CALL FOR PAPERS:
THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE ASSOCIATION

2015 CONFERENCE

“The Functions and Dysfunctions of the Medieval & Renaissance Family”

The 2015 meeting of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association will be in conjunction with the Wooden O Symposium at Southern Utah University in Cedar City, Utah, August 3-5. The Wooden O Symposium, sponsored by the Utah Shakespeare Festival and Southern Utah University, is a cross-disciplinary conference focusing on the text and performance of Shakespeare’s plays, held in one of the most beautiful natural settings in the western U.S. Both the RMMRA and Wooden O Symposium will organize sessions in this joint conference.

The RMMRA invites all approaches to the medieval & early modern eras, over a wide range of disciplines—history, literature, art, music, and gender—special consideration will be given to paper & panel proposals investigating this year’s theme, "The Functions and Dysfunctions of the Medieval and Renaissance Family."

Abstracts for RMMRA sessions should be sent to Program Chair Jen McNabb: JL-Mcnabb@wiu.edu.

Participants in RMMRA sessions must be members of RMMRA; RMMRA graduate students and junior scholars are encouraged to apply for the $250 Walton Travel Grants; details at http://rowdy.msudenver.edu/~tayljeff/RMMRA/Index.html

Deadline for proposals is May 1, 2015. Session chairs and presenters will be informed of acceptance by May 15.

Please include 250-word abstracts or session proposals (including individual abstracts) and the following: *name of presenter(s) • participant category (faculty, graduate, undergraduate student, independent scholar) *college/university affiliation *mailing address • email address • *audio/visual requirements and any other special requests.

The Wooden O Symposium invites panel and paper proposals on any topic related to the performance text and texts of Shakespeare’s plays, & papers/panels investigating how his works reflect or intersect with early modern life and culture.

This year’s symposium encourages papers and panels that speak to the Shakespeare Festival’s 2015 summer season: The Taming of the Shrew, Henry IV Part Two, & King Lear. Abstracts for consideration for the Wooden O sessions and individual presentations should be sent to usfedu@bard.org.

Shakespeare by Louis-François Roubliac: permission of the British Museum
Notice to Contributors

Quidditas (http://humanities.byu.edu/rmmra), the annual, on-line journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association, invites submissions that falls within the domain of all Medieval and the Renaissance disciplines: literature, history, art, music, philosophy, religion, languages, rhetoric, or interdisciplinary studies. Since there is NO subscription fee, the journal is easily available from any computer without charge.

Quidditas also features a “Notes” section for short articles (2 to 10 pages) pertaining to factual research, bibliographical and/or archival matters, corrections and suggestions, pedagogy and other matters pertaining to the research and teaching of Medieval and Renaissance disciplines. Our “Texts and Teaching” section seeks longer Review of Literature essays and short (2 to 12 pages) reviews of individual textbooks and other books instructors have found especially valuable in teaching courses in Medieval and Renaissance disciplines.

Membership in the Association is not required for submission or publication.

Please submit articles, notes, or reviews electronically in MS Word (.doc or .docx) to the appropriate editor listed below. The author’s name must not appear within the text. All articles or notes must include a short abstract, (200 words maximum) before the main text, and a full bibliography of works cited at the end. Use The Chicago Manual of Style (15th ed.). Also please accompany any submission with a cover letter including the author’s name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and title of the submission.

Documentation: Quidditas uses footnotes. No endnotes or parenthetical citations since submissions must include a full bibliography, footnotes, including the first footnote reference, should use abbreviated author, title, and page. For example:


First and subsequent footnotes—Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 22-24. Do not use ibid. Subsequent references to the same work should continue the use of abbreviated author, title and page number.

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The Allen D. Breck Award is given in honor of Professor Allen D. Breck (1914-2000), a founder of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. As Professor of History at the University of Denver, he also served for 20 years as department chair. As Professor Emeritus he became the historian of the University of Denver, writing *From the Rockies to the World—The History of the University of Denver*. His specialties included medieval and church history, particularly John Wyclif. He also taught Anglican studies at the Hiff School of Theology, and wrote, edited, or contributed to histories of Jews, Methodists, and Episcopalians in Colorado and books on medieval philosophy, the lives of western leaders, and the relationships between science, history, and philosophy. In addition to his involvement with RMMRA, he also was a fellow of the Royal Historical Society, and belonged to the Medieval Academy of America, the Western History Association, and the Western Social Science Association.

The Breck Award recognizes the most distinguished paper given by a junior scholar at the annual conference.
Is Geoffrey Chaucer’s Tale of Sir Thopas a Rape Narrative?

Reading Thopas in light of the 1382 Statute of Rapes

Kristin Bovaird-Abbo
University of Northern Colorado

Considering the tale’s placement between two narratives of violence—the Prioress’s Tale and the Tale of Melibee—it is surprising that the Tale of Sir Thopas has not merited more discussion of the potential for violence against feminine bodies. I argue that Chaucer the author introduces significant changes to the typical medieval romance, with the result that Thopas’s actions in the name of “love” conceal a rape narrative that engages late fourteenth-century debates as to what exactly constituted rape. As the transfer of property was a significant portion of such discussions, the 1382 Statute of Rapes prompted concerns about the ability of men and women to manipulate rape and abduction laws to select their marriage partners, and I argue that the Tale of Sir Thopas reflects these concerns. Sir Olifaunt is a protective warden rather than a destructive rapist, and Thopas, despite his seemingly non-threatening demeanor, is the true threat.

The Prioress has just concluded her tale of young Hugh of Lincoln’s death, and in an attempt to lighten the mood, the host Harry Bailey turns to a slightly plump pilgrim, demanding a tale of mirth. This pilgrim immediately embarks on a daring narrative of fairy queens, giants, and heroic deeds, as an unknown knight sets out to find an unknown beloved, facing unknown dangers. This is Geoffrey Chaucer’s Tale of Sir Thopas, and as the pilgrims listen to the narrator’s tale, they cannot help but notice verbal echoes of romances, despite their lack of familiarity with Thopas himself. But after the dignified rhyme royal of the Prioress’s Tale, the pilgrims find it difficult to concentrate on the narrator’s story due to its jarring tail-rhyme, and finally Harry Bailey bursts out, “Namoore of this, for Goddes dignitee, / . . . . / Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord!”

Considering the tale’s placement between two narratives of violence—the Prioress’s Tale and Chaucer the Pilgrim’s Tale of Melibee—it is surprising that the Tale of Sir Thopas has not merited

1 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, lines 919-29.
more discussion of the potential for violence against bodies, particularly feminine ones. This may be in part due to the naïveté of the pilgrim who delivers the tale, best displayed in the General Prologue, when he smiles approvingly at the pilgrim Monk’s rejection of Augustinian rule but fails to comprehend the latter’s neglect of his spiritual duties. As Ben Kimpel suggests, the persona which Chaucer the author creates and baptizes with his own name is “humble and rather stupid but well-meaning.”

Clearly Chaucer the pilgrim is not intentionally weaving a rape narrative around a character described by Elaine Tuttle Hansen as “sweet young Sir Thopas.” Nonetheless, I hesitate to dismiss Sir Thopas as an innocuous failure of a knight, for underlying the tale’s parody of medieval romance is a disturbing thread of the potential for violence against female bodies.

In the wake of Christopher Cannon’s careful exploration of the medieval sense of the word raptus in his 1993 article, scholars have delved into Chaucer’s corpus, seeking reflections of rape that might elucidate Cecily Chaumpaigne’s deed of release concerning Chaucer in 1380. At the same time, scholars have found the tales themselves to be valuable reflections of fourteenth-century attitudes and legal practices towards gender. Although Evelyn Birge Vitz

2 Kimpel, “The Narrator of the Canterbury Tales,” 84. R. M. Lumiansky (313-20) suggests that Chaucer the pilgrim reveals a mischievous personality, particularly since Harry Bailey describes him as “elvyssh” (fragment 7, line 703) in the prologue to Sir Thopas, and that he adopts a mock humility as he indirectly ridicules the Host’s literary sensibilities. Lumiansky’s argument is compelling, but I tend to lean toward Kimbel’s assessment that the tale is less funny if the narrator is intentionally funny. Kimbel, “The Narrator,” 84. Ann S. Haskell follows a similar interpretation, arguing that the pilgrim Chaucer is merely a puppet of Chaucer the author, and the Host indirectly reinforces this idea when, in fragment 7, line 701, he describes Chaucer the pilgrim as “a popet in an arm.” “Sir Thopas: The Puppet’s Puppet.” Chaucer Review 9 (1975): 253-261.

3 Hansen, Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender, 17.

4 Cannon, “Raptus in the Chaumpaigne Release,” 74-94. Ever since F. J. Furnivall’s 1873 description of Cecily Chaumpaigne’s deed of release concerning Geoffrey Chaucer in 1380, the topic of rape in Chaucer’s literary corpus has enjoyed a presence in literary criticism. Most come to a conclusion similar to that of Allman and Hanks, who note that “little has been made critically of the conflict with Chaumpaigne because little can.” “Rough Love,” 37.

5 For example, William A. Quinn observes that “[a]fter 1380, . . . Chaucer more often than not does refer to rape quite literally, and even his more oblique references to rape seem more graphic, more negative and much more personally relevant” in “The Rapes of Chaucer,” 4. A more recent study of the interaction between legal practice and Chaucer’s tales can be found in Edwards’s “The Rhetoric of Rape,” 3-26.
complains that scholars erroneously label “every act by which a male dominates or possesses a woman, erotically or in other ways” as “an act of rape,” due to the pervasive presence of rape and rape themes throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, I believe we do the text a disservice by too quickly dismissing Thopas’s threat of violence against the fairy queen, especially given the legal debates arising in England concerning rape and their connection to the transmission of property. Thopas’s encroachment on the elf-queen’s lands and on her image is, I argue, an attempt to control a powerful, independent female.

The 1382 Statute of Rapes reveals that there were debates during the late fourteenth century as to what exactly constituted rape, and the transfer of property was a significant portion of such discussions. While the specific word *raptus* meant “forced coitus” in fourteenth-century English law, there remained concern about the ability of women to manipulate rape and abduction laws to select their marriage partners. That is, if a woman’s parent or guardian disapproved of the man that she desired to marry, she could arrange an abduction, marry her sexual violator, and later “consent” to the act, thereby forcing the parents or guardians to accept the match. Prior to 1382, as J. B. Post notes, it was the responsibility of the wronged woman to report the crime in timely fashion, offering evidence of torn clothing and her bleeding body.

Although the proscribed punishments for successfully prosecuted rape cases were severe—blinding and castration—few were actually convicted, and often only a fine was applied. Subsequent amendments to thirteenth-century rape laws, as Suzanne Edwards

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6 Vitz, “Rereading Rape in Medieval Literature,” 288. As William Quinn notes, “Under investigation, the issue of *raptus* proves to be surprisingly salient throughout the *Canterbury Tales*” (12). Christine M. Rose (49) argues, “Rape is regularly encoded by Chaucer as part of a larger system of the control of women’s bodies.” Rachel Warburton (270) also argues for a broader interpretation of rape in Chaucer.

7 Cannon, “*Raptus* in the Chaumpaigne Release,” 92.

8 Cannon, “*Raptus* in the Chaumpaigne Release,” 81.

has argued, were “designed to protect families’ interests in women’s marriage value.” That is, whereas the thirteenth-century laws emphasize the role of the victim’s consent, a century later, such consent is rendered secondary to family approval. As Kim Phillips notes, the end effect of the 1382 Statute was to trivialize or dismiss completely the need for consent on the part of the female; instead, rape and ravishment became a crime of property. Many cases leading up to and following the enactment of the 1382 Statute dealt with families fighting to deny dowries or otherwise prevent the transmission of property to men who acquired their daughters in such a manner. However, what happens in the case of an independently wealthy woman, such as Thopas’s fairy queen, when there is no family to protest? Chaucer the narrator, through his account of Thopas’s adventure to gain a fairy queen as his bride, reveals a loophole in the laws surrounding rape, one which made independent women sexually vulnerable. Thopas may come across as a silly failure of a knight, but even the most demure of men, the tale suggests, may be transformed into a sexual threat. A man who might be seen as “a popet in an arm t’ enbrace / For any womman” contains the potential to reverse the power hierarchy, embracing instead the desired female.

Although the opening description of Thopas suggests that he is not threatening to women—”he was chaast and no lechour”—the extreme reversal that he undergoes when he “fil in love-lonynge” is conspicuous. Both “chaast” and “no lechour” evoke the prologue

10 Edwards, “The Rhetoric of Rape,” 4. Specifically, the Statutes of Winchester, 1275 and 1285 allowed for rape to “induce a woman’s consent to a marriage that neither she nor her family would otherwise have chosen” (6). For more information on these Statutes see Post, “Ravishment of Women.” Post notes that “[h]e interpretation and extension, therefore, the Statutes of Westminster turned the law of rape into a law of elopement and abduction, which inhibited the purposes of the woman herself . . . and fostered the interests of those who wanted material recompense for the material disparagement wrought by self-willed womenfolk and suitors” (160). In “Sir Thomas West and the Statute of Rapes, 1382,” Post summarizes the changes enacted by this new statute: “The emphasis of the law of rape was thus drawn away from the actual or potential plight of the victim of a sexual assault, and placed upon the unacceptability of an accomplished elopement, or an abduction to which the victim became reconciled” (25).


12 Chaucer, “Prologue to Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, lines 701-02.

13 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, lines 745, 772.
of the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, where variations of both words appear. For example, Alison refers to one of her husbands as “‘Sire olde lecchour’” while accusing him of paying too much attention to other women; at the same time, she also announces that “For sothe, I wol nat kepe me chaast in al.”  

Yet despite these opening lines which seem to suggest that Thopas is the opposite of the lecherous Wife of Bath, his sudden violence against his horse suggests rather that the two tales share more similarities than differences. The verb *priketh* first seems to occur innocuously as Thopas enters into the forest: “He priketh thurgh a fair forest.” I would argue, as do Allman and Hanks, that the larger connotation suggests that Thopas’s actions are sexualized, particularly as this verb is repeated in close proximity; in fact, three lines later, we are told of Thopas that “he priketh north and est.” What is significant about the repetition of this verb is the expansion of Thopas’s actions; that is, in the first instance, his actions take him in a direct line “thurgh a fair forest”; however, his movements become more erratic, perhaps even frenzied, in the second occurrence as he moves in two different directions simultaneously. The third usage occurs after Thopas “fil in love-longynge” upon hearing birdsong, and his behavior becomes violent: he “pryked as he were wood,” and his “prikynge” causes his horse to bleed. Angela Jane Weisl takes the sexual nature of Thopas’s violence a step further: “while his horse is not a woman, per se, its position under him (literally and figuratively) in this sexual metaphor puts it in her place. This violent sexuality is the same as that which is overtly expressed by the rape in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale.*” Yet this is not the only evidence that for Thopas, sex and violence are intertwined. We might initially


17 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” *Canterbury Tales*, fragment 7, lines 772, 774, 775.

18 Weisl, “‘Quiting’ Eve,” 123.
gloss over the minor detail that Thopas carries a “launcegay” in his hand as he rides out, 19 but if we consider John Gower’s use of this word in Book VIII of his Confessio Amantis, where it is used to denote the love-dart of Cupid, it becomes clear that Thopas sets out in quest of an amatory experience that is far different from what is typically encountered in medieval romance. Thopas carries the love-dart, rather then Cupid, because he intends to create his own romantic encounter.

Thopas’s behavior, then, is a far cry from that of one who is “chaast and no lechour,” particularly since the first adjective suggests a continent demeanor. In fact, his actions link him closely to Jankyn of The Wife of Bath’s Prologue. When Thopas becomes maddened by the birdsong, the term that Chaucer uses to describe his state of mind is “wood.” 20 Although this word denoting a type of madness is frequent in both Chaucer’s corpus and in romance as a whole, it appears in the Wife of Bath’s Prologue, where it is used to describe Jankyn’s behavior moments before he delivers the deafening blow to Alison. 21 In both cases, this word signals that these men are out of control, reduced to primal and bestial behavior. In fact, Chaucer’s description of Thopas once he has expended his energy upon his horse is “So fiers was his corage.” 22 Although fiers may have positive denotations of bravery and nobility, it can also mean “ferocious, savage.” 23 Corage is often translated as “heart,” but it can also denote “sexual desire” or “lust.” 24 In light of the increasing violence of Thopas’s actions, as well as the word choice of wood, these secondary definitions of fiers and corage seem more appropriate. Further-

19 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, line 752.
20 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, line 774.
21 Chaucer, “Prologue the Wife of Bath’s Tale,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 3, line 794.
22 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, line 780.
more, the catalyst for the frenzy of both Jankyn and Thopas is their desire for possessions. In the case of Jankyn, his marriage to Alison of Bath has resulted in a meteoric rise in social position, for while he “som tyme was a clerk of Oxenford,” Alison grants him possession of her substantial material wealth.25 The conflict that arises between Alison and Jankyn results from Jankyn’s desire for complete control over Alison’s body and activities. Thopas desires a similar control over the elf-queen, for when he wakes from dreaming of her, he expresses his desire to redefine “[a]n elf-queene” as “my lemman” who will “slepe under my goore,” or under his direct influence.26 The use of possessive pronouns here is striking, particularly in the shift from the indefinite “an” applied to the fairy woman to the emphasis of Thopas’s possession in the repeated use of “my.”

