* metaphorical alchemy in the play possessed of its own covert value? Such a claim is understandable coming from a well-known Shakespearean, but it is perhaps doubtful since, as Barton herself admits, "at the end of the day, no Shakespearean miracle has occurred";⁹ all the transformations in the play fail. Certainly alchemy has in the play come to seem like an essential way of talking about the self in relation to society, but Jonson's social vision is perhaps less sanguine, and more conservative, than Barton suggests. We might consider instead John S. Mebane's general assertion that in Ben Jonson's major plays "the radical individualism, utopian dreams, and anti-authoritarian forces of the Renaissance are the objects of skillful and concentrated satiric attack."¹⁰ Mebane singles out *The Alchemist*, which sets out to deflate "the illusion that the individual can realize godlike potential through a series of self-transformations and that this perfection of the soul can lead directly to the radical reformation of nature and society." Mebane's argument is largely convincing, since the deflation he identifies is accomplished in part by exposing the revolutionary social changes sought by the Anabaptists Tribulation and Ananias, and even more importantly by Sir Epicure Mammon, as narcissistic dreams of unlimited self-indulgence and personal control. Thus the spiritual dream of a return to a "golden age" entertained both by Puritan "enthusiasts" and believers of alchemy and magic descends bathetically to a very materialist, mundane, and selfish desire for the possession of gold and worldly power. The parallel that Mebane draws between the more strictly medical or (al)chemical ambitions of Mammon, and the politico-religious ambitions of the Anabaptists, receives support from other critics. Schuler's essay focuses on the "historical links between alchemy, Puritanism, and millenarianism,"¹¹ while Lyndy Abraham has recently argued that "alchemy and chemical medicine were particularly espoused by radical Protestants"; she concludes that the traditions of Protestantism, Hermeticism, and alchemy were "largely in alliance" in early-seventeenth-century England.¹²

I suggest, however, that while Jonson's satire is in many ways brilliantly developed, its edge is dulled somewhat by the fact that the conservative social vision Jonson offers as a necessary corrective to the delusions and excesses of his dupes is itself narcissistically grounded in questionable ambition, exploitation, exclusion, and indulgence. There is, for example, the notorious crux concerning the moral or ethical status of Lovewit, who

⁹Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, 138.

¹⁰John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 137.

¹¹Schuler, "Jonson's Alchemists, Epicures, and Puritans," 172.

¹²Lyndy Abraham, *Marvell and Alchemy* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 18, 20.

appropriates the wealth amassed by the “venture tripartite” of the three tricksters and wins the rich widow Dame Pliant for himself—and to this crux I will return at the end of my argument. I begin with the character whom I cannot help imaginatively embracing (indulging for a moment a purely personal response) each time I deal with the text, in spite of his ludicrous self-delusions. While the play’s satirical program reduces the spiritual dream of a return to a “golden age” to a materialist and mundane desire for gold and worldly power, Sir Epicure Mammon’s desires, at least at first, seem anything but mundane, and his discourse turns “worldly” desire into the stuff of fantasy. While the observation has been made by earlier critics, it deserves further emphasis here: in a play where ruthless competition and aggressive self-interest seem the general rule, Mammon is the only character to entertain, at least temporarily, thoughts of human charity. In such a play-world Subtle’s initial description of him is in fact quite startling:

O, I did look for him
 With the sun’s rising: marvel, he could sleep!
 This is the day, I am to perfect for him
 The *magisterium*, our great work, the stone;
 And yield it, made into his hands: of which,
 He has, this month, talked, as he were possessed.
 And, now, he’s dealing pieces on’t, away.
 Methinks, I see him, entering ordinaries,
 Dispensing for the pox; and plaguey-houses,
 Reaching his dose; walking Moorfields for lepers;

 Searching the spittle, to make old bawds young;
 And the highways, for beggars, to make rich:
 I see no end of his labours. He will make
 Nature ashamed of her long sleep: when art,
 Who’s but a step-dame, shall do more, than she,
 In her best love to mankind, ever could.
 If his dream last, he’ll turn the age, to gold.

(1.4.11–29)

This speech is highly significant not only in its theatrical but also its historical context, since, as David Riggs points out, the

year 1609 has seen the worst outbreak of the bubonic plague since 1603, and the epidemic persisted into 1610.... Jonson wrote *The Alchemist* for an audience of city dwellers who remained in town during the plague.... Since Jonson situates the

master's abandoned house on the exact site occupied by the Blackfriars Theatre, the more attentive spectators could have seen that their situation was not just analogous, but identical, to that of their onstage counterparts. Despite the risk of disease, they too could not resist the allure of the crowded "House" in the Blackfriars.¹³

Riggs concludes therefore that Jonson's relationship to his audience was "deeply ambivalent." Jonson's ultimate ideological point in his satire may be to debunk alchemy's *art* as a delusion and a "deplorable flight from Nature," to borrow Barton's phrase, but the temptation to regard it as an art that could possibly save one from the ravages of nature (in the form of the plague) would surely be irresistible on the part of the Jacobean audience. Stanton Linden discusses the development in the sixteenth century of one branch of alchemical studies, iatrochemistry and Paracelsian medicine, which concentrated on "medicines chemically prepared and derived from minerals (as distinguished from herbal medicines)," and underlines the optimism of some of the alchemical writers, with their "expectations of improved conditions for human beings while on earth, not an escape from a temporal 'vale of tears' into a conventional Christian afterlife."¹⁴ If from our present perspective we can imagine Mammon's idealized visions, or visions like them, as historically contributing to the impetus behind the development of medical science, we also might be less willing to dismiss them.

But of course Mammon's altruism is radically undercut in the play by his monomaniacal sensual appetites, and in this, as several commentators have noticed, he resembles Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. As Barton observes, "Like Faustus, Mammon begins by talking like a universal social benefactor, a man who can 'confer honour, love, respect, long life, / Give safety, valure: yea, and victorie, / To whom he will'" (2.1.50–52). While "[t]here is a powerful concern with self in all these visions," they at least admit, "and even show some compassion for, the independent existences of other people." Yet, Barton has to acknowledge, "as the actual moment of his possession of the stone grows nearer (or so he thinks) his ambitions narrow, leaving him at last in a private world of sensual self-indulgence."¹⁵ In one sense, then, Mammon is brought down to the level of the other dupes; in a nascent capitalist world, he thinks he can buy his dreams, with extraordinary returns on his investment. When Surly objects that a true alchemist must be a pure and spiritual man—"Why, I have heard, he must

¹³David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 170–71.

¹⁴Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 7, 35.

¹⁵Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, 140–41.

be *homo frugi*, / A pious, holy, and religious man / One free from mortal sin, a very virgin"—Mammon replies, "That makes it, sir, he is so. But I buy it"(2.2.97–100). Mammon's sensual appetite and ambition reaches its most comical extreme in his hopes that the elixir will make his back so strong that he will be able to "encounter fifty a night"(2.2.39), and in his desire to make eunuchs of not only Face, his prospective master of the seraglio, but also of all the town and court "stallions"(2.2.66) that presumably would otherwise sexually compete with him. He thus seems the ultimate embodiment of male narcissistic fantasy; his "manliness" expresses itself primarily on this infantile level, which is aptly emblemized, as Ronald Huebert points out, in the image of "The boy of six year old, with the great thing"(5.1.24) later mentioned by Lovewit (significantly, perhaps, since Lovewit represents the final, triumphant narcissist of the play).¹⁶

In spite of this narcissism, however, Mammon's virtual embodiment of Eros or the life impulse maintains its appeal in the Thanatos world of plague-ridden London. A Freudian perspective may in fact prove helpful here, and we need to pause over the idealism displayed by Mammon and carefully encouraged by Subtle, which, in spite of its narcissistic component, contributes to a more positive or optimistic subtext beyond (or below) the scathing criticism of Jonson's satire. In a sometimes questionable but nevertheless intriguing discussion entitled "The Moral Vision of *The Alchemist*: Tricks, Psychotherapy, and Personality Traits," Ruth Evans Netscher suggests we consider the "theme of [psychological] healing" in the play, and the resemblance of Subtle to the modern psychotherapist: "All Subtle's patients seek someone who will listen to their everyday discontents and cooperate with them in 'projecting' something more satisfying. So, although Subtle's concern is not altruistic, he is able to help his patients by letting them think that it is."¹⁷ Netscher relates Subtle's moral ambiguity to the role of Jonson the artist. She points out that the Prologue to the play states a clear moral purpose consistent with the healing aims of psychotherapy—"Though this pen/ Did never aim to grieve, but better men"¹⁸—yet she also relates an anecdote from Drummond which at the same time casts doubt on Jonson's general ethical intentions:

He can set horoscopes, but trusts not in them. He, with the consent of a friend, cozened a lady, with whom he had made an appointment to meet an old astrologer in the suburbs, which she kept; and it was himself disguised in a long gown and white beard

¹⁶Ronald Huebert, "A Shrew Yet Honest: Manliness in Jonson," *Renaissance Drama*, n.s., 15 (1984): 55.

¹⁷Ruth Evans Netscher, "The Moral Vision of *The Alchemist*: Tricks, Psychotherapy, and Personality Traits," *Literature and Medicine* 7 (1988): 177.

¹⁸Netscher, "Moral Vision," 179.

at the light of a dim burning candle up in a little cabinet reached unto by a ladder.¹⁹

While we might expect a close and conscious identification between Jonson the literary alchemist and Subtle (who is after all the play's titular character) the fictional one, Subtle does, I suggest, continue to operate in a space beyond, and not quite under control of, the satirical confines of Jonson's social vision; the vexed nature of this identification lies, I suggest, at the heart of the critical controversies, and the very meaning of the play. It is interesting, for example, that Mammon's most "altruistic" vision,²⁰ his highest and most idealistic moment, comes in fact as a description out of the mouth of Subtle—as if, under the ironic grandiosity and intentional ridicule, resides a certain degree of sympathy. But the conjunction of these two characters, with what I might term their "occult" sympathies, has further ramifications in the play which encourage a reading against the grain of Jonson's satire.

It could be argued that no characters suffer from Jonson's conservatism, his tendency to ridicule attempts to reform nature and society, more than his female characters. For example, in *Volpone* heavenly Celia's virtue is "rewarded" only by having her jealous husband ordered to "send her/ Home to her father, with her dowry trebled" (5.7.141–42). This tendency to idealize women only as monied prizes, booty that can be seized, or trophies to be won by the most successful male competitor, is certainly evident in *The Alchemist*, where the rich widow, and seemingly brainless, Dame Pliant is pursued by the majority of the male characters, including Face, Drugger, Surly, Lovewit—and (admittedly) even Subtle, although significantly he relinquishes his interest in her to Face with the words, "Much good joy, and health to you, sir./ Marry a whore? [They are about to prostitute her to Surly.] Fate, let me wed a witch first" (4.3.89–90). As a "cunning man," a sorcerer/alchemist, Subtle is a kind of "witch" himself—Face in fact calls him one at 1.1.107—and in a sense seeks his own here. A master of the imagination, he shows less terror of the Dionysian powers than his cohort, and in fact he seems to display more natural sympathy towards women than the other men; he certainly shows more professional respect for Dol than Face does. In the "venture tripartite" Dol Common is denigrated and sexually objectified by Face but not by Subtle; when she manages to smooth over the wrangling of her two male partners in the opening scene, Subtle acclaims her as a kind of female hero, "Royal

¹⁹Netscher, "Moral Vision," 178–79; quoting "Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden," in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C.H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn M.S. Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 1:app. 1, p. 141, lines 306–11.

²⁰See above.

Dol! / Spoken like Claridiana, and thy self!" This is immediately undercut by Face's assertion, however:

For which, at supper, thou shalt sit in triumph,
And not be styled Dol Common, but Dol Proper,
Dol Singular: the longest cut, at night,
Shall draw thee for his Dol Particular.

(1.1.175–79)

As Elizabeth Cook explains, common, proper, singular, and particular are "grammatical categories used to indicate Dol's sexual range," and Face implies that the winner at drawing straws, or perhaps the most generously endowed, will receive her particular sexual favors. Dol's last name "Common," indicates her status as punk or whore; she is presumably potentially "common" or available to everyone. While Subtle prefers a "witch" to a "whore," ironically both Dol and Subtle are in effect granted an equivalently low status in the play's social hierarchy when they escape together (penniless) at the end—both have in a sense been "prostituted" and then betrayed by Face.

The exact nature of this "prostitution" deserves closer examination, especially with respect to the encounter between Dol and Sir Epicure Mammon. Although Mammon seeks her out with undeniable sexual interest, his treatment of her forms a remarkable contrast to the behavior and the attitudes of the other male characters, with the significant exception (as suggested above) of Subtle. Gerard Cox observes that Mammon first perceives Dol "pass silently over the stage, a Helen to his Faustus."²¹ In a rhetorical gesture paralleling Subtle's epithet "Claridiana," Mammon exclaims, "'Fore God, a Bradamante, a brave piece"(2.3.225), identifying Dol with the female warrior in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* that served as a model for Spenser's Britomart. When he meets her next he experiences an elevation that is "simultaneously sexual and spiritual" and attains "a state of rapture, deluding himself that his lust for Dol is love for divine splendor."²² And of course Jonson obviously does expose this as delusion, for when Mammon exclaims to Dol, "There is a strange nobility, i' your eye, / This lip, that chin! Methinks you do resemble / One o' the Austriac princes," Face smirks in an aside, "Very like, / Her father was an Irish costermonger"(4.1.54–60). Yet we might well wonder, with or without overt Marxist sympathies, why *can't* she be beautiful, why *can't* Mammon be perceiving

²¹Gerard H. Cox, "Apocalyptic Projection and the Comic Plot of *The Alchemist*," *English Literary Renaissance* 13 (1983): 79.

²²Cox, "Apocalyptic Projection," 79.

real bearing and beauty?²³ Like Subtle, Mammon seems to be able to imagine Dol as coequal. He not only praises Dol's beauty, but he admires her education, and promises her a partnership in his fantasized "free state," where they may "enjoy a perpetuity / Of life, and lust" (4.1.155–66). It may still be a narcissistic fantasy, but at least he invites her to share it as a kind of compeer; Mammon's behavior, though exposed as delusional and outrageous through the play's satire, nevertheless implicitly ironizes the limited possibilities that most of the other men in the play—and men in general in Jonson—imagine for women and for social relationships.

Some speculation concerning "unconscious" meaning may be in order to explain satisfactorily the interesting inconsistencies, the chinks in the armor of Jonson's misogyny suggested by his portrayals of Subtle and Mammon in their interaction with Dol. Similar "inconsistencies" in attitudes towards women have been noted by critics of Jonson. Louise Schleiner observes that Jonson agreed with James I

in disapproving of witty, independent, politically active women who talked to each other as if they were men.... Even while he was flattering the Countess of Bedford (Epigram #76) for having "a learned and a manly soul" and being able to "control the shears / Of destiny and spin her own free hours," he was satirizing the collegiates in *Epicoene* for wanting to be masculine state-women (II.iii.123) and "spin their own days."²⁴

David Riggs as well comments on the significance of that "misogynist farce entitled *Epicoene*," which "turns the androgynous woman into a figure of ridicule." Riggs contrasts *Epicoene* with *The Masque of Beauty* and *Masque of Queens*, which "pay tribute to powerful court ladies who are perfectly at home in a man's world," but he adds the ironic observation that "to glorify women by turning them into men was, in that day and age, to rob them of their femininity, and [even] *Queens* hovers perilously close to satire."²⁵ In a longer analysis of *The Masque at Queens*, Lawrence Normand points out that Jonson creates an ostensible opposition between powerless female witches (of peasant origin) and the elite female power represented by the queens. Yet in the process Jonson has to repress those aspects of his sources "which attribute the queens' extraordinary, incomprehensible powers—exceeding the supposed natural limits of their sex—to magic," which would otherwise erode the distinction he has estab-

²³I regret that around the time when Elizabeth Taylor appeared as Helen of Troy in Richard Burton and Nevill Coghill's film version of *Doctor Faustus*, someone didn't cast her as Dol Common in a film version of *The Alchemist*, since she could have supplied the perfect combination of intense beauty and earthy vulgarity needed for the role.

²⁴Louise Schleiner, *Tudor and Stuart Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 112.

²⁵Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life*, 154.

lished. Normand concludes that “Jonson fashions an image of legitimate female power in the queens that challenges as much as supports patriarchy and draws on as much as rejects representations of peasant women as witches.”²⁶ Thus while Jonson the artist attempts to repress witches or deny their powers, he may (via Subtle) express a secret sympathy; their “incomprehensible powers” arising from sources beyond their social or political standing perhaps unconsciously appealed to a man himself chafing under the burden of the necessary but obsequious flattery directed at those above him in the social hierarchy. In his epigram “To My Muse,” for example, Jonson regrets his poetic services to a “worthless lord” and exclaims, “welcome poverty. / She shall instruct my after-thoughts to write / Things manly, and not smelling parasite.”²⁷

Yet even while Jonson in his drama consciously ridicules women’s, especially middle- and lower-class women’s, bid for greater personal autonomy and political power (ironically in spite of his own problems and resentments concerning social subordination), the subtexts of *The Alchemist* further dull the edge of this intended satire, as in, for example, Mammon’s offer of a “free state” to the marvelous Dol. Face perhaps speaks truer than he realizes when he gleefully remarks, “Why, this is yet / A kind of modern happiness, to have / Dol Common for a great lady” (4.1.21–23). Here “modern” means “commonplace,” therefore punning on Dol’s name, but it also suggests “contemporary,” which raises interesting possibilities related to the historical context. One of the obvious butts of Jonson’s satire is the millenarian hopes of radical Protestants who dreamt of setting up their own kind of “free state” with all goods held in common, without restrictive law and rigid social hierarchy. As John Mebane reminds us,

The Puritans and the occultists obviously had their differences, but in *The Alchemist* Jonson emphasizes their very real similarities. Most importantly, he links them together because both are “enthusiasts” who regard their own subjective inspiration as superior to any institutional authorities. It is this enthusiasm—or “possession,” to use Jonson’s own term—which gives rise to the spirited but unintelligible languages of the play, such as the enigmatic jargon of alchemy and the apocalyptic prophecies from Broughton which Dol spews forth in act 4.²⁸

For Mebane the political point of Jonson’s satire is very clear and very conservative; Jonson’s gulls are deluded into “thinking they can establish

²⁶Lawrence Normand, “Witches, King James, and *The Masque of Queens*,” in *Representing Women in Renaissance England*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 118, 120.

²⁷*Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (London: Penguin, 1988), 54–55.

²⁸Mebane, *Renaissance Magic*, 140.

a new political, social, and religious order,” and therefore the playwright illustrates “his belief that the rhetoric of individualism and reform can become the tool of a vicious megalomania.”²⁹ One might, however, take a different critical tack here, as Jacqueline Pearson does when she also observes that “Dol Common’s alleged madness is triggered by her reading,” and concludes that Renaissance women’s reading was by male writers “troped as—indeed seemed literally identical to—disease, madness, deception, rebellion and transgression of the boundaries of acceptable femininity.”³⁰ But of course Dol’s madness is “alleged,” feigned, and she seems a remarkably resourceful and controlled woman who has been underestimated and unfairly slighted in criticism of the play. Her mastery of Broughton’s apocalyptic terminology makes her the intellectual equal of Subtle, with his mastery of alchemical jargon. And surely it is significant that in the brilliant opening scene it is *she* who possesses the self-discipline and emotional control (supposedly masculine qualities) to resolve the dangerous and vicious quarrel between Face and Subtle—what Dol calls “civil war” (1.1.82)—that threatens to overthrow their “republic.” She in fact describes the golden political world, the classless society, dreamt of by the radical sects:

And the work
Were not begun out of equality?
The venture tripartite? All things in common?
Without priority?

(1.1.133–36)

It is relevant to consider here Dol Common’s relation to the slightly later political developments of the English Civil War, and of the radical religious groups that actually did believe that women deserved a fair and equal partnership in social governance. H. N. Brailsford in his study of the Levellers observes:

[t]wice in 1649 ... when the lives of the [Leveller] leaders were in danger, the women in their own names petitioned Parliament on their behalf. The rough usage they then met with from ... soldiers and politicians of other views is a reminder that in their attitude to women the Levellers were ahead of their time. They encouraged women to play their part in politics side by side with their husbands and brothers, because they believed in the equality of all “made in the image of God.” This was, indeed, an article of their

²⁹Mebane, *Renaissance Magic*, 140.

³⁰Jacqueline Pearson, “Women reading, reading women,” in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500–1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 86.

religious creed, which reflected the influence of the Anabaptists among them. Everyone knows that however low the position of women sank round about them, the Quakers always preached and practised equality. But few of us remember that they were following the example which their forerunners the Anabaptists had set from the early days of the sixteenth century onward. In their community women had an equal standing, an equal right to pray and speak at its meetings.³¹

With this historical context in mind, we might be less inclined to embrace Jonson's satirical characterization of radical Protestantism as simply hypocritical and megalomaniacal. Mebane, who offers such a reading, does consider the peculiar role of Dol in the venture tripartite republic, observing that her "appeals to their reason and their professed egalitarian principles fail...and she finally imposes order only by seizing Face's sword and threatening her partners with physical violence." Thus the problem with the cozeners' commonwealth "is that each presumably 'equal' partner is always attempting to gain ascendancy over the others."³²

Yet this attempt to gain ascendancy is, I suggest, a distinctly male quality in the play; Dol only resorts to such a phallic measure—Face's sword—out of desperation. One reason may be that for Jonson, as Huebert observes, manliness is inextricably linked to competition and fighting.³³ But we have to look more closely at what exactly the men are fighting over. The answer, in a word, is women, and while this may seem self-evident, there are in fact aspects of women, and women's power, that critics of *The Alchemist* have not considered closely enough. We might recall here Jonson's secret sympathy with the "incomprehensible powers" of women mentioned earlier—it seems that Jonson's desire for manly independence, his reaction against "things parasite," ironically involved an unconscious admiration for, or perhaps even envy of, women's inherent sexual and creative power. Such power was, in Jonson's cultural context, frequently if not invariably seen in terms of "magic," as in *The Masque of Queens*. It is indeed remarkable—no matter how esoteric or arcane or mystical its Hermetic and Neoplatonic philosophical expression—that Renaissance magical theory so often seems connected to concerns with sexuality and eroticism. As Ioan Couliano controversially, but in my mind convincingly, asserts in *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, "Magic is merely eroticism applied, directed, and aroused by its performer."³⁴ And of all forms

³¹H. N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, ed. Christopher Hill (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 316–17.

³²Mebane, *Renaissance Magic*, 146.

³³Huebert, "Manliness in Jonson," 33.

³⁴Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xviii.

of male philosophical magic, alchemy seems the most obvious attempt at a male appropriation of female procreative power. We might consider the ironic metaphorical appropriation in the rude parallel between alchemical endeavor and the sexual act in Donne's scathingly misogynistic poem "Love's Alchemy," where the speaker, having "digged love's mine," fails to find the "hidden mystery," and claims "no chemic yet the elixir got / But glorifies his pregnant pot."³⁵ Or we might consider the alchemical texts directly, which introduce yet once more, when related to Jonson's dramatic treatment, intriguing inconsistencies and unexpected cross-gender identifications.

As Gareth Roberts observes, while the analogy of the agricultural cycle of sowing, reaping, and harvesting is sometimes employed in alchemical texts, "it is to human reproduction, conception, gestation, birth and indeed the subsequent life of man, that alchemical processes were more often compared."³⁶ Jonson definitely echoes the images of pregnancy and procreation so prominent in alchemical writings. When the newly arrived Mammom exclaims, "Is it, my Zephyrus, right? / Blushes the bolt's head?" Face replies, "Like a wench with a child, sir" (2.2.8–9). When the incredulous Surly objects that they are trying to "hatch gold in a furnace... As they do eggs, in Egypt," Subtle retorts that hatching eggs would be the greater miracle, since "lead, and other metals... would be gold, if they had time" (2.3.126–40), as if alchemy itself were an elaborate brooding process. In fact Subtle sees the entire con game as a kind of nursing of the infantile, narcissistic gulls (so many fantastic babies), when he asserts: "A man must deal like a rough nurse, and fright / Those, that are froward, to an appetite" (2.5.89–90).

But Roberts also observes an interesting gender differentiation in the descriptions of the alchemical process. Since all metals were believed to be generated from mercury and sulphur,

The union of the principles had its social aspect in alchemical images of marriage and there are endless references to the marriage of the red man and the white woman.... Chemical weddings of male sulphur and female mercury abound.... In a work by George Ripley, mercury is an unruly woman "in her working... full wild" who has to be governed, and is not let out until she has conceived a child. A fragment of a poem by Pearce, the Black Monk, describes the woman as "both wanton and rude" presumably because of mercury's volatility. Alternatively mercury could

³⁵ John Donne: *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 65.

³⁶ Gareth Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy: Alchemical Ideas and Images in Manuscripts and Books from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 82.

be a good wife and mother, and although wooed by many would deal only with her husband; or a wife who kills herself to bring life to her child. Sulphur is the father of metals, the male active principle of Aristotelian physiology, and it is his seed, the Sperm of Sol, which should be cast into the matrix of mercury in copulation.³⁷

The gender assignment of female mercury and male sulphur is also noted by Charles Nicholl, who states that “‘mercury’ and ‘sulphur’ are descriptive of the binary principles, the *yin* and *yang*, of matter. Mercury is associated with the moist, vaporous, volatile, spiritual, female aspects of matter; Sulphur with the solid, combustible, fixed, bodily, masculine aspects.”³⁸

It is, however, notable that this gendered distinction is carefully avoided or elided in Jonson’s treatments of alchemy. In the masque *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court*, which involves, as Stanton Linden argues, an “examination and rejection of Art’s claims to superiority over Nature,” Mercury is masculinized; “he” is “Nature’s son” and stands in opposition to Vulcan (art). Jonson gives Mercury “the attributes of spiritedness, volatility, and fusibility, properties that must be removed or transformed if Mercury is to be efficacious in preparing the stone. Given this natural state, efforts to enslave Mercury must necessarily be harsh and unnatural.”³⁹ Thus the alchemists of the masque figure as persecutors of Nature. It is perhaps not quite true that Mercury is “masculinized,” since “he” complains, “I am their Crude, and their Sublimate; their Præcipitate, and their vinctuous; their male and their female; sometimes their *Her-maphrodite*.”⁴⁰ The androgynous figure now appears not as an object of ridicule but of sympathy, a victim of “men’s” barbarous art, which is here associated with the demonic.⁴¹ The solution to Mercury’s persecution is an appeal to James I as Sol or the sun, ruler of Nature. As Linden argues, “in this portion of the masque, the attack on alchemy is inseparable from a withering critique of the effects of materialism and commercialization on the manners of court and society.”⁴² Yet ironically the feminine “Nature” and her son Mercury are only relieved by subordinating the entire social and political system to an absolutist “sun-king.”

Such a subordination results, in effect, in the complete denial of agency to all but the king, and the “feminization” of everyone else, when

³⁷Roberts, *Mirror of Alchemy*, 84–86.

³⁸Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre*, 32.

³⁹Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 132, 141.

⁴⁰*Mercury Vindicated*, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C.H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn M.S. Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 7:lines 51–54.

⁴¹Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 144–45.

⁴²Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 146.