Thopas’s overall lack of self-restraint as well as a lack of respect for the boundaries of others is also marked by his behavior once he sets out in quest of the elf-queen. That is, Thopas does not travel by established roads; rather, he “priketh over stile and stoon.”27 The movement over stiles indicates that he is crossing artificial borders with no concern that he is potentially trespassing. Furthermore, when he arrives at the country of Fairy, it is described as “a pryve woon.”28 While *pryve* is often translated as “secret,” it can also indicate personal possession.29 While it may be that Thopas just happens across this place as part of his quest, at the same time, his behavior towards his horse and his trailblazing of paths suggest rather that he is willfully and thoughtlessly intruding upon the property of others. Yet another detail that helps to establish Thopas’s behavior as such is the appearance and speech of the giant, to which I turn next.


As Middle English romances often depict giants as rapists, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests in his study of medieval giants that the *Tale of Thopas* is indeed a rape narrative due to the tale’s invocation of the giant as abductor. Cohen is, of course, focused on establishing the ways in which the tale evokes conventions of medieval romance as they pertain to giants, with the ultimate goal of arguing that Sir Thopas’s masculinity is “diminished” as a result of the encounter with the giant. Reading the episode against other abductions such as that found in the Mont St. Michel episode of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Cohen repeatedly notes that the fairy queen has been abducted and therefore in need of rescue from the monstrous giant: “Both [giants] abduct a woman and keep her against her will . . . That Olifaunt has abducted the elf-queen and holds her in his lair suggests that he is the traditional giant of romance.” I would counter Cohen’s argument however, for I neither view Sir Olifaunt as a rapist giant nor would I argue that the elf-queen has been abducted. Chaucer’s giant differs significantly from the giant rapists who appear throughout romances such as *Libeaus Desconus*, *Sir Percyvall de Galles*, and *Guy of Warwick*. Likewise, the presentation of Chaucer’s elf-queen has been distorted from its usual function in medieval romance.

At first glance, the giant which Thopas encounters during his search for the elf queen seems to be the typical monster of medieval romance: “Til that ther cam a greet geaunt, / His name was sire Olifaunt, / A perilous man of dede.” As Laura Hibbard Loomis has noted, a similar giant appears in one of the “romances of prys” which Chaucer the pilgrim lists at the end of his tale: *Lybeaus Desconus*.  


33 Loomis, “Sir Thopas,” 516. Joanne A. Charbonneau (682) lists several Middle English romances in which giants appear to test the worth of the hero, including *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis*, *Lybeaus Desconus*, and *Sir Eglamour*. As she notes, *Guy* and *Lybeaus* contain the most parallels to *Thopas* in regards to the giant episode.
In this story, the giant haunting the Il d’Or warns Guinglain, like the character of Thopas, to turn back: “‘Torne home ayene tite, / For thyne owne prophite, / Yf thow lovyst thy prowe.’” When Guinglain refuses to do so, the giant “levyd on Turmagaunte” and kills Guinglain’s horse.\(^{34}\) Chaucer’s giant warns Thopas in a similar fashion, for he uses the same oath and threatens danger to the knight’s steed: “‘Child, by Termagaunt, / But if thou prike out of myn haunt, / Anon I sle thy steede.’”\(^{35}\)

However, significant differences exist between \textit{Libeaus} and \textit{Sir Thopas} as regards the episode of the giant. Specifically, in Chaucer’s tale, the appearance of the giant is not particularly grotesque: the elf queen is not in danger. In other Middle English romances, the giant’s monstrosity is reflected visually through unusual skin color. For example, in \textit{Lybeaus}, while the hero makes his way to rescue the Lady of Synadoun, the accompanying maiden’s dwarf sees a fire in the distance. As the group draws nearer, they find two giants: one is “rede and lothelych, / That oþer black as eny pyche.” Later, the giant Maugys, who is besieging the castle of Yle d’Or, is described in similar terms: “He is as blacke as pyche.”\(^{36}\) In \textit{Guy of Warwick}, another major source of Chaucer’s \textit{Tale of Sir Thopas}, the giant Amoraunt whom the hero encounters is also hideous to behold:

\begin{quote}
Michel and griselych was that gome  
With ani god man to duele.  
He is so michel and unread  
Of his sight a man may drede  
With tong as Y thee telle;  
As blac he is as brodes brend,  
He semes as it were a fende  
That comen were out of helle.\(^{37}\)
\end{quote}

\(^{34}\) \textit{Lybeaus Desconus}, lines 1344-46, 1363.  
\(^{36}\) \textit{Lybeaus Desconus}, lines 604-05, 1299.  
\(^{37}\) \textit{Guy of Warwick}, lines 737-44.
Chaucer’s giant, on the other hand, is described only as “greet” and “A perilous man of dede.” There is no indication that he is monstrous in appearance, only that he is large in size. After all, geaunt can simply refer to a “man of extraordinary size or strength.” What further supports this reading of Olifaunt as a large man is the fact that, unlike the giants of Lybeaus, he is granted a title: “sire Olifaunt.” Although “sire” can be used contemptuously, typically it is “applied to one of the order of knighthood.” These subtle differences suggest that Chaucer the author is purposefully deviating from the traditional giant trope of medieval romance.

In the typical Middle English romance, such loathly giants are often accompanied by extremely outspoken damsels in distress. In Lybeaus, the maiden trapped by the red and black giants begins crying noisily once Guinglain comes into view of the giants: “‘Wayle-a-waye! / . . . . / Helppe me, Mary mylde, / For love of thine childe, / That J [sic] be nought for-yett!’” Even though the maiden is not aware that any potential rescuers are in the vicinity, she is still loud, raising her cries to implore the intervention of the Virgin Mary. Later in the text, we are told that the Lady of the Il d’Or is under siege by the giant Maugys; she too is vocal: “Her haþ be-leyde abowte.” In both of these situations, the hero is made explicitly aware of the danger posed by the giants to these women. Yet no indication is given that the elf-queen of Chaucer’s tale is in need of rescue. She has not been abducted from her homeland, for Thopas has entered the “con-tree of Fairye,” and when he sets out on his quest, he makes it clear that he does not intend rescue, for he seeks only to “t’espye.”

38 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, lines 807, 809.
40 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, lines 808.
42 Lybeaus Desconus, lines 616-21, 1248.
43 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, lines 802, 800.
Although Sir Olifaunt haunts her surroundings, he does not appear to be her captor or her persecutor. When he speaks to Thopas, Olifaunt offers no threat to the person of the elf-queen, which is contrary to what typically occurs in medieval romances. In *Ywain and Gawain*, for example, the main character finds lodging at a castle whose inhabitants continuously shift from joy to sorry. When he inquires as to the reason for their shifts in mood, he is told that “‘A geant won here-nere-bysyde, / Þat es a devil of mekil pride; / His name hat Harpyns of Mowtain’”; this same giant has laid waste to the surrounding lands and now demands the lord’s daughter so that he might defile her body. In Chaucer’s *Tale of Sir Thopas*, however, there is no cry for help; no one comes to the main court seeking a champion, and Thopas encounters no one on his journey who requests his aid. Although Sir Olifaunt threatens Thopas with violence if he does not depart the land of faery, there is no indication that the giant has laid siege to the land, the faery queen’s residence, or the faery queen’s own person. When he returns to town, Thopas boasts of his upcoming fight; however, he makes no mention of a damsel in distress. Instead, he speaks of his plans to fight “For paramour and jolitee / Of oon that shoon ful brighte.”

In addition, the means by which Thopas’s elf-queen enters the narrative is unorthodox, signaling a significant departure from the romance convention, for in the *Tale of Sir Thopas*, the hero knight wanders aimlessly through the countryside, and when he stops to rest in a meadow, we are told that he “dremed al this nyght, pardee, / An elf-queene shal my lemman be.” As Lee Patterson notes, it is rare to fall in love with a fairy lover in a dream. Rather,

44 *Ywain and Gawain*, lines 2249-51.
45 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” *Canterbury Tales*, fragment 7, lines 843-44.
47 Patterson, “‘What Man Artow?,’” 127. As Laura Hibbard Loomis (516) observes, only two other Middle English romances deal explicitly with female fairy love: *Sir Launfal* and *Thomas of Erceldoune*. A similar scene appears in *Thomas of Erceldoune*, for as Thomas lays under an apple tree in the month of May, he witnesses a beautiful woman riding by. Entranced, he leaps to his feet and chases after her, and when she allows him to catch up to her, she reveals that she is a queen “of ane oþer countree” (Thomas has mistaken her for the Queen of Heaven) and personally leads him into her land.
as Anne Rooney has shown, romances make explicit use of what she calls a “meeting-motif” in forests, and “[i]n no instance is the hunter actively seeking a sexual encounter, and in all cases the woman presents herself to him and tells him what he must do.”

Chaucer’s own work indicates familiarity with the romance convention of the fairy mistress, for in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, we see both aspects of the “meeting-motif” play out. Thopas follows the first component of the motif with his initial aimless searching; he violates the second aspect because he actively quests after the lady—simply because of a dream—and he stumbles upon Fairyland by accident—neither destiny nor the desires of the elf queen instruct his movements.

Furthermore, we are told that the elf-queen is “‘With harpe and pipe and symphonye, / Dwellynge in this place.’” The description of this setting echoes that of Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, where the elf-queen dances with her company. Although dancing is not mentioned in *The Tale of Sir Thopas*, nonetheless we are given the impression that the elf-queen lives in comfort rather than constraint, and the present participle “dwellynge” suggests a place of permanence, typically associated with the home. Of course, provided that the prisoner is of high rank, such captivity may not be a hardship; after all, Meleagant in Chrétien’s twelfth-century *Chevalier de la Charrette* provides the abducted queen with comfortable lodgings. However, in Chrétien’s romance, Guinevere clearly desires to be rescued. The elf-queen neither appears (except in Thopas’s dream) nor speaks—she gives no indication of needing to be rescued, and no

48  Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, 61.

49  Whether or not Chaucer knew either *Thomas of Erceldoune* or *Sir Launfal*, we cannot know, despite the extensive source work undertaken by previous scholars regarding the many verbal echoes and parallel motifs. Loomis makes the compelling point that the Manuscript Cotton Caligula A II includes Lybeaus, *Ypotis*, and the unique text of *Launfal*, so if this is the manuscript in which Chaucer read *Lybeaus Desconus* (rather than the Auchinleck MS), it is possible that he was exposed to *Sir Launfal* as well. “Sir Thopas,” 489.


52  In addition, as Burrow (920 n.815) notes, the home of the fairy mistress found in *Thomas of Erceldoune* is also filled with music.
messengers are sent from her with cries of distress. In addition, the fight between the hero knight and the menacing giant nearly always takes place within view of the besieged lady. This allows a narrative heightening of fear, for the audience is able to see the reactions of the onlookers when the villain seems to have the upper hand; at the same time, the knight, as is the case with Chrétien’s *Chevalier de la Charrette*, draws strength from the lady’s presence, and the lady is witness to the knight’s prowess. There is no immediate audience present when Thopas encounters the giant, however, and the giant gives no indication that he will meet Thopas the next day, much less bring the elf-queen with him. While Oliphant’s use of the demonstrative pronoun “Heere” indicates that she is indeed nearby and within auditory range, her silence indicates that no rescue is needed and that Thopas’s intrusive presence is not desired.53

We also know from *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* that an elf-queen can quickly disappear if threatened, for when the bachelor knight comes across the elf-queen and her ladies dancing in the forest, immediately “Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where.”54 In their place sits the notorious loathly lady, whom others have identified as a fairy.55 Thus, Thopas’s fairy woman, per the rules established earlier in *The Canterbury Tales* by the Wife of Bath, is in no danger from Sir Olifaunt. This giant more likely fulfills the function of the Otherworldly guide, for not all club-wielding giants are malicious. In *Ywain and Gawain*, for example, Sir Colgreuance encounters a monstrously foul churl: “a laithy creature, / For fowl he was out of mesure; / A wonder mace in hand he hade.” He too is large, “wely more than geant.”56 As is typical in medieval romance upon encountering such a creature, the hero’s first reaction is to prepare to fight until Colgreuance recognizes the churl not as an enemy who poses a threat to females, but as a guide to adventure. Therefore,

55 See Quinn, “Chaucer’s Arthurian Romance,” 215.
56 *Ywain and Gawain*, lines 247-49, 258.
Colgreuance “frayned him if he wolde fight.” However, the churl gives no response until Colgreuance alters his approach, calling the churl “belamy.” He then asks the loathly man, “‘I the pray of thi kownsayle / Thou teche me to sum mervayle.’”

This meeting is instrumental for the success of the romance, for it is this churl who instructs the knights in the adventure of the golden basin. Although Sir Colgreuance fails, he relays the pertinent information to Ywain, who in turn succeeds. A similar guide appears in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for the Green Knight who enters Arthur’s hall is “On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe.” The members of the court immediately recognize his Otherworldly origins, “Forþi for fantoum and fayryze þe folk þere hit demed,” and by the end of the poem, we learn that the Green Knight’s Otherworldly appearance has been crafted by the “‘myȝt of Morgne la Faye, . . . / And koyntyse of clergy.’” Morgan’s appellation of “la Faye” marks her Otherworldly nature, and Bertilak’s confession of her magic confirms it. Thus we see that not all large and ugly sentient creatures are malevolent in nature, but can also serve at the whim of elf queens such as Morgan le Fay in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the fairy queen of *Sir Thopas*. The discrepancy between Chaucer’s fairy queen and women abducted by giants suggests, therefore, that Oliphant is a guardian rather than an aggressor. I would also point out a further connection between Thopas’s giant, who is given the name Sir Olifaunt, and the churl of *Ywain and Gawain*, for the churl of the latter text has “eres als ane olyfant.”

What, then, does Thopas’s interaction with the giant reveal about his own character? Typically, the reaction of the hero to creatures such as Oliphant reflects the hero’s worth. That is, Colgreuance recognizes the Otherworldly guide and treats him with courtesy, which is then returned with information regarding further adventures. Gawain, too, always approaches such a situation calmly,

57 *Ywain and Gawain*, lines 272, 278, 317-18.
58 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 137, 240, 2446-47.
59 *Ywain and Gawain*, line 257.
carefully considering the motivations of his opponent before acting hastily, in both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chrétien de Troyes’s *Conte du Graal*. But in Chaucer’s *Tale of Sir Thopas*, when the giant attempts (albeit brusquely) to guide Thopas, telling him “‘But if thou prike out of myn haunt, / Anon I sle thy steede / With mace,’” the knight’s response reveals his lack of merit, for fighting is the only option that he considers possible.60

Yet although he determines to fight the giant, at the present moment, Thopas lacks his armor. Upon escaping “sire Olifaunt,” Thopas imagines that he fights on behalf of his beloved, the fairy queen, for as he tells his men, “nedes moste he fighte / With a geaunt with hevedes three, / For paramour…”61 Suddenly the giant (who earlier is described merely as tall) has grown two extra heads, and the fairy queen herself has become the stake—but it is all in Thopas’s imagination. Thus Thopas’s response to the giant indicates his inability to read correctly the situations in which he finds himself, for he sees the giant only as a threat (even though he is not) and wants only to fight him, whereas other knights know to treat such a character courteously. In other words, the giant tries to prevent this medieval Actaeon from spying upon the bathing Artemis, for Sir Thopas, unlike Gawain, Perceval, and other well-established knights of the Round Table, has not earned the right to be in the elf-queen’s presence. Had he proved himself worthy, she would have come to him.

If Thopas were anything like Sir Gawain in terms of his martial ability, he would meet with a number of women clamoring for his aid; after all, any time that Gawain sets out on a quest, he typically encounters at least one female character seeking his help along the way. Thopas’s magnetism appears to be merely in name, for he encounters only men on his quest: “in that contree was ther noon / That to him durste ride or goon, / Neither wyf ne childe.”62 and as

mentioned earlier, even the fairy queen, who surely is aware of his approach, does not seek him out, a detail which suggests that his dream is not a vision sent by the fairy queen, but rather simply a male fantasy. In fact, the closest that Thopas comes to interacting with the fair sex is only in his dreams. Yet from this point on, Thopas determines that he will have her, “For in this world no woman is / Worthy to be my make / In towne; / Alle othere wommen I forsake.”

Surely Thopas must be a doughty knight indeed if he can aim so high as a fairy mistress! Yet does a knight such as Thopas deserve such a lofty prize? As Cohen and others have noted, Thopas is rather passive; Chaucer’s verb choices reflect this inactivity. Within the first forty lines of the tale, Thopas performs only one action, and it is one without purpose, for “so bifel upon a day, / . . . / Sire Thopas wold out ride.”

The absence of both monstrous detail and danger to the female suggests a distance between Middle English romances and Chaucer’s parodic Thopas. Not surprisingly, criticism on the Thopas tale tends to strip Thopas of agency and therefore malicious intent. For example, Cohen writes that “The male body is diminished in ‘Thopas’ to keep it safe from the possibility of sex.”

Susan Crane comes to a similar conclusion, via Lee Patterson, who notes “that Geffrey and Thopas are sexualized ‘children with a difference’ due to the ‘powerfully erotic valence’ of ‘elvyssh’ figures and the perpetual ‘prikyng’ that is the physical manifestation of Thopas’s love-longing.” However, the differences between the typical encounters with giants and Thopas’s own foray into Fairyland problematize

63 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, lines 791-94.