Nature is recognized “here no stepdame, but a mother.”⁴³ James in this sense achieves what Mammon only fantasizes about, making eunuchs of all his competitors. Yet the king, in his close identification with female Nature and the hermaphroditic Mercury, represents not so much manly control as sanctified, divine power. James’s role as a kind of divine controller—yet with distinctly feminine overtones—is further suggested in Stephen Orgel’s analysis of the king’s political appropriation of the maternal role:

Upon his accession in 1603, he declared to Parliament that “I am the husband and the whole island is my lawful wife; I am the head, and it is my body.” The imagery derives from St. Paul on marriage, and the two statements are presented as synonymous. Mothers became unnecessary; he himself would be “a loving nourish-father” who would provide his subjects with “their own nourish-milk.”⁴⁴

It is in fact this political strategy that, according to Orgel, renders James less effective than his predecessor:

as a political solution, James’s patriarchy had a fatal weakness: it required Parliament to allow itself to be conceived as the monarch’s children, or wife, or the body to his active mind, to be dictated to.... Queen Elizabeth’s rhetoric with the men on whom her power and her purse depended had been shrewder, and much more effective: it represented them as her lovers. This was, for James, in every way an impossible act to follow.⁴⁵

James’s assumption of the role of divine father-mother thus figures as another narcissistic (and untenable) drive towards absolute power. Regarding the denouement of *Mercury Vindicated*, Linden argues that the twelve final masquers that appear suggest Christ’s disciples, and that in the end “Jonson’s Mercury/Christ has escaped the permanent ‘fixation’ of crucifixion and death and is now vindicated.... The masque is an enactment of the Passion of both Mercury and Christ, with both of whom James is identified.”⁴⁶ Earlier in the masque the alchemists are dismissed as false creators, “fire-wormes... [who] professe to outworke the *Sunne* in vertue, and contend to the great act of generation, nay, almost creation.” These references to “generation” and “creation” come close to recognizing the peculiar power of women, although ironically the (barely) mascu-

⁴³*Mercury Vindicated*, line 209.

⁴⁴Stephen Orgel, “Jonson and the Amazons,” in *Soliciting Interpretations: Literary Theory and Seventeenth Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 126.

⁴⁵Orgel, “Jonson and the Amazons,” 126.

⁴⁶Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 150.

linized Mercury who makes the speech also indulges in some typically Jonsonian misogyny, since Mulciber, the patron of the alchemists, is ridiculed for such questionable achievements as making “statues dance, a dog of brasse to barke, and (which some will say, was his worst acte) a woman to speake.”⁴⁷ Again we see the curious ridiculing of women in a discursive context that implicitly seems to recognize their (ultimate) power.

It is thus possible that behind the rampant competitiveness of the men in *The Alchemist* lies the intimation of a deep dependency on female power. Dapper gagged and forgotten in the privy, all in the expectation of meeting his aunt, the Queen of Fairy (alias Dol), might be regarded as a particular comic version of this dependency, and he is instructed to “Kiss her departing part” when he finally leaves. But the intense struggle for the rich widow Pliant also suggests this male neediness; as Surly rather pathetically admits to Dame Pliant, “I am a bachelor, / Worth naught: your fortunes may make me a man” (4.6.12–13). A bachelor is worth naught; a man without a woman is worth nothing. It is therefore not surprising that Dame Pliant is the real treasure of the play, and Lovewit’s eventual triumph in this competition, which has caused critics and readers so many problems, perhaps needs to be understood in archetypal sexual terms. For if we accept Mebane’s reading of Jonson’s satirical purpose—to ridicule “all the areas of Renaissance life into which [he] saw the new individualism (or, in his view, self-centredness) penetrating[:] capitalism, religious dissent, republicanism, Epicureanism”⁴⁸—then it is hard to know what to make of Lovewit’s rather unethical appropriation and triumph at the play’s conclusion. While Mammon only threatened to castrate Face, Lovewit’s return in a metaphoric sense actually does emasculate this General or Captain of the tripartite, who must shave his beard and return to his obsequious state as Jeremy the Butler. His triumph then is the triumph of a “parasite.” His final act as pander or pimp is to help Lovewit to the rich widow—ironically the prize that he himself aspired to—but even the master in this transaction must don the disguise of the Spanish count, that is, must problematize his identity. Where then does true “manliness” lie? The house in Blackfriars—which, as Ian Donaldson points out, has been “capable of being whatever people want it to be ... a shell within which their fantasies may be projected, a sounding board for the imagination”⁴⁹—turns out to possess nothing but smoke-stained walls, a few cracked pots and glasses, and “MADAM, with a dildo, writ o’the walls” (5.5.42). With this image of male imaginative and sexual failure, the play repudiates the marvelous perhaps because the real marvel is missing; as Subtle subtly reveals to us in the

⁴⁷ *Mercury Vindicated*, lines 128–34.

⁴⁸ Mebane, *Renaissance Magic*, 146.

⁴⁹ Ian Donaldson, “Jonson’s Magic Houses,” in *Essays and Studies*, ed. G. A. Wilkes (London: John Murray, 1986), 51.

first scene, Face has been conversing with cobwebs since his “mistress’ death hath broke up the house”(58); that is, Lovewit’s wife has died and presumably left no heir. Without this wife and potential mother no real transformation is possible, and the limits of Jonson’s satire are revealed through ironies that indirectly appear to work against his own conservative social vision; regardless of their social class or levels of competence, men’s acts of self-creation are desperate, sometimes violent, and ultimately futile attempts in the void of the absent mother, whose power they attempt to imitate or appropriate, but can never really possess.

Yet I think the limits of the satire need to be understood as more than a manifestation of what might be called “womb envy,” a term Katharine Eisaman Maus regards as “no more a fact of nature than ‘penis envy,’ but rather a cultural construct the mechanism of which begs to be investigated.”⁵⁰ Maus observes that in the Renaissance many writers associated the creative imagination with the female body or the womb, and, as alchemy in the Renaissance is certainly seen in such terms, it logically follows that the alchemy of the play suggests (on some level) similar artistic processes—Linden refers to the “proximity of the ‘alchemical imagination’ to the literary imagination.”⁵¹ But Mebane’s and other social critics’ readings suggest the link between alchemy and both radical Protestantism and capitalism, the conflation of which may be understood, according to the Weberian paradigm, as the secularization of radical spiritual impulses. Jonson’s attack on “alchemy” in both these senses might seem, finally, remarkably self-thwarting; as Don E. Wayne has observed, after *Volpone* “Jonson begins to show signs of a disturbed awareness that his own identity as poet and playwright—and therefore his personal transcendence of the still rigid social hierarchy in which he lived and wrote—depended on the same emerging structure of social relationships that he satirized in his plays.”⁵² I suggest that men’s acts of self-creation remain desperate and futile in the play because of unacknowledged or repressed narcissistic dependencies on maternal power, which (as a kind of contagious mental disorder) have the social effect of narcissistically reducing women to prizes and possessions (or prostitutes), or to beings whose only creative capacity is the womb itself. Yet these dependencies are ironically exacerbated, in a neatly vicious circle, by Jonson’s own attacks on social systems that might ultimately promise more “manly independence” because his subversive imagination allows or intimates that such freedoms—a bending, a transcending, an improving upon nature (and an improving of self)—could conceivably be achieved by women as well.

⁵⁰Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 186.

⁵¹Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 132.

⁵²Don E. Wayne, “Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson: An Alternative View,” *Renaissance Drama*, n.s., 13 (1982): 107

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“Falseness Reigns in Every Flock”: Literacy and Eschatological Discourse in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381

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The literature of the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, a miscellany of fourteenth-century poetry and prose penned before, during, and after the insurrection, often stresses the importance of literacy to the nonaristocratic population of England. Since literacy was a primary marker of one’s social status in the stratified society of medieval England, the rise of literacy in the lower orders pointed to a dramatic change in the prevailing socioeconomic structure.¹ In the literature of the revolt, eschatological themes highlight the tensions resulting from this tremendous upheaval in the traditional estates. The power of literacy is depicted as adumbrating a new social order free from class division; these themes of revolution are reinforced by eschatological motifs, including the prevalence of falsehood, God’s judgment of his enemies, the beginnings of war, and the appearance of natural disasters such as famine and earthquakes. The eschatological thematics of the Peasants’ Revolt literature reflect the insurrectionists’ conviction that, unless the inequities of England’s economic caste system were ameliorated, God’s judgment was at hand; these eschatological motifs also evince the poets’ concerns with the ideological, political, and social ramifications of literacy. We can see in these writings a twin concern with literacy and eschatology predicated upon the spread of dissident thought and the society’s reaction to these ideas.

LITERACY IN FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Before addressing the literature of the rebellion itself, the literacy of medieval English society should be considered. Throughout the medieval period, most of the European population was illiterate; however, defining

¹On the dynamics between literacy and social class, see Steven Justice, “Insurgent Literacy,” in *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and Maurice Keen, “The Spread of Literacy,” in *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: 1348–1500* (London: Penguin, 1990). Janet Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), is another excellent source.

and quantifying this illiteracy is difficult because of the polyglot nature of European society with Latin and the vernacular tongues. Because Latin was the language of medieval government and administration, the vernacular was becoming increasingly important as a means of expressing dissent with the reigning power structures. Franz Bäuml offers a paradigm of literacy which underscores the complexity of defining literacy in a multilingual society such as fourteenth-century England. In such an environment, the range of a person's fluency with language would include that of "the fully literate, that of the individual who must rely on the literacy of another for access to written transmission, and that of the illiterate without need or means of such reliance."² Medieval literacy, therefore, in terms of individual and personal comprehension of written documents, is virtually impossible to quantify with any validity because the people of the culture were accustomed to relying upon one another for their needs in this regard. Steven Justice thus theorizes a "delegated literacy" in which "the literacy of one family member could be a delegated literacy for the entire family."³ Though the difficulties of reconstructing accurate literacy rates for medieval English peasant society may be insurmountable, clear evidence exists of some kind of literacy among the villeins of the fourteenth century. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 called for a minimum of instruction for all Christians and thus fostered instruction in the vernacular; in England, Pecham's Syllabus of 1281 likewise established a minimum of religious knowledge of which priests should instruct their parishioners. Furthermore, Justice observes both that "the feudal custom that required the lord's consent before a villein family could send a son for formal schooling would have been pointless unless families did conceive that ambition" and that "the existence of [New College, Oxford] show[s] that there was a rural... clientele for university education."⁴ We can thus conclude that the medieval peasantry did at least have limited access to education and, accordingly, to literacy.

²Franz H. Bäuml, "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Speculum* 55 (1980): 246.

³Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 33. Brian Stock's concept of the "textual community" offers another paradigm of medieval literacy in which one person influenced others through the written word; he affirms that "[w]hat was essential to a textual community was not a written version of a text, although that was sometimes present, but an individual, who, having mastered it, then utilized it for reforming a group's thought and action" (*The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983], 90). In the monastic world that Stock describes, however, basic literacy was obviously much more available to the community members, as opposed to the much higher rates of illiteracy in communities where a delegated literacy was practiced. Also of interest is M. T. Clanchy's work on "practical literacy" in *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

⁴Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 32.

The leaders of English villages had greater access than the peasants to literacy through their familiarity with town record keeping, and it is important to note that many leaders of the Peasants' Revolt were also the leaders of their villages. As Christopher Dyer observes, "every village had an élite, and it was evidently from this group that the leadership in the revolt was drawn."⁵ Accordingly, Justice's supposition of a delegated literacy in which one person could read and write for his entire family may work analogously to a literate town leader who shared the written rebellious sentiments of others dissatisfied with the prevailing order in order to foment dissension. The elite of the village often held such local offices as reeve, alestaster, bailiff, juror, and constable, and in such positions they would inevitably witness and/or participate in the record keeping which was part of their jobs. Since the leadership of the rebellion was largely composed of these officeholders who were exposed to literacy, they would thus have been able to exploit literacy for the spread of revolutionary literature and thought for their cause.⁶ The written word was available as a means to erode the aristocratic and religious hegemony of literacy.

That the leaders of the rebellion were able to share these written works with the insurrectionists does not, however, necessarily indicate that they were the authors of the works. Who the authors of the rebellion's political poems were remains a mystery, and the possibility of ever conclusively establishing authorship for any of them is doubtful. Though the authors' identities may be unknown, it is possible to surmise their most likely position in medieval society. Common themes and phrases between political poems and homilies suggest a clerical authorship. G. R. Owst notes that "a highly important point to be noticed about the early satirical poems is the evidence of homiletic origin which they show in the matter of style and construction";⁷ J. R. Maddicott, building upon Owst's work, declares that "[i]f we had to guess at authorship [of the early political songs], we should on a priori grounds alone, name the clergy."⁸ Since radical preachers such as the reform-minded John Ball contributed directly to the Peasants' Revolt, the assumption that the authors of these political

⁵Christopher Dyer, "The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revolt of 1381," in *The English Rising of 1381*, ed. R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 17.

⁶I am not suggesting that the majority of the insurrectionists were landowners and officeholders, as Dyer has persuasively concluded that "most of the rebels were peasants and artisans" ("Social and Economic Background," 15). I distinguish between the leadership and the body of the rebellion in order to draw my conclusions about the role literacy plays in the rebellious writings.

⁷G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1966), 225.

⁸J. R. Maddicott, "Poems of Social Protest in Early Fourteenth-Century England," in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium*, W. M. Ormrod (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1986), 134.

poems were members of the clergy suggests a tradition of radical clerics writing radical verse. Indeed, the examples of textual interplay between homilies and political verse supports this contention.⁹ Consequently, though no firm conclusions can be drawn from these observations, they nonetheless “point to a stock of references and catchphrases of both poets and preachers... which they might put to common critical use.”¹⁰ I cannot prove that the poets of the political songs were preachers, but they certainly shared a common vocabulary based upon biblical teachings which was easily adaptable to purposes of criticizing social structure and, hence, inciting rebellion. Furthermore, the eschatological themes present in the poems, as I will demonstrate, suggest authors quite familiar with biblical thought and language, which also points toward clerical authors.¹¹ As Norman Cohn notes of the intersection of political rebellion and Christian apocalypse, “though... the majority of the insurgents were simply moved by specific grievances to demand specific reforms, it seems certain that millenarian hopes and aspirations were not altogether lacking.”¹²

The crucial issue to consider in regard to the nexus of rebellion and literacy is that the writings make their dramatic claims about peasants’ reading abilities at a time of rebellion. As writing was an activity based upon education and access to the necessary implements of the task, the spread of literacy and, consequently, the spread of dissident thought marked the end of the aristocratic and religious monopoly on the written word. For example, if we consider the insurrectionary letters of John Ball, which catalyzed much of the revolt, we see evidence of the widespread appropriation of radical literacy. Scholars have long questioned the authorship of the six letters attributed to John Ball by the chroniclers Walsingham and Knighton, and Steven Justice cites the *Anonimale Chronicle*, the epistles’ stylistic features, and the differences in dialect to support his contention that the letters were not penned solely by John Ball, but that other literate participants in the revolt likewise disseminated their radical ideas through the written word. Though John Ball undoubtedly wrote the three letters which bear his name, the remaining three letters—whose stated authors are Jack Miller, Jack Carter, and Jack Trueman (though these names seem to suggest allegorical figures rather than real people)—could well have been composed by his confederates. Justice further

⁹For example, Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, documents the use of the satirical phrase “liouns in halle, and hares in the field” in both Bromyard’s *Summa Praedicatorum* and the prerebellion protest lyric “The Simonie”; the image of a hunted hare also appears in another prerebellion piece, “The Song of the Husbandman.”

¹⁰Maddicott, “Poems of Social Protest,” 135.

¹¹We cannot be certain, of course, that the authors were *practicing* clerics, though anyone writing would at least have had a clerical education.

¹²Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 203.

hypothesizes that the letters were broadsides and thus were widely distributed throughout the countryside; in his words, this innovation in the dissemination of ideas represents the evolution of writing into a political statement: "Writing itself—both the activity and the product—was at issue in these letters: their composition and copying, recomposition and recopying were so many acts of assertive literacy."¹³ The effect which the appropriation of writing brought to the rebels' cause cannot be overestimated; this assertive literacy, through every piece of poetry and prose which argued for the rights of the poor to self-determination, suggested an incredible transformation of England. Of course, as I have delineated earlier, literacy for the peasants most often centered around a literate person who could share his or her abilities with others. This combination of rebellion and peasant literacy suggested a vast restructuring of the social order with apocalyptic implications.

ESCHATOLOGY IN FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

The eschatological motifs in the writings of the rebellion stress that God's damning judgment awaits those unconcerned with assisting the lower classes. Eschatology, in its broadest sense, concerns the biblical teachings about last things—"the resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment, the end of the world, and the creation of a new one"¹⁴—and eschatological thought is found both in the Old and the New Testaments. The Books of Amos, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zachariah, and Daniel are all written in the eschatological tradition, as is Isaiah, which stresses the eternal damnation which awaits God's enemies: "For behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the stormwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the Lord execute judgment, and by his sword, upon all flesh; and those slain by the Lord shall be many" (66:15–16). Biblical eschatology clearly attests that, on the Day of Judgment, God will punish vengefully those who oppose Him. The passage also stresses that the number of people slain by God will be a large one, that vast multitudes will be killed for their iniquities.

Another prime concern of eschatology is the spread of falsehood. The Book of Daniel's eschatological passages graphically stress the appropriate punishment of purveyors of falsehood who unjustly rule their community, as in this passage in which the eponymous hero condemns and oversees the execution of two elders who bore false witness: "And they rose against the two elders, for out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; and they did to them as they had wickedly planned

¹³Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 24.

¹⁴William B. Nelson, Jr., "Eschatology," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 192.

to do to their neighbor; acting in accordance with the law of Moses, they put them to death. Thus innocent blood was saved that day.”¹⁵ In eschatological thought, death is the accepted punishment for those who bear false witness, as this passage affirms. The poetry of the Peasants’ Revolt often laments the prevalence of falsehood in contemporary England, and with this biblical injunction to support them, the economic dissenters could find biblical sanction for violent action. Though eschatological thought usually reserves punishment to God’s power, this excerpt from Daniel suggests that God’s retributive power can at times be employed by human agents.

This emphasis on falsehood is likewise evident in the eschatology of the New Testament, in which signs of the end are detailed. The apocalypse of Matthew presents a litany of portents of the final days: false prophets (24:5), wars (24:6–7), famines (24:8), earthquakes (24:8), and the persecution of true believers (24:9). The final judgment will mete out everlasting damnation for sinners and eternal reward for the elect, as Matthew writes that “Then he will answer to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (25:45–46). John’s apocalyptic letters present the dangers of the Antichrist in terms of the spread of falseness. In his first letter, John describes the ubiquity of antichrists and how, in essence, the Antichrist is a liar: “Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour.... Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son” (18–22). The antichrist appears to be both singular and plural, the leader and his followers; the emphasis, however, bears not upon a final showdown between good and evil but on the spread of heretical thought. As Robert Fuller observes, “According to John I, what is to be dreaded about the Antichrist is not the unleashing of awesome destruction but the fomenting of heresy. This heresy, moreover, did not come from unconverted Jews or Gentiles but from Christians themselves.”¹⁶ The threat of falseness lies in its ability to appear at any moment; innocent Christians need not only suspect the infidel, but their own neighbors as well when the end times approach.

Medieval conceptions of eschatological falseness thus often underscore the importance of discovering and exposing untruth and error.

¹⁵Daniel 13:61–62; cf. Susanna 61–62. The thirteenth chapter of Daniel in the Vulgate is also known as the apocryphal Book of Susanna. I refer to it as part of the Book of Daniel, as it was separated into its own apocryphal book after the Middle Ages. Medieval clerics would have thus read this passage as part of the Old Testament.

¹⁶Robert C. Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 17.

Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135–1202) concludes that, as Jesus came to save the world through truth, the Antichrist will come to spread falseness, and, thus, the vigilant Christian must beware of heretical error:

Ut ergo Christus Iesus venit in signis veris et tamen palliatus et occultus ob similitudinem carnis peccati, ita ut vix a paucis agnosceretur quod ipse esset Christus: ita rex iste septimus venturus est in signis mendacibus et tamen occultus et palliatus ob similitudinem spiritualis iustitie, adeo ut vix pauci sint qui possint illum agnoscere quod ipse sit Antichristus: propter quod si fieri possit in errorem etiam ducentur electi.

[So, therefore, as Jesus Christ came in true signs, even though cloaked and hidden on account of the similitude of sinful flesh, so that it was scarcely acknowledged by a few that he was the Christ, so too that seventh king will come in false signs and will be hidden and cloaked on account of the similitude of spiritual justice, so that there are scarcely a few who will be able to recognize that he is the Antichrist. On account of this, even the elect will be led into error, if it is able to be done.]¹⁷

As Richard Emmerson and Ronald Herzman argue, this passage suggests that the final conflict will emerge when the Antichrist appears as a man: “Thus, given the fact that Christ first came to the world as man...it is not surprising that in the future Satan will first appear as a man—Antichrist—and then again just before Doomsday.”¹⁸ Joachim delineates the vigilance which humanity must practice lest they are duped by one who appears among them. He concentrates on the threat of the Antichrist through the contamination and corruption of Christians; as the profusion of error and falsehood undermines the stability of the Church, the Antichrist’s evil mission will seduce the faithful from their God. If even the elect may be led astray through falseness, if the words of the false prophets through their leader the Antichrist may succeed in blinding the holy, the end and God’s judgment will appear.¹⁹

Joachim of Fiore’s vision of the Antichrist’s threat through falsehood resonates in an English Wycliffite sermon on John 10:11–18: “Ego sum

¹⁷Joachim of Fiore, *Il Libro delle figure dell’abate Gioachino da Fiore*, ed. Leone Tondelli, Marjorie Reeves, and Beatrice Hirsch-Reich, 2d ed. (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1953), 2, sec. 14. My translation.

¹⁸Richard K. Emmerson and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 12.

¹⁹Though both centuries and geography separate Joachim of Fiore from the fourteenth-century English writers and insurrectionists, ample evidence exists that Joachim’s writings were known directly in late medieval England. See Morton Bloomfield, “*Piers Plowman*” as a *Fourteenth Century Apocalypse* (Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1961), 157–60.

pastor bonus.” In this passage, the reform-minded Wycliffite author stresses Jesus’ goodness as a shepherd, the Antichrist’s dissemination of false doctrine, and the sinfulness of Christians who do not live in charity. The author couches his social critique both of England’s economic caste system and of the failure of the Church to help the poor in terms of his eschatological concerns with the Antichrist:

For [as] Crist puttith wijsly his owne lijf for hise scheep, so anti-crist puttith proudli many lyues for his foule lijf.... And thus seemen oure religious to be exempt fro charite, for, nede a man neuere so moche to haue help of suche goodis, the if thei han stoonnes or othir iewels that harmen hem, thei wole not gyue suche goodis ne value of hem to helpe her britheren, ne cesse to anoie hemself in bildinge of highe housis, ne to gadere suche veyne goodis if it do harm to her britheren. Suche auarous men ben fer from maners of a good heerd.²⁰

The Antichrist leads men astray, but it is his followers who receive the brunt of the author’s opprobrium. The lack of Christian charity and the selfish hoarding of goods lead Christians from their God as they fall to the sinful shepherding of the Antichrist. As we shall see, these thematics resound throughout the writings of the Peasants’ Revolt. Casting the rich and powerful as poor shepherds under the Antichrist’s sway, the writers of the rebellious literature assert their own right to tend Christ’s flock and metaphorically to assume the role of the shepherd.

To medieval thought, such a revising of the social order necessitated apocalyptic change. As Morton Bloomfield argues, “Social thinking on the subject of perfection, above all in the fourteenth century, had to be apocalyptic. The transcendence of society to a new level was thought by many to be the only way out of the crushing dilemmas.”²¹ To cure the ills of corrupt society, God’s apocalyptic power is summoned, the result of which, as Matthew 25:45 makes clear, will be salvation or damnation. Salvation and damnation are twin themes of eschatological thought, and the authors who employ these themes in the rebellious literature dispense God’s mercy or judgment to others in light of the treatment which the lower classes in need of Christian charity receive from them. As Kathryn Kerby-Fulton argues in her consideration of religious reform and *Piers Plowman*, apocalyptic reformers typically address “an overwhelming concern with Church reform and the question of renewal: can there be a

²⁰Anne Hudson, ed. *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 65. I have substituted modern orthographic counterparts for thorn and yogh in citations of Middle English.

²¹Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman*, 104.

renewal of the Christian Church or is it already too late?"²² Likewise, secular reformers summon God's judgment, threatening English society with heavenly destruction if its citizens cannot redeem themselves immediately.

PROTEST POEMS PRIOR TO THE PEASANTS' REVOLT OF 1381

The prerebellion poems which are investigated in this paper—"The Outlaw's Song of Trailllebaston" (ca. 1305–7), "The Song of the Husbandman" (ca. 1300–40), "The Simonie" (also known as "On the Evil Times of Edward II," ca. 1325), and "The Song against the King's Taxes" (ca. 1311–40)—argue with the tropes and imagery of eschatology for a radical change in the social structure.²³ They upbraid the rich and powerful while extolling the poor and exploited, and the might of God is called upon to bring an end to the unjust and oppressive times which the peasants must endure. Two of the poems, "The Song of the Husbandman" and "The Simonie," are written in vernacular English, and their very language thus stands as a radical poetic posturing. Rossell Robbins observes, "In certain respects Middle English literature itself, by its very existence, advocated dissent. It is in the vernacular. To break away from Latin or French and use English was a major act of rebellion."²⁴ In addition to a consideration of these vernacular lyrics, I will also address antiauthoritarian verse penned in Anglo-Norman ("The Outlaw's Song of Trailllebaston") and in macaronic Anglo-Norman/Latin ("The Song against the King's Taxes"), as authors of the rebellious literature could still effectively voice protest in the dominant tongues. The appropriation of literacy—in English, Anglo-Norman, and Latin—by the peasants and those who supported them signaled a massive restructuring of literacy's signification: writing would no longer be the exclusive province of the elite. As Nicholas Watson notes, "[F]rom the 1350s on, as the use of French declined and as lay interest in religious writing in English began its rapid rise, writing in the 'mother tongue' increasingly implied writing for an indeterminate and socially mixed group

²²Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and "Piers Plowman"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4.

²³The poems were collected by the nineteenth-century antiquarian Thomas Wright, who published them in the collection, *The Political Songs of England, from King John to That of Edward II* (London: The Camden Society, 1839). The poems have recently been re-edited in Peter Coss, ed., *Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England, from the Reign of John to That of Edward II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For the dating of "The Outlaw's Song of Trailllebaston," see Coss, xlv–xlvii; for the dating of "The Song of the Husbandman," see Coss, lii; for the dating of "The Song against the King's Taxes," see Coss, liv; for the dating of "The Simonie," see Derek Pearsall, "The Timelessness of 'The Simonie,'" in *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, ed. O. S. Pickering (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 59.

²⁴Rossell Hope Robbins, "Dissent in Middle English Literature: The Spirit of (Thirteen) Seventy-Six," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 9 (1979): 40.

who had in common only the fact that they were not *literati*.”²⁵ The threat of the poems to the prevailing ideological structures would have been less if all the poems were written in the vernacular English; by voicing dissent in all three tongues, the dissenters express their ease and fluency with multiple levels of language and, therefore, their rights to more privileges than had hitherto been accorded their estate.

An eschatological concern with falseness is virtually omnipresent in the rebellious literature, and these poems highlight the rampant spread of falseness throughout England and its dire consequences for the poor and powerless.²⁶ “The Outlaw’s Song of Traillebaston” offers a vituperative attack on the traillbaston commissions, special delegations composed of justices organized in five circuits whose jurisdiction included all of England and whose responsibility was to hear cases concerning disruptions of the general peace.²⁷ The speaker of the poem laments the corruption of the traillbastons as he describes how he was improperly indicted: “Mès le male doseynes, dount Dieu n’eit jà pieté! / Parmi lur fauce bouches me ount enditée” [But the bad idlers, on whom may God have

²⁵Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitution of 1409,” *Speculum* 70 (1995): 838.

²⁶Perhaps it is wise to warn the reader that my explication of these poems runs counter to the opinions of several distinguished critics. Pearsall, “Timelessness,” for example, argues that the poets of these poems “would have been horrified to find people responding to their litany of ‘protest’ by acting to remove the abuses they described, as Langland was horrified to find the rebels of 1381, in the *Letters of John Ball*, using the name of the hero of his poem as the watchword of insurgency” (65). In his opinion, these poems are formulaic laments about the fallen nature of humanity. Though such an argument is compelling in its focus on the rhetorical ploys of the authors, I hope to demonstrate that the combination of eschatology and insurgent literacy provides these poems with an immediacy that was pivotal to the insurrectionists. If Pearsall is correct, however, and the poems were misread in terms of authorial intention, such a misreading nevertheless constitutes quite an act of assertive literacy. And as Richard Green notes in reference to John Ball’s letters, the interpretations of conventions can change drastically over time: “There is after all the possibility that Ball’s letters are indeed entirely conventional, but that for some reason their very conventions, however pacific in origin, had become inflammatory by 1381.” Richard Firth Green, “John Ball’s Letters: Literary History and Historical Literature,” in *Chaucer’s England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 189.

²⁷The traillbastons were created due to the failure of the eyre system, but they quickly became mired in corruption as they converted judicial authority into a manipulative tactic for use in wranglings over community power and politics. The degeneration of the traillbaston commissions must have happened remarkably soon after their conception: the ordinance of traillbaston, which authorized the commissions, was established in 1305, and “The Outlaw’s Song of Traillebaston,” which condemned them, appeared sometime between 1305 and 1307. Since the poem had to have been penned after the genesis of the traillbaston commissions, it appears that these courts were corrupt virtually from their very inception. For more information on the traillbaston commission, see Alan Harding’s “The Revolt against the Justices,” in *The English Rising of 1381*, 165–93.

no pity! / with their false mouths have indited me] (232).²⁸ The narrator's criticism of the corruption and falseness of the governing officials segues into his concern with preserving himself from such corruptive falseness. He then describes the edenic world of the forest to which he has escaped as a refuge from the duplicity of the political realm: "Pur ce me tendroi antre bois sur le jolyf umbray; / Là n'y a fauceté ne nulle male lay; / En le bois de Belregard" [For this cause I will keep myself among the woods, in the beautiful shade—where there is no falseness and no bad law / —in the wood of Beauregard] (232). The speaker positions himself in a utopian escape from worldly falseness where he will be free from God's wrath, where no "bad law" can touch him. Should God's anger fall on those purveyors of falsehood from whom he flees, he will be safely secure from the righteous punishment.

"The Song of the Husbandman" and "The Simonie" both identify falseness as a key downfall of English society. The poet of "The Song of the Husbandman," bemoaning the hardships of the farmer, denounces the falseness both of the lords and of the members of the religious orders for their complicity in the husbandman's plight. The narrator specifically links the crimes of the other estates to falseness as he states that "Thus wil walketh in lond, and wondred ys wene / Falsshipe fatteth and marreth wyth myht" (150). The contrast between the hunger of the famine and the falsehood which fattens the mighty looms as a visual critique of an immoral England. With falseness as a contributing cause to the hunger and famine of the poor, the author's scathing criticism of the social system stands as a call to action. "The Simonie"'s critique of falseness similarly locates it in the powerful, first in the religious orders:

God greteth wel the clergie, and seith theih don amis,
And doth hem to understonde that litel treuthe ther is;
For at the court of Rome, ther treuthe sholde biginne,
Him is forboden the paleis, dar he noht com therinne. (324)

The reign of falseness among the clergy precludes the presence of the truth. Developing this point of his poetic argument, the poet then depicts truth as not only forbidden in Rome, but as dead, should it attempt to reside there: "If treuth come amonges [the papal court], that he shal be ded" (324). Falseness appears not only in the clergy, as it is also evident in the description of an adulterous man who seeks to divorce his wife: "And bringge tweye false wid him and him self the thridde, / And he shal ben to-parted so faire as he wole bidde / from his wif" (332). False physicians

²⁸Rather than cite the line numbers of the poetry which I quote, I provide the page numbers from Wright's and Coss's editions because they do not provide the line numbers for most of the poems. For consistency, I retain the practice for all literary quotations I use in this essay, including those from Justice and Robbins.

(“thise false fisiciens that helpen men to die” [333]) and false squires who pronounce false oaths (“But sholde he for everi fals uth lese kirtel or kote, / I leve, / He sholde stonde starc naked twye o day or eve” [335–36]) also inhabit the falsehood-ridden landscape. The theme of falseness then appears as a general lament which foreshadows God’s justice: “For falsnesse is so fer forrth over al the londe i-sprunge, / That wel neih nis no treuthe in hond, ne in tunge, / ne in herte; / And tharfore nis no wonder thouh al the world it smerte” (339–40). The poet has delineated the pervasive spread of falseness in religion, man, and the world; next falseness appears as encompassing all of England: “Ac certes Engeland is shent thurw falsnesse and thurw pride” (344). Clearly, the poet considers falseness a major abuse of the times, an abuse which, as we will see, he believes needs to be forcefully corrected.

The poets establish the return to truth from falseness as one of their prime objectives. In order to speak against the prevalent falsehood of England, the narrator of “The Simonie” positions himself as the voice of truth in the midst of chaos as the explicator of God’s wrath:

Whii werre and wrake in londe and manslauht is i-come,
 Whii hunger and derthe on eorthe the pore hath undernome,
 Whii bestes ben thus storve, whii corn hath ben so dere,
 Ye that wolen abide, listneth and ye muwen here
 the skile.
 I nelle liyen for no man. (323–24)

After establishing himself as the voice of truth against the miasma of falsehood, the narrator begins a catalogue of the abuses against the poor committed by lords, Church officials, justices, physicians, and lawyers. An eschatological falseness reveals itself as an indicator of the world’s fallen state. The war, death, hunger, and famine which have plagued England are revealed to be God’s punishment of the false, and this author presents himself as a spokesman of truth in the war against the false. Likewise, the author of the “Song against the King’s Taxes” beseeches God to stop the spread of error: “Dieu pur soun seintime noun, confundat errores” [May God, for the sake of his holy name, confound errors] (187). The prayer for the end of falsehood and error comes immediately before a call for God’s vengeance against evil. Clearly, such falsehood and abuse must leave English society.

The poets do not hesitate to call forth God’s judgment upon the spreaders of falsehood whose actions they lament. The narrator of “The Outlaw’s Song of Traillebaston,” running from the trailllebastons because he does not trust them to mete out true justice, calls God’s curse upon the courts’ creators and warns of impending war:

Si Dieu ne prenge garde, je quy que sourdra guere.
Ce sunt les articles de Trayllebastoun
Salve le roi meismes, de Dieu eit maleysoun
Qe a de primes graunta tiel commissioun!
Quar en ascuns des pointz n'est mie resoun.

[If God does not avert it, I think that there will arise war. / It is
the articles of Traillebaston; / Except the king himself, may he
have God's curse— / whoever first granted such a commission! /
For there is little reason in any of the points of it.] (231)

Despite a gesture to the safety of the king, the eschatological themes of God's curse of his enemies and the approach of war warn of the dire aftermath stemming from the corrupt governmental processes. Though the author places the authority of God's curse within the rightful power of the divine, war rests in human hands. The lines concentrate on God's power, but the possibility of war reveals a veiled threat of a very human revenge and retaliation.

As previously mentioned, famine is an eschatological sign of God's wrath, and it appears as the punishment for humankind's sins in "The Song of the Husbandman" and "The Simonie." The former poem begins with a description of the suffering throughout the land due to the dearth of grain: "Ich herde men upo mold make muche mon, / Hou he beth itened of here tilynge, / Gode yeres and corn bothe beth a-gon" (149). Likewise, "The Simonie" limns a causal connection between famine and God's punishment: "Tho sente God on eorthe another derthe of corn, / That spradde over al Engeland bothe north and south" (342). The poem's lyric speaker declares that God's wrath is for all humanity, but he emphasizes throughout the poem how the clerics and government officials have provoked God's anger. The vision of medieval England in the poem is that of a society which must reform or face God's judgment; as the poet declares, "That God wole for-don the world we muwe be sore agaste" (344). The verse's depiction of life in England stresses the necessity of reform in order to avoid God's wrathful judgment; by emphasizing the falsehoods which contaminate the powerful and the ostensibly religious leaders of England, the poet's calls for God's purifying but fatal intervention appear a reasoned response to a society gone awry.

The author of "The Song against the King's Taxes" likewise employs apocalyptic rhetoric throughout the poem in references to the flouting of God's will, God's justice, and the impending war, all signs of God's eschatological judgment. The rich and powerful shirk their responsibilities, and this sinfulness, in the poet's view, is opposed to God's vision of how his world should be in which the rich and powerful should assist those with less: "Rien greve les grantz graunter regi sic tributum; / Les simples

deyvent tot doner, contra Dei nutum" [It is no trouble to the great thus to grant to the king a tax; / The simple must pay it all, which is contrary to God's will] (184). The judgment which God passes on the rich will result in their dismissal from his grace:

Je voy en siècle qu'ore court gentes superbire,
D'autre biens tenir grant court, quod cito vult transire.
Quant vendra le haut jugement, magna dies iræ,
S'il ne facent amendement, tunc debent perire.
Rex dicit reprobis, "ite:"—"venite," probis.

[I see at the present day how people are proud, / With other people's good they hold great court, which will quickly pass. / When the high judgment comes, the great day of wrath, / Unless they make atonement, they must then perish. / The King [of Heaven] says to the bad, "Go:" to the good, "Come."] (185)

Despite the separation between the narrator and the lower (and, in the future, rebellious) classes, the use of eschatological discourse exhibits an understanding of the potential results—rebellion and warfare—of the social injustices of the contemporary political situation in fourteenth-century England. These inequalities then become the basis alternately for God's damnation of the unjust and salvation of the wronged.

God's eschatological judgment, though presented in the above quotations as within his divine power, is at times accorded to the common people. In "The Song of the Husbandman," the emphasis on the falseness both of the lords and of the members of religious orders becomes in the closing lines of the poem a call for men to take arms against their oppressors: "Ther wakeneth in the world wondred ant wee, / Ase god is swyn den anon as so for te swynke" [There wakens in the world wonder and woe, / It is as good to strike as so to labor] (152).²⁹ Through the employment of biblical eschatology, "The Song of the Husbandman" suggests a fitting punishment for the mighty who rule with falsehood. In the antiauthoritarian discourse of the poem, the use of eschatological tropes cogently argues for retribution against those who have privileged themselves at the expense of others. Similarly, "The Song against the King's Taxes" recognizes that the common people have been mistreated and that they may avenge themselves against their rulers. This poem is not written

²⁹My translation. Though Wright translates the last line of "The Song of the Husbandman" as "As good is to perish at once as so to labour," I believe that the line actually suggests, not resigned suffering, but radical anger. The word "swyn den" is the basis of our interpretational differences: Wright translates it as "to perish," but I follow the Middle English Dictionary and translate its meaning as "to beat, strike, thrash" or "to cut or strike through a body."

from the perspective of a participant in the Peasants' Rebellion; rather, the narrator of this poem explicitly states his fear of such a course of events: "Je me doute, s'ils ussent chief, quod vellent levare. / Sæpe facit stultas gentes vacuata facultas" [I fear, if they had a leader, they would rise in rebellion. / Loss of property often makes people fools] (186). Clearly, the use of the third person plural pronoun rather than the first person plural indicates that the narrator does not see himself as a member of the potential rebellion of which he speaks. Nevertheless, the narrator is sympathetic to the condition of the exploited poor and blames the situation, not on the king, but on his false counselors, as he prays "Rex ut salvetur, falsis maledictio detur" [In order that the king may prosper, may his false advisors be accursed] (182). Though this poem is written from the viewpoint of one who does not want rebellion, the sympathies expressed explicitly side with the oppressed poor who have fallen prey to the falseness prevalent in the world, a falseness which only the hand of God can rectify; the recognition that the poor may take up arms against the rich fulfills the poet's realization that the king's false counselors have led the kingdom astray.

The eschatological tropes evident in these poems should not be seen as discrete or divorced from the topic of literacy. Following Steven Justice's lead, I consider these poems to be examples of what he terms "assertive literacy"—writings which by their very existence advocate a revising of the social structure. Two of these poems, "The Simonie" and "The Outlaw's Song of Traillebaston," present radical revisions of the meaning and power of literacy and then criticize the power of literacy to serve the rich and powerful. The author of "The Simonie" links his concern with falseness to abuses of literacy. Though reading, and especially reading the Bible, should be a means for spreading Christian charity, the poet portrays the priesthood squandering their gift of literacy: "No more wot a lewed prest in boke what he rat / bi day. / Thanne is a lewed prest no betir than a jay" (328). The poet's concern for literacy links the eschatological thematics with the abuses of reading. The poet has already indicted the priesthood as purveyors of falsehood; by condemning the reading habits of the religious estate as well, the author suggests that the priesthood abuses their literacy. If powerful and ostensibly holy clerics read sinfully, the poet asks, who is to employ literacy for the good of the English people?

"The Outlaw's Song of Traillebaston" offers a radical revision of literacy in England when the author hints that the peasants of England will be able to read the poem for themselves. As the speaker flees the falseness and hypocrisy of the traillbaston judges, he threatens them with revenge while inviting others to join him in his refuge from injustice. The speaker underscores that his invitation lies open to those with the power of literacy, as they will be the ones most hunted by the government intent on imprisoning such persons:

Vus qy estes endité, je lou, venez à moy,
 Al vert bois de Belregard, là n'y a nul ploy,
 Forque beste savage e jolyf umbroy;
 Car trop est dotouse la commune loy.
Si tu sachez de lettrure, e estes coroucé,
 Devaunt les justices serrez appelée.

[You who are indited, I advise you, come to me, / To the green wood of Beauregard, there where there is no plea, / Except wild beast and beautiful shade; / For the common law is too much to be feared. / *If thou knowest letters*, and art enraged, / Thou shalt be called before the justices.] (234; emphasis added)

The last two lines of this passage suggest a literate and angry faction which could flee from the authority of the *traillebastons* and join the speaker in exile. Significantly, these motifs adumbrating literacy continue in the closing lines of the song in which the narrator declares “Escrit estoit en parchemyn pur mout remenbrer, / E gitté en haut chemyn, qe um le dust trover” [This rhyme} was written on parchment to be better remembered / And cast in the highway, that people may find it] (236). Though Coss prudently warns that “we should not take this [passage] literally,”³⁰ the poet nonetheless seems to imagine a large number of literate compatriots as he depicts his narrator hoping that the text will be seen by other like-minded people. Perhaps we should envision these lines to suggest that the poem was posted in the manner of a broadside, an act which would again dovetail with Justice’s conception of assertive literacy. The obvious corollary assumption is that those who find the poem will either be able to read it themselves or to find someone who can read it to them. The poem implies that sufficient literacy exists for the author’s message to be understood and further disseminated throughout the countryside in order to gather the people against the authority of the *traillebastons*. The poem delivers its message of discontent with the prevailing social order through both its eschatological discourse and its awareness of the availability of literate sympathizers to its message.

JOHN BALL’S LETTERS AND THE PEASANTS’ REVOLT OF 1381

John Ball, the clerical leader of the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, and his confederates appropriated literacy and eschatological thematics in their assault upon the power structures of fourteenth-century England with Ball’s six rebellious “letters” advocating the revolt. The continuity of thought between the prerebellion writers and their counterparts who actually par-

³⁰Coss, *Thomas Wright’s Political Songs*, lxii.

ticipated in the uprising is clearly found in Ball's revolutionary jingle of social unrest: "When Adam delfed and Eve span / Who was then the gentleman?" Ball's lyric is heavily indebted to a verse often erroneously ascribed to Richard Rolle.³¹

When Adam delf & Eue span, spir, if thou wil spede,
Whare was than the pride of man that now merres his mede?
With I and E, syker thou be, thare es nane, I the hete,
Of al thi kyth, wold slepe the with, a night schete.³²

Both Ball and the lyric's author demonstrate in their teachings an eschatological belief in the fallen state of England, though the anonymous poet locates the source of the problem in humankind's pride, whereas Ball locates it in social inequalities. Both men, however, look to an edenic past (ignoring Adam and Eve's dramatic fall from grace) for a model of a proper fourteenth-century Christian community. As Nick Ronan comments, "the ideology of the Rising [exhibits] an attitude to the past...described as 'retrospective radicalism' in that it aims to recreate an idealized past rather than design a utopian future."³³ The golden age of the past offers freedom from humankind's fallen nature, and this vision of democratic liberty allows Ball to envision a world free from the eschatological threats which he warns the leaders of his day that England faces.

The rampant spread of falsehood is an eschatological theme found frequently in the six letters. Jack Trueman's epistle warns of the ubiquity of untruth and the prevalence of guile: "falsnes and gyle havith regned to longe & trewthe. hat bene sette under a lokke. and fal[s]nes regneth in euerylk flokke."³⁴ The concern with falseness in the flocks runs parallel to the Wycliffite sermon quoted above in which the Antichrist appears alongside those sinners uncharitable to their neighbors. Ball describes the threat of falseness in similar terms, urging his followers to unite against error: "bee war of gyle in borugh and stondeth [togidere] in godes name" (14–15). The rebels believe England has become corrupt under a torrent of deception; the leaders of the country have led it into a state of depravity in which truth has vanished from the land. Reform—and violent reform, if necessary—is consequently depicted as the only escape from England's corrupt state.

John Ball suggests in his second letter that the proper response to the falseness and injustice rampant throughout England is a just and righteous

³¹See Hope Emily Allen, *Writing Ascribed to Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole, and Materials for His Biography* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1927), 296.

³²Allen, *Writing Ascribed to Richard Rolle*, 296.

³³Nick Ronan, "1381: Writing in Revolt: Signs of Confederacy in the Chronicle Accounts of the English Rising," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 25 (1989): 310.

³⁴I employ Steven Justice's edition of John Ball and his confederate's letters (*Writing and Rebellion*, 13).

anger. The only one of the Seven Deadly Sins whose presence in England he does not bemoan in this epistle, anger is thus privileged as an appropriate response to bad leadership: “Nowe regneth pride in pris. and couetys is hold wys. and lecherye with [outen shame] and glotonye withouten blame. Enuye regnith with tresone. and slouthe is take in grete sesone” (14). The absence of anger in the catalog of sin is intriguing and suggests that, for Ball, anger is a justifiable response to the spread of falseness throughout the land. God’s judgment and wrath will punish those who have corrupted the world, and the peasants will appropriate the role of God’s anger for themselves by taking up arms against the purveyors of falsehood in the other estates.³⁵

The writers of these letters believe that God’s judgment is coming and the end is near. The God of Ball’s letters is shown helping the cause of rebellion. Jack Trueman’s and Ball’s second letter both state “god do bote for nowe is tyme,” and Jack Carter declares in his letter that “[Ye] haue gret nede to take god with yowe in alle youre dedes. ffor now is tyme to be ware” (13). Figuring the justice of the biblical past against the injustices of contemporary England, Ball aligns God on the side of the poor and calls his might against the rich. The rebellionists, like the poets of the pre-rebellion poetry, bestow upon themselves the power of God’s judgment and depict themselves as the instruments of the eschatological judgment. Jack Carter’s letter states “that ye make a gode ende. of that ye haue begunnen ... for at the euen men hery[e]th the day. ffor if the end be wele. than is alle wele” (13). The epistle stresses that only at the end of an event can it be judged, and if it ends well, all is fine. Since their objective is nothing less than the overthrow of the current socioeconomic order, the epistle argues for a dramatic reversal of the prevailing social structure. John Ball’s first letter makes a supplication to the divine through Mary to Jesus for God’s intervention in the end: “Nowe is tyme lady helpe to ihesus thi sone. and thi sone to his fadur. to mak a gode ende” (14). The rebels depict their rejection of contemporary society in words which illustrate its imminent demise; the repeated emphasis upon the world’s end alludes to

³⁵David Fowler sees in John Ball’s allusion to six of the Seven Deadly Sins a reference to the A text (2.57–71) of *Piers Plowman*, which also omits wrath in a similar catalog. David Fowler, “Star Gazing: *Piers Plowman* and the Peasants’ Revolt,” *Review* 18 (1996): 1–30. The question of which text of *Piers Plowman* the writers of the rebellion were responding to is an intriguing one: Steven Justice bases his argument about rebellious appropriations of literacy on the assumption that the insurrectionists read and resignified *Piers Plowman*’s B text into a politically radical text. Fowler contends that the rebellious writers based their words on the A text before the rewrites of the B text; he concludes that the A text expresses radical thought congruous to that of the rebellionists: “The A text was written by an angry man, and the ideology that drives him is an almost perfect match for that of John Ball” (7–8). Whether John Ball’s catalog of six of the Seven Deadly Sins is a direct allusion to *Piers Plowman* or not, the author’s decision to omit anger, not to replace it with its fellow failings, likewise argues through absence that its force is needed and appropriate for the rebellion.

their hopes for a fitting conclusion both to their own struggles and to the unjust society which engendered such adversities.

Though less dramatic than the peasants' appropriation of God's anger for their cause, the letters of John Ball also demonstrate the usurpation of literature for the purposes of the rebellion, and, again, we see the conflation of eschatology and literacy. William Langland's *Piers Plowman* was skillfully adapted for rebellious purposes in the insurrectionists' letters, and that they read and wrote about the text stands as an important act of self-definition against the dominant and more literate caste. The conventional understanding of the interaction of the rebellion and *Piers Plowman* is that they resignified *Piers Plowman*'s B text into a declaration of radical change; as Lindsay and Grove argue, "Although he wrote of a peasant-saint and was quoted by the revolutionaries, Langland was himself no revolutionary, he was a reformer. Yet he became a battle cry to John Ball, that man of action."³⁶ David Fowler, however, convincingly concludes that the insurrectionists read the more radical A text.³⁷ Whichever text the insurrectionists read, the writings of the revolt, radical in their very existence in the vernacular, become even more volatile through their exploitation of literature. Conscripting Langland to galvanize public support for the rebellion, the authors assert a reading of *Piers Plowman* which stresses their familiarity with the world of letters through its allusions to a recent and recognizable literary figure. Both letters which refer to Piers Plowman—Jack Carter's and John Ball's third—treat him as a kindred spirit to the insurrectionists: Jack Carter's epistle requests "lat peres the plowman my brothur. dwelle at home and dyght vs corne." Likewise, John Ball's third letter considers Piers Plowman a confederate to the cause as its author commands the malcontents to "stondeth [togidere] in godes name. and biddeth Peres ploughman. go to his werk" (15). The letters transform a literary figure into a propagandistic representative of their cause and then surround him with eschatological thought. The Piers Plowman that the aristocratic orders know has been metamorphosed into the emblem of their enemies, and this new figure of Piers Plowman is yet another of the multitude who call for God's judgment and vengeance upon the unjust.³⁸

³⁶Philip Lindsay and Reg Groves, *The Peasants' Revolt* (London: Hutchison and Co., 1950), 17.

³⁷Fowler, "Star Gazing."

³⁸My argument concerns how John Ball and the authors of the insurrectionary letters employ the figure of Piers Plowman rather than how Langland addresses these topics in *Piers Plowman*. For an in-depth analysis of *Piers Plowman* and its relationship to issues of eschatology and the reform of Church and individual, see Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism*. See also Justice, "Piers Plowman and the Rising" in *Writing and Rebellion*, for further consideration of the peasants' appropriation of Langland's protagonist.

THE POETIC AFTERMATH OF THE PEASANTS' REVOLT OF 1381

After the rebellion ended unsuccessfully, poets continued their use of eschatological themes in their considerations of English society, though now such reformist thought could be directed at the defeated insurrectionists. The poems "On the Evil State of England" (1381), "The Course of the Revolt" (1381), "The Insurrection and the Earthquake" (1382), and "The Complaint of the Plowman" (ca. 1391–94) present a picture of a conflicted English society in which the reigning power structures have regained control of the land; nevertheless, the class inequities and abuses of power still provoke dissension and dissatisfaction among the lower classes.

"On the Evil State of England" and "The Course of the Revolt" argue for a return to a prerebellion England as they detail the execution of the insurrectionists. "On the Evil State of England" depicts the very real fate of the rebellion in its argument for humankind to refrain from such disruptions to English society:

Man be ware and be no fool:
Thenke apon the ax, and of the stool!
The stool was hard, the ax was scharp,
The iiij yere of kyng Richard.³⁹

The peasants' cry to the rich to "be ware," evident in Jack Carter's and John Ball's letters, is now turned against them and subsequently carries a reminder of the execution of their allies. The image of the sharp ax recalls the fate of those who fought against England's economic caste system. "The Course of the Revolt" depicts the execution of Jack Straw, the rector of Fobbing and one of the priests who participated actively in the rising. The macaronic poem calls for revenge upon sinners: "Vengeaunce nedes most fall, / propter peccata malorum" [Vengeance needs must fall, / On account of the sins of the bad].⁴⁰ The sinners whom the poet condemns are those who rebelled, and he closes the poem with the death of Jack Straw ("Iak straw down they cast") and a petition to God on behalf of the king ("god, as thou may best, / Regem defende, guberna" [God, as You may best, / Defend the king, Ruler]). According to the poet, the insurrectionists deserved death: "Deth was ther dewe dett."⁴¹ The poet employs an eschatological view of God's judgment to argue for the rightness of the executions of the rebelling clerics and peasants.

³⁹Rossell Hope Robbins, ed., *Historical Poems of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 54.

⁴⁰Robbins, *Historical Poems*, 56. My translation.

⁴¹Robbins, *Historical Poems*, 57.

The discourse of “The Insurrection and the Earthquake” makes repeated use of eschatological themes to warn the English people against their sinfulness, of which the rebellion is signified as God’s punishment. The poet believes that “[t]he Rysing of the comuynes in londe / The pestilens, and the eorthe-quake” are “tokenes [of] the grete vengauce & wrake / That schulde falle for synnes sake.” The Peasants’ Rebellion is thus linked to natural disasters as a sign of God’s impending judgment on the waywardness of the English people. Furthermore, the earthquake is specifically linked to the sin of falseness: “The Meuyng of this eorthe,... / A pure verrey toknyng hit is, / That Mennes hertes ben chaungable; / And that to falsed thei ben most Abul, / ffor with good feith wol we not fare.” The poet argues that falsehood is a sin subject to God’s punishment, a punishment meted out by both the rebellion itself and the earthquake. The answer to this problematic falseness, however, is the knowledge of the clerks:

The Rysing of the comuynes in londe,
The Pestilens, and the eorthe-quake—
Theose threo thinges, I vnderstonde,
Beo-tokenes the grete vengauce & wrake
That schulde falle for synnes sake,
As this Clerkes conne de-clare.⁴²

In direct contrast to the critique of priestly learning in “The Simonie,” the author locates temporal authority in the clerks; their knowledge is privileged as the locus of proper judgment against the rebellious classes.⁴³ The eschatological theme of God’s vengeance looms over those who would rebel against this estate, though now both the power of literacy and the hope of reform are placed in the hands of the clerical, rather than the peasant, estate.

“The Complaint of the Plowman” delivers a condemnation of churchly abuses in contrast to the proclerical argument of “The Insurrection and the Earthquake.” The narrator of the poem witnesses a dialogue between a griffin and a pelican, an allegorical representation of Christ. The pelican and the narrator lament the abuses and falsehoods of the priestly caste, the narrator declaring that the clerics serve the Antichrist:

Antichrist these [priests] serve all.
I praie thee who may say naie?
With Antichrist soch shull fall,

⁴²Robbins, *Historical Poems*, 59.