64 Chaucer, “Tale of Sir Thopas,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, lines 748-50. That is, the majority of the verbs associated with Thopas are forms of the copula, merely renaming their subject: “Yborn he was”; “His fader was a man ful free”; “he was a good archeer”, “he was chaast” (fragment 7, lines 718, 721, 739, 745). A slight variation occurs with “He koude hunte at wilde deer; / And ride an haukyng for river” (fragment 7, lines 736-37), but even here the voice is subjunctive rather than indicative; in other words, there is the possibility that Thopas is capable of these things, but he is not actively doing them.

65 Cohen, Of Giants, 100.

66 Crane, Gender and Romance, 114.
Thopas’s quest. Although there is not an actual rape, there remains the potential for rape, with Thopas himself as the culprit rather than the giant. What becomes prominent in the Flemish knight’s pursuit of the elf-queen in light of the historical 1382 Statute of Rapes is the absence of family; there is no patriarchal guardian from whom to obtain consent—or, *ex post facto*, to object. In contrast, the late fourteenth-century *Sir Launfal* emphasizes the fairy’s familial connection twice in three lines when the fairy mistress is first introduced:

He fond yn the pavyloun  
The kynges doughter of Olyroun,  
Dame Tryamour that hyghte;  
Her fadyr was Kyng of Fayrye . . . 67

Of course, unlike the elf-queen of *Thopas*, Dame Tryamour makes her consent explicit. In addition, it is the style of the *Tale of Sir Thopas*—not the content—to which Harry Bailey objects, suggesting an indifference to the vulnerability of female bodies when no familial concerns are apparent.

The following tale, *The Tale of Melibee*, which is delivered by Chaucer the pilgrim, also addresses the susceptibility of female bodies as established in *The Tale of Sir Thopas* when a masculine guardian is absent. When the character of Melibee spends the afternoon away from his household, his enemies enter and attack only the females present: “Thre of his olde foes . . . betten his wyf, and wounded his doghter with fyve mortal woundes in fyve sondry places.” 68 There is no mention of any damage to his inanimate possessions. Although Melibee considers waging war against his enemies in reaction to this attack, his wife persuades him to grant mercy instead. What is striking, though, is the emphasis throughout the tale on the physical state of the daughter—the marriageable female property. On three separate occasions, Melibee is reassured that his daughter will recover, and both the surgeons and Dame Prudence even use nearly identical language. The surgeons assure Me-

67 *Sir Launfal*, lines 277-80.

libee that “‘she shal be hool and sound as soone as is possible,’” and Dame Prudence tells her husband that she “‘shal restoore yow youre doghter hool and sound.’”

While the daughter has not sustained a rape, nonetheless, the repeated emphasis on her body is striking in light of the 1382 Statute of Rapes. The primary driving force behind the establishment of the 1382 law was the specific case of Sir Thomas West who disapproved of the abduction of his daughter Eleanor by Nicholas Clifton—that is, Clifton was landless and had no desirable prospects.70 In contrast, in Chaucer’s tale, Melibee grants mercy to his foes instead of prosecuting them because he retains control over his property—his daughter—and while she has been temporarily damaged, he can still control her marriageable future without any current diminishment of his wealth.

As Corinne Saunders notes, medieval romances dealing with raptus blend a “concern to defend the virgin from corruption against her will” with “interest in protecting or gaining the woman as property, irrespective of her consent.”71 As medieval romance has implied, knights with fairy lovers are rewarded and esteemed; thus, unaccomplished “knights” such as Thopas are compelled to seek out rich and independent women in order to subjugate them in their quests to establish their reputations. The chivalric codes within medieval romance, such as the Pentecostal Oath in Thomas Malory’s fifteenth-century Le Morte Darthur, as well as conduct literature, repeatedly present women as needing protection; a woman without a guardian therefore becomes a woman in need of a guardian. Thus through the Tale of Sir Thopas, Chaucer reveals the subversive side of Middle English romance.

69 Chaucer, “Tale of Melibee,” Canterbury Tales, fragment 7, lines 1015, 1110.


71 Saunders, “Middle English Romance,” 106.
It is one thing to tilt at windmills, as Miguel de Cervantes will have his Don Quixote do a few centuries later, but it is quite another to target an independent woman, turning her into an unwilling damsel in distress. Even though the tale is framed by more positive portrayals of gender power relations, Thopas’s story remains with its nefarious promise of a fairy damsel besieged by a three-headed giant. Should Thopas fail (and there is little doubt in my mind that he would have), another more virile man will take his place. And in the real world, the desired woman possesses no magic by which she may escape.

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The following article argues that the idea of the allomorph is a productive way to view two “transformation” riddles from the Old English collection of riddles in the Exeter Book. In the view of the authors, Riddles 74 and 33 should both be solved generally as “water,” and specifically as “in the form of a thunderstorm.” Both riddles dramatize the multiple forms that water may take, and meditate on the divinely-ordained grandeur of the storm and the particular paradox of a thing being both immensely violent and necessary for life on earth. Understanding how these riddles play out these truths provides students of the riddles with further examples of the happy epistemological sense to be widely found in them.

Though it arose first in the field of chemistry, the term allomorph is now perhaps used more often in the realm of linguistics, where it describes the variant shapes a particular morpheme may take as a result of its phonetic environment—for instance, the plural morpheme in English may be realized in the allomorphs /s/, /z/, or /iz/, among others. In mineralogy and chemistry, allomorphs are “alternative crystalline forms” of the same chemical compound, the different allomorphic forms of cellulose being a well-known example. In this essay, we would like to extend the term to the world of Old English
riddles, using it to refer to the alternative forms a riddle object may take in its various real and imaginative environments.

It is true that in many riddles, the riddle object does not change: it is simply presented under an obscuring cloak. However, within a pairing of cloak and object, there can be a world of shifting states of being and perception. Craig Williamson notes in his introduction to *A Feast of Creatures* that “the metaphor of riddles mirrors metamorphosis: all things shift in the body of nature and the mind of man… [A riddle] liberates us from the prison of reified perception and recalls the metamorphic flow.”¹ Williamson’s notion of the “flow” is highly evocative; however, it may obscure the way that a number of other riddles appear to recognize the metamorphosed states of the riddle objects as distinct in and of themselves. We identify these distinct states as *allomorphs* of one essential substance. Consider, for instance, the solution to Riddle 30a²:

*Ic eom leghysig, lace mid winde,*

*bewunden mid wuldre, wedre gesomnad,*

*fus forðweges, fyr gebysgad,*

*bearu blowende, byrnende gled.*

“I am busy with flame, I play with wind,

wound about with glory, summoned by storm,

ready for departure, occupied with fire,

a blooming grove, a burning ember.”

These lines strike us by the rapid transitions they make between the various states of the riddle object. John Niles suggests that the


² The following discussion employs the now conventional numbering system of Krapp and Dobbie in *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3; however, the text for the Exeter riddles is that of Muir, *The Exeter Anthology.*
riddle can be solved with the Old English solution of *trēow*, the polysemy of which captures the object’s various manifestations as “tree,” “wood,” “grove,” “log,” and, later in the riddle, “object made of wood” (specifically “cross”). In effect, these things are all allomorphs of *trēow*. Niles envisions the riddle functioning via para-nomasia, a conscious punning on a word’s multiple senses, but it is equally possible to see the riddle dwelling upon the nature of the essential substance which could be manifested both as *bearu* and as *glēd*.

Likewise, the distinct manifestations of the riddle creature in Riddle 12 may be considered as allomorphs of one essential being. The riddle begins thus:

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Fotum ic fere,    foldan slite,
grene wongas,    þenden ic gæst bere.
Gif me feorh losað,    fæste binde
swearte Wealas,    hwilum sellan men.
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“By my feet I travel, I tear the ground,
the green fields, whilst I bear the spirit.
If life departs me, I bind fast
swart Welshmen, [and] sometimes better men.”

Though a careful distinction is made between the creature’s behavior while it is alive and after it is dead, the riddle’s first-person narrator asserts that there is a continuity of identity, and this has posed a problem for solvers: is the solution properly “ox” or is it instead “leather”? As Niles remarks, “Debate could continue for some while concerning whether the answer to this riddle is the living beast that pulls the plough or the leather made from its hide”; Niles’ own solution is to propose an Old English alliterative doublet, *oxa ond*

3 Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, 130.
oxan-hỳd. However, Patrick Murphy argues that most of the riddles should not be considered as having double solutions, and for this reason, we should consider the leather and the living beast as allomorphs of one thing, which for want of a better term we will call the “ox” (or oxa).

In this essay, we make use of the idea of the allomorph to propose new readings of two riddles that appear to be linked both in their solutions and their general concerns. These are Riddle 74 (recently solved as “water”) and Riddle 33 (traditionally solved as “iceberg”). In our view, these riddles may plausibly be read as describing storms coming from the sea onto the land; in describing the many components of the storms, especially those that are “born” from one another, the riddles make definite use of allomorph. Indeed for ancient and medieval people, clouds, rain, hail, ice, waves, and even lightning could all be viewed as manifestations of the element known as water. In our view, the two riddles can be solved as “water,” but with the additional understanding “in the form of a thunderstorm.”

**Riddle 74 and the Majesty of the Storm**

Let us begin with the shorter riddle. Though brief, Exeter Riddle 74 is elegant, suggestive, and encapsulates a number of the themes and movements we will observe in Riddle 33. It has also been highly resistant to definite closure:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ic \text{ wæs fæmne geong, } & \text{ feaxhar cwene,} \\
ond \text{ ænlic rinc } & \text{ on ane tid;} \\
fleah \text{ mid fuglum } & \text{ ond on flode swom,} \\
deaf \text{ under yþe } & \text{ dead mid fiscum,} \\
ond \text{ on foldan stop— } & \text{ hæfde ferd cwiu.}
\end{align*}
\]


5 Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, 59-60, n. 98; 183-184.
“I was a young girl, gray-haired woman,
and peerless man at one time;
I flew with birds and swam on flood,
dove under wave, dead with fish,
and stepped on land—I had a living spirit.”

It would take a number of pages to critique the twenty-odd answers that formally have been proposed for this riddle, ranging from “sun” to “shadow” and from “flying fish” to “figurehead.”

Many of these solutions are quite ingenious and the terms of the riddle are such that they tend to require highly figurative interpretations of clues. One result is that many creatures or entities that are wide-ranging and variable in form may be offered as viable candidates. The approach taken by most would-be solvers has been to attempt to fit the solution into some larger pattern from Anglo-Saxon, early medieval, or classical literature. This is tricky, however, because Riddle 74 seems to echo many other texts, despite its brevity. It is a highly allusive, suggestive poem, resembling, among other texts, Aldhelm’s Enigma 16 (Luligo, “cuttlefish”), Exeter Riddle 7 (“swan”), Exeter Riddle 10 (“barnacle goose”), and a number of Old English and Latin writing riddles, including lines from Exeter Riddle 26 (“bible”). In recent years, Niles, supported by Murphy and Mark Griffith, argued for what is effectively an allomorphic reading: for them, the solution “is an ac, or oak tree, which has been cut down and made into a bat, or boat.” As such, the riddle would resemble evocations of boats in Old English poetry and a series of folk riddles developing this very conceit. However, Riddle 74 lacks the motif – common to the examples cited as parallels by Niles and Murphy – of the riddle-object being a once-living creature that has been fashioned into a useful servant. Furthermore, the use of gram-

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6 For summaries and critiques of a number of the most important solutions, see Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, 18-23, and Klein, “Of Water and the Spirit,” 5-8, 12-13.

mational gender to solve the changing sexes of the first two lines is highly speculative, as no other Old English riddle directly identifies a riddle-object as a “woman” or “man” as the sole result of grammatical gender.\textsuperscript{8}

Thomas Klein has recently argued that the best interpretation of Riddle 74 is a solution first proposed by Moritz Trautmann in 1904: the riddle encodes the mystery of “water” in its various states as snow, ice, clouds, and flowing streams; water is both “dead” as an inanimate substance yet “alive” as a life-giving and life-necessary element.\textsuperscript{9} For this, there are many parallels in the Anglo-Latin riddle tradition and elsewhere. While Trautmann imagined the “young girl,” “gray-haired woman,” and “peerless man” to be referring to water in various states (spring, ice-floe, and snow) bolstered by grammatical gender, there is in fact a very long tradition going back to late-classical riddling whereby states of water that “beget” other states of water are figured as mothers, daughters, fathers, and sons; the girl, woman, and man of Riddle 74 would then seem to be a variation on this theme. Klein argued, moreover, that the particular form that these clues take is influenced by an overlying metaphor in which water is presented \textit{in the guise of the Holy Spirit}. Through this metaphor, in the riddle, water’s shape-shifting ubiquity becomes in effect an analogue for the Spirit (and indeed water is a universal Christian symbol of the Spirit). In concluding, Klein wrote, “it is not at all a stretch for forms of water to match the terms of the riddle, even if we might not be able to say for certain why or how the woman is \textit{feaxhar} or the man is \textit{ænlic}.”\textsuperscript{10} In other words, it might not be possible to determine precisely how all the clues match the solution – how, for instance, water is like a “young girl” – as there seems to be such a wide variety of possibilities.

Here we present an alternative solution that could serve as a corrective to the above statement, as the third co-author – himself

\textsuperscript{8} Klein, “Of Water and the Spirit,” 6-8.


\textsuperscript{10} Klein, “Of Water and the Spirit,” 18.
an ornithologist with a specialization in the reproductive biology of birds and thus particularly attuned to the sort of creatures that “fly with birds” and move with natural rhythms of the environment—has proposed a compelling reading of the riddle that retains an allomorphic understanding of the riddle-object as “water.” Again, as with Riddle 33, the riddle describes a “thunderstorm,” which (as the larger tradition makes clear) in its many components and behaviors is a manifestation of water’s many forms and powers.

Let us again explicate our solution to Riddle 74 clue-by-clue, being careful to keep in mind the plausible cultural milieu. As with Riddle 33, the concrete solution “thunderstorm” (or “ocean storm”) would be highly relevant to many Anglo-Saxons: big storms rolling in from offshore and making landfall have always been meaningful and dramatic events to coastal and seafaring people, and thereby worthy of a riddle.

To begin with the first two lines and the opening clue, “I was a young girl,” the white, but not yet raining cumulus clouds on the leading and boundary edges of a forming storm could appear as the virginal young female who has not given birth to rain but grows to that capacity with time. The “gray-haired woman” might then be collectively the gray-streaked clouds dropping sheeting rain of a storm that has matured. A gray-haired woman already has “dropped” her babies, has birthed rain. As for the “peerless man,” ænlic rinc literally means a man without peers. He is thus at the top of the social hierarchy, and may well be royalty. Perhaps the riddler was associating the deep color of the storm with the medieval color of kingship; even now, we recognize the sign of a big storm rolling in because it is cloaked in purple. This metaphor is masculinized because the peerless man may appear as a “warrior” who bears a flashing sword, the lightning bolts that flash underneath the cloak of purple.

11 Among ænlic’s primary meanings, the Dictionary of Old English lists the senses “unique, peerless, incomparable” (DOE, s.v. ænlic, ðænlic) which because of its broad application seem to work best in the context; the phrase has also been translated “handsome man,” but that may be applying too positive an attribute to the storm.

12 Another primary sense of rinc; cf. Clark Hall (s.v. rinc): “man, warrior, hero.”
clouds. The following Old English phrase *on ane tid*, which is just as ambiguous as its Modern English translation “at one time,”\(^\text{13}\) may then be taken as a double entendre and a diversion. Not only does the riddle refer to a past storm, the storm itself simultaneously has white, gray, and purple elements all at one time.

The following three lines are fairly easy to associate with the storm. With “I flew with the birds,” we should imagine the high billowing clouds on the front of the storm as it sweeps in. In fact, gulls and other seabirds often are seen airborne, circling and fleeing in front of a moving storm as it comes piling in from offshore. Then, for “[I] swam on flood,”\(^\text{14}\) we should picture how at sea, or from the shore looking out to sea, as a storm appears at the horizon, it is “swimming” on the surface of the water. That is to say, it appears to be moving on top of the water at the horizon during the initial phase of the approach. (For a six foot man standing on the beach and looking out to sea, the horizon is three miles away; a storm moving directly at him at 25 miles per hour will reach him in seven minutes and will certainly be “flying with the birds” by the time it gets there.) With “dove under wave,” not only does a windy storm at sea mix with the waves of the storm surge, but the phrase may also be associated with other Old English and Latin water riddles in which rain (or ice) falls into the water and disappears.\(^\text{15}\) Once below the surface, i.e., “with fish,” no matter how wicked the storm is above the water, under water it is as if the storm is not occurring – it is “dead,” lifeless. As for “stepped on land,” even now, we use the phrase “making landfall” for a storm. The storm is stepping onto land. And it has a “living spirit” because, as we still recognize, storms seem to have


\(^{14}\) The sense of *flod* here seems to be “(ocean) tide” or “body of flowing water” (cf. *DOE*, s.v. *flood*); “water(s)” is possible, but it might be objected that this gives too much of the solution away.

a life and spirit of their own. However, when the storm is over, that living spirit is gone. Hence, it “had” a living spirit.

The thunderstorm of Riddle 74 is less openly hostile and aggressive than that of Riddle 33. As such, and ultimately as a representation of the allomorphic states of water, it is essentially a “force of nature” that operates as a vehicle of God’s will. In this regard, the previously proposed metaphorical overlay still holds true whereby the terms of the riddle bring to mind varied manifestations of the Deity\textsuperscript{16}: the storm that is in the sky, on the surface of the water, below the waves, and on land is like and calls to mind the ubiquitous Holy Spirit; by appearing as a young girl, old woman, and peerless man, the storm likewise suggests various configurations of the holy family, all infused by that same Spirit, as well as the Trinity itself.

**Riddle 33: Action, Voice, and Being**

Riddle 33 has been subject to surprisingly little critical examination. As Williamson notes, “Dietrich’s solution, “eisscholle,” is accepted by all editors though there is some disagreement as to whether the creature is an ice-floe (river or sea ice) or an actual iceberg (broken off from a glacier).”\textsuperscript{17} As we will argue, neither solution is correct.

\textit{Wiht cwom after wege wratlicu lifan;} 
\textit{cymlic from ceole cleopode to londe,} 
\textit{hlinsode hlude— hleator was gryrelic,} 
\textit{egesful on earde. Ecge weron scearpe;} 
\textit{was hio hetegrim, hilde to sene,} 
\textit{biter beadoweorcga. Bordweallas grof} 
\textit{heedhipende. Heterune bond!} 
\textit{Sægde searocraeftig ymb hyre sylfre gesceaf:}

\textsuperscript{17} Williamson, \textit{Old English Riddles}, 237.
“Is min modor mægða cynnes
þæs deorestan þæt is dohtor min
eacen uplodon; swa þæt is ældum cuþ,
firum on folce, þæt seo on foldan sceal
on ealra londa gehwam lissum stondan.”

“A wondrous creature came traveling along the way;
comely, it called from shipboard to land,
rumbled loudly—its laughter was dreadful,
terrifying on land. Its edges were sharp;
the creature was hostile, slow to fight,
bitter in battle-works. It carved up shield-walls,
ravaging hard. It bound a hate-rune!
The crafty one said, about its own origin:
‘She is my mother, the most honored
of woman-kind, who is my daughter
grown pregnant; so it is known to men,
to folk in the nation, that she must stand
gracefully on the surface of every land.’”

In the long shadow of the Titanic, the sharp edges of Riddle 33 have promoted its reflexive identification as the “Iceberg Riddle,” evoking a disaster unlikely for near-shore Anglo-Saxon shipping. In the reading we propose, the overall riddle is structured on the basis of two different aspects or experiences of “water”: one (occupying lines 1-8a) focuses generally on water’s destructive potential, while the other (occupying lines 8b-13) focuses on its creative and nurturing aspects. Further, in the first part, the riddle concentrates on our experience of the creature’s action and voice; in the second, with
a distinct ontological turn (ymb hyre sylfre gesceæft [8b]), on the nature of the creature’s being. Throughout, the riddle embraces a broad, allomorphic understanding of water’s many forms and behaviors.

As the riddle opens, the first action of the creature, a thunderstorm approaching the land, is relatively unthreatening: it simply comes traveling along the way, and interestingly, it is wrætlic, an almost exclusively poetic word that has the general sense of “curious, wondrous, rare,” but at times retains something of the sense of the noun wrætt from it derives, “ornament, jewel.”¹⁸ The jewel that both reflects and refracts light is very much like many of the forms of the unnamed riddle object, and how people experience them.¹⁹

In translating the opening line “An awesome beauty angled the wave,” Williamson was evidently thinking of an iceberg slicing through water,²⁰ but the sense seems more like that of wind causing the small waves that precede the coming of a storm. Indeed the whole first eight lines convey the somewhat ambiguous approach of this creature that begins at a distance and then comes closer and ends up attacking and causing damage. The voice of the creature is particularly highlighted: first it calls out to us on land – cleopode to londe (2b) – and then it surrounds us and cruelly laughs at us – hlinsode hlude – hleator wæs gryrelíc (3). The phrase from ceole (2a) is something of a crux, though our reading works with either of the proposed options: the DOE (s.v. cēol) proposes a figurative sense “from shipboard” (i.e. from out at sea) of a word which generally means “ship, sea-going vessel”; cēol’s apparent connection to “keel” has probably been suggestive to those who favor the iceberg

¹⁸ Clark Hall, s.v. wrætlic, wrætt. Cf. the use of the word in Beowulf: Hyrde ic þæt he done healstæah Hygde gesæalde, / wrætlicne wundormæðum – “I heard that he gave the necklace to Hygd, a marvelous bejeweled ornament” (Fulk, Bjork and Niles, Klaeber’s Beowulf, ll. 2172-2173a).

¹⁹ Indeed, the Rune Poem reminds us that ice glissab glæshlutter gimmum gelicust – “glitters clear as glass, very like jewels” (Halsall, The Old English Rune Poem, 88-89, l. 30; Halsall’s translation).

²⁰ Williamson, A Feast of Creatures, 91, l. 1.
interpretation, although that particular sense does not appear until the late 14th century. Williamson however argues for amending the phrase to from ceolan to connect the word to the weak noun ceole, “throat, gullet” so that the creature is now “deep-throated”; if so, this indeed reflects our experience of the way that a storm, rumbling from distance, gets louder and louder, even as it is hilde to sæne, “slow” or even “negligent” in entering battle. Once it has arrived, the storm (still ultimately just a form of water) is incredibly violent, as it takes on the character of a warrior, carving up shield-walls (the sides of boats?) with its cutting “edges” (bolts of lightning?). The storm has an intentionality that is not really explicable by any kind of literal reading, and in binding a heterun, literally a “hate-rune,” it seems perhaps to even have a kind of magical character, as if the storm were a kind of spell-casting warlock or even a sort of Viking coastal attack, a “blitzkrieg.” Nonetheless, the features described in the first eight lines are only one aspect of the riddle-object; as Williamson points out (paraphrasing Aristotle), “metaphor begins with deception and ends with the recognition of a deeper truth.” As we will see, in solving this riddle (as with some other riddles and especially the opening sequence of the Exeter collection), we come not just to an answer but to a deeper understanding of the nature of this particular riddle-object.

21 Cf. OED Online, s.v. keel, n.1.
22 Williamson, The Old English Riddles, 239-240, and A Feast of Creatures, 91, l. 2; cf. DOE, s.v. ceole.
23 Cf. Clark Hall, s.v. sæne: “slack, lazy, careless, negligent, dull, cowardly.”
24 As Murphy (Unriddling the Exeter Riddles, 48) observes, “We cannot assume that all details of a riddle’s proposition must make literal sense in relation to a riddle’s solution.”
25 Here we must register a disagreement among the co-authors. One of the three sees the inverse relationship between the tenor and vehicle of the metaphor: rather than a storm being described in terms of a battle, this author believes the riddle describes a Viking coastal attack using the metaphor of a storm surge arriving from the sea and striking the coast. This offers a challenge to Murphy’s general approach to the metaphorical “focus” of the riddles: how does one determine what is more prominent—the thing described, or the obscuring cloak that describes it?
26 Williamson, A Feast of Creatures, 36.
Having evoked the destructive potential of water, the riddle transitions in line eight to an entirely different experience of the element, effectively introducing a principle contrary to the hostile force hitherto described. The shift is first suggested by the equivocal adjective *searocræftig* which, as Bosworth-Toller notes, can mean “cunning” (or “crafty”) either in a “good” or a “bad” sense.27 The lines that follow replace the metaphor of water as a ravaging giant with a new metaphor of mothers and daughters; instead of focusing on the riddle-object’s voice and action, here the riddle evokes the creature’s essence and role in the natural world. To use these two distinct approaches to describe water – thereby exploiting the allo-morphic potential of water to its fullest – constitutes a very striking kind of epistemological principle.

In describing its mother as its daughter *eacen upladen* – “grown pregnant” – the riddle signals its participation in a truly long-standing riddle tradition. Presenting forms of water as mothers and daughters who give birth to one another was apparently at one point as familiar a riddle as “Why did the chicken cross the road” is now.28 Aelius Donatus and the other fourth century Roman grammarians all cite the following riddle as an example of the rhetorical mode known as *aenigma*:

*Aenigma est obscura sententia per occultam similitudinem rerum, ut Mater me genuit, eadem mox gignitur ex me, cum significet aquam in glaciem concrescere et ex eadem rursus effluere.*29

“A riddle is a statement that is disguised through the hidden similarity of things, for example, *The mother who gave birth to me is subsequently born from me*, whereby it means that water hardens into ice and in turn flows out of it.”


28 Klein, “Of Water and the Spirit,” 15-18. In the alternate view among the co-authors, this part of the riddle is the cleverest, because it deceptively evokes a known riddle tradition while actually referring to something else: in this view, the true meaning of these lines is that the mother is the longship of the invading Viking (because the longship bears him) but is also his daughter (because he built her – he produced her).

Versions of this same riddle extend from the late classical period to the early modern and beyond.\textsuperscript{30} Especially interesting here is the particular twist Riddle 33 gives the motif: suddenly the creature is among the \textit{deorestan} (10) of women, standing \textit{lissum} (13) on every land (and we recall that the storm was originally called \textit{cymlic} [2]). Still, there are parts of this formulation that do not entirely mesh with the first part of the riddle. Is the daughter that stands on every land snow or hail? If snow, thunderstorms do not typically happen in winter; if hail, is it appropriate to think of it as standing gracefully?\textsuperscript{31}

As some scholars have noted, much of the Exeter collection is characterized by paired riddles either sharing the same solutions or a similar thematic thrust.\textsuperscript{32} Niles, citing Mercedes Salvador’s approach to Riddles 77 and 78, articulates this general principle: “If a solution that is proposed for a problematic riddle can be shown to be one member of a pair of closely related items that follow one another in immediate succession, then that pairing can be counted in its favor.”\textsuperscript{33} While the solution to the riddle that immediately follows our riddle (Riddle 34, “rake”) bears little resemblance to our “water as thunderstorm,” the plundering, harrowing creature does behave in a similar way in miniature as it tears up \textit{wyrte} ... \textit{be fæst ne biþ} “the plants that are not fixed” (5b, 6b) and \textit{lætæd} ... \textit{wyrtum fæste} ... \textit{beorhtæ blican, blowan ond growan} “leaves those fixed by their roots to shine brightly, bloom and grow” (7, 9). Just as the scratching rake becomes a support for healthy plants, gracefully standing water provides the sustenance for growing things on every land.

\textsuperscript{30} Tupper described variants of this riddle motif in \textit{Riddles of the Exeter Book}, 147-8. See also Williamson, \textit{Old English Riddles}, 238-239.

\textsuperscript{31} The Rune Poem’s description of hail does seem rather beautiful: \textit{hægl byþ hwitust corna; hwyrft hit of heofenes lyfte, / wealcalp hitwindes scura; weorphp hit to watere syððan} – “Hail is the whitest of grains; it whirls down from heaven’s height, / and gusts of wind toss it about; then it is transformed to water” (Halsall, \textit{The Old English Rune Poem}, 88-89, ll. 25-26).

\textsuperscript{32} For instance, Tupper (\textit{Riddles of the Exeter Book}, 105) notes of Riddle 18: “This riddle is certainly a companion-piece to \textit{Rid.} 24, “Bow,” and forms with it one of the many pairs in our collection.” See Tupper, lxvi-lxxii, for a survey of parallels and likeness between neighboring riddles and across the collection.

\textsuperscript{33} Niles, \textit{Old English Enigmatic Poems}, 96; see Salvador, “The Oyster and the Crab,” 400-419.
At the heart of the riddle is the assertion that the things it says about water are absolutely true under the circumstances it articulates for us. The riddle goes to the core of what water is: an allo-morphic substance that is transformed in the sequence we know as the hydrologic cycle. Aristotle was perhaps the first among Western writers to fully describe this cycle in his *Meteorology*:

For the sun as it approaches or recedes, obviously causes dissipation and condensation… The moisture surrounding [the earth] is made to evaporate by the sun’s rays … and rises… Then vapour cools because its heat is gone and because of the place, and condenses again and turns from air into water. And after the water has formed it falls down again to the earth. The exhalation of water is vapour: air condensing into water is cloud… So we get a circular process that follows the course of the sun.  

Classical and patristic discussions of the hydrologic cycle might be more directly known to the Anglo-Saxons from such sources as Pliny’s *Natural History*. But we don’t really need Aristotle or Pliny to understand the hydrologic cycle: in many ways, it’s obvious, and we can observe it readily in many of our daily circumstances. The many late-classical and Anglo-Latin riddles that make use of the cycle in riddles on rain, ice, and water are not necessarily going back to a learned source.  

The contrast between the two parts of Riddle 33 – the way that the riddle requires us to reconcile them – effectively drives home the paradox of a violent thing that is good for us and for all things. Something of the same idea is captured in Riddle 6, where the “sun” announces that *Oft ic cwice / bærne unrimu cyn ... hwilum ic monigra mod arete* “Often I burn countless living kinds; at times I gladden the minds of many” (2b-3a, 6); even closer in spirit, perhaps, is Riddle 39. While the solution to the latter is still an open question, consensus has developed around Antonina Harbus’ suggestion of “True Dream.” The riddle concludes, *Soð is æghwylc / þara þe ymb þas with wordum becneð ... Gif þu mæge reselan recene gesecgan / sōþum wordum, saga hwæt hio hatte* (“Everything


about this creature which is expressed in words is true. If you can give the answer immediately with true words, say what it is called”). Solving this riddle, as well as performing a true dream, requires two kinds of thought (and here we may recall that the Old English noun *andgyt* means both “the faculty by which one understands” and “the capacity to perceive by the senses”\(^{36}\)). As Harbus says, “The very nature of the dream, its allusive suggestiveness and the absolute necessity for “telling” and interpretation, are reflected exactly in the genre and form of this riddle… The poet of Riddle 39 demonstrates the inherent enigma of the dream and the real elusiveness of its form and meaning.”\(^{37}\)

**Conclusion**

We will conclude by articulating a general principle. What we describe for both Riddle 74 and Riddle 33 is arguably the way most of theExeter Book riddles work. The riddles involve themselves in life and the business of living. Here this is accomplished through a consideration of the phenomenon of allomorphic forms. As we consider particular riddles, we should look to see that they sense in the way that other riddles make sense. In doing so, we continue to articulate the rules by which these remarkably sophisticated verbal constructions work. Just as Fred Robinson demonstrated in 1975 that the “artful ambiguities” of the “Book-Moth” riddle (47) “make the poem self-referential in a complex and sophisticated way, forcing the words themselves to display the simultaneous reality and insubstantiality of language,”\(^{38}\) the grandeur of Riddle 74 and the initially inexplicable contrast between the two parts of Riddle 33 go (by slightly different routes) to heart of what water is. Using these and other examples, students of the riddles may continue their project of discovering how a “happy” epistemological sense characterizes virtually all the Exeter riddles.

\(^{36}\) *DOE*, s.v. *and-gyt*

\(^{37}\) Harbus, “*Exeter Book Riddle 39 Reconsidered,*” 146. The translation of Riddle 39 is Harbus’.

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The Exeter Book

Donated to the library of Exeter Cathedral by Bishop Leofric in 1072
Frederick Barbarossa (1152-90) was the first German emperor—later to be called the Holy Roman Emperor—who gave considerable attention to the three terms of the imperial title. His own registers and contemporary chronicles reveal frequent references to the three components of both his title and the Holy Roman Empire. I argue that Barbarossa was the first to attempt to integrate them into the German traditions of the empire, in particular the method of electing the king of the Romans, the historical ties with Charlemagne, and the concept of the empire as an amalgam of smaller principalities. He was the first to attach the three attributes and the Germanness of the empire to the concept of “honor,” a classical word which he based in the Germanic court culture of the time. Barbarossa can be said to be the first to assign full imperial powers to the elected king of the Romans (crowned at Aachen), and to the future direction of the Holy Roman Empire for the Hohenstaufen and afterwards.

Who was the first Holy Roman Emperor? According to many college-level world civilization textbooks, the honor goes to Charlemagne when Pope Leo III crowned him in St Peter’s on Christmas 800.1 This attribution is universally accepted and is unlikely to change. Actually the choice of nomenclature is appropriate as long as its limitations are recognized. The honorific did after all have some connection to ancient Rome—the West had lacked an emperor since 476—and it was bestowed by a pope, who would retain close relations with the emperor for the next seven centuries. But the problem with the title, Holy Roman Emperor, is as follows: Charle-

1. Typical is “Charlemagne Crowned Holy Roman Emperor” Christianity.com; www.Historynet.com; Saylor.org.AncientCivilizationsoftheWorld/CharlemagneandtheCarolingianEmpire; Wiki/Coronation_of_the_Holy_Roman_Emperor; “Inside the Medieval World” National Geographic 2014, p. 51 (with the inevitable portrait by Dürer of Charles as Holy Roman Emperor).
magne never used it, his empire included Western Europe (kingdom of the Franks), and the three terms of the title Holy Roman Emperor would later undergo considerable changes in meaning.

Another candidate for the designation of first Holy Roman Emperor would be Otto I the Great (936-73), who was crowned by a pontiff in 962. At this time the kingdom of the West Franks was excluded, making the empire more closely aligned geographically with the reality of the Holy Roman Empire [henceforth HRE] in subsequent centuries. Indeed medieval (and modern) historiography generally makes Otto I the first “German” emperor of the West, who recovered many of the lands lost by Charlemagne’s successors, including the Kingdom (or Duchy) of Burgundy. Otto is associated with the custom of crowning German kings at Aachen, his own in 936. After 962 the king elected by the German princes (later fixed at seven at Frankfurt) was crowned king of the Romans (a later title) and then emperor of the Romans in St. Peter’s in Rome. While this electoral procedure was not always followed, it was considered the correct one.