⁴³Of course, I have shown that rebellious clerics participated in just such disruptions which the author of this poem upbraids; however, nothing in “The Insurrection and the Earthquake” suggests that radical clerics are the ones the author has in mind.

They followen him in deede and faie;
 They serven him in rich arraie,
 To serve Christ such falsely fain.
 What, at the dreadfull domes-day
 Shull they not folowe him to pain?⁴⁴

Linking the priests to the Antichrist, the narrator envisions their eternal suffering on Judgment Day. The eschatological force of the passage condemns those who serve falsehood rather than Christ's truth. Also apparent in the passage is an excoriation of the rich pageantry ("in rich arraie") of the Church, in that money which could help the poor is wasted on pomp.

Though "The Complaint of the Plowman" demonstrates that verse could still be used to voice critique, "The Insurrection and the Earthquake," decidedly not written by a participant in the rebellion, warns its audience of the dangers of disrupting English society. The warning to "Be ware" of God's final judgment is repeated in the last line of all eleven stanzas of the poem, and the final stanza heightens this rhetorical effect by stressing the words six times in eight lines:

Be war, for I con sey no more,
 Be war for vengauens of trespas,
 Be war and thenk vppon this lore!
 Be war of this sodeyn cas;
 And yit Be war while we haue spas,
 And thonke that child that Marie bare,
 Of his gret godnesse and his gras,
 Send vs such warnyng to be ware.⁴⁵

The poet warns the citizens of England to beware of more punishments like the rebellion and the earthquake; if they do not reform, God's judgment will return. The rebellion, emphasized by the poem's very title, is signified as a sign of God's displeasure, and, in order to avoid further divine reproaches, the poet urges the aristocracy to reform themselves: "But that god thoughte yit sumdel / That lordes schulde [God's] lordschup feel, / And of heore lordschipe make hem bare."⁴⁶ The lords, the objects of the peasants' wrath, are not free from recrimination; according to this author, their actions led to the rebellion.

Where does insurgent literacy stand after the failed Peasants' Revolt? Returning to "The Complaint of the Plowman," we find intriguing insight into this question. At the end of the poem, the narrator presents a

⁴⁴Thomas Wright, *Political Poems and Songs relating to English History, Composed during the Period from the Accession of Edward III to That of Richard III* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1859), 328.

⁴⁵Robbins, *Historical Poems*, 60.

⁴⁶Robbins, *Historical Poems*, 58.

disclaimer to his critique of the Church and lays the blame for any offensive material on the pelican to whose debate he was merely witness:

Therefore I pray every man,
Of my writing have me excused;
This writing writeth the pelican,
That thus these people hath despised.⁴⁷

In this transparent gesture we see an author aware of the power of his words and his literacy. Knowing that the spread of such radical condemnations of the Church could cost him everything, the poet distances himself from his own abilities and gives credit for his work to his poetic creation. For the author, cognizant of the possibility of unsympathetic members of his audience, a literate pelican can voice what he dare not express directly.

Though the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 failed in its immediate goals to win self-determination for the peasant caste, its assumption of literacy for the lower classes marked a watershed moment in English history. The rise of literacy effected great changes in English society by giving the exploited a voice in the fate of their country. In the use of this tool, disaffected poets, clerics, and other reformers efficaciously employed eschatological discourse in order to make their argument that only a correct transformation of English society could stave off God's punishment. With falseness in every flock and all flocks employing literacy to push their own agendas, the eschatological themes of the rebellion's poetry denote the electrifying nature of insurgent literacy.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Wright, *Political Poems and Songs*, 345.

⁴⁸I would like to thank Martha Bayless, Louise Bishop, Marshall Brown, Jim Earl, Clare Lees, and Mavis Mate for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

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Meter Change as a Relic of Performance in the Middle English Romance *Sir Beues*

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Despite the paucity of direct evidence of performance, some form of public representation of the Middle English popular verse romances remains a possibility, and that possibility has been reached by extrapolation from a number of directions. The convergence of evidence, though indirect, has become convincing, and a new approach strengthens that likelihood even further. In an attempt to understand if and how the romances were performed, scholars have considered internal references to performance,¹ historical documents of performance and audience,² physical

¹Ruth Crosby in the 1930s and Albert C. Baugh in the 1950s and 1960s developed an elaborate theory of performance based on literal readings of these "minstrel tags." Ruth Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 11 (1936): 88–110, and Albert C. Baugh, "The Middle English Romance: Some Questions of Creation, Presentation, and Preservation," *Speculum* 42 (1967): 1–31. Much of the skepticism about romance performance expressed in the 1980s and 1990s has been in reaction to this approach. Janet Coleman was influential in discounting romanticized models of minstrel performance, suggesting the substitution in the late fourteenth century of literate poet for performing minstrel. Janet Coleman, *English Literature in History 1350–1400: Medieval Readers and Writers* (London: Hutchinson, 1981). P. R. Coss suggested that the minstrel tags were strictly "a literary convention designed to create an atmosphere of lively recitation." P. R. Coss, "Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood," *Past and Present* 108 (1985): 35. Along similar lines, in 1987 both W.R.J. Barron and Carol Fewster argued strongly against a performance model. W.R.J. Barron, *English Medieval Romances* (London: Longman, 1987); Carol Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987). In the 1990s the internal references to performance are again thought to provide valuable information, but they are now considered largely in the light of literary theory and conjunctions of orality and textuality. In addition, questions of generic integrity developing from questions raised by Garbáty and others have complicated the issue. Thomas J. Garbáty, "Rhyme, Romance, Ballad, Burlesque, and the Confluence of Form," in *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1984), 283–301.

²Probably the most useful historical evidence has come from the fields of musicology and theater history. For example, John Southworth has documented numerous instances of payment for narrative performances in late medieval England, John Stevens has discussed performance of the English romances in terms of the French tradition, and Mary Remnant has combined historical documents with extensive iconographic evidence on the use of bowed instruments. John Southworth, *The English Medieval Minstrel* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1989); John Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Mary Remnant,

evidence from the manuscripts,³ cognitive theory,⁴ theory of orality and “*mouvance*,”⁵ and evidence from textual variants.⁶

This last approach has focused on variants in structure and phrasing, but so far scholars have not considered *metrical* variants in discussion of performance practice. Since meter is integrally tied to both sound and structure, it can provide a useful threshing floor for distinguishing among

English Bowed Instruments from Anglo-Saxon to Tudor Times (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

³Karl Brunner, looking at quality, content, and provenance of manuscripts containing romances, suggested an upper-class rural interest in alliterative poetry. Karl Brunner, “Middle English Metrical Romances and Their Audience,” in *Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor Albert Croll Baugh*, ed. MacEdward Leach (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961). Refining this approach, Derek Pearsall systematized and exemplified a method of exploring literary implications derived from manuscripts. Derek Pearsall, *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England: The Literary Implications of Manuscript Study* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983) and “Texts, Textual Criticism, and Fifteenth Century Manuscript Production,” in *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1984), 121–36. He further emphasized the fifteenth-century taste for didactic verse, suggesting the irrelevance of modern generic categories dividing sacred and secular (Derek Pearsall, “Middle English Romance and Its Audience,” in *Historical and Editorial Studies in Medieval and Early Modern English for Johan Gerritsen*, ed. Mary-Jo Arn and Hanneke Wirtjes [Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1985], 37–47), a view corroborated in different terms, but equally based in manuscript studies, by John Thompson, “Popular Reading Tastes in Middle English Religious and Didactic Literature,” in *From Medieval to Medievalism*, ed. John Simons (New York: St. Martin’s, 1992), 82–100. Maria Dobozy’s study of “minstrel books” in the German tradition approaches manuscript study from a more interdisciplinary perspective, one that has become increasingly popular. Maria Dobozy, “Minstrel Books: The Legacy of Thomas Wright in German Research,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 87 (1986): 523–36.

⁴Studies of memory, such as Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), have been helpful in providing theoretical background for treatments of memory in texts. Michael Riffaterre discusses “aspects of orality that inhere in any literary text” in terms of theory of memory. Michael Riffaterre, “The Mind’s Eye: Memory and Textuality,” in *The New Medievalism*, ed. Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee, and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 29–45.

⁵In the last decade, literary theory surrounding medieval romance has become very complex, but the most significant branch in terms of performance study has been connected with oral tradition. William A. Quinn and Audley S. Hall presented a detailed study of oral improvisation in early Middle English romance. William A. Quinn and Audley S. Hall, *Jongleur: A Modified Theory of Oral Improvisation and Its Effects on the Performance and Transmission of Middle English Romance* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982). While this stems back to the work of Milman Parry (*The Making of Homeric Verse*, ed. Adam Parry [London: Oxford University Press, 1971]) and Albert B. Lord (*The Singer of Tales* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960]), study of orality has since developed beyond the original oral-formulaic theory. Paul Zumthor gave impetus to a recognition of text as a written manifestation of a speech act (“Intertextualité et mouvance,” *Littérature* 41 [1981]: 8–16), and he subsequently established the vital significance of physical presence (“*Les traditions poétiques*,” in *Jeux de mémoire: Aspects de la mnémotechnie médiévale*, ed. Bruno Roy and Paul Zumthor [Montréal: Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1985], 11–21) and, more recently, of gesture (“Body and Performance,” in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, trans. William Whobrey [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994], 217–26). Ward Parks codified the criticism to that point (“The Oral-Formulaic Theory in Middle English Studies,” *Oral Tradition* 1 [1986]: 636–94). In

performative and textual dimensions. *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* is particularly suited to this study, since it contains a curious metrical anomaly, and since it survives in seven fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts which vary in their treatment of that anomaly.

Although Joyce Coleman's recent book *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* does not address the popular romances, her call for an "ethnographic" approach, "following the texts as they draw their own map for us," is answered by this treatment of a specific instance of the "complex interlinking and differentiation of modalities."⁷ Evelyn Birge Vitz similarly notes the complexity of the performance possibilities among the earlier French romances: "the range goes from fairly sedate prelection, modestly enlivened with intonation and gestures, all the way to virtually theatrical performance."⁸ Analysis of a specific dimension of transformation (meter) within the tradition of a specific romance provides an ethnography of the sort Coleman mandates.

The metrical variation in *Sir Beues* manuscripts documents some of the many stages and complexities in a shift from an aural to textual representation of the narrative. Overwhelmingly, the evidence delineates a shift from values defined by performance to values defined by the text apart from any public performance. Understanding of the process of metrical transformation in this romance can enhance appreciation and awareness of both performative and textual elements in *Sir Beues* and may provide a key to understanding anomalous aspects of some contemporary works.

Sir Beues has not attracted much attention as a work in its own right. In an article on Middle English romances in general, Derek Pearsall sug-

the 1990s two important books have emerged on the subject: A.N. Doane and Carol Braun Pasternack, *Vox intexta: Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), and W.F.H. Nicolaisen, ed., *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995). Of related importance are Joseph Harris, ed., *The Ballad and Oral Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), which contains an important discussion of romance by Karl Reichl, and Bruce A. Rosenberg, *Folklore and Literature: Rival Siblings* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), which formalizes an important interdisciplinary connection. Andrew Taylor has challenged structural assumptions, using oral theory to present a theory of simultaneous oral and textual representation. Andrew Taylor, "The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript," *Speculum* 66 (1991): 43–73 and "Fragmentation, Corruption, and Minstrel Narration: The Question of the Middle English Romances," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992): 38–62.

⁶S.T. Knight used manuscript variants to suggest oral transmission of *Sir Launfal*, but his evidence was not developed in depth. S.T. Knight, "The Oral Transmission of *Sir Launfal*," *Medium Aevum* 38 (1969): 164–70. Most significant in this area has been Murray McGillivray, *Memorization in the Transmission of the Middle English Romances* (New York: Garland, 1990).

⁷Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2, 222.

⁸Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 226.

gests that *Sir Beues* shows “a range of textual variation within the individual romance which is difficult to attribute to the normal processes of scribal transmission.”⁹ So far no one has explored that textual variation more specifically. Herbert Schendl usefully discusses the word “randon” in the poem, but that is a treatment of a specific crux rather than analysis of the work itself, and it has more to do with how the Middle English *Sir Beues* relates to a larger tradition. Similarly, Linda Brownrigg discusses implications of the “visual quotations” of Josian with the two lions in the fourteenth-century Taymouth Hours, an article which is more about how *Sir Beues* is represented in another work than a study of the work itself. Analyses of texts of the Bevis story in other languages, such as François Suard’s treatment of expressions of amorous sentiment in the French version, are adequately represented, but these make only glancing reference to the English version. In fact, the Middle English *Sir Beues* has been largely treated in the light of its position with respect to other works. Stephen Hunt mentions a mistranslation in the Middle English poem in connection with the *Beyers Saga*, Maldwyn Mills considers the structure of the poem in connection with *Guy of Warwick*, and Jennifer Fellows touches on the poem in connection with the St. George legend.¹⁰

The romance of *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* is 4620 lines long in the Auchinleck Manuscript, dated 1330–40, one of the earliest extant collections containing Middle English romances.¹¹ The narrative covers the hero’s life from his birth and dysfunctional childhood, in which his mother kills his father and sells Beves into slavery at age seven, through many adventures involving giants, dragons, lions, and strong knights, until his death and burial together with his wife Josian and his horse Arundel. Much of the tale is set in Armenia, Damascus, and the East, and it involves some complex interactions between Christians and Muslims. Eugen Kölbing’s edition is fairly reliable, but it can be difficult to reconstruct variants from his notes. The only reliable way to discuss the prosody of the work is through direct reference to the manuscripts.¹²

There is a sufficient number of manuscripts of this text, and they are sufficiently varied, to provide an intriguing range and complexity of actualiza-

⁹Pearsall, “Middle English Romance and Its Audience,” 41.

¹⁰Herbert Schendl, “ME *Randon* in *Sir Bevis of Hampton*,” *Anglia* 102 (1984): 101–7; Linda Brownrigg, “The Taymouth Hours and the Romance of *Beves of Hampton*,” *English Manuscript Studies* 1 (1989): 222–41; Jennifer Fellows, “St. George as Romance Hero,” *Reading Medieval Studies* 19 (1993): 27–54; Stephen Hunt, “Further Translation Errors in *Beyers Saga*,” *Notes and Queries* 32 (1985): 455–56; Maldwyn Mills, “Structure and Meaning in *Guy of Warwick*,” in *From Medieval to Medievalism*, ed. John Simons (New York: St. Martin’s, 1992), 54–68.

¹¹National Library of Scotland MS Adv. 19.2.1, fols. 176r–201r.

¹²Eugen Kölbing, ed., *The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun* (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Reprint Company, 1978). Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the texts are from direct consultation of the manuscripts.

tion of the text. Most significantly, though, this group of manuscripts presents a well-documented and full instance of a prosodic anomaly that is not uncommon during this era, an anomaly that can shed light on the specific mechanism of how performative elements continued to operate in texts.

One of the difficulties in discussing Middle English prosody has been to sift through the complex relationship between verse and music. The terminology connected with prosody has historically been linked with music, and both prosody and music concern patterns of relative prominence of sound events in a time continuum. O.B. Hardison Jr. suggests that the French number-dependent verse “probably derives its reliance on ‘number’ from the fact that its verses were written to pre-existing melodies according to a formula that required one syllable for each musical note and that divided verses into measures ending with accented syllables and, eventually, rhyme.”¹³ It is easy to see how this approach may have transferred to English, in which, since it is more heavily stressed, ictus would be more important.

But not all music was syllabic; some was melismatic, assigning several notes to certain syllables, thus extending those syllables’ duration in time. Furthermore, some syllabic music (usually unmetered) maintained a set pitch to a certain point in the line, no matter how many syllables might be contained in that section, thus allowing considerable variation in the number of syllables per line. Both musical models suggest more flexibility in the expression of ictus. These widespread musical phenomena may help explain some of what we perceive as deviations from patterns in the Middle English romances, and, in fact, considerable diversity of metrical approach is evident in late medieval poetry and music.¹⁴

Hardison points out the converging influence of accentual-alliterative, accentual foot meter and syllabic verse in the late Middle Ages. He suggests that our concepts of meter distort the original perspective:

Since English is a stressed language, poets who wrote in regular patterns of light and heavy stresses were merely doing what came naturally. On the other hand, if they had been asked to explain their prosody, they would have spoken of syllable count and line types rather than metrical feet, and their terminology would have echoed that of the French poets who influenced them. Neither

¹³O.B. Hardison Jr., *Prosody and Purpose in the English Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 53.

¹⁴Steven Guthrie (“Meter and Performance in Machaut and Chaucer,” in *The Union of Words and Music in Medieval Poetry*, ed. Rebecca A. Baltzer, Thomas Cable, and James I. Wimsatt [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991], 72–100) suggests: “With respect to French verse, both octosyllable and decasyllable evolve from strict primitive forms with fixed caesura and strong binary stress toward more complex forms with greater rhythmic variety and greater abstraction of the caesural boundary. The lyric line is the more experimental, and its evolution influences that of the narrative line.” (95)

accentual nor syllabic terminology quite works. Medieval English verse is more inclined to regular stress patterns than medieval French verse, but it is not as easily segmented into regular units as the norm posited by accentual foot meter.¹⁵

A consideration of how ictus is expressed is crucial to an understanding of prosody and of how these various influences might work together in the tail-rhyme stanzas and couplets of Middle English romances. Seymour Chatman observes that we can readily determine which syllables are or might be prominent, but it is difficult to explain how we know. He suggests that we hear ictus in terms of what we would do to create it, and he indicates that in this matter both length and pitch seem to take priority over intensity. One of the consequences of his theory is a divergence between scansion and meter in which scansion is connected with performance and meter with text. Regarding scansion he states:

it seems clear that scansions can only derive from recitations—whether actually vocalized or “silent,” that is, the scanner cannot but proceed by actually reading the words and coming to some decision about their metrical status.¹⁶

He thus argues that scansion is just one version of meter:

The meter of a poem is not some fixed and unequivocal characteristic, but rather a structure or matrix of possibilities which may emerge in different ways as different vocal renditions. Obviously, these will not be of equal merit; but value judgments should not obscure the range of linguistic possibility even before inquiry begins. It is a mistake in method to confuse the metrical abstraction (in the sense of “derivation of common features”) with any of its / actualizations.¹⁷

An intriguing corollary of this theory is the association of text-based meter with regularity in pattern and the association of performative actualizations with variation and flexibility. This distinction takes on vital importance in consideration of metrical variants.

Reuven Tsur pursues a similar approach in different terms when he suggests that the “rhythmic performance” of a poem involves both the rhythm dictated by meter and also natural prose rhythm. When they conflict, he argues, and become mutually exclusive, the performer nevertheless finds a way to indicate both rhythms simultaneously, possibly by

¹⁵ Hardison, *Prosody and Purpose*, 8.

¹⁶Seymour Chatman, *A Theory of Meter* (London, The Hague, and Paris: Mouton, 1965), 102.

¹⁷Chatman, *A Theory of Meter*, 104.

different means. He argues that “a discriminating understanding of the tensions, the counterpoint between prose rhythm and metre, is largely dependent on a better understanding of the nature of the superinduced patterns of performance.”¹⁸ Like Chatman, he connects regularity with text and multiple dimensions with performance.

The early redactions of *Sir Beues* reflect a metrical flexibility indicating a performance context, while the later and more regular redactions reflect a shift to a text-based perception of the poem. The complexity of the metrical situation is evident in the description of Eugen Kölbing, the editor of the standard edition, which actually applies only to the early redactions:

The romance of *Sir Beues* is composed in two entirely different metres. The first 474 lines are written in the tail-rhymed six-line stanza. Only ll. 91–102 and ll. 3397–408 may be considered as twelve-line stanzas. The arrangement of the rhyme is such that the formula for the stanzas beginning at ll. 61, 73, 301, is *aab aab*, that of the rest *aab ccb*.... The *a* and *c* lines have four accents; the *b* lines only two. The rest of the poem is composed in couplets, consisting of lines of four accented syllables. Now and then the lines have only three accents, and that no doubt intentionally, especially in Beues’s address to King Brademond, ll. 1375–83, to add to the words a kind of solemnity. Now and then four successive lines are bound by the same rhyming syllable.¹⁹

While widely recognized as an important Middle English verse form, the tail-rhyme stanza has eluded precise definition. In 1907 Caroline Strong discussed the history of the tail-rhyme stanza in connection with its Latin and French precursors. In 1910 Jakob Schipper described several poetic forms with *caudae*.²⁰ But it was A. McI. Trowce in 1932–33 who codified the English tail-rhyme romances. He describes them at the outset of his discussion:

By tail-rhyme romances are meant romances composed in stanzas of twelve lines divided into four groups of three, each group containing, as a rule, a couplet with four accents to the line, and a concluding line, a “tail,” with three accents. The four couplets, in most of the poems, have different rhymes, while the tail-lines rhyming with one another organize the stanza into a whole.²¹

¹⁸Reuven Tsur, *A Perception-Oriented Theory of Metre* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1977), 21.

¹⁹Kölbing, *The Romance of Sir Beues*, x–xi.

²⁰Jakob Schipper, *A History of English Versification* (1910; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1971).

²¹A. McI. Trowce, “The English Tail-Rhyme Romances,” *Medium Aevum* 1 (1932): 86–108, 168–82; 2 (1933): 34–57, 189–93.

Needless to say, *Sir Beues* is not considered among the twenty-three poems Trounce approved as fitting the tail-rhyme pattern, since the verse form does not comply with his description and since the three-line units are used only in the first tenth of the poem.

More recent descriptions of the tail-rhyme meter have allowed greater variation, as does Susanna Greer Fein's discussion of twelve-line stanza forms in Middle English:

The earliest, most widespread type of twelve-line stanza is the tail-rhyme stanza of romance (a meter also known as *rime couée*). In its simplest form this stanza contains six lines rhyming *aa₄b₃cc₄b₃*, with four stresses in the couplet lines and three in the *b*-rhyming "tail lines," that is, the same distinctive rhythm parodied by Chaucer in *Sir Thopas*. Existing alongside the six-line form is a more challenging variant in twelve lines rhyming *aa₄b₃cc₄b₃dd₄b₃ee₄b₃*, an extension of the basic formula that requires the poet to produce four tail rhymes instead of two.²²

She goes on to describe further permutations, and much of her essay serves to demonstrate the diversity of late medieval metrical forms. Even among approved tail-rhyme romances there is considerable variation, so it is not surprising to find a somewhat anomalous form of tail-rhyme in *Sir Beues*.

In the Auchinleck Manuscript, the romance begins in a renegade tail-rhyme stanza in which the tail-lines contain only two, or in some cases one stressed syllable, rather than the more typical and Trounce-approved three.

Lórdinges, hérkneþ tó me tále
Is mérier þán þe níztingále
þat ý schel sínge
Óf a knízt ich wíle 3ow roúne
Béues a hízte of hámtoune
Wiþ oúten lésing

(Auchinleck MS 1–6)

The effect is to create at the end of every third line an enhanced pause which defies enjambment. It would be tempting to believe that the redactor shifted to couplets after 474 lines because, after a fair trial, the anomalous tail-rhyme meter seemed an affront to the genre, but that would not explain why an educated person, capable of testing verse before committing it to writing, would use up nearly three leaves of parchment with double columns of unsuccessful verse.²³

²²Susanna Greer Fein, "Twelve-Line Stanza Forms in Middle English and the Date of *Pearl*," *Speculum* 72.2 (April 1997): 372.

²³It is worth noting that the York Corpus Christi plays sometimes involve tail-lines with two stresses.

Two early- to mid-fifteenth-century manuscripts follow Auchinleck or its equivalent in beginning in truncated tail-rhyme stanzas and switching to couplets at exactly the same place.²⁴ It would seem then that at least two other scribes found the curious meter and its cessation inoffensive enough not to bother to change it. British Museum MS Egerton 2862, however, probably dating from the late fourteenth century, evidently responds to some impulse toward consistency and extends the tail-lines a few dozen lines further, and Biblioteca Nazionale MS XIII.B.29, dated 1457, follows this practice. By the late fifteenth century, consistency was evidently a powerful enough force to provoke thorough revision. Instead of extending the tail-rhyme stanzas, Chetham Library MS 8009 transforms the beginning into couplets, and the romance continues in that form in all of the subsequent early print editions. The seventh medieval manuscript, dating from the late fifteenth century, contains only a fragment from the end, which is in couplets in all redactions.²⁵

But the most perplexing aspect of the meter change is its creation rather than its transmission. In this matter, traditional textual analysis can be greatly enhanced by performance-based study. Pursued in isolation, textual analysis ultimately reaches an impasse; and pursued to the exclusion of all else, performance-based study collapses into indefinite sensibility. Together the two approaches can provide a scaffolding to extend our understanding of the matter. Clues to the construction of the romance may be explored in the parallel French version, in the nodes of transformation from tail-rhyme to couplet, in a comparison between the tail-rhyme patterns and the couplet patterns in the Auchinleck Manuscript, and in other instances of meter change in Middle English romances. This information is fairly unenlightening unless it is reviewed with an expectation that the romance might have been performed. With that as a priority, the different variants can be examined with respect to their effect in performance.²⁶

The romance mentions a French source several times, and an early *chanson de geste* in Anglo-Norman survives in two manuscripts: *Bibl.*

²⁴Caius College MS 175, 131–56, and Cambridge University Library MS Ff.II.38, fols. 102v–33v.

²⁵Trinity College MS O.2.13/IV, fols. 149r–52r.

²⁶In subsequent references, the seven *Beues* manuscripts will be referred to by the following sigla (in roughly chronological order):

A: National Library of Scotland MS Adv. 19.2.1 (the Auchinleck Manuscript), 1330–40

S: British Museum MS Egerton 2862 (formerly the Sutherland Manuscript), probably end of the fourteenth century

E: Caius College MS, early fifteenth century

N: Biblioteca Nazionale MS XIII.B.29, 1457

C: Cambridge University Library MS Ff.II.38, middle of the fifteenth century

M: Chetham Library MS 8009, late fifteenth century

T: Trinity College MS O.2.13/IV (fragment from end), late fifteenth century

Dates are from Gisela Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Middle English Romances* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976).

Nat. fr. nouv. acq. 4532 contains the first third of the poem, and *MS Didot* contains the end. The poem consists of assonating laisses of twelve-syllable lines, and, while this is probably not the source used by the English redactor, it is probably close. The scale of transformation varies dramatically, but here is a typical instance of an Anglo-Norman passage and its metamorphosis into English. Beues's mother requests that the messenger tell no one of her nefarious scheme to have her husband murdered.

Messenger, jo voil, que tu ore me afie
 Ke de mon conseil ne me descoveras mie,
 Ne le dirras a homme que soit en vie.

(*Bibl. Nat. fr. nouv. acq.* 4532, lines 47–49)²⁷

[Messenger, I would like for you to assure me that you will not
 betray my counsel in any way nor tell it to any man who is alive.]

The Middle English reads:

maseger do me surte
 þat þow nelt nouȝt discure me
 to no wiȝt

(A 73–75)

Rather surprisingly, most of the meaning is preserved in the English version, though it contains exactly half as many syllables. Though this is not necessarily a pattern, it is a useful instance of three equal lines being reduced to three shorter and unequal lines. While the diction is clearly influenced by the French in such choices as “maseger” and “discure,” the tail-rhyme stanza is very much an English form, so the decision to adopt that form and the manner of structuring that form is unlikely to be influenced by a French source. It is here that the notion of syllabic verse in opposition to accentual verse becomes intriguing, since the redactor seems to have substituted an accent-based pattern for a syllabic one, but the Middle English does not follow the pattern we perceive with great regularity.