The trouble with the choice of Otto I involves some backward reading of history, since the “holy” and the “Roman” components of the *titulus* were undeveloped, as indeed was the word “empire,” which was used rather casually. Also a “German” consciousness can just barely be discerned in the tenth century. And the cult of Otto did not really accelerate until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when he became viewed as a sort of proto-nationalist figure and defender of the HRE, in which Germany was the heartland.

Interestingly Frederick II Hohenstaufen has never been a serious contender for the first Holy Roman Emperor despite his impact on Europe during 1212-50. Perhaps Frederick’s ambiguous standing

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in the history of the HRE—albeit he is fondly remembered in Italy, while his grandfather namesake is not—is due to his lack of acceptance by the papacy, his relative neglect of Germania and his German legacy, and his further weakening of the cohesiveness of the Empire. Frederick’s reign was remembered as the resurgence of the Roman element in the Empire, as is evident in Staufen iconography and propaganda.

The Emperor who certainly embodies all three sides of the imperial title is Charles IV of Bohemia (1347-78), who managed to integrate the sacred and the Carolingian traditions, while excluding a constitutional role for the pope. Yet the link with Germany and Germanness (he was Czech) remained ambivalent. Far from asserting the supremacy of the German center, he promoted cooperation and concord among the estates. When Voltaire ridiculed Charles IV’s title with his sarcastic “The Holy Roman Empire was neither Holy nor Roman nor an Empire,” referring to the election of Charles IV and the Golden Bull, he misunderstood how the three attributes were used in 1356 and when he wrote the celebrated line in mockery of Maria Theresa in 1756. In any case, Charles IV is too late in time to claim the title of Number One.

This question of who’s on first is not a quaint game of semantics. It has absorbed historians since the mid-nineteenth century because the issue of the origin of the HRE compels the scholar to define the HRE in its formative stages and describe its essential characteristics. After the creation of the nation of Germany in 1871, historians looked to the past for relevance and guidance; many were motivated less by a desire to understand Germany in the Middle Ages on its own terms, than by a search to determine specifically German antecedents. The question of national origins confronts historians with the larger problems of national identity, of Germany in

4 See the classic biography by Ferdinand Seibt, Karl IV.

5 From Voltaire, Essai sur les moeurs de l’esprit des nations 423. For context see Thomas Renna, “The Holy Roman Empire was neither Holy nor Roman nor an Empire,” (forthcoming).
the context of Europe, and of the historical ties between Germany and the HRE. (Much like modern Turks who still grapple with their relationship to the Ottomans.) In the historiography of the HRE after Frederick III (1440-93) there has been a conceptual revolution since the 1970s. The institutions of the post-1648 HRE are realized to be more effective than once thought. It is now time to do the same for the pre-Avignon Empire. There are plenty of modern discussions on the meaning of the three terms of the HRE taken separately. Pre-1300 sources seem little interested in constructing a comprehensive “theory” of the HRE. Actually the first use of the full title of the HRE was not until 1254, though the geographical reality can be traced back to Otto I. The profusion of treatises on the HRE after the passing of the Staufen was due to the confusion about its condition and fate. There were fears that the pope would give the Empire to a non-German, and that the Empire would break apart. The papacy after Innocent III often treated emperors with contempt.

Frederick I Barbarossa (1152-90) was the first Holy Roman Emperor. It will be argued here that he was the first to give considerable attention to the meaning of the three attributes of the HRE, which were widely alluded to in many kinds of sources in the second half of the twelfth century. I contend that Barbarossa joined the German heritage to the triple title, a connection which successor Emperors continued to develop. Building on this Staufen legacy, the identity of German *cum* empire would be given considerable examination by theorists after 1320, when the literature on the empire vastly expanded. While Frederick II the Wonder of the World may perhaps surpass all emperors in the number and diversity of anecdotes about him, his grandfather Frederick I clearly stands out.

6 See Wilson, The Holy Roman Empire; Evans et al., *The Holy Roman Empire*; Evans and Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire*; Coy et al., *The Holy Roman Empire Reconsidered*; Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire* 1: 1-57.

7 See Moraw, “Heiliges Reich,” 4: col. 2025-28. The term *sacrum imperium Romanum* was used henceforth (with variants), including “of the German nation.” The HRE of the German Nation appears officially in 1452, 1474, and 1512 (*Imperium Romanum Sacrum Nationis Germanicae*), which seemed more appropriate as the Hapsburgs relinquished territories in Burgundy and Italy. But even after 1512 the Hapsburgs seldom used the full title. Charles V often called himself simply the “emperor.”
as the ruler who embodies the ideals and the destiny of the Empire, and, later, modern Germany, save for Charlemagne himself. From the point of view of political ideology no one after Karl der Grosse had passed on more of the ingredients for the treatise-makers during the reigns of Louis of Bavaria and Charles IV.

Frederick I never perished. He is sleeping under the Kyffhäuser Mountain in Thuringia, waiting for the right time to restore the German Reich. When the ravens stop flying around the mountain, he will awake and bring back the glory of the First Reich. Perhaps Emperor William I in 1896 thought he needed the help of Barbarossa for the Second Reich when he had built a colossal monument to himself and Frederick I on the Mountain.

For reasons known only to himself, Adolf Hitler on 18 Dec 1940 adopted the code name *Fall Barbarossa* (Operation Barbarossa) for the invasion of the Soviet Union. Perhaps Hitler’s directive implied a justification for the conquest of the Slavic peoples in German *lebensraum*. Or it signified the rebirth of Frederick’s Reich. Or the venerable name conjured up this famous name in “German” history. In 1990 the new German government issued a commemorative ten-mark coin with an image of Frederick Barbarossa as a world conqueror; on the reverse is an imperial eagle, with the Barbarossa-style single head as opposed to the double-headed eagle, which became the norm for the HRE after 1400, reminiscent of the Roman empire. This coin imagery is an odd symbol of German unification, since modern German historians have sometimes criticized him for devoting too much time to Italy and not enough to *Germania*. At any rate, the selection of Barbarossa reveals the strong historical link between contemporary Germany and the medieval HRE (which modern Austrians also continue to revere).

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8 See Munz, *Frederick Barbarossa*, Chap. 1; Frotscher, *Der Kyffhäuser*. The dates of the First Reich depend on whom one considers the first Holy Roman Emperor. If Charlemagne is chosen, the time would be 800 to 1806. If Otto I, 962 to 1806, when the HRE was dissolved. The Second Reich lasted from 1871 to 1918.
The appendage “holy” to the imperium was a long time in coming. Despite the attacks by Pope Gregory VII and subsequent popes on the priest-king designation of the German kings after the Saxon monarchs, the kings continued to affirm their sacred status and semi-sacerdotal functions. To counter papal claims to supremacy over the emperors who were crowned in Rome, the rulers emphasized their divinely-given authority. But after Henry IV (1056-1105) all this talk about the sacred status of the anointed king or emperor was getting harder to defend. The York Anonymous of 1100, a series of royalist treatises which elevate the king to near-priestly status, was already an anachronism. As the distinction between the sacerdotium and the laity became wider, the notion of the priest-king became outdated, although it never disappeared in subsequent German imperialist propaganda.

The office of the rex or imperator was acknowledged to be sacred by virtue of its consecration and its functions. But in the end the monarch did not celebrate Mass, distribute the sacraments, or (usually) preach the Gospel. The imperial office was of course from God, who assigned special duties to his anointed surrogates on earth. It was safer to stress the origin of the imperial potestas than its sacerdotal status. The lingering residue of the Augustinian idea of temporal power born in sin presented a difficulty for imperialists, but more

9 See Heer, The Holy Roman Empire, Chap. 5; Krieg, Herrscherdarstellung in der Stauferzeit, Pt. 5, Chap. 9. In the later Hapsburg Empire the term “holy” often meant simply “Catholic” and that the sovereigns had the responsibility to protect the Catholic religion—from Protestants and Muslims. Following the Investiture Controversy, papalists sometimes refer to the king’s anointment as the bestowing of real power from the pope or the sacerdotium. Imperialists of course denied any transference of political authority, seeing in the act of anointing merely a confirmation of the king’s divine approval and his duties over the church throughout the Empire. Having said that, we should not exaggerate the political dimensions of the anointment, as if it were entirely an element of power politics. Most Catholic monarchs probably approached the rite with devotion and sincerity. Ceremonies in a solemn liturgical setting convey powerful symbolic meanings.

10 Barbarossa never tires of asserting his God-given right to rule the Empire in the interests of peace and the Christian faith. See his letter of Oct 1159, cited by Otto of Freising), Deeds, Bk. 3, 184. This semi-priest-king language was quite common even in the fourteenth century.
positive views of temporal powers were rapidly gaining momentum, long before the reception of Aristotle in the thirteenth century. The next obvious step—to make the “empire” holy, as opposed to the person or office of the sovereign—was not difficult, since imperium was a flexible term which could simply mean authority, or territories within the (ill-defined) boundaries of this unique empire in central Europe. The Roman empire in its present form (post-Carolingian and post-Otto I), after all, has a divine mission and is in a sense identical to Christendom, a vague notion of areas where Christians dwell. Did not an archbishop (of Cologne) crown him king of the Romans at Aachen? The king continued to influence the election of prelates and the distributions of ecclesiastical benefices.

Surely an anointed monarch was no mere layman, even if he were not in holy orders. Did not Bernard of Clairvaux include the anointing of kings among the sacraments? Surely his responsibilities to defend the church, including the Roman church, and the faith set him apart. God gave him the duty to spread the Catholic religion (particularly in eastern Europe), suppress lawbreakers, and check pagans, heretics, and infidels. Granted that the imperial title was in some sense holy, can the same be said of the empire? We must remind ourselves that in the twelfth century the term “empire” was not used exclusively as a territorial entity. With the revival of the Roman empire (in the view of Barbarossa) and Roman law at the time, many of the classical usages abounded. Indeed some definitions had never disappeared, such as the notion of imperium as a military command or as a right to auctoritas in a specific geographical area.


Although Frederick Barbarossa did not employ the term imperium sacrum until 1157, the official documents and chronicles often refer to the divine origin—directly from God without the intermediary of the Roman church—and the religious duties assigned to him. In his vigorous exchange with Pope Hadrian (1154-59) following the incident at Sutri (June 1155)—the different interpretations of whether the emperor received his empire or authority from the supreme pontiff as a fief, a gift, or simply as a post-facto blessing—Frederick affirmed that his imperial authority derived directly from God. The emperor did not require papal approval for his ecclesiastical appointments in Germany and Italy, whatever was decreed by the Concordat of Worms in 1122. He did not need the pope’s approbation for interference in church affairs anywhere in the empire. The holiness of the emperor’s functions did not come from the supreme priest, but from the traditional practices of the emperors, Roman law, and his unique position as the elected king of the Romans.

It is this last-named attribute—the election by the German princes—that Barbarossa gives more attention to than his predeces-

14 See, e.g., MGH, Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae, Friderici I. Diplomata, v. 10, part 2, D 358: p. 205, line 16 [henceforth in this format: 10: 2: D 358 (Apr 1162): 205, 16]: Romanorum imperator a deo coronatus magnus et pacificus inclitus triumphator et semper augustus. See also Otto of Freising Deeds, p. 185: “And since, through election by the princes, the kingdom and the empire are ours from God alone, Who at the time of the passion of His Son Christ subjected the world to dominion by the two swords.”; Georg Waitz and Von Simson, eds., Ottonis et Rahewini Gesta Friedrich, Bk. 3, Chap. 11, 179: Cumque per electionem principum a solo Deo regnum et imperium nostrum sit, qui in passione Christ filii sui duobus glADIUS necessariis regendum orbem subiecit. (page 143 in 1884 edition, Georg Waitz).

15 For sacrum imperium see MGH, Diplomata: 10: 2: D 254: 54, 28; D 267: 74, 21; D 342: 179, 10; D 342: 179, 11; D 369: 228, 24; D 405: 283, 35-7; D 406: 285, 10; D 409: 290, 15; D 410: 292, 33; D 413: 298, 36; D 445: 344, 33; D 500: 428, 42; D 516: 453, 30; D 530: 473, 20; D 532: 476, 27; D 536: 482, 31. Barbarossa rarely refers to the empire as German, but see Diplomata 10: 2: D 382: 251, 1; D 487: 406, 24; D 538: 486, 4. Imperial authority is directly from God: Diplomata 10: 4: D 1046 (Apr 1162): 363, 12 : imperator a deo coronatus.

16 Diplomata 10: 2: D 363: 213, 33; D 540: 488, 26: D 541: 489, 26; //10: 4: D 1040: 348, 29; Otto of Freising, Deeds, Bk. 3, Chap. 11, 193. Frederick’s theme that his power derives from the election by the German princes (eventually fixed at seven, and later expanded by the Hapsburgs) becomes fundamental to later German thought on the origin of imperial potestas. See Scales, Shaping, 77-8, 272-78; Ertl, “Alte Thesen und neue Theorien,” 619-42; Mitteis, “Die deutsche Königsrundlagen:” Erkens, Kurfürsten und Königswahlparagraphen, 30.
sors, including Charlemagne and Otto I. The election by the princes, a venerable custom in Germany, is what gives him his special status in all of Christendom. The emperor’s right to rule flows not from any papal benefice, but from the divine beneficium. Frederick reminds the German bishops that he holds his sacred position from the election of a bishop, noting that the archbishop of Mainz voted for him, and that the archbishop of Cologne anointed him king of Romans. Thus the German character—by election of the princes, both ecclesiastical and lay, and together representative of all Germans, and by unction at Aachen—is united to the sacred nature of the emperor and the empire. In a sense, the voting and the anointing by prelates signify for Barbarossa the approval of the entire church, since the archbishop stands for all the clergy. The German character of the sacredness of the imperium is what makes the HRE unique in Christian Europe. As Frederick put it, “and since, through the election by the [German] princes, the kingdom and the empire are ours

17 See Schmidt, Königswahl und Thronfolge. The explosive issue of papal approval of the choice of the Electors—and also the right of the Electors to elect, and the pope’s right to declare the suitability of the imperial candidate(s)—was intensely debated from the time of the Investiture Controversy to the 15th century. Part of the reason Barbarossa insisted on the election by the princes was to negate this papal claim to approbatio. See Unverhau, Approbatio-Reprobatio, Chap. 4 (Barbarossa). It is unlikely that the princes assigned any constitutional significance to the election of Otto I on 7 Aug 936, when he assumed the royal title from his father, Henry I. As the memory of Otto I intensified in the twelfth century and afterward, the importance of the election as king of the Romans and the role of the German princes grew steadily. In his Deeds of the Saxons Widukind of Corvey refers to Otto as the “elect of God” and the “chosen of our lord Henry,” subsequently acclaimed by the princes. The latter appear to merely approve the choice made by hereditary right. See Widukindi, Bk. 2, Chap. 3, page 65, lines 6-9: in illa basilica in rotundum facta—, quo ab omni populo cerni posset...adduco vobis a Deo electum et a domino Heinrico olim designatum, nunc vero a cunctis principibus regem factum Oddonem; si vobis ista electio placeat.... See Laudage, Otto der Grosse, 96-104 (Aachen), 180-94 (Rome); Reuter, Germany in the Early Middle Ages, 148-54. When Voltaire wrote his witty remark about the irrelevance of the HRE he seems unaware that the event he discusses—the election of Charles IV—was explicitly patterned after the election of Otto I; for Charles, the previous electio added legitimacy to his own election.


19 Otto of Freising, Deeds, Bk. 3, 185, 193.

20 See Folz, Le souvenir, 191-213; Leuschner, Germany in the Late Middle Ages, xvi-xvii; Scales, Shaping, 262-78.
from God alone,” as Christ affirmed when he subjected the world to the dominion of the two swords, implying that the emperor wields the temporal sword on behalf of Christ.

But Barbarossa went beyond the dispute over the meaning of beneficium with Pope Hadrian. When he invaded Italy in Nov 1158 and assembled his court and the Bologna lawyer-teachers at Roncaglia, he presented his imposition of imperial rights over the Italian communes as his sacred duty commensurate with the restoration of peace in the Roman empire. Although Frederick’s decrees proclaim the “recovery” of lost imperial rights over the Lombard towns, he formulates his arguments in moral terms: to serve justice and bring concord to factious communities. His dictatorial pronouncements sound like a restoration of a providential order and a concern for the best interests of his “subjects.” (He seems oblivious to the events of the past century, when the towns had incorporated much non-Roman customary law.) He is carrying a divine mandate—which the communes have permitted to lapse—which he is obligated to enforce for the common good of northern Italy.

The conflicts with Popes Eugene III, Hadrian IV, and Alexander III, however, could not prepare Europe for what was arguably one of the most defining moments in the history of the medieval HRE: the canonization of Charlemagne. This extraordinary event in 1165 would forever connect the emperor and the imperium to the

21 Otto of Freising, Deeds, Bk. 3, 185; Waitz and Von Simson, eds., Ottonis et Rahewini Gesta Friedrich I. Imperatoris, Bk 3, Chap. 11, 179: Cumque per electionem principum a solo Deo regnum et imperium nostrum sit, qui in passione Christi filii sui duobus gladiis necessariis regendum orbem subiecit.

22 Otto, Deeds, Bk. 3, 185-86.


24 See Frederick’s speech to the Diet of Roncaglia in Otto of Freising, Deeds, Bk. 4, 234-37.

sanctity of Saint Charlemagne and Aachen. Over the next centuries the holy site of Charlemagne’s tomb and the Marian/Passion relics became fused with the sanctification of the emperor of the Romans and his “German” ancestor, Karl der Grosse. The liturgy of the feast of Saint Charlemagne quickly spread to other places in Germany and France. Interestingly Alexander III and subsequent pontiffs raised little objection to the canonization of Charles, even though Paschal III was an antipope.

While much has been written in modern times about the canonization, the relevance here is the bond between the emperor and the “German” Charlemagne, as opposed to the “French” Charlemagne. Everything about the historical Charlemagne became intertwined with Barbarossa and his successors. The election, anointment, coronation-site, and physical proximity to the Marian (actually only one of the four relics is of Mary, the mantle at the birth of Jesus; two of Jesus (swaddling clothes, loin cloth on the cross), and the cloth which held the head of John the Baptist) Shrine, relics, site of pilgrimage, Charles’ tomb and relics, and the “relics” of Roman Caesars, such as the cameo of Augustus. The chandelier donated by Barbarossa—still in place—is reminiscent of the celestial Jerusalem. It would be hard to imagine a more compelling integration of the HRE and its emperors with the traditions of Saint Charlemagne, Jerusalem (earthly and heavenly, with possible intimations of the legend of the Last Emperor), and the lives of Jesus and Mary. That


28 On the Germanization of Charlemagne see Latowsky, *Emperor of the World*, 186-95; Petersohn, “Saint Denis—Westminster—Aachen,” 420-54; Folz, *Le souvenir*, Bk. 3. The relative silence of the papacy on the canonization may have been the popes’ reluctance to antagonize the prelates of Germany. Eventually the church compromised and accepted Charlemagne as in effect blessed, by Benedict XIV (1740-58), who acted as a “private theologian” not as pope.

is quite a lot of precious objects and reminders confined to a small space! The immediate presence of Barbarossa, Charlemagne, Jerusalem, Jesus, and Mary (and, later, images of other German emperors) must have overwhelmed the visitor, whether a pilgrim or someone else.

The other “emperor,” the vicar of Christ in Rome and sometime-rival, had close ties with only two apostles, Peter and Paul, if one includes the latter among the apostles. As the pilgrimage to Aachen increased after 1120, the pilgrimage to Rome after the Jubilee of 1300 was less directed toward the tomb of Peter than it was to the shroud (sudarium) of Veronica. Aachen was easily the equal of Santiago de Compostela and Rome as a preeminent center of Christian pilgrimage. The newly crowned kings of the Romans in the octagon were reminded of Barbarossa in the chandelier overhead.

ROMAN

Barbarossa was the first German emperor to attempt an extensive application of Roman law to the empire, especially in northern Italy. Henry VI and Frederick II would continue to extend the reach of the Roman law, however sporadically. Frederick Barbarossa often refers to the Roman empire, a virtual identification with the HRE which would become a staple after his reign. It is not always easy

30 Although Boniface VIII was not the first pontiff to call himself the verus imperator, he used the title more frequently. Papalist writers, such as Henry of Cremona and Augustinus Triumphus, refer to it often.

31 Aquisgrani was a pagan site long before Charlemagne, who gave it greater Christian significance with the relics he supposedly brought back from the Holy Land, inaugurating a venerable tradition in German and French literature. Barbarossa added to the repute of these relics and the Charlemagne pilgrimage with the canonization and the promotion of the cult of the latter. The new reliquaries of Charlemagne and the Passion relics in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries solidified these associations between Charlemagne and the relics, and accelerated the popularity of Aachen as a pilgrimage site. See Moffitt, “Karlsgrab,” 28-55.

for modern historians to disentangle the various short-hand terms for the empire. Many of Barbarossa’s contemporaries equated the HRE with the Roman empire,\(^{33}\) an identification which affected Staufen policies, such as: the Staufen obsession with Italy; the conflicts with the Byzantine emperor; the competition with the city of Rome (such as who had the authority to crown the emperor of the Romans); the disagreement with popes over claims to Rome, the Papal States, and other areas throughout Italy; the claims to *de iure* jurisdiction over lands outside the empire; the nomenclature, symbols (such as the Roman imperial eagle), art, architecture, studies, and literature at imperial courts and cities; the acquisition and rights of the titles of king of the Romans and emperor of the Romans;\(^ {34}\) the authority to use the Roman law (from the Justinian Code). It might be added that the *translatio studii* to the French was never well received by the Germans, who were not content solely with the Translation of Empire (from the Romans to the Greeks [Byzantines] to the Franks to the Germans, with German historiographers often preferring to merge these last two groups)\(^ {35}\) effectively making the German emperors descendants of the “German” son of Pippin.\(^ {36}\) The Germans of course would not concede that they were in any way culturally inferior to the French. By the time of Barbarossa the terms *Germani, Alamanni, and Theutonici* had become virtually synonymous, and did not suggest inferiority to the Romans.


34 Contemporary pro-Barbarossa sources typically give no constitutional significance to the crowning by the pope in Rome. A mere title is conferred, as the “custom” would have it. See Carson, *Barbarossa in Italy*, 3. Frederick in effect acts as an emperor by restoring good laws and establishing peace in northern Italy; Carson, 2-3, 17.


In the prophetic and apocalyptic literature of the era of Barbarossa, the Roman connection to the modern German emperor was strong. It was a commonplace that the fourth kingdom (or empire) of Daniel’s prophecy of world empires was the Roman, which continued to the present in the form of the German empire.\(^{37}\) (There were differences, however, in how the Germans related to the Romans, that is, whether the ancient Roman Empire survived intact or in an altered form under the Germans.) Also popular in the twelfth century was the legend of the Last Emperor, who would conquer the Holy Land and then lay down his weapons on Mount Moriah and usher in the End of Days. The Tiburtine Sibyl prophesied the union of East and West, a feat to be accomplished by Frederick Barbarossa.\(^{38}\) Pseudo-Methodius makes the Last Emperor into a latter-day crusader who would vanquish the Muslims—a prophecy not forgotten when Barbarossa headed out on his much publicized crusade in 1189.\(^{39}\) Adso of Montier-en-Der’s Antichrist (after 950) places the Carolingians—the ancestors of Barbarossa—as the near end-point of Daniel’s scheme of world empires.\(^{40}\) The numerous chansons de geste that deal with Charlemagne and his epic journey to Jerusalem were widespread in Staufen Germany.\(^{41}\) The French Descriptio (1100) made its way into many German renditions of Charlemagne’s


\(^{38}\) See Latowsky, Emperor, 69-70, 236.

\(^{39}\) Latowsky, Emperor, 150, 234-35.

\(^{40}\) See Verhelst, Adso of Montier; Cardini, “Il ‘Ludus de Antichristo’ e la teologia imperiale di Federico I,” 175-87; Latowsky, Emperor, 150-54.

\(^{41}\) See Morrissey, Charlemagne, Chap. 2; Folz, Le souvenir, 223, 318, passim; Durand-Le Guern and Ribémont, eds., Charlemagne, Chap. 2; Stuckey, Charlemagne: The Making of an Image, Chaps. 2, 3; Geith, Carolus Magnus: Studien zur Darstellung Karls der Großen.
pilgrimage to the Holy City.\textsuperscript{42} It was assumed that Barbarossa the new Charlemagne could not fail to accomplish the same deed on his own crusade.\textsuperscript{43}

Modern historians continue to discuss the reasons for the Germanization of Charlemagne. Was the primary motive of the German writers to counter the French claims to make Charlemagne one of theirs (and the quasi-founder of the Capetian dynasty), or was it to adjust the Carolingian past to the new imperialist aims of Barbarossa?\textsuperscript{44} Our concern here is with the attempt to deepen the ties with the ancient Roman empire. Barbarossa’s defenders took offense at the papal jibe that the emperor was merely a king of the “Germans,”\textsuperscript{45} and that the title of emperor of the Romans was a recent gift of the pope, suggesting that the title came with conditions and obligations to the Holy See; indeed the pontiff could withdraw the title if the recipient proved obdurate.\textsuperscript{46} Far more than his predecessor emperors, Barbarossa fastened the imperial title and the Roman empire.\textsuperscript{47} The office implied claims to govern “Roman” Italy.

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\textsuperscript{42} See Latowsky, Emperor, 75-98, 189-90; Folz, Le souvenir, 179-81, 215-16.

\textsuperscript{43} See Loud, Crusade of Frederick Barbarossa, 135, 152.

\textsuperscript{44} Folz has been influential in advancing the Germanizing of Charlemagne in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century as a response to the French adherence to the tradition of Saint Denis. See Folz, Le souvenir, Bk. 3. Latowsky, however, stresses the ideological need for Barbarossa to develop a myth of Charlemagne firmly based on a German legacy; Emperor, Chap. 5. My own views lean toward the latter. The French apologists also sought other ancestors: ancient Trojans, Roman Gallic, “French” Franks.

\textsuperscript{45} See Heer, Holy Roman Empire, 56; Gregory VII refers to Henry IV as a mere king of the Germans. As can be seen in the vast outpouring of vernacular writing in the twelfth century, the German sense of national sentiment and identity had deep roots. For the next four centuries imperialist writers had little reticence in including the Germans or variant Theutonici or Alamanni in the royal title. Lupold of Bebenburg proudly refers to the imperial heartland as Germanic.

\textsuperscript{46} See Otto of Freising, Deeds, 180-84, 253-72; Görich, Die Ehre Friedrich Barbarossas, Chap. 3, 92-132.

(Charlemagne had “restored” the kingdom of Italy [Lombardy] to the “Roman empire”). It was associated with the de iure claims to other parts of Europe, an important distinction in the Two Laws, even if imperial sovereignty was not de facto; with the promulgation of the Roman law as needed; with the right to the Translation of Empire, often but not always traced to Charlemagne; with the assertion to be equal to the other western “emperor,” the supreme pontiff, the lord of matters spiritual; with the right to act as a universal arbiter in European disputes, secular or ecclesiastical. After Barbarossa it was impossible not to think of the HRE as in some sense a continuation of the greatest of world empires, the Roman. The Roman Empire never experienced a “decline and fall;” it was alive and well in central Europe, as a result of the Translation of Empire from the Romans to the Greeks to the Franks to the Germans.

Which “German” elements were added to the empire of the ancient Caesars? There were four: (1) The “capital” was Aachen, not Rome. (2) The imperium was a territory which included several regna. (3) German princes—by means of designated Electors—elected the king of the Romans. (4) The German Charlemagne founded the empire, not Romulus and Remus or one of the Caesars. Charlemagne was the second Augustus, just as Barbarossa was the second Charlemagne. Without disparaging Otto I as the first German emperor, Frederick’s publicists were content to retain the ambiguous relationship among Charlemagne, Otto I, and Frederick Barbarossa. If there were no coherent “theory” of the HRE and its Roman past, the road from Aachen to Rome was straight; it could have been named the Via Barbarossa. The Aachen-Rome axis had become a mainstay of western political thought.

But whatever these German components in his new empire, Barbarossa was not able to bolster it with another ingredient: the crusade. Not for nothing did the Muslims call the crusaders “the Franks” and not the Germans. The poor performance of the Germans on the Second Crusade needed to be corrected. Barbarossa’s preoc-

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48 Barbarossa’s insistence on de iure sovereignty at Roncaglia continued into the later Middle Ages. See Canning, The Political Thought of Baldus de Ubaldis, 64-8; Woolf, Bartolus of Sassoferrato, Chap. 2.
ocupation with Italy, however, prevented any such ventures before 1189. Unlike St. Louis IX, Barbarossa’s reputation as a crusader was short-lived. His crusade received little attention in contemporary and later histories, mainly because the German crusade ended in failure. Yet the main source for Frederick’s expedition gives his motive as the desire to rescue the Christian lands from the Saracens, “who were afflicting the Christians.”

Prior to his departure he had spent long years waging war against the enemies of the “Roman empire,” which he largely restored (in Italy). Barbarossa as the emperor of the Romans received homage from the “rebels” for “the everlasting glory of the Roman empire.” The rebels agreed to this homage out of love for him and the German kingdom. Reflecting a common German attitude at the time, the chronicler objects to the Byzantine emperor calling himself the Emperor of the Romans, who insultingly refers to Barbarossa as the “King of the Germans,” reminiscent of the slur of Pope Gregory VII. Frederick reminds his “brother” the Emperor of Constantinople that there is only one Roman emperor, and that is himself, who has been raised up by the imperial blessing of the supreme pontiff and the city of Rome. Barbarossa’s predecessors, the Roman emperors of the past 400 years, now rule through him, by virtue of the Translation of Empire from Constantinople and Rome, the original seat of the empire. In short, Frederick Barbarossa is the reigning Roman emperor.

**EMPIRE**

We moderns have become used to thinking of empires as large expanses of lands that include subject peoples and political entities in various states of relationships to the imperial center. The new discipline since the 1970s of the study of comparative empires illustrates how difficult it is to identify common elements in larger

49 Loud, *Crusade of Frederick Barbarossa*, 36.

50 Loud, *Crusade of Frederick Barbarossa*, 36.

51 Loud, *Crusade of Frederick Barbarossa*, 62.

52 Loud, *Crusade of Frederick Barbarossa*, 78.

empires. The great land-based empires prior to the Roman *imperium* reveal a wide diversity in how they were governed. These invite comparisons with the sea-borne empires (Spanish, Portuguese, British, French) of early modern Europe, and the later smaller land empires in the nineteenth century. Historians of Barbarossa have an additional problem when examining the large number of references to *imperium* in the sources: the ancient works they draw upon are themselves diverse in their use of the term. The empire of the Late Republic and the Early Roman Empire was in flux. Only gradually did *imperium* refer to an oversized-territory with many satellite political bodies, a core with peripheries.  

At the time of Barbarossa the use of empire as a territorial entity was generally accepted. Certainly no one cared to specify what exactly the boundaries of the HRE were. Sometimes the emperor’s possessions seem like an amalgam of political bodies, such as counties, duchies, and towns. The term “kingdom and empire” was already heard, and would increase in usage. It has been argued that the Ottonians gave a specifically German meaning to the empire by defining it as a collection of kingdoms under various degrees of control. Barbarossa joins the “kingdom and the empire” from God alone to the election by the princes. Thus the *imperium* is German by virtue of these two attributes: *imperium cum regna* and the *election* by the Theutonic *principes*.

The idea that Barbarossa stood in a direct line of the ancient Caesars is a major theme of the *Kaiserchronik* (c. 1152–c. 1165),

54 John Richardson, *The Language of Empire*, Chaps. 3, 4. The Romans, at least until the time of Hadrian, had no concept of a “boundary” in the modern sense. The demarcation line, often a sort of temporary stopping point along the way of expanding Roman control, could simply mean the limit where Roman *auctoritas* was in force. Words like *terminus* or *finis* (or even the later *limes*, a fortified border) were flexible.


56 See Folz, *Le souvenir*, 56-64.

one of the most popular works of world history in the German Middle Ages, rivaled only by Otto of Freising’s Two Cities (to 1146).

The leitmotif of the Book of Emperors is that the Roman Empire proceeds down to the present day. The lineage of the Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Charlemagne, when Pope Leo III (Charlemagne’s “brother”!) crowned him, thereby transferring the Roman Empire to the “Germans.”58 The princes crowned Otto “the Roman ruler” at Aachen.59 The princes surrendered their lands to Otto I, who held the “Roman empire.”60 Barbarossa’s predecessor, Conrad III (1138-52, and also Conrad I, 911-18) was never consecrated by a pope, yet he functioned as the de facto emperor. While the author of the Kaiserchronik often refers to German rulers as “kings” before they were crowned emperors by the popes,62 he clearly thinks of the monarchs as having imperial powers prior to any papal action. Barbarossa is a true Roman emperor in the descent of the Roman Caesars, with no constitutional need of papal coronation. Since the time of Charlemagne, the “Roman” imperator is fully German.

Although Barbarossa himself probably never gave it a thought, there was a small theoretical matter which would concern imperialist writers for the next two centuries: the right of the German princes to elect the king of the Romans was alleged to be a “gift” from the pope (usually Gregory V). One of the earliest references to this bizarre tradition came from one of Barbarossa’s most famous and prolific historians, Godfrey of Viterbo (d. 1196).63

58 Myers, Book of Emperors, Chap. 38, 321-22. See Matthews, Chap. 3 (Charlemagne).
59 Book of Emperors, 329.
60 Book of Emperors, 353. See Matthews, Kaiserchronik, Chap. 4 (Otto I).
61 Book of Emperors, 356.
62 Book of Emperors, 57.
63 Godfrey of Viterbo, Martini Chronicon. Imperatores, 466 [7 Electors]. Many references to Barbarossa: 94, 97, 98, 100, 102, 106, 126, 128, 134, 139, 146, 150, 159, 260-71, 298-300, 339-41, 362-68, etc. Whatever the origins of this tradition, the inclusion of a work by the influential Godfrey ensured its longevity in late medieval sources. Godfrey often alludes to Charlemagne as the ancestor of Barbarossa. See also Abraham de Wicquefort, John Digby tr., The Ambassador and his Functions, Chap. 4, 443; Folz, Le souvenir, 386-92.
later fell from imperial grace. One of the most original historians of the Staufen era, Godfrey attempted to connect Barbarossa with numerous bloodlines and historical legacies: German (and many families), Frankish, Trojan, Carolingian, Roman, Greek, and myriad genealogies. He attributes the German electoral custom of choosing the king of the Romans from a grant of Gregory V (996-99), which implies that imperial power derived from the bishop of Rome. Godfrey seems not to have seen in this practice any threat to imperial potestas. His motive in telling the tale may simply have been to foster cooperation between the emperor and popes following the schism at the time of Alexander III (1159-81). Later imperialists rarely challenged the accuracy of the story, preferring to see in the papal grant merely a confirmation of the right the German princes already possessed. The gift in itself gave no constitutional authority to the prince-Electors or the emperor-elect.