The Anglo-Norman source is equally unrevealing of a motive for switching to couplets. In this matter the actual passages that contain that transformation can reveal the effects of the change, whatever its motivation might have been. In the Auchinleck Manuscript, the new meter is marked by a large capital S, and the change is clean:

beues queþ saber þow ert toblame
 þe leuedi wile now do me schame
 for þine sake
 boute þow be me consaile do

²⁷Quotations from the French versions are from Kölbing, *The Romance of Sir Beues*.

þow miȝt now sone bringe vs bo
in meche wrake

Saber beues to his hous ladde
meche of that leudi him dradde
þe leuedi out of þe tour cam
to saber þe wei ȝhe nam

(A 469–78)²⁸

It takes a couplet or two for a listener to get over the expectation of a tail-line, but otherwise it is not a troubling change. In a performance context, a change of this kind can energize the narrative, giving it heightened intensity as a modulation into a new key can heighten energy at a dance.

Such an assertion cannot be substantiated from within the text, but this performance perspective, based on extensive experience performing Middle English texts, can effectively work in tandem with textual analysis. Evelyn Birge Vitz, among many others, argues for the incorporation of historical performance in studies of medieval romance, averring that “such performances may give us valuable data on the fundamental character of the performability of such works and on the options open to performers.”²⁹

When the structure of the entire work is not physically and simultaneously present, as it is in the written text, any asymmetry created by a change such as the Auchinleck change in meter is minimal. A listening audience would be unlikely to remember that proportionally a tenth of the poem was in one meter and nine tenths in another. The meter change would be just another device for varying the poem.

This concept of aural tolerance is a pragmatic principle derived from a performance context, but the concept is substantiated by the flexible reality of the meters. The two meters represented in the Auchinleck *Sir Beves* are internally consistent to a degree, but only to a degree. It is this potential for variation within a meter that buffers any change from one meter to another, damping any jarring effect on a listener. A tail-line half stanza may approximate a couplet. Early in the poem, the Auchinleck redactor states:

Ich wile ȝow tellen al to gadre
Of þat kniȝt and of is fadre
sire gii

(A 7–9)

Since “gadre” and “fadre” rhyme, those two lines are established as a rhymed pair, and “sire Gii” is tacked on more as a bob than a tail-line. The

²⁸The line marking the meter changes are my addition.

²⁹Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, 283.

effect, though, of such a brief tag is to extend the previous line, so that the perceived meter may actually be different from that indicated by the rhyme scheme and the placement on the page. The combination of the second and third lines in the unit produces exactly the number of stresses and very nearly the same rhythm of one line in the Chetham Library Manuscript, which is written entirely in couplets. Thus “Of þat kniȝt and of is fadre / sire gii” (A) is comparable to “And by his faders days, that hight sir Gye” (M).

Conversely, couplets in combination can at times create effects very like tail-lines:

þe trompes gonne here bemes blowe
 þe kniȝtes riden out in arowe
 & þo þe tornement be gan
 þar was samned mani aman
 þe tornement to beholde
 to se þe kniȝtes stout and bolde

(A 3793–98)

These six lines consisting of three couplets are divided into two groups of three by units of meaning, and thus the middle couplet is split with respect to sentence structure. While it would be possible to continue immediately from the third to the fourth line, a pause would not be unreasonable, and such a pause would turn the third line into a kind of tail-line for the first two:

þe trompes gonne here bemes blowe
 þe kniȝtes riden out in arowe
 & þo þe tornement be gan [pause]

In an oral context, line groupings are not mutually exclusive. So, while the couplet is divided in one sense, it can still operate as a couplet because of the rhyme connection. Thus simultaneously we may hear juxtaposed

& þo þe tornement began
 þar was samned mani aman

But the sentence is not complete there, and a tag line, this time with three stressed syllables, is added to that, “þe tornement to behold.” Thus we have:

& þo þe tornement began
 þar was samned mani aman
 þe tornement to beholde

This sounds like a complete and conventional tail-rhyme half stanza, but the last couplet must be completed, so we have another simultaneous grouping:

þe tornement to beholde
 to se þe kniȝtes stout and bolde

In a written context, the couplets take structural precedence and shape our perceptions of the work, but in an oral context, structural perceptions are more flexible, and allow simultaneous and overlapping groupings patterned according to different parameters, such as pitch, duration, vowel quality, and intensity, and creating a closely interwoven texture which enhances the drama of the tournament. Thus evidence of aural metrical flexibility, as discussed by Chatman and Tsur, survives in the earliest English redaction of *Sir Beues*.

The two manuscripts following Auchinleck most closely in the meter change can further understanding of this performative quality.

beues queþ saber þow ert toblame þe leuedi wile now do me schame for þine sake boute þow be me consaile do þow miȝt now sone bringe vs bo in meche wrake	Saber sayde þou art to blame þe lady wole doo me schame Al For þy sake But þou wyȝt be cou(n)sayl doo þou myȝt soone brynge vs too In mechyl wrake	Syr seyde Saber þ(u) art to blame The lady wyȝl do me schame For thy sake But þou aftur counceyle do Thou mayste sone brynge bothe two Jn mekull wrake
Saber beues to his hous ladde meche of that leuedi him dradde þe leuedi out of þe tour cam to saber þe wei ȝhe nam	Saber þat chyld nam be þe gour(e) & he lokyd hym i(n) hys bour þe lady out off þe bour com Too saberys In þe wey sche nom	Saber yn to hys chambur hy lad And of the lady he was drad The lady owt of the towre came To saber yn the wey sche name
(A 469–78)	(E)	(C)

Although the textual meter of the couplets calls for four stresses for each line, the actualization in the Auchinleck Manuscript shows considerable variation from that. The first two couplets follow a 4-3 pattern:

Sáber béues to his hoús ládde
méche of that leúedi him drádde
þe leúdi óut of þe toúr cámm
to sáber þe wei ȝhe nám³⁰

This is followed in A by a couplet in the more typical 4-4 pattern:

sáber ȝhe seíde whár is bíf
þat wíke treítour þat fúle þéf

³⁰The following scansions are presented acknowledging Chatman's observations that

1. Metrists do not agree upon the number of syllables in a given word or line;
2. Metrists do not agree upon whether a given syllable is prominent or not;
3. Metrists do not agree upon how the syllables are grouped. (103)

These principles are particularly true of Middle English verse, where we do not have the assurance that comes with dealing with poetry in our primary language. Nonetheless, many patterns do elicit general agreement, and there is some value in comparing ictus possibilities in alternate versions, where scansion can provide a terminology for discussing differences. In most cases, reasonable alternate scansions do not materially affect the argument.

Both E and C substitute lines of four stresses each for the anomalous lines in A. E accomplishes this in the first instance by substituting an entirely new couplet:

Sáber þat chýld nám be þe goúr(e)
&´ he lókyd hym í(n) hys boúre

Although there are four stresses in each line here, the unstressed syllables do not readily fall into a regular pattern, and the effect in performance, as in A, is a drawing back and hurrying forward underscoring the uncomfortable waiting described in the passage. C accomplishes the increase to four stresses in each line of that couplet by keeping the overall phrasing of A, but making minor revisions to allow more regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables:

Sáber ýn to hys chámber hy lád
And óf the lády hé was drád

All three manuscripts follow the same phrasing for the second couplet, though E and C's addition of a reference to Saber's "in" normalizes the number of stressed syllables. Here C sacrifices the possessive indicated in E's "saberys" to create a line with precisely alternating stressed and unstressed syllables: "To sáber ýn the wéy sche náme." Effective as A may be in an oral context, the fifteenth-century E and C already seek to normalize the meter according to textual patterns.

The metrical elasticity of the early versions of *Sir Beues* is particularly evident in the brief continuation of the tail-rhyme stanzas represented by the late fourteenth-century British Museum Egerton MS 2862, followed closely by Biblioteca Nazionale MS XIII.B.29. Here the transition from tail-rhyme stanzas to couplets is much more gradual. Following a six-line stanza in consistent *Beues* tail-rhyme form is a stanza with the tail-lines extended from two stressed syllables to four, rendering all the lines in that stanza metrically equivalent to couplets, though the rhyme scheme still follows the tail-rhyme pattern of *aabccb*.³¹ The following stanza switches to the most typical tail-rhyme pattern, consisting of tail-lines of three stressed syllables each. At this point the text makes the switch to couplets, but the first line contains only three stressed syllables rather than the typical four. The redactor prepares a listening audience for the metrical shift by training them to accept a range of metrical possibilities. The ultimate shift to couplets is thus not utterly unprecedented, since it is immediately preceded by such diverse patterns.

³¹For this to work, the vowel in "held" needs to be lengthened, and this change reflects the meaning of the passages. Such explanations for variant rhythms are frequent in the romance, but they are difficult to illustrate in a text-based format.

With her shíp zere gón þey lónd þré márchantes gán þen fóund Tó þat cítee With hem þey tóke childe Béuoun Fór to sélle him ín þe toún For góld plénte	With her shíp th(er) theí gan lónd iií márchant(is) gan fónd Tó that cíte With hem thei tóke chıld Béuon Fór to sílle him ín the toún <i>For gólde</i> plénte
With séluer cheýnes þey him gýrte To léde him þey wére aférde Éche héld ón him hónde For him to háue gréte byzéte þey lád him þrouzout éuery stréte Ón his héd a roós gárlonde	W(ith) sílu(er) cheýnes thei wére bi gúrd To léde him thei wére a férd Éche héld ón him hónde For him to háue grét bi yéte Thei lád him thrówe éu(er)y stréte Ón his héd a róse gárlond
And þey ne mýst nó man fýnde To býe þe chıld of c(rí)sten kýnde So dére þey gán him hólde Týl þ(er) cóm a kínges stéwarde þát was hénde and nó négarde An týl him þey him sóld	And thei ne mýght nó man fínde To bígge th(e) chıld of crísten kýnde So dére thei him hólde Tíl th(er) cóme the kíng(is) stéward Thát was kýnd and nó négard And tó him thei him sóld
----- The stéward wént to þe kýng And p(re)sénted him w(yth) þe childe	----- The stéward wént to the kýng And p(re)séntis him w(ith) th(at) childe
so ýng þe kíng þ(er) óf was glád and blýth And þánkyd him þ(ér) of móny sýth (S)	yóng The kýng was th(ér) of glád and blítthe And thánkid him mány a síthe (N)

It is only with the late-fifteenth-century Chetham Library MS 8009 (M) that we find enough value placed on consistent meter to warrant a thorough revision. The manuscript begins with regular couplets and continues to follow that pattern throughout.

Lýstonythe lórding(ys) yf yé wilt dwéll
Of a dóughty mán I wýll you téll
Thát hathe béne in mány a stoúre
And hól dyn in Énglond hís honoúre
That hé fóre this týme hathe béne
Bý a knýght is thát I meáne

(M)

Although more than one unstressed syllable may intervene between any two stressed syllables, the general pattern is regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. This makes most sense in a textual context, where simultaneous patterns are difficult to express and the many dimensions of the human voice are absent. Lacking a vehicle for more complex interpre-

tation, the poem follows an increasingly rigid metrical pattern as it moves into an increasingly text-based context.

Analysis of the metrical variants among manuscripts thus provides further evidence for the theory that *Sir Beues* and other romances of its kind were at one time publicly represented and were shaped by performative values. The process of disintegration of those values provides evidence that the romances were performed in Middle English even as it provides an ethnographic study of the process of textualization in a particular instance. Recognition of relics of performance in the manuscripts of *Sir Beues* renders numerous anomalies comprehensible and provides a tool for appreciating dimensions of the poem that cannot be realized in a strictly written format.

Examined in isolation, the Auchinleck Manuscript's shift from tail-rhyme to couplets may seem remedial rather than an integral and desirable aspect of the text, but there are other instances of internal meter changes in the Auchinleck Manuscript. *Guy of Warwick*, which occurs just before *Sir Beues* in the manuscript, adopts just the opposite of the *Beues* meter shift: it begins in couplets and shifts to tail-rhyme stanzas. *Roland and Vernagu*, though constructed entirely in twelve-line tail-rhyme stanzas, shifts halfway through from typically 4-4-3 stresses for each three lines to 3-3-3, though the meter in this poem is somewhat irregular. *Richard Coeur de Lion* begins with two twelve-line stanzas in tail-rhyme and then switches to couplets for the rest of the poem. Derek Pearsall and I.C. Cunningham see this as "best explained in terms of the collaborative activity of professional hacks with access to the same exemplar."³² But they note that meter changes at no point correspond with changes in scribe and postulate "rough working drafts provided by versifiers working in collaboration." This is a reasonable scenario, but it is important to note that, however the manuscript was produced, consistency in meter was not a priority.

In the Auchinleck Manuscript and the other early redactions of *Sir Beues* metrical consistency is not necessary to the decorum of a romance, but by the end of the fifteenth century metrical consistency becomes essential, and couplets become preferable. Neither the change in attitude to consistency nor the repugnance to tail-rhyme can adequately be explained in terms of the textual tradition, but they can be understood if we hypothesize a shift from performance.

This theory is supported in the wild metrical variation in some of the Middle English Corpus Christi plays, which were documentably designed for performance. For example, in the Wakefield *Creation* God speaks in 4-4-3 tail-rhyme stanzas, the cherubim in 4-4 couplets, and Lucifer most

³²Derek Pearsall and I.C. Cunningham, eds., *The Auchinleck Manuscript: National Library of Scotland Advocates' MS 19.2.1* (London: Scolar Press, 1979).

often in a distorted imitation of God's tail-rhyme stanzas, usually falling a line short or muddled in some other way. In the case of Lucifer's variations from regular metrical patterns, the patterns violate, not textual principles, but patterns aurally perceived. For example, in the following stanza, the missing line violates expectations established in an aural context:

Certys, it is a semely sight!
Syn that we ar all angels bright,
And ever in blis to be,
If that ye will behold me right,
This mastré longys to me.³³

The effect, appropriately, is confusion.

These other texts indicate that metrical inconsistency is not unique to early manuscripts of *Sir Beues*, but that the phenomenon is widespread enough to deserve some attention and attempt at explanation. The transformations in the *Sir Beues* manuscripts are clearly enough documented to substantiate the hypothesis that the metrical anomalies preserve values defined in a performance context.

Carl Lindahl (1995) discusses variants among analogues of the Wife of Bath's Tale in terms of oral tradition. He suggests:

some books are more bookish than others. The prospect that Gower's *Tale of Florent* was read aloud does not stop it from *sounding* like a book. The fact that *Gawain and Ragnall* was written in manuscripts does not stop it from reading like an oral performance. The Wife of Bath's Tale falls somewhere between. Although it employs (even as it parodies) bookish convention, it must have been written for an audience thoroughly familiar with oral romance.³⁴

Murray McGillivray discusses several Middle English romances using variants to suggest memorized transmission. David Fowler similarly considers variants in aligning some of the romances with the ballad tradition.³⁵ Previous studies, however, have not examined metrical variants as evidence of oral dimensions. Yet metrical analysis could help clarify some of the complexities of the oral/aural/textual continuum.

Here, then, is one instance of the sort of analysis that could be applied to the works discussed above. An "ethnography" of the prosody of the

³³David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 261.

³⁴Carl Lindahl, "The Oral Undertones of Late Medieval Romance," in *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages*, ed. W.F.H. Nicolaisen (Binghamton: State University of New York, 1995), 75.

³⁵McGillivray, *Memorization in the Transmission of the Middle English Romances* and David C. Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968).

Beues manuscripts is productive in demonstrating how consistency becomes more important as written texts begin to function in their own right rather than as reflections of a performance tradition. Aural elements become less and less compelling. In performance, tail-lines are useful as a transition from one couplet to the next, and they provide a break for both performer and audience. In a literary text, however, couplets are more efficient, and tail-lines become trivial and extraneous.

Metrical variants in manuscripts of *Sir Beues* provide concrete evidence that this romance was publicly represented in some way. Furthermore, study of these variants provides a specific model for exactly how performative elements can remain in a text and the process by which they are eradicated. While this analysis informs our understanding of the nature and development of *Sir Beues*, it also validates the use of historical performance as a tool to be used in tandem with textual analysis for exploring and explicating the Middle English popular romances.

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**ALLEN D. BRECK
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Anne Southwell, Metaphysical Poet

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T.S. Eliot has remarked that “[n]ot only is [it] extremely difficult to define metaphysical poetry, but [it is] difficult to decide what poets practise it and in which of their verses.”¹ Although the terminology was initially *ad hoc*, *post hoc*, and somewhat hostile, the adjective has been transvalued and it “stuck.” But ever since John Dryden accused John Donne of affecting “the metaphysics,” and “perplexing the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy,” and long before Samuel Johnson wrote that the metaphysical poets were “*men* of learning,” there has been a tacit assumption that women did not or could not comprehend or compose metaphysical poetry.² In the anthologies of Herbert Grierson or Helen Gardner and in the critical studies of Joan Bennett, George Williamson, Louis Martz, et alii, metaphysical poets are almost always men. Nonetheless, in 1994 Louise Schleiner observed that Anne Southwell (1573–1636) is “a female ‘metaphysical’ poet and direct associate of John Donne, who should have been receiving study along with Donne, Herbert, Carew, and company.”³

Before Schleiner’s analysis, few scholars had discussed Southwell in any depth, and as Sister Jean Klene, professor at Notre Dame, observes in her pathbreaking 1997 edition of Southwell’s commonplace book, even fewer had actually discussed her poetry.⁴ Klene explains that in 1752,

¹T.S. Eliot, “The Metaphysical Poets,” in *Selected Essays* (1932; repr., New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1964), 241.

²John Dryden, “A Discourse concerning Satire” [1692], in *Dryden: Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, ed. George Watson (1912; repr. New York: Dutton, 1962), 2:76. In his famous remark Dryden casually assumed a single-minded utilitarian purpose for love poetry and patronizingly implied that women weren’t well educated enough, high-minded enough (or bright enough) to appreciate metaphysical imagery. Samuel Johnson seems to make a similar assumption in “The Life of Cowley,” in *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols. (1905; repr., Hildesheim: George Olms Verlag, 1968), 1:19.

³Louise Schleiner, “Mrs. Bulstrode’s and Lady Southwell’s Inventions, and Lady Southwell’s Later Writings,” in *Tudor & Stuart Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 121. Schleiner’s research is pioneering and sometimes difficult. In her second appendix, Schleiner offers a sampling of Southwell’s poems, including the two considered here. See pages 243–49.

⁴*The Southwell-Sibthorpe Commonplace Book: Folger MS. V.b. 198*, ed. Jean Klene, C.S.C. (Tempe, Ariz.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies [MRTS], 1997), 24–28 (notes pp. 193–94) [hereafter *Commonplace Book*] or Folger MS V.b. 198, fols. 19v–21r. With the assis-

George Ballard, the feminist antiquarian, lamented that he could not find any information about Lady Anne Southwell, but he knew of her existence; in 1838 Joseph Hunter mentioned Anne Southwell; and in 1886, Alexander Grosart noticed her in passing. More recently, Anne Southwell has been discussed in essays by Jean Cavanaugh, Barbara Lewalski, Louise Schleiner, Jean Klene, and Linda Dove.⁵ In each case, the annotation and discussion of Southwell's poetry is relatively brief.

Although the unpublished status of Southwell's work makes her neglect more intelligible, I would like to second Professor Schleiner's claim with a close reading of the poems she champions. Contrary to the legend that the metaphysical poets were high Anglican men, Anne Southwell was a Puritan woman who composed metaphysical poetry. After a review of her life intended to establish her Puritan sentiments, the focus turns to the metaphysical qualities of her poetry.

Anne Southwell (1573–1636) was one of John Donne's near contemporaries: she was born a year after him, and she died six years after his death.⁶ In the research for her edition of Anne's commonplace book, Klene uncovered most of the facts in the following account of the poet's life. Born in Devonshire, not far from the port of Dartmouth, on lands adjacent to the property of Sir Walter Raleigh, Anne Harris was the daughter of a sergeant at law and a member of Parliament. In 1594, at age 21,

tance of Georgiana Ziegler, I purchased a microfilm of the MS while anxiously awaiting the appearance of Professor Klene's edition. Each of us worked independently, and each of us noted items the other overlooked or omitted.

⁵For further discussions of Southwell, see Sister Jean Carmel Cavanaugh, "The Library of Lady Southwell and Captain Sibthorpe," *Studies in Bibliography* 20 (1967): 243–54; Barbara Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 76; Sister Jean Carmel Cavanaugh, "Lady Southwell's Defense of Poetry," *ELR* 14, no. 3 (1984): 184–85; Jean Klene, "Recreating the Letters of Anne Southwell," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985–1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton, N.Y.: MRTS, 1993), 239–52. In "Composing (to) a Man of Letters: Lady Anne Southwell's Acrostic to Francis Quarles," *ANQ* 11, no. 1 (1998): 12–17, Linda Dove follows up an observation by Professor Klene and discusses the clever acrostic compliment Southwell composed for Francis Quarles. (See *Commonplace Book*, 20; Folger MS V.b. 198, fol. 17r.) Although Southwell undoubtedly admired Quarles, she displays a very critical attitude toward authority, and she never regarded James I or Charles I as uncritically as Quarles did. Her lines in praise of King James read like an attempt at placation; a note subscribed suggests, "wee are undonne/if off thy court I am" (*Commonplace Book*, 125; British Library [BL] Lansdowne MS 740, fol. 142r). As Southwell remarks in her meditation on the first commandment, "For Truth is stronger then the strongest king" (*Commonplace Book*, 135; Lansdowne MS 740, fol. 149). In another passage, Southwell notes that her outspokenness, personified as a spirited Pegasus, almost ruined her: "when first I backed this jade hee dashed at princes/ & almost broke my neck from off[f] his back" (*Commonplace Book*, 138; Folger MS V.b. 198, fol. 153v).

⁶English orthography is notoriously irregular in this period. The running title of the Folger MS V.b. 198, perhaps added by Captain Sibthorpe, reads "Lady Ann Sothwell," but she spells it "Anne Southwell" in the first of the poems discussed here.

she married Thomas Southwell of Norfolk, the Protestant nephew of Robert Southwell, the distinguished Jesuit poet. In 1603, with the accession of King James, Thomas Southwell was knighted, but Anne Southwell was sent away from Queen Ann's court under a cloud. Afterward, Anne and her husband resided in Ireland where they raised two daughters. In 1626, sometime after her first husband's death, she married a Captain Sibthorpe.⁷ Although little is known about her family life, her second husband clearly admired her intelligence and encouraged her to write. Despite her first husband's last name and her famous Jesuit in-law, Robert Southwell, Anne's religious attitudes and political affiliations were militantly Protestant and strongly antiauthoritarian. In her view, "kings breake theyre lawes," and "patriarches, apostles, prophets all / have slipped away from truth...."⁸ As indignant as Martin Luther, she refers to the Papacy and the concept of transubstantiation with towering contempt. Although she occasionally makes a perfunctory effort to praise King James, royal authority is not sacrosanct: she knows that "potentates and mighty kings...need not be untrew, / and yet you are, the greatest theeves of all / that have beeing upon this massy ball."⁹

Nominally Anglican, Southwell's sentiments were clearly Puritan.¹⁰ One of her first husband's relatives died in the siege of Ostend assisting the Dutch revolt against the Spanish occupation of the low countries; her second husband, Captain Sibthorpe, was an officer in the Northern Irish garrison. Although she participated in the colonization of Ireland, she was not an unscrupulous imperialist. Raised in a militantly Protestant milieu, Anne Southwell is one of the earliest English writers to condemn the slave trade. Although her family's admired neighbor, the martyr to royal tyranny, Sir Walter Raleigh, brought slaves to Jamestown in 1609, Anne

⁷Her previous husband was a "Sir," so that made Anne a Lady. She retained her title when she married her second husband.

⁸*Commonplace Book*, 58 and 73; Folger MS V.b. 198, fols. 35v and 45r.

⁹For the notable attempts to praise or placate King James, see *Commonplace Book*, 70; Folger MS V.b. 198, fols. 42v, 124; Lansdowne MS 740, fols. 142–43. For the quoted passages, see *Commonplace Book*, 84; Folger MS V.b. 198, fol. 52r. The lines about kings as thieves are populist, but they would have been especially topical during the period of "personal rule" or in reference to the struggle over the limits of "royal prerogative" in the "ship-money" case.

¹⁰Like Archbishop Abbott and most of the Anglican bishops, Anne Southwell appears to have been a Calvinist. The very first entry in her numbered list of 110 books is "Calvins Institutions, in ffolio"; the second is "Calvins Sermons upon Job: in folio"; and the third is "Synopsis Papismi," a militant anti-Catholic treatise by Andrew Willet. The bulky folio of Calvin's *Institutes* appears to be entered first by choice, from memory (*Commonplace Book*, 98–101). Klene's introduction indicates that the commonplace book was rebound in the nineteenth century, and her transcription shows that some pages have been placed out of sequence; this, in turn, raises the possibility of other errors of pagination (xxxiv, 98–101).

writes, "Whoe steales a man and seles him ought to dye."¹¹ Although Southwell reluctantly accepts a measure of wifely subordination on scriptural grounds, she rebuts sexist attempts to silence women, rebels against any imputation of intrinsic inferiority, and defends the fundamental equality of the sexes.¹² It is no accident that the hotbed of the American abolitionist and feminist movements was formerly Puritan New England.

At the same time, Southwell's poems were collected as part of a manuscript culture which Arthur Marotti describes; some of them appear in the British Library Lansdowne MSS with poems by Donne, and Donne's influence is readily apparent. A. J. Smith observes that Donne's *Anniversaries* "inspired an impressive body of quotation, imitation, adaptation, and remark."¹³ Anne Southwell's companion poems, her mock elegy and her epigram on Cassandra MacWilliams, Lady Ridgway, shows Southwell's clear familiarity with Donne's *Second Anniversarie: The Progresse of the Soule*, and the poems of Ben Jonson.¹⁴ Both of her poems are meditative poems, both poems are, in a manner of speaking, love poems, and both poems are episodes in a spiritual autobiography.

In these contrary poems, Southwell does what Donne often does: she tries to confront and reconcile contraries into a complex vision which

¹¹*Commonplace Book*, 89; Folger MS V.b. 198, fol. 55r. Southwell was invoking what would become one of the key texts of the abolitionist movement, Exodus 21:16, "He that stealeth a man, or selleth him, or if he be founde in his hand, shal dye the death." *Geneva Bible* [1560], facsimile, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). For another example of the invocation of this passage, see the excerpts from Alexander McLeod's "The Practice of Holding Men in Perpetual Slavery Condemned, Exod.xxi.16," in *Against Slavery: And Abolitionist Reader*, ed. Mason Lowance (New York: Penguin, 2000), 72–80.

¹²Like Emilia Lanyer, Southwell openly speaks in defense of Eve, and she interprets Adam's sleep during the creation of Eve as a symbol of male incomprehension of the role of women (*Commonplace Book*, 42; Folger MS V.b. 198, fol. 26r). In many respects, her position is "Pauline": she remembers the controversial injunctions in Ephesians, but she also remembers Galatians 3:28 and 5:1. Men and women are equal, for good and for evil: "God called them Adam both, and did unite / both male and ffemale one hermaphrodite / And being one ther's none must dare to sever / without a curss, what God hath injoined together.... Which was the meekest foole is hard to tell" (*Commonplace Book*, 43; Folger MS V.b. 198, fol. 26r). For a more recent equalitarian reading of Paul's epistles, see John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said about Women: An Apostle's Liberating Views on Equality in Marriage, Leadership, and Love* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988, 1991).

¹³A. J. Smith, ed., *John Donne: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 3.