Thus the three elements of the imperial titulus—Holy, Roman, Empire—were integrated into the imperium of Barbarossa. While the three spokes of the imperial wheel were forged into a notion of the history, extent, powers, and purpose of the empire, they were after 1152 intrinsic to the Staufen vocabulary of fundamental concepts of governmental rule. All three aspects were related to the German character of the HRE, particularly with reference to Charlemagne, the German past, the method of electing the king of the Romans, and the empire as a network of sub-kingdoms and principalities. But there was another side to the HRE: honor. A number of recent studies on Barbarossa’s use of the “honor of the empire” have been made since the seminal analyses of H. Appelt and P. Rassow.

64 See Latowsky, Emperor, 198-215.
67 See, e. g., Rassow, Honor imperii: De neue Politik Friedrich Barbarossas 1152-1159 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche, 1961; orig. 1940); reviewed by Herbert Grundmann in Wolf, Friedrich Barbarossa, 26-32.
But this new field of research is only slowly catching up with the more synthetic approaches to the era of Barbarossa. A single biography attempts to integrate some of this promising study. We limit ourselves here to some ways the notion of honor relates Barbarossa to the imperial culture at the time.

The term honor is used frequently in Barbarossian sources. While the word often has juridical and legal overtones, it had broader meanings. When the pope impinged upon the king’s sacred prerogatives as the defender of the church and of the faith, the honor of God was denigrated. If the pope was the vicar of Christ, the emperor was God’s chosen representative to ensure that the temporals of this earth be put to heaven-directed use. It is blasphemous to interfere with the king’s duties to perform his sacred responsibilities. God appointed him to defend the honor and dignity of the empire.

The honor imperii of Barbarossa’s realm was synonymous with the honor of the Roman empire. When he sets out to quell rebels, Barbarossa seeks to exalt the glory and honor of the empire.


69 Görich, Friedrich Barbarossa. This monumental work is a masterful synthesis of the author’s many studies and the work of others on the German court-culture in the twelfth century. Görich reexamines the main events in Barbarossa’s reign from the perspective of honor.

70 There are some 138, by my count, references to honor and its variants in MGH Diplomata 10:2 (1158-1167) alone! And over 110 allusions to honor in 10: 1 (1152-58). In the following footnotes I limit myself to usages I consider representative of multiple examples.


73 See MGH Diplomata 10: 1: D 181 (1157): 304, 26, // 10: 2: D 224: 8, 21 and 9, 26; D 265: 72, 17; D 272: 192, 33; D 356: 199, 27; D 357: 204, 21; D 358: 205, 19; D 359: 206, 31; D 363: 216, 32; D 367: 219, 32; D 368: 227, 9; D 242: 35, 15; D 380: 247, 11; D 421: 308, 5; D 367: 221, 40: gloriem et honorem Romani imperii; D 382: 249, 26; D 425: 315, 13; D 451: 326, 32; D 451: 327, 35; D 435: 331, 6; D 436: 332, 13; D 442: 341, 11; D 444: 344, 9; D 451: 352, 35; D 482: 400, 32; D 485: 401, 40; D 496: 422, 34; D 508: 442, 34.
The *honor imperii* refers not only to the ancient Roman empire, but also to the Carolingian heritage and the crown (*imperator Romanorum*). In his defense of his actions at Besançon (1157)—or rather, his response to the indignities the papal legates inflicted on the honor of the empire—Barbarossa suggests the pope attempted to upset the balance between the honor of the papacy and the honor of the empire. God granted him the honor of the empire, not the pope. Significantly Barbarossa justifies his decrees at Roncaglia and his attacks on the “rebel” Lombard communes as affronts to the “expansive” aspect of the *honor imperii*. In other words the imperial honor refers not just to the Roman empire in itself, but to the extension of its authority. Barbarossa often juxtaposes “glory” and “dignity” with honor as the object of pursuing the honor of the empire.

It has been persuasively argued that this was based in the aristocratic court milieu with its concept of social rank. Barbarossa’s vision of the HRE—and he is the first German emperor who may be said to have had a “vision” of the empire—was nothing less than a hierarchy of authority, with the emperor ultimately being in charge of temporals (and *de iure* for all of Christendom) and the Vicar of Christ in spirituals. He is “restoring” the Roman Empire in

74 See MGH Diplomata 10: 2: D 327: 154, 25; D 356: 199, 19; D 367: 221, 40; D 382: 249, 26; D 421: 308, 5; D 503: 435, 27; D 539: 487, 1.

75 MGH Diplomata 10: 2: D 253: 54, 4; D 257: 58, 18; D 308: 125, 21; D 355: 196, 41; D 348: 187, 13; D 362: 212, 31; D 367: 223, 40; D 375: 240, 1-3; D 433: 328, 16; ad hoc divina providentia tocius Romani imperii coronam et sceptrum nobis gubernandum comitit; D 463: 372, 20.


Italy in the interests of the public good. (Likely the Italians who had to submit to the regalia did not see it that way.) Frederick’s refrain about the honor of the empire can be called a plan, however vague, for the recovery of the Roman Empire, with its affiliations to Saint Charlemagne, German elections, and with the territorial core called Germania.

While pre-WWII historians generally saw Barbarossa’s policies as deficiencies because of his weakening of the bonds with German princes and his setbacks in Italy, the historiographical trends since the 1960s are more aware of his successes. Doubtless Barbarossa’s own criteria for success would have been the standing of the honor imperii, with its unwieldy mix of Holy, Roman, Imperial, and Germanic. Who can say? Frederick explicitly bases his imperial power on the election of the German princes; the papal coronation is merely a confirmation of the honor imperii.

Barbarossa’s authority is “holy” because (German) archbishops have crowned him king of the Romans at Aachen. The honor of God is virtually synonymous with the Roman Empire. The honor of the church is the honor of the empire. The glory of God is the

80 Barbarossa refers to the German church: MGH Diplomata 10: 1: D 91 (1154): 153, 7; in Italia quam in Alamannia. // 10: 2: D 296 (1160): 109, 15; D 490 (1165): 411, 18; D 487: 406, 25. Theutonicum imperium; D 538: 486, 3. 81. MGH Diplomata: 10: 1: D 186 (1157): 315, 8: per electionem principum a solo deo regnum et imperium nostrum...honorem imperii (315, 17); //10: 4. D 1049 (1162): 363, 12: imperator a deo coronatus. Cf. Otto of Freising, Deeds, 185, 193. For practical reasons (Frederick needs the support of Pope Hadrian) and ideological correctness (imperial power comes from God, without intermediary) he emphatically rejects the offer by the citizens of Rome to offer him the crown of the emperor. See Otto of Freising, Deeds, 146–49. Long after the demise of Arnold of Brescia, this tradition of the right of the citizens of the Eternal City to be independent and to crown the German emperor was deeply rooted. Witness the coronation of Louis of Bavaria in 1328 and the episode of Cola di Rienzo.

81 MGH Diplomata: 10: 1: D 186 (1157): 315, 8: per electionem principum a solo deo regnum et imperium nostrum...honorem imperii (315, 17); //10: 4. D 1049 (1162): 363, 12: imperator a deo coronatus:


83 Diplomata 10: 2: D 437: 334, 10; D 480: 397, 8: honorem ecclesie dei et imperii; D 481: 399, 12; D 292: 106, 18.
The salvation of the church is the honor of the empire;\textsuperscript{84} The honor of God is the utility of the church and the empire;\textsuperscript{85} To serve the church is to serve the honor of the empire.\textsuperscript{86}

The honor of the holy empire is the honor of the Roman empire, which Frederick never tires of repeating.\textsuperscript{88} Barbarossa’s \textit{crown} is that of the Roman empire.\textsuperscript{89} God crowned the Roman emperor.\textsuperscript{90} Pope Leo crowned Charlemagne “augustus,” an appendage Barbarossa often adopts.\textsuperscript{91} The honor of the empire is also its \textit{onus}.\textsuperscript{92}

It should be emphasized that the “crown” Barbarossa receives as king of the Romans bestows on him not only a sort of sacred office, but also full imperial authority and the prerogatives of the Roman emperor. He implies that the papal coronation in Rome simply added a blessing to his constitutional authority—a theme which would preoccupy imperialists in the early fourteenth century. His power comes from God through the \textit{electio} of the German Electors, and not from the supreme priest.


\textsuperscript{85} Diplomata 10: 2: D 322: 146, 39; D 326: 153, 22; D 437: 334, 40; D 437: 335, 1; //10: 3: D 356: 199, 27.

\textsuperscript{86} Diplomata 10: 2: D 230: 18, 24; D 230: 19, 18; D 253: 53, 16; D 358: 205, 16; D 534: 480, 20.

\textsuperscript{88} Diplomata 10: 2: D 433: 328, 16; D 533: 478, 31; //10: 3 D 634 (1174): 131, 13: honorem imperii et corone nostre gloriam. See n. 75 above. Roman emperors were of course never crowned, as Lorenzo Valla would later note in his refutation of the Donation of Constantine, a document already well known in imperial and papal curiae.

\textsuperscript{89} Diplomata 10: 2: D 358: 205, 16.

\textsuperscript{90} Diplomata 10: 2: D 345: 184, 4: in honorem et onus Romani imperii.
Barbarossa’s exceedingly large number of allusions to his *imperium* often lacks precision. Obviously the territorial boundaries of the Roman Empire during any period of its history never coincided with those of the HRE at the time of Frederick I. The distinction in his documents between empire as *auctoritas* and as *imperium* is fluid. This hyper-active Staufer had little time for clear distinctions or legal niceties. The driving force behind his foreign policy was the subjugation of Italy. His allies and enemies could, if they wished, establish some clarity in the definitions of empire and honor. Barbarossa’s historical significance is that he left a legacy for his successors to provide just such clarity, even as the HRE changed in territory and direction.

It has been argued that Barbarossa’s honor of the empire was in effect an ideology of his empire.93 Certainly this concept of honor in the context of the imperial court and the aristocratic *curiae* helps to explain his penchant to refer to it in so many contexts. But two points must be emphasized: A) the notion of honor was the product of conflict, in particular the clashes with popes. This is not the stuff of abstract political philosophy. The empire provided its own source of power and function irrespective of the papacy; B) the idea of honor was in part the result of his attempts to subdue Italy, the northern communes as well as the South—and perhaps the Papal States—and also his disputes with Sicily and Emperor Manuel.94 While the idea of the honor of the empire preceded Barbarossa, he expanded it in ways that deepened the layers of meaning of the triple designation of the HRE. More than his imperial predecessors, he attached it to the tradition of the German election of the king of the Romans. The *rex Romanorum* became in effect the *de facto* *imperator Romanus* with full imperial powers even before he was crowned by the pope in St Peter’s. While Barbarossa spent much of his reign in Italy, the “core” (to use the modern parlance) remained *Germania*.

93 Certainly Görich comes closest to viewing Barbarossa’s *honor imperii* as the principal component in his political outlook. See esp. his *Die Ehre Friedrich Barbarossas*, Chap. 1 and 364-77, and *Barbarossa*, Chap. 5.

Frederick Barbarossa considerably extended the uses of the Holy, the Roman, and the Empire in the HRE. He left behind a HRE firmly tied to German traditions of rulership in the empire of Otto I the Great. Many of the problems Barbarossa confronted during the first two decades of his reign would be intensely examined during the golden age of political thought in the HRE of 1320-60. As the HRE experienced a demise after the passing of the Staufen in 1254, the emperors went through a crisis of confidence and self-identity. Conflict in the empire and the loss of Italy stimulated a flurry of literature which attempted to assess the nature and the future of the empire. In the sense that the direction and to some extent policies of the empire were set out, Barbarossa can be said to be the first Holy Roman Emperor.

There was nothing inevitable about the direction the empire would take after the Staufen. But their concern for Italy, Roman law, and the German church would influence the historical course of the imperium. It would serve no purpose today to attempt to remove Charlemagne from the status of being the first Holy Roman Emperor, as the received tradition would have it. The name of Charles the Great and the coronation of the emperor (later called the emperor of the Romans) would be sufficient to entrench the heritage. As the “German” consciousness within parts of central Europe later evolved, so too would the German character of the HRE. Otto the Great certainly deserves the appellation as the founder, perhaps re-founder, of the German “transfer” of the empire to the Alamanni.95

95 Barbarossa often refers to Charlemagne and Otto I, and also to the ancient Roman Caesars, as his predecessors or ancestors. See MGH Diplomata: 10: 1 D 210 (1158): 353, 2; D 214 (1158): 358, 27 (Charlemagne and the Roman emperors); //10: 2: D 320 (1160): 144, 20; D 328 (1161): 156, 16; D 344 (1161): 182, 33; D 492 (1165): 416, 7; D 524 (1167): 466, 35; D 534 (1167): 480, 10; //10: 3: D 578: 51, 41 (Otto); D 697 (1177): 224, 28 (our predecessors Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, three Ottos); D 754: 305, 2.11.27 (Karolus); D 774 (1178): 329, 1 (augustus); //10: 4: D 892 (1185): 141, 36 (Charlemagne, Otto, Henry); D 578: 52, 39 (our predecessors Charlemagne, Otto, etc.); D 1032 (1153): 323, 31 frater Karolus; D 1079: 424, 40: antecessors nostri divi Romanorum imperatores.
An amiable compromise to who should merit the designation of the “first,” would be to establish a trinity of creators of the HRE: Charlemagne, Otto I, and Frederick I Barbarossa.

Historians of the medieval HRE need to examine continuously—since the three parts of the title were themselves evolving—the various components of the empire, in terms of actual policies and perceptions. The steady appearance today of documents and editions—and new methodologies—necessitates constant reexamination of the sources. A big problem for Barbarossa was the geographical areas of the empire that had their own traditions and special relationships with the imperial crown, such as the Kingdom of Arles. Although the term Holy Roman Empire was never used in the twelfth century, all three aspects appear frequently in the official and unofficial sources at the time of the first Hohenstaufen emperor, Frederick Barbarossa. Although the three components were only loosely delineated and should not be elevated to the dignity of a self-consistent theory of empire, they were juxtaposed in ways that give a semblance of identity, in distinction to, say, the kingdom of the (West) Franks. Lupold of Bebenburg in the fourteenth century would have recognized the need to clarify Frederick Barbarossa’s Germany in the context of the larger HRE.

When Frederick Barbarossa awakes from his slumber beneath the Kyffhäuser Mountain, his first task will be to dictate a letter to his detractor, Voltaire, who famously quipped: *Ce corps, qui s’appelait et qui s’appelle encore le saint empire romain, n’était en aucune manière ni saint, ni romain, ni empire. [This body which is called, and is still called (in 1756), the Holy Roman Empire is in fact neither holy nor Roman nor an empire.]* Frederick will erase this age-old misconception with his own reply and restore the empire to its former glory. He will answer back: *Das Heilige Römische Reich war voll heiligen römischen voll und ganz ein Imperium. [The Holy Roman Empire is fully Holy, fully Roman, and fully an Empire!]***
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Golden bust of Frederick I, given to his godfather Count Otto of Cappenberg in 1171. It was used as a reliquary in Cappenberg Abbey and is said in the deed of the gift to have been made to be “in the likeness of the emperor”.

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Causality in *La Mort le Roi Artu*:
Free Will, Accident, and Moral Failure

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The thirteenth-century French *La Mort le Roi Artu* indicates forthrightly how the Arthurian world comes to an end, but the text leaves less clear what motivates the disaster. Many critics attribute the cause to an external force, God or the goddess Fortune, that obliges Arthur and others to pursue their own destruction. A few offer greater insight into the nature of causality in the romance. They see the characters as exercising some degree of free will or even complete liberty. But these critics err in alienating the notion of free choice from moral concerns. In their reading, the heroes suffer not from moral failures but from intellectual or psychological deficiencies. However, to thirteenth-century minds free will would be a moral question. Indeed, the author encourages us to think in such terms by framing his romance as a sequel to *La Queste del Saint Graal*, a story of moral choices. The focus on choice in *Mort Artu* is much more subtle, consequent with the absence of supernatural manipulations so present in the previous romance. The author implies the kingdom collapses because of the moral weakness of its inhabitants who cannot satisfy the imperatives established for them in the *Queste*.

The title and first folios of the thirteenth-century French *La Mort le Roi Artu* make no secret of what will follow. The romance recounts the collapse of the Arthurian realm, but the author makes less clear what produces that calamity.