¹⁴Linda Dove has suggested the influence of Francis Quarles. In addition, copies of Harrington's translation of Ariosto, the poems of Edmund Spenser, John Davies, William Browne, John Donne, and George Herbert were listed in Southwell's personal library. Southwell's poems also suggest the influence of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke. Greville died in 1628, but most of his work was not published until 1633. Yvor Winters later described Greville as a master of the plain style, but some nineteenth-century readers associated him with the "riddling" metaphysical poets. For instance, Elizabeth Barrett [Browning] wrote of Greville as "that high prince of riddledom, the thoughtful Lord Brooke." See *Elizabeth Barrett to Mrs. Mitford: Unpublished Letters*, ed. Betty Miller (London: John Murray, 1954), 153.

cannot be reduced to either of its components. In terms of genre, style, mood, and tone, she composes in the metaphysical mode. Many of the observations of Samuel Johnson or T.S. Eliot apply to Southwell as well as they apply to Cowley, Donne, or Marvell.

The wit and seriousness of Anne Southwell's companion poems for her friend, Cassandra MacWilliams, the countess of Londonderry, exemplify the metaphysical style.¹⁵ The first poem is a hyperbolic metaphysical elegy in the manner of Donne's *Second Anniversarie*; the second resembles a terse Jonsonian epigram. Echoes of both Donne and Ben Jonson appear in Southwell's companion poems.¹⁶

Southwell's companion poems exemplify Samuel Johnson's definition of metaphysical wit in his essay on Abraham Cowley. Her poems achieve a "discordia concors... a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." Pagan poets and popes, obscure mythology, and controversial theology cohabit in her poetry. As Johnson wrote, "the most heterogenous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtilty surprises." Although Johnson goes on to criticize the metaphysicals according to neoclassical canons of taste, he admits that "to write on their plan, it was at least necessary to read and think."¹⁷ There is no shortage of thought in Southwell's poetry.

One poem is an imaginative panegyric with a satiric purpose, but the panegyric never obviates the satire, and the satire never cancels out the panegyric. The other poem is pained, chagrined, and yet dignified; its closing lines seem to echo Jonson's elegy for S.P. One poem begins as an arabesque of the imagination; the other begins as an unwanted confrontation with a horrible reality. One poem commences as an exercise or frolic of the imagination; the other is abrupt and serious. In the first poem, the author assumes a persona and reveals herself as herself; in the second the author writes as herself, and then assumes a persona without ever forfeiting the conviction of her utter sincerity. Hiding behind the gestures of a persona becomes a way to express and insinuate a genuine loss.

¹⁵In the Folger MS V.b. 198, the first poem is titled "An Elegie written by the Lady A: S: / to the Countess of London Derry as / supposinge hir to be dead by/hir longe silence"; the second is entitled, "An Epitaph, uppon Cassandra MacWilliams, wife of Thomas / Ridgway, Earl of London Derry by Lady A: S:"

¹⁶Aside from being friends, Donne's and Jonson's styles were not always quite as distinct as one might suppose—some of their poems have been confused in manuscript. Jonson admired Donne; he praised Donne in his epigrams and, according to the Drummond MS, in conversation.

¹⁷Samuel Johnson, "The Life of Cowley," 1:20–21.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY DONNE: IN THE METAPHYSICAL MOOD

Southwell's mock elegy is an internal colloquy, in which the poet argues with herself. The first couplet broaches the *donnée* of the poem: it begins as a wistful speculation taken as an assumption, disguised as a question.

Since thou fayre soule, art warbling to a spheare
from whose resultances ¹⁸ these quickn'd were¹⁹

Anne assumes her friend has died, been resurrected, and has ascended into the heavens.

The next lines are couched in sensuous, almost Spenserian imagery; they combine a compliment to Cassandra's beauty with a meditation in a daydream. Anne imagines her friend's body laid up in a marble sarcophagus while her spirit has ascended to heaven. The beauty of life and the glory of heaven, carnal death, and spiritual rebirth stand in uneasy suspension.

Since thou hast layd that downy Couch ²⁰ aside
of Lillyes, Violets, and roseall pride;
And lockt in marble chests, that Tapestrye ²¹
that did adorn the world's Epitome;²²
Soe safe, that Doubt it selfe can never thinke,
fortune or fate hath power, to make a chinke;
Since, thou for state,²³ hath rais'd thy state, soe farr,
To a large heaven, from a vau[l]t circular,²⁴
because the thronginge virtues in thy breast
could not have roome enough, in such a chest.

(lines 3–12)

Then the author rebukes herself for telling her imaginary auditor what both of them already know, that the flesh is but the transient clothing of the soul which will be cast off at the day of doom.

¹⁸ According to astrology, events in the lower spheres, at least in part, are resultances of the higher ones.

¹⁹ Transcribed from a xerox of Folger MS, V.b.198, fols. 19v–21r, lines 1–2.

²⁰ Her body, the resting place of her soul.

²¹ Her skin? Donne calls the flesh "A Province Pack'd up in two yards of skinn" (*Second Anniversarie*, line 176); in the poem beginning, "Noe man may see the face of god and live," Southwell refers to our "house of skinn" (*Commonplace Book*, 60; Folger MS V.b. 198, fol. 36r). Also, please note, the writing is unclear, and many of the superfluous final "e"s may be flourishes rather than actual letters. All citations of Donne's *Anniversaries* are from *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C.A. Patrides, Everyman Library (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1985).

²² The soul was the epitome of nature, the microcosm: it reflected the world in miniature.

²³ A "progress" of state like royalty. Donne's *Second Anniversarie* is subtitled, "Of the Progress of the Soule."

²⁴ Her rib-cage?

What need hast thou these blotted Lines should tell,
 soules must againe take rise, from whence they fell,
 From paradise, and that this earth's Darke wombe
 is but a wardrobe ²⁵ till the day of Dome!
 To keep those wormes, that on her bosomes bredd,
 till tyme, and death, bee both extermined.²⁶

(lines 13–18)

Meanwhile, the corrupt body is food for worms until time comes to a stop and death dies. The underlying conceit conflates a compliment with a recollection of the day of doom and permutates into a *memento mori* which envisions, as Donne does, the death of death. The animus of the language is less pictorial than cognitive, less logical than speculative. Playful puns metamorphose into serious reflections as the poem proceeds by the logic of association. The changing thoughts of the author transform the meaning of the words, and what Eliot says of Donne—“[a] thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility”—applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Anne Southwell. As T.S. Eliot remarks of Donne, her mind is

constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.²⁷

For instance, the imagined sarcophagus recalls the vault of a tomb, and the vault of the tomb recalls the contrasting vault of the open heavens. A storage of a precious tapestry in a chest or trunk evokes the spirits thronging her friend's heart in her chest in her trunk. The number of Cassandra's thronging virtues suggests overcrowding, and that suggests the need to escape. Escape is, of course, the spirit's abandonment of the confinement of the body. One thought metamorphoses into another, in a stream of unselfconsciousness. In so doing, Southwell translates and momentarily explains away the imagined fact and pathos of death with a whimsical etiological fable. Underlying the imagery is an awareness of the ugliness and

²⁵ In “The Undertaking” Donne refers to a woman's outside as her “oldest clothes.” Vulgarly, her birthday suit.

²⁶ Exterminated, terminated, abolished. In addition to recalling the final line of Donne's Holy Sonnet 10—“death thou shalt die”—Southwell may have had in mind Donne's lines 117–18 from *The First Anniversarie*: “Think thee a Prince, who of themselves create / Wormes which insensibly devour their state.” Klene explains how Anne was ordered away from court in 1603, and she observes that Southwell's poetry reflects “disillusionment about the court” (*Commonplace Book*, xiii).

²⁷ Eliot, “Metaphysical Poets,” 247.

inevitability of death. Anne knows the thought of Hamlet, "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come...."²⁸

Then Anne shifts her point of view, and tries to identify with the ascending soul. Her words echo a tradition going back through Donne and Johannes Secundus to Cicero's dream of Scipio.

Yet in thy passage, fayre soul, let me know
 what things thou saw'st in risinge from below?²⁹
 Whether that Cynthia³⁰ regent of the flood
 within her Orbe admitt of mortall brood!³¹
 Whether the 12 Signes serve the Sun for state?
 Or else confine him to the Zodiaque!³²
 And force him retrograde to bee the nurse
 (whoe circularly glides his oblique course)
 of Alma Mater,³³ or unfreeze the wombe
 of Madam Tellus w[hi]ch else proves a tombe?³⁴
 Whether the Starrs be Knobbs uppon the Spheres?³⁵
 Or shreds compos'd of Phoebus³⁶ goulden hayres?
 or whether th'Ayre be as a cloudy sieve?

²⁸*Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (New York: Routledge, 1982), 5.2.215–20.

²⁹Recalls the visionary ascension through the spheres in Donne's *Second Anniversarie*.

³⁰In mythology, the goddess of the moon. Cynthia is another name for the lunar goddess Diana. By controlling the tides, the moon is "regent of the flood." Southwell's one-time neighbor Sir Walter Raleigh used the imagery to celebrate Queen Elizabeth. Southwell asks, is there life on the moon? In the *Second Anniversarie* [1612], Donne mentions speculations about whether "in that new world [the Moon], men live and die"; in *The Cypresse Grove* [1623], William Drummond of Hawthornden remarked, "The Earth is found to move, and is no more the centre of the universe.... Some affirme there is another World of men and sensitive Creatures, with cities and palaces in the Moone...." See Michael J. Crowe, *Theories of the World from Antiquity to the Copernican Revolution* (1990; repr., New York: Dover, 2001), 178–79.

³¹Within the sphere of the moon, within the "sublunary sphere," everything was supposed to be mortal and subject to decay. The following passages echo Donne's description of the celestial journey in *The Second Anniversarie: Of the Progresse of the Soule*.

³²By analogy, does the King control the court or does the court control the King? Anne Southwell also seems to recall the lines in the *First Anniversarie* [1611] where Donne writes, "They have empayld within a Zodiacke / The free-bourne Sunne, and keepe twelve signes awake / To watch his steps; the Goat and Crabbe controule, / And fright him back, els to eyther Pole. / (Did not these Trophiques fetter him) might runne..." (lines 263–67).

³³Literally, dearest mother; here, mother earth.

³⁴Another periphrasis for mother earth. Without the sun, earth becomes a dead planet.

³⁵The outer crystalline sphere was supposed to hold the incorruptible fixed stars.

³⁶Southwell is alluding to contemporary controversies inspired by the new astronomy. Were the stars reflective or luminescent bodies or both? Was light pulsed or was it a steady stream? Were the stars spheres embedded in transparent orbs or were they merely openings showing forth the light of heaven itself? "Phoebus' golden hayres" refers to the corona or coma [hair] flaring from the sun or the solar rays. Aristotle and Averroes assumed the distant "fixed" stars were dark, opaque spheres ["knobs upon the spheres"] which reflected the remnants or "shreds" of the light of the sun as sunlight was dissipated. Some scholars tried to

the Starrs be holes through w[hi]ch the good soules drive?
 Whether that Saturn that the 6 out topps³⁷
 sitt ever eatinge of the bratts of Opps³⁸
 whose jealousye is like a sea of Gall
 unto his owne proves periodicall?

(lines 19–36)

In jocular language, she wonders what Cassandra might have seen, and wonders which of the theories of cosmology is most correct. Planets evoke images of anthropomorphic pagan gods and barbaric legends. In turn, the barbarism of celestial cannibalism brings the poet's thoughts crashing to earth like a falling star until she thinks of Cassandra soaring through the spheres to heaven.

But as a glideing star³⁹ whoe falls to earth
 or lover's thoughts,⁴⁰ soe soules ascend theyr birth,
 w[hi]ch makes mee thinke, that thyne had noe one notion,
 of those true elements,⁴¹ by whose true motion,

explain away Galileo's awkward discovery of "sun-spots" by suggesting they were optical illusions caused by earthly vapors. Contrary to Aristotle, Macrobius and Avicenna argue that the stars shed their own light. Another tradition suggested that the stars were apertures in the firmament through which the light of the heavens shone, and through these virtual "star-gates" the saved soared into paradise. In contrast, Giordano Bruno, Kepler, Descartes, and Galileo believed the stars were huge burning bodies like the sun. See Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars, & Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 393, 416–19, 446, 449, 456, 458.

³⁷For centuries, Saturn was regarded as the seventh and last planet; Neptune and Pluto weren't discovered until later.

³⁸These jocular lines allude to a grisly myth. According to Hesiod, Kronos or Saturn married his sister Ops or Rhea, but once he heard the prophecy that he would be deposed by his own offspring, he began to devour them even as they emerge from the womb in hope of eliminating the threat of his predestined successor. Nonetheless, Mother Earth hid Zeus, and deceived Saturn with a large stone. When Zeus came of age he deposed Saturn and fought a war in heaven to establish his power over the Titans. See Hesiod's *Theogony*, trans. M.L. West (Oxford: World's Classics, 1988), 16–18. Southwell's lines also allude to the slow periodicity of the planet Saturn, perhaps referring to the way Saturn "devours" and disgorges (or eclipses) the other planets. Whether she knew Hesiod's account or Ovid's, whether she saw or read Thomas Heywood's play, *The Golden Age: Or The Lienes of Jupiter and Saturne, with the defining of the Heathen Gods: As it hath bene sundry times acted at the Red Bull, by the Queenes Maiesties Seruants* (London, 1611), Southwell knew what she was doing. In a cryptic, metaphysical manner, Southwell juxtaposes the myth of all-devouring time [Kronos] with a conviction of the certainty of resurrection.

³⁹A falling star or meteor. In tone, this passage seems to suggest the cynical mood of Donne's "go and catch a falling star."

⁴⁰Lover's thoughts, depending on their nature, are polyvalent. Southwell might have in mind either the carnal thoughts of earthly lovers or the celestial aspirations of spiritual love.

⁴¹In contrast to earth, air, fire, and water, the soul was immaterial. From a Christian perspective, neither time (Kronos) nor the four elements are entirely elemental. They, with

All things have life, and death, but if thyne eyne,
 should fix a while uppon the Christalline,
 Thy hungrye eye,⁴² that never could before
 see, but by fayth,⁴³ and faythfully adore,
 should stay, to marke the three-fould Hierarchy,⁴⁴
 differinge in state, not in felicitye
 How they in Order, 'bout Jehova move,
 In severall offices, but w[i]th one love,
 And from his hand, doe hand in hand come downe,
 till the last hand,⁴⁵ doe heads of mortalls crowne.

(lines 37–50)

Having already realized that the four elements are not our “element,” that the earthly precincts are not our true limits, Cassandra has ascended.

Anne asks if saints ever take their eyes away from the vision of God—which resembles the vision of pseudo-Dionysius or Dante’s *Paradisio*—to look below, but the rapturous tenor of her question provides its own implicit answer. Meanwhile, Anne continues her meditation on heaven by recalling St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:40; she wonders what a celestial body is like.

Fayne would I know from some that have beene there!
 what state or shape cælestiall bodyes beare?⁴⁶

all their vicissitudes, are derived from, and contrasted to, the constant action of the Prime Mover, God, through whom everything comes to exist: “For in him we live, and move and have our being; as also certeine also of your owne Poetes have said, For we are also his generacioun” (Acts 17:28). Southwell is tacitly, facetiously contrasting classical mythology, with its sometimes grotesque allegories, to Christian revelation.

⁴²This seems to refer to a spiritual hunger, the visionary Cassandra sees what she could have never seen before, pending the full cleansing of the soul. The saved, those bathed in the blood of the Lamb, shall serve in the presence of God: “They shal hunger no more, nether thirst anie more, nether shal the sunne light on them, nether anie heate. For the Lambe, which is in the middes of the throne, shal governe them, and shal leade them unto the livelie fountains of waters, and God shal wipe away all teares from their eyes” (Rev. 7:15–17).

⁴³In contrast, we now see through a glass darkly (St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 12:12). In the Geneva Bible, the passage reads, “For now we se through a glasse darkely: but then we se face to face. Now I know in parte: but then I shall knowe even as I am knownen.”

⁴⁴This refers either to the Trinity or to “three hierarchies [of angels] organized in nine choirs” which hymn the Lord. According to Diane McColley, pseudo-Dionysius designated the nine orders as Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels, and Dante envisioned them in the last six books of Dante’s *Paradisio*. See Jeffrey Lyle’s *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1992), 38–42.

⁴⁵The hand of God, and the hand of a clock as time runs out and Doomsday comes.

⁴⁶St. Paul, who had ascended to the third heaven, refers to the assumption of “celestial bodies,” but he never describes them (2 Corinthians 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:40).

For Man to heaven, hath throwne a waxen ball,⁴⁷
 In w[hi]ch hee thinks h' hath gott true formes of all,
 And, from the forge house of his fantasye,⁴⁸
 hee creates now, and spins out destinye.
 And thus these prowde worms,⁴⁹ wrap't in lothsome rags,
 shutt heavens Idea⁵⁰ upp, in letherne baggs.⁵¹

(lines 51–58)

Our apprehensions and preconceptions are as inadequate to describe the heavens as a celestial chart or description of the heavens is to the reality of the stars on a clear night. The waxen “tabula rasa” of the mind can only deceive itself with forgeries, with imaginary, “fantastic” imitations of reality.⁵² These forms are mere outlines, while the true Forms are substantial realities. Man’s conceit deludes him into thinking that he has mastered the secrets of creation or handles the spindle of destiny. Instead, men close off their access to the heavens by focusing on treasures the moth can corrupt. The Golden Rule is sacrifice to gold, and visions of celestial angels are reduced to gazing on the gloss of coins.

Again, Anne appeals to her friend to share her knowledge of life after death.

Now since in heaven art many Ladyes more,
 that blinde devotion⁵³ busily implore,
 Good Lady, freind, or rather lovely Dame,
 if you be gone from out this clayie frame,

⁴⁷A waxen ball might take “impressions” of things as they are or appear to be. A globe?

⁴⁸The faculty of imagination.

⁴⁹This echoes the indignation against human arrogance in Donne’s *First Anniversarie*, lines 216–18; 279–89. Southwell has a similar sardonic tone.

⁵⁰According to the famous conversations attributed to Drummond of Hawthornden, Donne had complimented the ambiguous heroine of the *Anniversaries* as the “Idea of a Woman.”

⁵¹Worldly men treasure up “angels” (coins) in leather moneybags.

⁵²In the second chapter of his “Meditations,” Descartes invokes the transient qualities of a piece of wax in order to show that knowledge is not reducible to perception. He remarks that his researches had “gradually ruined all the faith I had attached to my senses.” Like Donne in the *First Anniversarie*, lines 279–80, Southwell seems to be making the same point. Although Descartes’ *Meditations* weren’t published (in Latin) until 1641, four years after Southwell’s death, the skeptical mood was available long before Montaigne or Descartes. Living in tolerant Holland, Descartes shared his writings with a circle of admirers before they were published. Cartesian ideas, like those of Machiavelli in his day, may have been available before they were formally published. See René Descartes, “Second Meditation,” in *Discourse on Method* and *The Meditations* (London: Penguin, 1968), 102–12.

⁵³Devotees of the Saints ask for mercy from them, in lieu of appealing to Christ as they should. At the end of the *Second Anniversarie*, Donne also remarks hagiolatry: “Here in a place, where mis-devotion frames / A thousand praiers to saints, whose very names / The ancient Church knew not, Heaven knowes not yet” (lines 511–14).

tell what you know, whether th' Saynts adoration
 will stoop, to thinke on dusty procreation?
 And if they will not, they are fooles (perdye)⁵⁴
 that pray to them, and robb the Trinity.⁵⁵

(lines 59–66)

She wonders if angels ever stoop to think on dusty procreation—but she suspects they don't, and that the Catholic adoration of the saints is wasted. Saints and Angels only know our predicament by contrast to their own felicity, by reflection, or in contrast to the divine vision they share and we lack.

After gazing upward, Anne's thoughts are drawn back to earth. In a recollection of Lazarus staring down on Dives from the bosom of Abraham, Southwell wonders, if angels could, or would, look away from the heavens and down toward the earth, what they would see?

The Angells joyed in o'r good conversation,
 yet see us not, but by reverberation,⁵⁶
 And if they could, you so as cleere Eyes⁵⁷ have,
 if downe you looke to earth, then to the grave,
 'Tis but a Landskipp more, to looke to Hell,
 in viewinge it, what strange thinges may you tell!
 From out that Sulphurous, and bituminous⁵⁸ lake,
 where Pluto doth his Tilt, and Tournay⁵⁹ make,
 where the Elizium, and theyr Purgatorye⁶⁰
 stande, like two suburbs, by a promontorye.

(lines 67–76)

With x-ray vision, angels could see earth, and through the grave, into hell itself. If only such things as the pagan Elysium or the Catholic Purgatory existed as they did in Dante's in the *Commedia*, they could surely see them....⁶¹

⁵⁴ Certainly—at the risk of damnation? The word is derived from the same root as “perdition,” the state of being “lost.”

⁵⁵ Here Southwell criticizes the adoration of the saints.

⁵⁶ By reflection.

⁵⁷ Angels were thought to have acute, clear-eyed vision.

⁵⁸ Bitumen is a pitchy substance like asphalt or tar.

⁵⁹ Tournament. Southwell apparently imagines hell full of absurd (and perhaps ceremonial) violence. One is reminded of the grotesqueries of Hieronymus Bosch or the black humor in the “gargoyle cantos” of Dante's *Inferno*.

⁶⁰ Greeks and Romans sometimes imagined Elysian fields in the underworld, not far from Hades where the damned are punished; Dante places it in a kind of antechamber to Hell. Protestants like Donne or Milton respected Dante, but most of them rejected the concept of a literal Elysium and the idea of Purgatory.

⁶¹ Southwell seems to be alluding to the asinine butting of the wrathful, or the macabre gargoyle cantos, in Dante's *Inferno*.

Poets, and pope-lings,⁶² are æquippollent,⁶³
 both makers are of Gods, of like descent,
 Poets make blinde Gods, who with willows beats them,⁶⁴
 Pope-lings make Hoasts of Gods, and ever eats them.⁶⁵
 But let them both, poets and popelings, passe
 whoe deals too much w[i]th either, is an Asse,
 Charon conduct them, as they have devised,⁶⁶
 the Fall of Angells,⁶⁷ must not bee disguised

(lines 77–84)

Pagan poets and medieval popes are equally powerful in imagination, and equally impotent in reality. Poets invented the blinded god of love, and Popes, according to their bitterest critics, fabricated the specious mystery of transubstantiation in the Mass. She implies that only asses believe in either, and those who do can go to hell as is only appropriate for those who transform the adoration of God's Angels into idolatry or the worship of man's coins.⁶⁸

Southwell feels that the danger of damnation must not be disguised or mitigated, because the fearful promulgation of that danger is actually an act of love, an act of piety or pity which can warn the deluded and forestall delinquency. Just as kings or magistrates build prisons in order to maintain law and order, so God maintains the threat of damnation as a deterrent.

As 'tis not tyranny, but loving pittye,
 that Kings build prisons in a populous Cittye,
 Soe, the next way, to fright us back to good,
 is to discuss the poynts, of Stygian flood.

(lines 85–88)

This tragic necessity is a consequence of the fall.⁶⁹ When we follow Eve, or the way of all flesh, whenever we pursue our own selfish, carnal interests

⁶²Contemptuous diminutive: "little popes."

⁶³Equally powerful—or powerless.

⁶⁴Love poets create "cupidon." Erwin Panofsky explains that the blind Cupid was a symbol of carnal love or lust. See Erwin Panofsky, "Study IV. Blind Cupid," in *Studies in Iconology* (1939; repr., New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 95–128. Cupid is a symbol of Augustinian "cupiditas."

⁶⁵Like Spenser, Southwell makes sarcastic attacks on transubstantiation and the Catholic theology of the "real presence" in the Mass.

⁶⁶Ellipsis: "to hell." Charon is the "waterman" or boatman of the underworld who ferries souls to judgment.

⁶⁷To hell. If angels fall, mankind must be even more at risk.

⁶⁸This passage recalls the earlier Donnean pun on "angels."

⁶⁹Southwell is not afraid of sobering topics usually given over to men, and although her theodicy might provoke some uneasiness, one suspects that she (like Eliot) might have regarded this argumentation as an example of "tough reasonableness." See "Andrew Marvell,"

to the detriment of others, we are debased, and afflictions restrain us more than love or grace.

In Eve's disdained nature, wee are base,
and whippes perswade us more, then love, or grace,⁷⁰
Soe, that if heaven, should take away this rodd,
God would hate us, and wee should not love God;
For as affliction, in a full fedd state,
like vinegar in sauces, does awake
dull Appetites, and makes men feed the better,
Soe when a Lythargye, or languor⁷¹ doth fetter,
the onely way, to rouse againe our witts,
is, when the Surgions cheifest tool, is whips.
Brasse hath a cousening face and lookes like gold
but where the touchstone comes it cannot hold.⁷²
that sonne of ours, doth best deserve our rent,
that doth with patience bear, our chastisement.⁷³

(lines 89–102)

Southwell makes it clear that Eve's nature has nothing to do with gender, and that Adam isn't a whit wiser: Eve's nature, the susceptibility to temptation, is in all of us. Without the threat of punishment mankind would be forever estranged, we would misbehave so badly that God would hate us, and we would not love God.

In contrast, affliction keeps us awake and sharp. Those in a moral lethargy require sharp stimulants to arouse their drowsy minds. The purpose of the afflictions of the wicked is obvious, but affliction is also a test or touchstone of goodness, testing people by the way they accept affliction or chastisement. Anyone can enjoy prosperity, but only the most diligent, most noble among us can be devout in affliction, or on the verge of death.

in Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 252. Speaking of Marvell, Eliot argues that this sort of sentiment "is not cynicism, though it has a kind of toughness which may be confused with cynicism by the tender-minded... it implies a constant inspection and criticism of experience" (262). In Southwell's scenario, the threat of hell is a celestial necessity which is ultimately benevolent; the threat is meant to help us avoid becoming inured to neglecting and abusing one another

⁷⁰All mankind are corrupted by the sin of Eve (and Adam). In allegorical readings of the Bible like that of Philo Judaeus, Eve is sometimes made to represent the passionate, fleshly side of man's nature. In other scriptures, salvation is figured as a woman; St. Paul represents our corrupt tendencies as the old Adam, the "old man."

⁷¹The handwriting is very difficult. Klene reads "a Lythargye, of braynes."

⁷²Affliction in the midst of prosperity and contentment is a touchstone of character. A touchstone is a hard black stone of jasper or basalt used to test the quality of gold or silver by the mark left when rubbed or touched.

⁷³This is an analogy for one's relationship to God.

Each Titmouse,⁷⁴ can salute the lusty springe,
 And wearr it out, w[i]th jollye revellinge,
 but yo[u]r purest white, and vestall clothed Swan,
 Sings at hir death, and never sings but then;⁷⁵
 O noble minded bird, I envy thee,
 for thou hast stolne, this high borne note from mee.⁷⁶

(lines 103–8)

The next lines orchestrate a rich, complex, baroque comparison that epitomizes the metaphysical attitude. The lines contain a rich array of references: they combine a reference to the ascension of Elijah (leaving behind his mantle) with a contrasting thought on the fall of Adam.

But as the Prophett, at his M[aste]r's feete,
 when he ascended, up the welkin⁷⁷ fleete
 watcht, for his cloake,⁷⁸ soe every bird, and beast,
 When princely Adam, tumbled from the nest,
 catcht, from his knoweing soule, some qualitie,
 and humbly kept it, to re-edify,⁷⁹

⁷⁴Contrary to the suggestion embedded in its name, a titmouse is a small, common-place songbird. Anne contrasts herself with Cassandra, the ordinary titmouse with the prophetic swan.

⁷⁵According to Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, the swan was sometimes an “emblem of the ideal and perfect love, filled with the ‘candor’...which its plumage revokes.” Sometimes swans escort the souls of the saved to paradise, and according to one legend, Apollo changed “Cycnus, the king of Liguria,” into a swan and placed him among the stars. The resulting constellation is shaped like a cross, and swans came to be associated with Christ, Christians, and the saved. On the other hand, Charbonneau-Lassay observes that the legend of the last swan song can be traced through the work of Callimachus, Theocritus, Euripides, Lucretius, Ovid, Propertius, Aristotle and others. See “The Swan,” in *The Bestiary of Christ*, trans. and abr. D. M. Dooling (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 243–57. Southwell may have recalled Donne’s extravagant allusion to the swan and its song in the *First Anniversarie*, lines 407–8.

⁷⁶Swans were thought to prophesy their own deaths. The puns are suggestive: high-borne can mean carried high or of high birth; a note can hint at a note in the celestial harmony or at a person “of note.”

⁷⁷Sky. Chaucerian or Spenserian archaism.

⁷⁸The second book of Kings, 2:1–12, describes how, before his death, Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire. As he rose into the sky, he dropped his mantle behind for Elisha to take up. In an ironic inversion, when mankind “fell” Adam dropped the mantle of his authority, and sunk to a level beneath the beasts of the earth.

⁷⁹Like Shakespeare or Donne before her, or Milton later, Southwell is using a Latinate pun. To re-edify is to reeducate, to build, to erect, or perhaps by extension, to resurrect. *The American Heritage Dictionary* suggests that to edify is “to instruct or enlighten so as to encourage moral or spiritual improvement.” The *OED* says to edify is “to improve in a moral sense: sometimes *ironical*.”

theyr quondam⁸⁰ Kinge, and now, man goes to school,
to every pismire,⁸¹ that proclaymes him foole—⁸²

(lines 109–16)

The passage combines a possible compliment to Donne's *Anniversaries* to his symbolic "mistress" with a reference to Anne Southwell as Cassandra's humbled heir. As Elijah, servant of the church, ascended into the heavens, he left his cloak behind him. Just so, Cassandra left behind her earthly dress, the flesh, and the mantle of responsibility to mourn her death.

But just as the animals stole good qualities from the fallen Adam in order that they might admonish him, their previous king, because he, and not they, became the true Fool—so Anne Southwell has the sly audacity to try and teach the one from whom she acquired many of her good qualities. On one hand, the idea that Anne could "edify" the ascended Cassandra (or the living friend) is foolish, but on the other hand, lower creatures remind the higher ones of things they've forgotten. As Solomon rebukes the slothful (go to the ant, thou sluggard, and be wise), Anne may be gently rebuking her friend for not having written for such a long time that Anne jests that she must have died. The silliness of the presumption does not undermine Anne's daring, and in retrospect, her words *were* wise, even prophetic.

⁸⁰One time. Nominal. In Genesis 1:26–28, God said, "Let us make man in our image according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the fowle of the heaven, and over the beasts, & over all the earth, and over everie thing that creepeth on the earth." The following verse recounts the first of the two descriptions of the creation of man, the one least implicated with the subordination of women: "in his image: in the image of God created he him; he created them male and female." Shortly afterward follows the injunction to "Bring forth frute and multiply, and fil the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea, and over the fowle of the heaven, & over everie beast that moveth upon the earth" (Geneva version).

⁸¹The ant. In *King Lear*, the fool confronts Kent in the stocks and tells him, "We'll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee there's no labouring i' the winter" (2.4.65–66). Like the flippant remarks of her alter ego, Southwell's "joie de esprit" might seem foolish at first, but she's serious. In the Geneva Bible, Proverbs 6:6 reads, "Go to the pismire, o sluggard: beholde her waies, and be wise." (If men hadn't been foolish, they wouldn't need the advice to follow the example of a provident insect.) In contrast to the proscribed Geneva Bible, the King James version uses the word "ant." Not that proof is needed, the word "pismire" is another clear indication of Anne Southwell's Puritan orientation. John Donne recalls ants in his anniversary poems; both Donne and Southwell recall Montaigne. In his *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, Montaigne attacks man's pride in his own powers and his presumed superiority to animals. When Pierre Charron echoed Montaigne, it apparently produced an important theologian controversy. See *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, trans. and ed. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1987), xxii. By citing a Biblical precedent or proof text, Southwell may be protecting her reproof of mankind from rebuttal. Professor Klene cites James O. Halliwell-Phillips' *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1924), for another meaning of the word "pismire": "Anthill, a name which came from the urinous smell" (*Commonplace Book*, 194).

⁸²In true metaphysical style, and perhaps with a touch of gender anger, Southwell juxtaposes Lady MacWilliam's soaring rise to the heavens with foolish Adam's melodramatic, birdbrained fall. Elisha catches for Elijah's cloak, but Adam simply tries to break his fall. Instead, brute animals assimilate his lost knowledge and teach him by inadvertent example.

The audacity of the transition from the apotheosis of Elijah to the expulsion from Eden, from a rapture to the ejection of a fledgling from a nest, from the heavenward ascension of a prophet to the bumbling fall of birdbrained Adam, is breathtaking; Southwell's daring imagery recalls what Eliot says of the meditations of Donne: humor and seriousness are not merely successive, "the humour and the seriousness are fused."⁸³ Like Donne or Edward Taylor, Anne Southwell's poetry juxtaposes sublime and homely images, expressing serious ideas in a way which exemplifies what Joseph Anthony Mazzeo called the "poetic of correspondence." In his words, the "principle of universal analogy or universal correspondence provides the basis for a unified theory of the imagination which joins the philosopher or investigator of nature and the poet."⁸⁴ Theology is illuminated by astronomy or zoology, Scripture is illustrated by readings from the alphabet of the "Book of Nature," or the "Book of the Creatures." In a series of thoughtful articles Mazzeo explains that:

One of the cardinal tenets of the critics of the conceit is that the conceit itself is the expression of a correspondence which actually obtains between objects and that, since the universe is a network of universal correspondences or analogies which unite all the apparently heterogeneous elements of experience, the most heterogeneous metaphors are justifiable.⁸⁵

This theory of the universe, shared by Herbert and Vaughan, Southwell and Donne, encouraged poets to achieve striking effects: in the words of T.S. Eliot, we "watch a strange kaleidoscope of feeling; with suggested images, suggested conceits, the feeling is always melting, changing, into another feeling; we get a kind of unity in flux."⁸⁶ In all the eulogy, the poet never loses her sense of humor or her sense of irony. In the closing

⁸³See *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry: The Clark Lectures at Cambridge, 1926 and the Trumbull Lectures at Johns Hopkins, 1933*, ed. Ronald Schuchard (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1993), 135. Eliot's disparaging comment on Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" is mistaken, but his comment on Donne is accurate. There is a genuine spontaneity here. As Eliot observes in "The Metaphysical Poets" from his *Selected Essays*, "their mode of feeling was directly and freshly altered by their reading and thought" (246). In a certain sense, in reading the poem we witness Anne Southwell's "self-fashioning," her "transmuting ideas into sensations, of transforming an observation into a state of mind" ("The Metaphysical Poets," 249).

⁸⁴Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, "Universal Analogy and the Culture of the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15 (1954): 304.

⁸⁵See Joseph Anthony Mazzeo's, "A Critique of Some Modern Theories of Metaphysical Poetry," *Modern Philology* 50, no. 2 (1952): 88. Aside from the aforementioned, some of Mazzeo's other pertinent articles include "A Seventeenth Century Theory of Metaphysical Poetry," *Romanic Review* 42 (1951): 245-55; "Metaphysical Poetry and the Poetic of Correspondence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14 (1953): 221-34.

⁸⁶See Lecture V of "Lectures on the Metaphysical Poetry of the Seventeenth Century, with special reference to Donne, Crashaw and Cowley" (The Clark Lectures), in *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, 148.

lines, Anne apologizes for writing while taking a sly poke at her “senseless,” insensible, or insensitive friend.

But stay my wandringe thoughts, 'alas where made I?
In speakinge to a dead, a senceless Lady.
You Incke, and paper, be hir passinge bell,
The sexton⁸⁷ to hir knell, be Anne Southwell.

(lines 117–20)

Ink and paper will become a fictive bell to “ring out” the illusory news of Cassandra’s illusory death. Like Donne in “The Hymn to God the Father,” but more openly, Anne Southwell embeds her own name in her poem. With pride of authorship and humility combined, with the audacity and self-effacement that recalls the wry subtlety of Jonson’s poem on his first son—his “best piece of poetry”—Anne Southwell claims an office for herself, but not that of a prophet like John Donne, the great preacher of St. Paul’s. Instead she assumes the humble role of the sexton who sweeps out the church, digs the grave, and rings the funeral bell. In the guise of lowly humility, she humorously guys her friend and chimes out her own name. Her heartfelt Pauline epistle doubles as friendly epistolary verse.

TERSE JONSONIAN EPIGRAM

The second poem is much shorter, much more austere than the first. The enjambed pentameter of the first poem succeeds to clipped tetrameter lines of the second. Relaxed levity yields to galling shock. Anne is galled by the death of her friend, and her unwilling prophecy. She wonders why the world seemed so unattractive lately, but now she knows: her friend *has* died.

When she had written her mock elegy she had no idea that her friend had passed away until she heard of her husband’s mourning.

Now let my pen bee choakt w[i]th gall.
Since I have writt propheticall⁸⁸
I wondered that the world did looke,
of late, like an unbayed hooke
Or as a well whose spring was dead.⁸⁹
I knew not, that her soul was fledd

⁸⁷The sexton, typically a resident church official, sometimes a custodian and a grave digger as well, was assigned to toll the death knell when someone died. Anne Southwell bravely concludes in the metaphysical manner of Donne’s “A Hymne to God the Father.”

⁸⁸Her humorous poem unintentionally prophesied her friend’s death.

⁸⁹After the death of her friend, the world lost its seductions.

Till that the mourninge of her Earle
did vindicate this dear lost pearle.⁹⁰

(lines 1–8)

In a wistful reminiscence of the mood of her earlier poem, Anne wonders whether the astronomers have seen a new star arise?⁹¹ She knows better, but she wonders whether they could spot Cassandra seated near God the Father, the Prime Mover whose hand spins the spindle of the stars.

The next quatrain recalls the apotheosis of Callimachus, the grand vision of Dante, the sidereal discoveries of Tycho Brahe, Kepler, and Galileo, and hints the mock heroic pathos of *The Rape of the Lock*.

You, starr-gassears that view the skyes?
saw you of late a new star rise?⁹²
Or can you by your Art⁹³ discover
her Seat neare the Celestiall mover?⁹⁴

(lines 9–12)

⁹⁰In an extravagant compliment, the soul of the Countess is compared to the pearl of great price in Matthew 13:45. According to David Jeffrey Lyle, Augustine interprets the pearl as Christ, “the kingdom of God within us,” and charity. St. Jerome compared the pursuit of the monastic life to the acquisition of the pearl of great price, and accordingly, the pearl became a medieval symbol of purity or chastity. See *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English*, 594–95. In Christ’s parable, the pearl represents salvation itself. The strong, suggestive word “vindicate” hints at revision. “Indicate” probably came to mind first, but the letter “v” is clear in the text.

⁹¹According to Frank Manley, in “1572 Tycho Brahe discovered a new star in the constellation of Cassiopeia. In 1606 Kepler discovered two others, one in the Serpent on September 30, 1604, and the other in the Swan in the year 1600. And finally in 1610 Galileo announced in his *Siderius Nuncius* that he had discovered four satellites of Jupiter “and an innumerable number of fixed stars.” For further illumination, see Manley’s notes to *John Donne: The Anniversaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963), 148ff. As Donne remarks in the *First Anniversarie*, “in those constellations there arise/ New starres, and old do vanish from our eyes.” See lines 259–60.

⁹²In addition to invoking to the new stars, Southwell is also recalling that in mythology and classical poetry, dead women (or swans) are sometimes transformed into stars. In line with a tradition going back beyond Callimachus, she seems to associate Cassandra’s death with the appearance of a new star in Cygnus (the swan), and with the stories of Berenice and Cassiopeia. According to an anonymous website, the constellation called Coma Berenices (Berenice’s Hair) “is relatively new, introduced by Tycho Brahe in late 1500s.” The name of the constellation refers to an old legend: Berenice was the wife of Ptolemy III, of Egypt. After fighting a long war on the Assyrians, Ptolemy returned home victorious. His wife Berenice had ceremoniously cut her hair and laid out the long clippings on the altar to be given to Aphrodite. Over the course of the night as the festivities went on, it was noticed that the hair had vanished from the altar. It was decided that if the hair could not be found the priests would have to be sacrificed. The astronomer Conon of Samos came to the priests’ rescue. He proclaimed that Aphrodite had accepted the gift of Berenice’s hair, which was now “shining brightly in the sky next to Leo.” See <<http://www.geocities.com/seagryphon/constellations.html>>

⁹³ Astronomy.

⁹⁴ In scholastic philosophy, God was the “Prime Mover” of the universe who set the heavens in motion.

After the direct confession and apology of the opening lines, Anne assumes the role of a poet, but it isn't quite right. She hides and reveals her grief by importing the mood of an elegy into an epitaph. As her depression escalates, her lines lengthen out, from tetrameter, to nonosyllabic lines to awkward iambic pentameter.

She is gone that way, if I could finde her,
and hath not left her match behind her;

In her last couplet, she assumes another role, that of a penitent.

I'll prayse noe more, hir blest condicion,
but follow hir, w[i]th expedition.⁹⁵

A.S.

(lines 13–16)

Southwell's penultimate couplet echoes the feminine rhyme of Jonson's elegy on S.P.; in the last lines of the poem, she resolves, like the speaker of Donne's "Nocturnal," to follow her beloved.⁹⁶ She indicates the depth of her grief with the subdued glimpse of a wilful mood akin to suicide, but her self-restraint hints at the discipline of faith and mortification.

Whether one assumes, as I do, that these poems were written substantially as the author says they were, or even if one assumes that their pairing was an act of poetic craft, one has to respect Southwell's thoughtfulness, intelligence, and artistry. These are "metaphysical" poems written by a woman with a very sophisticated, highly autonomous sensibility. Although they imitate Jonson and Donne, they are far more than imitations. Anne Southwell has an invention and a voice of her own. She has assimilated a tradition, and she has enriched it. These poems should be included in any new anthology of metaphysical poetry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the inspiration of the late Louise Schleiner, the painstaking research of Jean Klene, the critical support of Nancy Gutierrez and Sharon Beehler, and the patient corrections of Kathryn Brammall. Any remaining mistakes are my own.

⁹⁵Expedientiously, promptly.

⁹⁶See Ben Jonson's "Epitaph on S[alomon] P[avy]" and the conclusion of Donne's "Nocturnal upon St. Lucies Day."

BOOK REVIEWS

Miran Bozovic. *An Utterly Dark Spot: Gaze and Body in Early Modern Philosophy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Miran Bozovic's imaginative but uneven book poses a challenge to this reviewer. In part, some of the disorientation may be attributed to my own disciplinary affiliations, since the "early modern" in the book's title aligns with the norm in philosophy (and not the period so designated in literary studies). For Bozovic, the term designates, more or less, a line from Descartes to Bentham, one that encounters Leibniz, Spinoza, Hume, and a great deal of Descartes' contemporary, Malebranche, along the way (all interpreted through the lens of Lacan). The not-registering of its post-Cartesian emphasis coalesces with the suppression of another term from the book's title: God. Indeed, to the extent that one can reconstruct a central thematic tying the various chapters together—and the book does not lend itself easily to such a task—this would seem to be the question of thanking God, especially for a world in which he is dead. (Perhaps Bozovic here extends, in another context, his earlier work, *Der Grosse Andere: Gotteskonzepte in der Philosophie der Neuzeit*.) The book stages the different ways in which post-Cartesian philosophy engages/projects the perversity of a *deus absconditus*—read here as the locus of radical alterity—to conclude by suggesting the paradoxical necessity of a form of theism: the need to believe in God precisely because he does not exist.

If Bozovic's rather slim preface provides little by way of overall guidance, the opening chapter at least takes us fairly directly to what I take to be the book's central concern. "The case of the unmanly Scythians" allows Bozovic to examine the patterns of inference whereby human beings relate themselves to the idea of divine action or intervention. A treatise in the Hippocratic Corpus tries to explain, we are told, the prevalence of impotence among *only* those Scythians who were pious and well-to-do, a phenomenon which led the afflicted to see the disease as a divine visitation. However, recourse to the incomprehensibility of divine purpose was blocked here because divine action appeared not indiscriminate but in fact guided by rules. The difficulties attendant upon seeing God in anthropomorphic terms (in particular, by attributing human purposiveness to ostensibly divine actions such as earthquakes and other natural disasters) becomes evident in the oddly *lawful* deviation from the "normal" that besets the Scythians. This failure of the usual teleological explanation leads to the conception of a "perverse" God, who punishes human beings precisely for worshipping him in a way that expects Him to return divine favor for human piety. To such a deviation, there are, Bozovic suggests, two responses. Either, like the Scythians, one internalizes divine "perversity" by becoming a "transvestite." Or, as in Humean philosophical theism, one

treats God as radically other, in which case He becomes a “transvestite,” dressing up as a favorable, compassionate, indulgent, or offended deity.

The converse of divine perversity, the succeeding chapter (“A Brief History of Insects”) implies, is the perversity of “life” and “body.” The thought experiment here involves the Leibnizian insistence that there is no birth or death “in the strict sense” (20) because all we have are transformations or metamorphoses of a persistent living body and its inseparable soul. While Bozovic accepts Leibniz’s demonstration that there is no “first birth” (after the creation *ex nihilo*), he takes it upon himself to compensate for Leibniz’s failure to provide an example of a living body that “survives” its own death. Bozovic imagines a “reversed life cycle” in which death precedes life—and indeed cites a species of mite as support: “the male copulates with its sisters within its mother’s shell and dies before birth” (22). It remains unclear what exactly this case proves, since the problem would seem to result largely from a linguistic game, a slippage between death or birth taken “in the strict sense” and the everyday or “normal” sense of the words. And a verbal shift seems constitutive of the argument regarding the Scythians as well. In that case, Bozovic slides from a description wherein impotence afflicts *only* the pious to the larger claim that it affects “*every* pious Scythian, *without exception*” (10, emphasis added). Clearly, the kind of “law” governing deviation would be different in these two cases, and thus the kinds of explanations they demand would also need to be different. But because the philosophical problem—and, consequently, its “perverse” solution—requires the additional assumption of universality, such an enlargement becomes necessary.

On one level, these are no doubt quibbles, since the specific instances dealt with in this book, instead of being illuminated in their own right, largely function to stage certain problems or to provide the material for what one could call “thought experiments” concerning the consequences of particular philosophical stances. The importance to the book of a figure as minor as Malebranche thus derives in part from his extreme and unwavering adherence to a form of Cartesian theism. (Such nearly exclusive focus on the immanent logic of a particular view of the world might also account for the absence of any explicit consideration of gender in a book that repeatedly invokes cases crying out for such a treatment: the so-called “transvestites”—both the “Scythians” and the serial killer of *The Silence of the Lambs*—in the opening chapter; the coquette of Marivaux’s *La Vie de Marianne* in the extended reading of Spinoza; the “unintentional erection of the male organ” as crucial disobedience of the body in Malebranche; the disturbing “explanation” for Althusser’s murder of his wife in the book’s conclusion.) But on another level, despite my general willingness to join in the cogitational games, the book does not succeed in conveying to me why these games are worth playing. Even if—to paraphrase Witt-

genstein somewhat baldly—all philosophical problems are, at root, problems of language, one nonetheless needs to feel a sense of being inextricably caught in the game for the problems to register as problems. In fact, Slavoj Žižek's playful and pithy foreword seems designed to provide just such a rationale: given the extent to which the Cartesian cogito “serves as the foundation of our post-traditional society,” the book's significance lies in its focus “on the fate of the body in ... [the Cartesian] reduction of the human being to abstract subject” (v). But in suggesting an urgency that Bozovic's book itself never quite addresses, Žižek's foreword paradoxically draws attention precisely to the absence of a reflection on what is at stake in the various paradoxes the book analyzes, the various language games it initiates.

An Utterly Dark Spot undoubtedly also has its strengths. While it is difficult to pin down the significance of the chapter on Spinoza's *Ethics* within the book as a whole, Bozovic nonetheless offers a stimulating and careful reading of how Spinoza anticipates the particular coordination of Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real effected in Lacanian psychoanalysis. As he plausibly demonstrates, in Spinoza, as in Lacan, the emergence of “love” calls for the symbolic “resolution” of a dyadic imaginary fixation, which occurs via a real trigger, that is, an “accidental, partial feature” (33) that takes the place of a constitutive absence or loss.

And there is a delight in paradoxical play that often charms and intrigues. The concluding chapter on Bentham's panopticon writings—which lend the book its title—offers an original and intriguing interpretation that shifts emphasis from the now *de rigueur* Foucauldian account of the emergence of the modern subject (through disciplining mechanisms) to how Bentham centrally engages the dependence of “reality” upon “fictitious entities” for its “logical-discursive consistency” (102). Relating the panopticon writings to Bentham's peculiar brand of utilitarianism, Bozovic shows that the panopticon's internal structure is that of a spectacle, or a stage effect, aimed at “achieving the greatest effect of the punishment on others [that is, society at large] with the least inflicted pain [on the prisoners themselves]” (99). This end involves the “fiction of punishment,” an appearance that functions successfully precisely because “reality itself is already structured like a fiction.” There is thus a critical distinction (and parallel) to be made between the role of fiction in the panopticon (to deter the prisoners from transgressing) and the deterring role of fiction for the innocents outside the prison. Focusing on the role of the inspector in the panopticon's central tower rather than on the prisoners in the cells, Bozovic further shows that it is the very absence of the inspector that sustains his (fictional) omnipresence for the prisoners; he thereby effectively takes up the place of God, who exists only insofar as we (the prisoners) imagine Him (the inspector) looking at us. God (or the inspector) is thus “an

imaginary non-entity” without which, however, the “universe” (the pan-opticon) “would collapse” (116). In turn, the fear of—or, by extension, the belief in—God paradoxically rests upon the very fact of his fictionality or nonexistence: for fear is the “intrusion of something radically other, something unknown into our world. And it is from this fear that we would escape,” if we could be sure that God really existed, or at least we would fear him in the way we fear “all the real entities we...designate as maleficent, like, for example, vicious dogs” (117). That God is dead, in other words, solves nothing, for it was precisely his nonexistence that had always structured the world. The only way to “escape” the rule of this present absence would be to endow it with the one feature it does not possess: existence. By making God’s dubious presence the focus of his book, Bozovic refuses us too easy an escape, leaving us to ponder instead the prison-house of the human mind.

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Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed. *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000. 286 pp. ISBN 0312219296.

In *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, the editor Jeffrey Cohen has organized a compelling volume of essays that discusses the Middle Ages in light of the critical paradigm of postcolonialism. What this volume sets out to accomplish is not only an application of current theory to a historical period, but rather as Cohen writes in his introduction, an attempt to interrogate postcolonial theory’s inability to confront its own postcolonial tendencies towards the Middle Ages. In particular, the inefficacy of postcolonial studies to confront the problem of time where the Middle Ages is often seen as just an abyss, one usually referred to only in considering the mythic origins of contemporary history or in constructing “modern” history. However, Cohen does believe that even though “time itself becomes a problem for postcolonial studies,” he thinks that “the medieval ‘meridian’ or ‘middle’” can become a useful tool in rethinking what postcolonial might signify (3). In essence, he writes that this work has a dual agenda:

Janus-faced, biformis, the postcolonial Middle Ages performs a double work, so that the alliance of postcolonial theory and medieval studies might open up the present to multiplicity, newness, difficult similarity conjoined to complex difference.(8)

Though theoretically in considering time he tries to open up the volume, he does decide that the book will focus geographically on the West. He explains the reasons behind this partial geographic focus by stating that the volume considers first the decolonization of "Europe." The various essays look closely at the medieval textual fantasies that this "Europe" creates as well as the products of European contact and colonization. All the essays in the volume suggest that "Europe" as unified concept is "a recent fiction that travels back in time problematically" (8). The one other firm objective that Cohen presents in the introduction involves the reasons why there is an inordinate number of essays focusing on England. He writes that "this imbalance was a deliberate choice, accomplished because England has such a tight grip on the critical imaginary of North American medievalists (and postcolonial theorists)" (8). He wants to loosen the grip a bit on both groups (North American medievalists and postcolonial theorists) by showing the "violences and internal colonizations" upon which Englishness was established and illuminating the postcolonial histories behind contemporary theoretical paradigms (8).

The book begins with an essay by Suzanne Conklin Akbari entitled "From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation." This first essay is a wonderful beginning because it precisely reconsiders the geography of the Middle Ages as a tripartite division rather than an East/West duality. She argues against Said's understanding of geography arranged along a binary division, "where the orient exists only to the extent that it mirrors fantastically its colonizer" (8). The article explains succinctly that medieval geography was a much more flexible classification that thought along the lines of climactic extremes that enshrined Asia as the happy middle area. She points out that the cold North only started to be thought of as a desirable West during the fourteenth century; "the once-temperate East becomes the overheated mirror of this newly invented Occident" (9). Her essay is a perfect beginning for this volume because it reevaluates the geography of the Middle Ages and lays a firm foundation in which to continue analyzing the period.

The end of the volume, chapter 14, is framed with Michael Uebel's article "Imperial Fetishism: Prester John among the Natives." This article is a compelling ending because it considers the geographical drives of constructing utopias and shows how early "modern" and "modern" texts have used Prester John as a fetish to alter reality and create utopias. He discusses how a list of gifts becomes a compensation for the geographical loss of the Holy Land and these lists fragment and keep the East in the possession of the West by making them into discrete *facta*, fracturing them into commodified and measurable units. He connects fetishism and imperialism in a disparate array of texts: twelfth-century narratives about Prester John, Christopher Columbus's journal, and an early-twentieth-century book for boys—John Buchan's

Prester John. While Akbari's essay reevaluates geography and lightly considers the question of time, Uebel's completes this cycle of essays by interrogating the use of past time in relation to geographic conquest.

With these two neat frames, the most lucrative way to organize the rest of the volume is in topical groups: Chaucer, late medieval England, the Celts, the Crusades and the Latinate East, and finally what I would call the Theory group. All of these essays are incredibly concerned and focused on theoretical issues; however, I would like to differentiate the last group as the Theory group because their essays tend to focus on the theoretical questions surrounding postcolonialism in which they bring examples from the medieval period while the other essayists focus on the medieval texts that produce postcolonial problems.

In this last group, there is also a split amongst the articles. Chapter 2, Kathleen Biddick's "Coming Out of Exile: Dante on the Orient Express"; chapter 6, Kathleen Davis' "Time behind the Veil: The Media, the Middle Ages and Orientalism Now"; and chapter 7, John Ganim's "Native Studies: Orientalism and Medievalism," are three essays that really consider the question of time in postcolonial theory. Biddick's article is a reevaluation of Said's *Orientalism* on its twentieth anniversary in light of what she calls the "technologies of exile" (43). She analyzes how Dante's *Vita Nuova* and the contemporary Orhan Pamuk's *The New Life* grapple with the "technologies of exile" which in essence, she uses as a metaphor (as well as a wonderfully well read critique of the phenomena) for medievalists to engage in the temporality of postcolonial history.

Davis' essay also confronts contemporary postcolonialism's tendency to have problems understanding the temporal. She discusses the idea of spatialized time where traveling to the Orient simultaneously becomes a step into the past, a way to make geographical space a medieval time. Similar to Cohen's introduction and Biddick's own thoughts on the subject, Davis' article is a call to arms addressed to medievalists to engage in the current debates which would facilitate dialogue that would help make the Middle Ages comprehensible to contemporary theorists.

John Ganim's essay can be considered one of the essential texts in this volume because it deals with the history of medieval studies and its postcolonial context. The point of his chapter is to emphasize that

the idea of the Middle Ages as it developed from its earliest formulations in the historical self-consciousness of Western Europe is part of what we used to call an identity crisis, a deeply uncertain sense of what the West is and should be. The idea of the Middle Ages as a pure Europe (or England or France or Germany) both rests on and reacts to an uncomfortable sense of instability about origins, about what the West is and from where it came. (125)

Ganim considers the history of medievalism and its scholarship (during the eighteenth century's celebration of medieval romance and its exoticism as well as the twentieth century's anthropological scholarship which saw the primitivism in the medieval past) and sees the medieval past as a site of duality. He writes that "Beneath its apparent stability as an idea, the Middle Ages repeatedly has been represented as both domestic and foreign, a both historical origin and historical rupture..." (131). His essay speaks to all medievalists and is a necessary history of the discipline's politics.

The fourth essay in this group is the one that veers away from the other two essays. Chapter 10, Steven Kruger's essay "Fetishism, 1927, 1614, 1461" considers the semantics of the word fetish and traces its multiple histories, commodification, and its use in colonization. His subject of the fetish also easily connects him with Uebel's essay, and his interest in the "medieval religious polemic" concerning the Jews connects him with chapter 8, Geraldine Heng's essay "The Romance of England: *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, Saracens, Jews, and the Politics of Race and Nation," and chapter 13, Sylvia Tomasch's essay "Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew."

Heng's article along with Glenn Berger's piece entitled "Cicilian Armenian Métissage and Hetoum's *La Fleur des histoires de la terre d'Orient*" can be grouped topically as the two articles concerned with the Crusades and the Latinate East. Heng's article considers cannibalism and racial jokes in the Middle English romance, *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, as catalyst in creating a romance of the nation by juxtaposing the dark Islamic/Jewish bodies in opposition. Berger's article considers the writer Hetoum as he creates a history of Cilician Armenia in a middle space of cultural multiplicities between the Christian West and the Muslim East.

The last three groups are concentrated geographically in or in reaction to England. Chapter 3, John Bowers' "Chaucer after Smithfield: From Postcolonial Writer to Imperialist Author" and chapter 13, Sylvia Tomasch's "Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew," both consider Chaucer's work in light of postcolonial theory. However Bowers' work contends with the formation of "English" identity in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in response to Norman French hegemony which advocates a multicultural English-speaking nation that in consequence almost erases French influence and origins. Tomasch concentrates her efforts on the question of the Jew in the *Canterbury Tales* and their presence in both the literature and art of the period after their expulsion from England in 1290.

Kellie Robertson's article "Common Language and Common Profit" focuses on the suspect quality of rise trade and vernacular translation in late medieval England. Claire Sponsler's chapter "Alien Nation: London's Aliens and Lydgate's Mummings for the Mercers and Goldsmiths" considers the spectacle of performing foreignness which puts a generous, cos-

mopolitan, and culturally accepting face to the hostile and xenophobic reality of urban London. These two articles are perfect complements because they both discuss the mercantile classes topically as well focus periodically on late medieval England.

The last group includes Jeffrey Cohen's article, "Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales," and Patricia Clare Ingham's piece "Marking Time: *Branwen, Daughter of Llyr* and the Colonial Refrain." These two can be categorized as the Welsh/Celtic pair because they both consider Welsh texts. Cohen's chapter focuses on Gerald of Wales' Latin work, biography, and hybrid corporeal body in the context of the recent work emerging from Gloria Anzaldúa and other Chicano/a scholars who have been writing about the border. He makes a comparison between Anzaldúa's concept of border culture and Gerald's multicultural identity in the Welsh Marches of the twelfth century. Patricia Ingham's piece begins with Matthew Arnold's conflicting reactions to Celtic studies: his pro-Celtic "sponsorship" of the discipline as well as his anthropological urges to make it only a field of academic study and thus efface its contemporary value. She is interested in time as a form of progress that requires "submission and loss" in the second branch of the *Mabinogi*, *Branwen uab Llyr* (Branwen, daughter of Llyr) (12). She evaluates the second branch with postcolonial and trauma theory as the centerpiece to her argument. One of my few criticisms in this volume involves Ingham's article. I find the categorization of Welsh equated always with orality and English always with literacy/written text a little problematic. Welsh/English classification into these two camps is just a little too reminiscent of Arnold's own romantic tendencies; nor does it consider the fact that English and Welsh can be looked upon as a primarily oral project in relation to Latinity's status as the written norm.

My second criticism is also one that involves a little more caution in delegating certain languages as an absolute indication of one particular thing. Geraldine Heng's article is incredibly persuasive, yet I would caution against making assertions that writing in English gestures towards creating English nationalism. Especially since *Richard Coeur de Lyon* is a text from the thirteenth century, I have to ask about multicultural readers. If England is a place where several languages coexisted (Anglo-Norman French, English, Latin, Welsh, etc.) and where manuscripts (Digby 86, etc.) often anthologize works in several languages, why must writing in English signal English authorship? Examples of the opposite happening include the prologue in the French prose *Tristan* where the author indicates that he is an English knight writing in French. Most scholars generally believe that Marie de France was a nun writing French lays and fables in England. In the fourteenth century, John Gower writes in Latin, English, as well as French. In a recent talk at a medieval conference, Pro-

fessor Jennifer Miller argued quite persuasively that the author of *Lazamon's Brut* may well be Welsh writing in English and at the beginning of his history, where he introduces himself, he actually geographically places himself in Wales.¹ Other than these minor critiques, the volume holds a sophisticated array of thorough scholarship.

The *Postcolonial Middle Ages* is a dense work whose message is clear. Cohen succinctly outlines in his introduction his plans for the volume and also his plans for "The Medieval Future" (6). He believes that medievalists can bring to this theoretical table and open up what the medieval may signify: by thinking continuously about the keywords in the discourse of postcolonial theory and by "insisting on cultural, historical, even textual specificity"; "rethink history as effective history, as history that intervenes within the disciplinization of knowledge to loosen its sedimentation"; "destabilize hegemonic identities (racial, ethnic, religious, class, age) by detailing their historical contingency"; "displace the domination of Christianity" and "decenter Europe" (6–7). All these resolutions have in some way been addressed and accomplished in this volume and Cohen and his colleagues have sounded off a call to arms to their fellowship medievalists who as medievalists, can bring a unique perspective to a contemporary theoretical debate in which their input can literally reshape the field.

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John Kitchen. *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 255 pp. ISBN 0195117220.

There is nothing modest in the undertaking John Kitchen has set for himself in this provocative and densely argued monograph. In a sweeping assessment of the past half century of scholarship on hagiography and gender, John Kitchen writes that "historians, especially those dealing with the Merovingian sources, showed themselves and continue to show themselves, to be on the whole the most inept group of scholars ever to deal with the religious significance of the literature." Among the ranks of the inept, we learn, historians of gender are the worst offenders, primarily because they fail to ascribe to a readily identifiable methodology when using hagiographic evidence. Kitchen, who ascribes to a "history of literature" approach, promises a study of gender in Merovingian hagiography

¹Jennifer Miller, "The View from Areley Kings."

which satisfies the methodological precision of Léon van der Essen's 1907 study of the Merovingian saints of Belgium. The question which he sets out to answer is this: Is the rhetoric of female hagiographers writing about female saints readily distinguishable from the rhetoric of male hagiographers writing about female saints? His answer to this question, in short, is no. However, for Kitchen, the importance of his book lies not so much in answering this question as it does in exposing the shabby scholarly practices which riddle studies of gender in this period. In what amounts to an appeal for a return to the solid and unspeculative scholarship of those working in the Bollandist tradition, Kitchen's book sets out to test scholarly assumptions about the gendered nature of hagiography in the Merovingian period, and set the direction of future gender studies on a steadier course. Kitchen's book is thus set on two paths. The first is a hefty critique of previous gender studies which used hagiographic material to support their claims. The second is the publication of his own scholarly inquiry into gender in hagiography, the fruit of his application of a very explicit methodology. These two directions are pursued with mixed success. I will address the second of these first.

There is an elegant clarity to the methodological framework of Kitchen's book. Chapters address in turn each component of his inquiry: the rhetoric of male hagiographers writing about male saints, male hagiographers writing on female saints, and a female hagiographer writing on a female saint. A major problem becomes immediately apparent, however. An important claim made by Kitchen is that, unlike previous scholars, he examines a broad range of hagiographic works to address the issue of gender. This claim is overstated on two counts. The first is chronological: the Merovingian hagiographies investigated by Kitchen are confined to sixth-century productions. This is a serious limitation when one considers that Merovingian writings span over two and a half centuries, and that the seventh century in particular was a century of great hagiographic enterprise. The second overstatement is that a wide range of hagiographies are examined for the sixth century. While occasional reference is made to other hagiographies, the clear focus of the book is on the hagiographic productions of three individuals: Venantius Fortunatus, Gregory of Tours, and a single work by the nun Baudonivia. Kitchen makes a genuine contribution to the literature here. Kitchen is right to point out that, in general, too little attention has been paid to the hagiographic works of Venantius Fortunatus as a distinct component in that author's *oeuvre*. Furthermore Kitchen has much of interest to say about Gregory of Tours' *Liber vitae patrum*. However, the writings of these two authors cannot speak for all issues of male gender in the Merovingian period, nor are their works sufficient to the task of assessing female gender issues in the literature, since these authors produced only one substantial hagiographic work apiece on

a female saint. Furthermore, in the sixth century only one hagiography (Baudonivia's *Life of Radegund*) is known to have been written by a woman. If Kitchen had extended his study to include the seventh century, he could have included discussion of the Lives of Balthild, Aldegund, and Praeictus, all of which have arguably some degree of female authorship. The deficiency is compounded by Kitchen's desire to read broad implications about gender into his findings.

Kitchen's critique of scholarship relating to gender is the overarching thesis which gives thematic coherence to his book. However, the author's presentation of the views of those scholars is often heavy-handed, and sometimes misleading. For example, he makes the unlikely claim that Pauline Stafford views the hagiographer Fortunatus as an accurate reporter of events at Radegund's convent, an interpretation which is not borne out by the passage from Stafford's work cited in the note. In its appraisal of the field of gender studies overall, the book has a schizophrenic quality due to serious discrepancies between the text and the notes. In the body of the text Kitchen alerts us to the parlous state of gender studies when handling Merovingian hagiography. Offending works are almost ubiquitously referred to as "recent scholarship." However, many of the studies with which Kitchen takes issue are hardly recent. In the notes to the book, however, a more balanced picture emerges. There, Kitchen cites many works which are truly recent, and in many cases they receive a favorable review. So are gendered readings of hagiography in the dangerous state that Kitchen would have us believe? Judging by the text, yes; judging by the notes, no.

One final comment: The decision to include in the index only those scholars and works which are mentioned in the body of the text is inappropriate in view of the fact that few of the scholars are mentioned by name in the text. So, for example, a single quotation from Virginia Wolf merits an entry in the index, but the works of JoAnn McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, extensively alluded to in the text and cited by name in the notes, receive only two page numbers apiece, while the works and opinions of Janet Nelson and Pauline Stafford are not indexed at all.

Kitchen's call for gender scholarship to be rooted in sound methodology will appeal to anyone who has recoiled at the questionable assumptions sometimes made in discussions of gender in Merovingian literature. Kitchen's criticisms are minute and forceful, and a study that consciously strives to avoid earlier pitfalls has everything to recommend it. The author is at his best when discussing the works of Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours. However, the book has serious deficiencies, especially when discussing the *Life of Radegund*. Here Kitchen's thesis seems to run aground. His overall claim is that there is no distinctively female expression of sanctity (male or female) in the literature, yet he insists that Fortu-

natus' emphasis on Radegund's asceticism is a distinguishing feature of his portrayal of a female saint, and that Baudonivia's preface to her *Life of Radegund* is very different from prefaces to the Lives of female saints written by men (Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus). Kitchen's book makes some interesting observations about his chosen texts, and I doubt that anyone will disagree with the view that sound methodology is important, but ultimately Kitchen's appraisal of contemporary gender studies is neither as balanced or as clear as he would have us believe.

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James Sharpe. *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter: A Horrible and True Story of Deception, Witchcraft, Murder, and the King of England*. New York: Routledge, 2000. 238 pp. + xvi. \$26.00.

This learned and absorbing book offers a detailed narrative of one remarkable and well-documented case of witchcraft. In 1604, Anne Gunter fell ill, and eventually began to show classic symptoms of demonic possession, such as going into fits and trances, and voiding pins from various orifices. She accused three women of bewitching her: a woman with a long-standing reputation as a witch and her illegitimate daughter, and a married woman who had a reputation for being difficult but who was also the kinswoman of two men whom Anne's father, Brian, had been accused of killing in a fight following a football match several years earlier. Because of family connections at Oxford, the case was widely discussed there, and Oxford dons interviewed Anne, supported her father's claim that she was bewitched, and encouraged a trial. Charges against the three women whom Anne accused were heard by assize judges in Abingdon in 1605; but the judges acquitted the accused. In part because the case had become so widely discussed, and in part because Anne's father, Brian, was so dogged, it didn't end there. On a visit to Oxford, James I interviewed Anne. Ultimately, he met with her a total of four times, and referred her case to Archbishop Bancroft, and his chaplain, Samuel Harsnett, who is now best known for his exposés of possession cases and exorcisms. Anne was removed from her father's house, and she lived in Bancroft's residence for some of the time that she was under surveillance. During this time she was examined by Edward Jorden, a physician known to many students of witchcraft in this period for the text he wrote attributing one Mary Glover's symptoms not to bewitchment but to hysteria or "fits of the mother." The appearance of both Harsnett and Jorden in the story bears

out Sharpe's contention that one of the fascinating things about this case is how many minor players in early Jacobean culture pop up in it.

The story of Anne Gunter's bewitchment reaches its climax when, as a result of the king's interest and Harsnett's scrutiny, proceedings are brought against Anne and Brian in the Court of Star Chamber for falsely accusing the three women. As Sharpe reminds his readers, Star Chamber was the "Privy Council acting in a judicial capacity" (191). It was not a common law court, and so had no jury, and no judge; all of the councillors rendered the verdict. Although it continued to be "routinely used to pursue offenders in whom the Crown was especially interested" and, at various moments, became notorious as a venue in which sovereigns from Henry VII to Charles I disciplined their opponents, it focused largely on suits between parties. The most severe punishment the Star Chamber could impose was "mutilation, usually by cutting off ears or slitting noses" (192); William Prynne is probably one of the better known victims of such treatment. Most often, the Star Chamber imposed fines. Unfortunately, we do not know what verdict the councillors reached regarding the charges against Brian and Anne Gunter. But we do have a remarkable record of the testimony they heard. The evidence of over sixty witnesses, amounting to several hundred pages, makes this case, according to Sharpe, "quite simply the best documented English witchcraft case." This rich cache of evidence clearly motivated Sharpe to undertake this book. By describing one episode from its fairly well-documented start to its vanishing resolution, Sharpe leads the reader unfamiliar with the period or with witchcraft from the particulars of one case to the larger picture. That larger picture will not surprise those with any knowledge of research on witchcraft in early modern England; the book reads as a kind of appendix to Sharpe's *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996). But specialists will take pleasure in being able to follow one case in such minute detail.

Sharpe begins with "Anne's story," that is, the records of her interrogation before the Star Chamber, in which she claimed that her father had used threats, beatings, and drugs to force her to counterfeit bewitchment. As soon as Anne was removed from her father's house, and, one presumes, his influence and coercion, she began to confide—at first tentatively to women caretakers—that she was pretending. After recounting Anne's testimony about the means and motives of her deception, Sharpe then backs up to help his readers understand relationships in the village of North Moreton, old grievances, and some of the reasons why Brian Gunter might have so used his daughter. In the course of the book, he then proceeds to explain the details of Anne's bewitchment, how it fits into what we know about beliefs regarding witchcraft and possession, Brian Gunter's mobilization of Oxford dons in support of his case that his daughter had

been bewitched, the trial at the Abingdon assizes, how Anne came to the attention of James I and what followed thereon, and, finally, the subsequent histories of many figures in this drama.

Sharpe, a veteran historian, is always careful to explain, within the body of the text, what sources he has used and what difficulties he's met in his researches. He's always wonderfully frank about deadends and missing evidence. Occasionally, he allows himself provocative gestures toward what is unknowable but worth considering: "we can only imagine what it must have been like for an accused witch to go back to her community and attempt to reconstruct her life after such a trial" (169). This approach makes the book a fascinating narrative not just of the case but of the research process. For this reason, it would be very useful to students interested in how historical knowledge is constructed. Given his emphasis on his own methods, I wonder why Sharpe did not allow himself to use the first person in the passages in which he describes his frustrations and breakthroughs. It would have enlivened the prose in those sections and engaged the reader even more.

Anne Gunter's story reveals many things: the tensions of village life, and the ways these could underpin witchcraft prosecutions; what assizes were and who staffed them and how they operated; how many cases ended in acquittal, as the one initiated by Brian Gunter did (in the samples Sharpe discusses, 18 of 87 and 16 of 69 people accused of witchcraft were acquitted [119]); the fact that "in witchcraft cases, as with prosecution of other serious crimes, it was the accuser who was expected to pay the costs of prosecution, expressed in fees to the court's clerical staff, and who was by custom expected to help witnesses with their expenses" (71); the widespread interest a case of alleged witchcraft could generate long before telecommunication; the broad dissemination of curiosity about and belief in the occult. Sharpe is especially eager to argue the uncontroversial point that "attitudes toward witchcraft in early modern England were not monolithic" (137). What he seems to mean by this is that witchcraft belief changed over time, and varied from person to person, and that even a given person might respond differently to different cases. "There was no single view of witchcraft, no mindless intolerance. Some people were rabidly against it, some were very sceptical, but most people's thinking on the subject was somewhere in between: unable to reject the notion of witchcraft entirely, they were nonetheless ready to evaluate each supposed instance of it on its own merits" (80). It's hard to disagree with this. When, towards the end of the book, Sharpe admonishes that "Our views on witchcraft have been far too influenced by Arthur Miller's version of what happened at Salem" (208), I have to wonder who he includes in that "our." This moment suggests that some of the straw men he tilts against in the book are erected by the desire to address both "general" readers and

specialist ones. Perhaps some nonspecialist readers still harbor the illusions he sternly critiques, but few specialists do. Focusing attention on defeating these strawmen deflects it away from making more of the riveting material assembled here.

Sharpe is particularly hampered in his attempt to explore the implications of the Gunter case by his dismissal of feminist arguments about the role of gender in witchcraft beliefs and in witchcraft prosecutions. For Sharpe, using gender as a category of analysis seems to mean denouncing misogyny. Since he wants to do something subtler than that, he downplays the importance of gender. But then he everywhere observes its operation without being able to analyze it. Sharpe cites the familiar statistic that over 90 percent of the accused witches in the southeastern assizes in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were women. While he recognizes the significance of this, he immediately points out that "Few serious scholars, even those writing from an avowedly feminist position, would attribute it to straightforward woman-hating, although England around 1600 was a patriarchal society in which religious, scientific and medical thinking all took the moral, intellectual and physical inferiority of women for granted. The key, however, seems to lie not in simple misogyny but rather in the ways in which witchcraft was seen as something that operated in the female sphere. Women had no inhibitions about accusing other women of being witches, about witnessing against other women in witchcraft-trials at the assizes, or about serving in the more or less official female juries that searched women suspects for the witch's mark" (67–68). As this passage makes clear, Sharpe's desire to move beyond "straightforward woman-hating" or "simple misogyny" actually prevents him from assessing factors he acknowledges as important: patriarchal institutions, the assumption of female inferiority, gendered divisions of labor, and the complex reasons for conflicts among women. To say that "it was not just any woman who was likely to be accused of witchcraft" is not to say that gender did not matter, but that gender intersected with social, economic, and marital status, age, and reputation, in marking some women as more vulnerable than others. Women's participation in so marking out these women, which Sharpe often here and elsewhere points to as proof that witchcraft wasn't about woman-hating, could be used to demonstrate that some relatively privileged women had an investment in protecting gender and class constructions that served their own interests.

Sharpe seems to assume that feminists see women as victims. So when he wants to assign some agency to the various women in his story, he presents doing so as a kind of challenge to feminist interpretations. Yet I would argue that his approach is, in fact, informed by recent developments in feminism, whether he recognizes it or not. He claims of Agnes Pepwell, one of the women accused of bewitching Anne Gunter, "There is no evi-

dence that Agnes Pepwell was either a believer in some early, pre-Christian, religion or that she was a female healer being victimized by a male-dominated, misogynist clerical or legal establishment" (89). Few feminists would make these long-discredited claims. Again, we see the problem of the broad audience, since some general readers might still think this, and some trade books on witchcraft have continued to present this simplified picture. Attempting to explain why a woman like Agnes Pepwell might have confessed, Sharpe floats an argument that is as much indebted to recent feminist work as it is a correction of older feminist work. He claims that perhaps "given her long-standing reputation for being a witch, Pepwell felt that she had been cast in a role, and that the logic of her situation persuaded her to play that role to the best of her ability" and that playing this role granted her "a certain status, one that was risky but nonetheless undeniable." "She had taken the main elements of [witchcraft] beliefs, and fashioned them into a personal witchcraft narrative. The supposed witch had fully internalized popular contemporary notions of witchcraft" (88). This argument—a role was thrust upon Agnes Pepwell, but, by colluding in this casting, she also achieved a limited, and potentially costly, kind of agency—is quite typical of feminist work on early modern women.

The ways in which Sharpe both sees and cannot analyze the operations of gender is most evident in his discussion of Anne Gunter. Towards the end of the book, Sharpe presents the claim that Anne fell in love while awaiting her hearing before the Star Chamber as a kind of reward for her sufferings: she may have found "a happy end to our story" (180); "if nothing else, Anne found love and possibly marriage in the course of her troubles" (186). But the evidence he presents suggests that Samuel Harsnett may have entrapped Anne, encouraging an attachment between her and a male servant in the house where she was lodged precisely in the hope of breaking down her defenses and deceptions. Anne testified to the Star Chamber that, before she left home, her father warned her against falling in love "because that (as he said) might be a means to make her this deponent to disclose any secret though otherwise she had intended to have kept them never so close" (186). As Robert Johnson reports in his *Historia Rerum Britannicarum* (1655), this may have been just what happened. Johnson concludes his account of Anne's love affair with a helpful moral: "Thus was fraud laid bare and detected by the lack of self-control in a woman" (187). This does not make falling in love seem like a happy ending.

As in his discussion of Agnes Pepwell, Sharpe, like many another feminist, wants to find some space for Anne Gunter's agency, to see her as something more than the victim of bewitchment, or her father, or misogyny, or men's manipulations in general. What, he wonders, might she have had to gain from her impostures? Certainly, she was, in part, the instru-

ment of her father's rage and revenge. But the pretense also enabled her, Sharpe argues, to get out and live a little. Sharpe concludes his discussion of how Harsnett may have used a male servant to entrap a young woman whom her contemporaries would have viewed as especially vulnerable to seduction, with a perky reminder of her empowerment: "But Anne had learned about falling in love, had confided in a king, and had danced before the court: one senses that in many respects her experiences in that autumn of 1605, in the course of her twenty-first year, were liberating ones" (189). He repeats the same trio of proofs of her liberation a few pages later, reminding us that hers is "a story that had concluded with her meeting King James, falling in love and dancing before the court" (195). Sharpe's account does show that Anne might have had something to gain from becoming a center of attention, and his emphasis on her agency makes her a very memorable protagonist. But he also shows that the spectacle Anne became exposed her as irrational and then duplicitous, and, throughout, exhibited her in highly sexualized ways. From this distance, Anne's position is of interest precisely because it might have empowered and even liberated her in some ways, while traumatizing and threatening her in others. That Anne disappears from the historical record—we don't know whether she married, have no record of her death, and do not find her unequivocally named in her father's will—suggests to me that the verdict is still out on whatever empowerment Anne may have achieved and on the long-term effects for an unmarried woman of having her body displayed, viewed, and discussed, and her word shown to be unreliable.

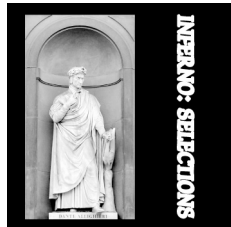
One of the most provocative revelations of Sharpe's study is how Brian Gunter turned to printed pamphlets to provide a script for his daughter's bewitchment. Anne Gunter testified that her father consulted books about other bewitchment cases, such as *The Most Strange and Admirable Discoverie of the Three Witches of Warboys* (London, 1593). Anne testified that people brought her father these books so that "he 'should see in what manner the parties named in those books were tormented & afflicted,' and she testified that he did indeed 'read & consider them.'" Anne testified that her own fits were heavily influenced by the descriptions in the pamphlet about the Warboys case (62, 135). Gunter also seems to have gotten the idea of giving Anne a mixture of "sack and sallet oil" which made her sick and supposedly provoked fits from Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (London, 1603). As Sharpe points out, "It has long been suspected that trial pamphlets and similar literature helped spread ideas on witchcraft, but such striking evidence of so direct a connection between a printed account of one case and what happened in another is very rare" (8). This is, indeed, so rare that I wish Sharpe had done more with it. Gunter's use of print reveals not only that "people 'knew' what happened in cases of demonic possession, and

demoniacs ‘knew’ how to behave if they thought they were possessed” in part because they read about it in books (141). It also provides yet more evidence that representation and experience are very complexly interrelated. Reading shaped imaginative and practical possibilities, offered strategies for playing into and manipulating other people’s expectations, provided scripts for conduct. Regrettably, Sharpe makes little or no reference to the considerable work done by literary critics on the very texts Gunter read. I realize that I’m repeating the oft-made complaint that the traffic between historians and literary critics tends to run one way. But Sharpe might have learned something about how to talk about both gender and representation from the work of literary critics, just as they have much to gain from reading his work.

If detail is one of the great delights and contributions of this book, it can also prove too much at times. Given how much the reader is expected to absorb—the careers of every Oxford witness, the dysentery and gallstones that end the lives of various players in the case—I want a more interesting payoff. “What is the affair’s broader significance?” Sharpe asks on page 207 (of 212). In response to his own, rather belated question, he returns to his unassailable central claim: thinking about witchcraft was pretty complicated in early modern England. He does venture this provocative speculation: “it seems very likely that if Charles had not committed that series of political miscalculations that led to the Civil Wars and all they entailed, witch-trials, as well as intellectual and theological interest in witchcraft, would have died out in England” (210). I would have liked far more exploration of the implications of the Gunter case. In part because Sharpe leads with his most dramatic evidence, Anne’s depositions before the Star Chamber, and Anne disappears from the historical record after this stunning performance, his story limps to a close with a description of a visit to the Gunter’s village today. While I wish that Sharpe had risked more arguments about the material he assembles here, I do find this material inherently important and compelling.

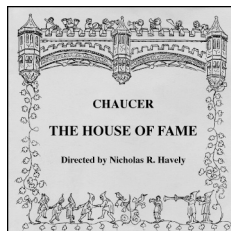
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THE
CHAUCER
STUDIO

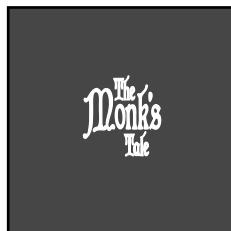


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