Most critics understand Arthur and his knights more as objects acted upon than as agents of destiny. Jean Frappier and Norris J. Lacy, for example, see Fortune as a willful power that carries the narrative’s heroes on a downward spiral. Alexandre Micha attributes the catastrophe to God’s anger and “le déterminisme des
passions” [the determinism of passions].\(^1\) The most recent contributor on this subject, Roger Pensom, sees the kingdom as torn asunder by a pre-Christian divinity acting as a “principe justicier” [justice dispensing principle].\(^2\) Karen Pratt, who interprets the romance as a tragedy, finds that the author strikes a “careful balance between fate and free will.”\(^3\) Nonetheless, in her reading, the characters do not assume moral liberty until the Mort Artu’s “epilogue,” so her explanation for the cause of the disaster itself differs little from Frappier’s and Lacy’s.\(^4\) Donald MacRae makes a similarly attenuated claim for liberty. He characterizes Arthur and Gawain as exercising a “measure of free choice” and concedes “the importance of fate in the Mort Artu.”\(^5\) David Hult, in the introduction to his recent edition and translation of the romance, recognizes all of the protagonists as exercising complete freedom of choice.\(^6\) According to both MacRae and Hult, the damage arises from cognitive or psychological dysfunction, not from moral weakness.\(^7\) Hult even implies that Lancelot’s and Guenevere’s adulterous love plays no role in the kingdom’s

1 Micha, Essais, 205. The translation from modern French into English is mine, as are all other such translations in this essay.
3 Pratt, “La Mort le Roi Artu as Tragedy,” 107.
4 Pratt, “La Mort le Roi Artu as Tragedy,” 86 and 108.
5 MacRae, “Appearances and Reality,” 266-67. MacRae never indicates clearly how free choice and fate interact. Laurent, “Le problème de la liberté dans le Lancelot-Grail,” suggests that although the characters exercise free will through most of the Lancelot-Grail Cycle, they lose that freedom in the Mort Artu, 22-23 and 61.
7 MacRae, “Appearances and Reality,” on the one hand, characterizes Arthur’s reluctance to accept reality as an inability to choose well, and this weakness leads to disaster, 267. On the other hand, MacRae says of that same reluctance “The King is prepared to close his eyes to the truth . . . as long as he can postpone the inevitable,” 272, suggesting that Arthur chooses well in denying the truth of Lancelot’s behavior. Hult, “Esquisses,” 39-73. Lyons, “La Mort le Roi Artu: an Interpretation,” rejects any notion of “decay and decline among great Arthurian figures;” she assigns blame for the end of Arthur’s kingdom to bad luck and bad timing without assuming that “misfortune” results from anything other than random chance, 147. Bloch, Medieval French Literature and Law, would seem to agree more with MacRae and Hult than with Lacy and Frappier, when he asserts that Lancelot’s championing of Guenevere against Mador’s accusation “implies a world in which human and divine wills function independently of each other, a world from which the gods have withdrawn, leaving humans responsible for the consequences of their deeds,” 28. Like MacRae and Hult, Bloch shows little interest in the moral significance of free choice. His interest lies instead in the political implications of the kingdom’s turmoil: “rooted far deeper than personal foible or folly . . . . the death of Arthur and the destruction of the Round Table . . . look like the failure of feudal organization to deal with the problems of a new, more centrally-oriented era,” 14. Because I address Bloch’s arguments in “Judicial Duels and Moral Inadequacy in La Mort le Roi Artu,” I will not devote them attention here.
MacRae’s approach failed to persuade Pratt, Lacy, or Pensom, and Hult’s much more recent effort seems unlikely to convince those skeptical that such freedom exists in the kingdom of Logres for two reasons: first, because Hult examines the nature of causality only in the final third of the narrative; and second, because he does not offer a clear idea of what free will represents. In that respect, Hult is not alone.

Among nearly all who have considered the matter of causation in the *Mort Artu*, there is misunderstanding about the meaning of free will. To begin with, severing it from the notion of moral responsibility, as MacRae and Hult do, would make little sense to the thirteenth-century author and his readership for whom free will would be nothing if not a moral question. Indeed, MacRae’s and Hult’s gesture is all the more wrongheaded given that the *Mort Artu*’s author casts his story as a sequel to *La Queste del Saint Graal*, a romance that focuses on the moral choices of its protagonists and rejects any notion of fortuity. A careful reading suggests the final installment in the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle follows a similar, if much subtler, course in which supernatural interventions give way to a natural order. In this way, the author suggests the kingdom disintegrates because the survivors of the quest fail to live up to the high moral standards set for them in the previous romance. The best among them win eternal life but their worldly society cannot endure.

Before considering the moral choices in the *Queste*, and what those choices imply for the *Mort Artu*, let us first clarify the meaning of free will. It is essential not to confuse agency, the individual’s exercise of choice, with the ability to realize ambitions. The inability to achieve a desired end does not imply that one cannot choose a course of action. Unforeseen circumstances may thwart the realization of a project, and that obstruction does not by itself suggest manipulation by a supernatural force. If all individuals exercise the same freedom, then the will of some must inevitably interfere with the will of others. Aristotle refers to such contingency as a form of *causa per accidens*, and establishes, in the words of Howard Patch,

8 Hult, “Esquisses,” 72.

9 MacRae, ”Appearances and Reality,” 275.
that “chance is necessary to make room for free-will.” That Aristotle makes this case in his *Nicomachean Ethics* indicates that even in the pre-Christian period free will represents a moral concern.

With Augustine, who follows Aristotle on the necessity of accident, freedom of choice becomes not just a moral concern for this world but one of consequence for the next. Early in his theological career, Augustine asserted in *On the Free Choice of the Will* (ca. 387-395) that heaven as reward for the virtuous and hell as punishment for the sinner made no sense if believers were not free to choose between good and evil (2.1.3.7). Later, in countering Pelagius, who preached an extreme form of free will for which man alone was responsible, Augustine insisted on the preeminent role in salvation of God’s grace, the gift that gives rise to virtue. To some his insistence seemed to leave no room for free will. Animated by this misunderstanding, Augustine wrote several treatises explaining the cooperation of grace and free will, e.g. *On Grace and Free Choice* (ca. 426-427), *On Reprimand and Grace* (ca. 426-427), and *On the Gift of Perseverance* (ca. 428-429).

Several centuries before the period of the romance’s composition, some elements within the Church used Augustine’s anti-pelagian writings in an effort to deny or minimize the role of human agency in salvation. But after the ninth century this current of thought lost currency that it did not regain until the reformation of


12 Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, “In the end what carried the day was a pastoral theology that was fundamentally grounded in Augustinianism, but an Augustinianism that had evolved in its encounter with the monastic theology of Cassian and with the realities of the wider Western Church. . . The pastoral solution employed . . and officially accepted by the Western Church confirmed the connection between human action, as prepared, empowered, and assisted by grace, and human destiny. Predestination had proved to be unpreachable,” 239. McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, explains “with Semi-Pelagianism and Semi-Augustinianism alike, and after them with most Catholic theologians, it [the motive] was both moral and ecclesiastical, to preserve human freedom and responsibility and yet to restrain human pride and insure man’s absolute dependence on the church. The ecclesiastical interest to be sure was in a sense religious— the church was a divine institution and to make men dependent on it was supposedly to make them dependent on God,” 142.
the sixteenth century. For the period of interest to us, the Church maintained much the same the position Augustine elaborates in *On Grace and Free Choice*. Such is the position Saint Anselm of Canterbury offers in *On Freedom of Choice* (ca. 1085) and that Peter Lombard echoes in *The Sentences* (ca. 1155), a scholastic manual forming “the basis of all further theological elaboration in the West until the end of the Middle Ages,” according to historian R.W. Southern. Bernard of Clairvaux, promoter of the Cistercian order whose monks offer guidance to the knights in the *Queste*, wrote his own treatise *Concerning Grace and Free Will* (ca. 1127-1128), the inspiration for which came to him when he was accused of so “strongly commending the work of grace” that he “lay himself open to the charge of unduly minimizing the function of free will.”

Albert Pauphilet, who highlights the prudhomes of the *Queste* as representatives of the Cistercian order, characterizes the penultimate romance in the Cycle as “l’histoire des âmes à la recher-

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13 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, “the National Synod of France held at Toucy, near Toul, in October, 860, . . . ended the controversy” because “the medieval church needed the doctrine of free will . . . as a basis for maintaining the moral responsibility, the guilt and merit of man. . . . [A] revival of strict Augustinianism . . . took place on a grand scale in the sixteenth century,” 536-37. See also McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, 132, 134.

14 Augustine’s *Enchiridion* (ca. 421-422) served this end; see, for example, J.F. Shaw’s translation, *The Enchiridion*, chapters 30, 31, 32, 100, and 101. However, Augustine himself did not see his doctrine of predestination as incompatible with free will and sought to reconcile them in *On Grace and Free Choice* (ca. 426-427), see, for example, *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice*, 141-42, 146.

15 See Anselm, *Freedom of Choice*, in particular, chapters 9, 11, and 13. See Lombard, *The Sentences Book 2*, distinction V, ch. 2, distinction VII, ch. 2, distinction XXIV, ch. 1, 3; distinction XXV, ch. 2-4, 7-8; distinction XXVI, ch. 1-2, 7, 11; distinction XXVII, ch. 1-3, 6; distinction XXVIII, ch. 4. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, 145. Ghelinck, *Le mouvement théologique du XIIe siècle*, notes of Peter Lombard that “Le concile de Latran de 1215 . . . assuré définitivement son triomphe dans l’enseignement de la chrétienté et inscrit le nom du Magister à une place d’honneur dans un des premiers canons dogmatiques du concile. L’enseignement trinitaire de Pierre Lombard fut solennellement reconnu orthodoxe,” [The Lateran Council of 1215 . . . definitively assures his triumph in the teaching of Christendom and inscribes the name of the Magister in a place of honor in one of the first dogmatic canons of the Council. The Trinitarian teaching of Peter Lombard was solemnly recognized as orthodox], 162.

16 Williams, introduction to his translation of *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, v-vi.
che de Dieu” [the story of souls in search of God]. Others scholars, such as Micha, reject Pauphilet’s assertion that “on n’y trouve rien qui ressemble à la predestination” [one finds nothing here that resembles predestination]. Frappier characterizes the pious narrative as “le roman de la grâce” [the romance of grace], thereby assigning all agency to the Almighty. In Hult’s estimation, “un déterminisme absolu régit tous les personnages, toutes les actions (aventures), tous les destins” [an absolute determinism governs all characters, all actions (adventures), all destinies]. Similarly, Lacy sees a “divine plan” at work in the adventures of the questers.

Such doubts about Pauphilet’s claim of complete personal liberty are not without foundation. The Queste lacks the quality that Aristotle and Augustine deem necessary for a world in which free will operates. Although the narrator and characters alike speak of mescheance [accident or misfortune], in every case, it indicates the unpleasant consequences resulting from sinful behavior rather than a fortuitous occurrence (9, 30, 42, 44, 61, 104, 107, 110, 123, 184, 212, 258) [6:8, 21, 28, 29, 40, 65, 67, 69, 77, 114, 131, 157]. Nevertheless, only one of the knights follows what amounts to a pre-determined path. Galahad neither sins nor feels the temptation to do so. When he slays evil knights, the narrator tells us that witnesses are so impressed with his energy and prowess that they see him as other than human (48, 230, 238) [6:32, 142, 146]. In effect, the narrative presents him as so virtuous that he appears not to be a

17 Pauphilet, Études, 26.
18 Pauphilet, Études, 31, and Micha, Essais, 195.
19 Frappier, Étude, 244.
22 The reference to Aristotle and Augustine is from Patch, The Goddess Fortuna, 12.
23 References to the Queste are from La Queste del Saint Graal, ed. Albert Pauphilet. Translations are by E. Jane Burns from the Lancelot-Grail, ed. Norris J. Lacy, indicated in brackets by volume and page.
quester so much as a model for others who seek the grail. A monk even compares his arrival “a la venue Jhesucrist, de semblance ne mie de hautece” (38) [to the coming of Jesus Christ, in form if not in significance, 6:26].

To these lesser mortals who confront difficult moral choices, the author devotes much more attention. The only successful quester with a sin in his past, Bors, joins Gahalad and Perceval only after five years of wandering on his own, improving his understanding of what the quest represents (265) [6:162]. Even the second purest of the questers, Perceval, faces moral temptations. Early on, he finds himself overwhelmed by an attack from twenty knights, and “li Bons Chevaliers” [the good knight] comes to his rescue. But as soon as the danger has passed, Galahad departs without saying a word despite Perceval’s efforts to retain him (87-88) [6:56]. Whereas Perceval may not immediately grasp the meaning of the rescuer’s limited intervention, the reader understands the message—the quest is an individual endeavor on which each participant must make his own way, choosing between sin and virtue. On the other end of virtue’s spectrum, iniquitous and nameless knights meet an untimely end; others, such as the covetous Meliant and the proud Bademagu are wounded and quickly fall by the wayside.24 Gawain, a man of good will but one who never understands the quest as anything other than the search for a treasured object, disappears from the narrative before its conclusion. A repentant Lancelot ends up at the grail castle in Corbenyc, but tainted by his adultery with the queen, finds himself excluded from the remainder of the quest and the journey the successful knights undertake to Sarras (272) [6:166]. In short, although adventure and white-robed monks set the scene for moral choices in the Queste, the questers—aside from the exemplar Gahalad—face choices fraught with consequence. The supernatural suppresses fortuity, nonetheless the questing knights experience freedom of choice.

24 Bademagu’s name reappears only when Lancelot discovers his tomb. The inscription indicates that Gawain has killed Bademagu, but the killing does not figure in the narrative (261) [6:160].
The action of the *Mort Artu* begins as the survivors return to Arthur’s court. The results of the quest create a somber tone, because those who might bask in the triumph of the undertaking, the worthiest of knights, Gahalad and Perceval, have passed into another world. It falls on Bors, who shared in their glory, to communicate the sad tidings: “en furent tuit moult dolent a court” (1) [all those at court were grief stricken at the news, 7:3].25 Gawain, representing those who failed in the quest, recounts his numerous disgraces, including the killing of eighteen other questers “non pas pour ce que ge fusse mieudres chevaliers que nus autres, mes la mescheance se torna plus vers moi que vers nul de mes compaignons. Et si sachiez bien que ce n’a pas esté par ma chevalerie, mes par mon pechié” (2) [not because I was a better knight than any other, but because misfortune afflicted me more than any of my companions. And you may be assured that it was not a feat of prowess, but rather the consequence of my sin, 7:4].

Given that Gawain recalls here events from the quest, *mescheance* preserves the meaning it had in the previous romance. As Pensom correctly points out, “il désigne évidemment un malheur survenu en conséquence d’une faute morale précédente.” [it evidently designates a misfortune arising as a consequence of a previous moral error] (12). Based on this one instance, Pensom assumes the meaning of the word will remain unchanged in the narrative that follows because “il n’est sûrement pas fortuit que le conte saute directement de la pénitence de l’orgueilleux Gauvain jusqu’à la recrudescence de la passion coupable de Lancelot et Guenièvre” [it is surely no accident that the story jumps directly from the penitence of the proud Gawain to the recrudescence of the guilty passion of

25 References to the *Mort Artu* are from Jean Frappier’s edition, *La Mort le Roi Artu*, indicated by page. I reference Frappier’s edition rather than Hult’s, *La Mort du roi Arthur*, based on the assumption that the reader will more likely have access to the former than the latter. In the introduction to his edition, Hult indicates that the divisions of the narrative Frappier introduces into his edition are somewhat arbitrary, 116-27. However, the wording of the two versions is remarkably similar, particularly for the passages quoted in this essay. All translations are by Norris J. Lacy from the *Lancelot-Grail*, indicated in brackets by volume and page.
Lancelot and Guenevere] (13), as if the connection between sin and the harm it brings to the sinner were to remain unchanged from one romance to the other. 26

This assertion fails to take account of an important indication of rupture with the past. Before mentioning Lancelot’s deviation from his vow of chastity taken during the quest, the narrator reveals that “les aventures del roiaume de Logres estoient . . . menees a fin” (3) [the adventures of the kingdom of Logres had been brought to a close, 7:4]. This absence comes as no surprise to readers of the Queste, for there it is made clear that the grail itself produces adventure and once the holy vessel leaves the kingdom, adventure will cease. Without a doubt, the absence indicates that the immanent God has receded from the narrative landscape. 27

One might assume, as Pensom and other critics do, that another directing force fills the vacuum. Lacy, for example, sees a world in which “Arthur and those around him no longer have even the illusion of control. Deprived of adventure, they are also deprived

26 Griffin, The Object and the Cause, like Pensom, attributes the same meaning to mescheance that the term has in the Queste: “mescheance and pechié are the same thing.” As she sees it, the romance’s notion of predestination is “illusory” because the narrative was composed retrospectively in that the romance begins by telling how it will end, 45. Lacy, “The Sense of an Ending,” offers a different understanding of the Old French term: “mescheance, the word that characterizes Gawain’s killing of eighteen knights, might indicate nothing more than poor luck, but in this text the word (like its translation as ‘misfortune’) must be seen as a reference to fate or Fortune,” 117-18.

27 Although critics see signs of divine intervention in this narrative—see Frappier, Étude, 233, 235, 252—and some of the characters expect divine participation in judicial duels, the narrator never explicitly evokes an immanent God during the events between the end of the grail quest and the end of Camelot. During Gawain’s duel with Lancelot, we learn that Arthur’s nephew benefits from a divine gift that affords him greater strength as he fights at noon. But the narrator tells us that this gift was bestowed upon Gawain at his birth because he was baptized by a hermit “de si seinte vie que Nostre Sires fesoit tote jor por lui miracles” (198) [who lived such a pure life that for his sake our Lord performed miracles every day, 7:102]. In other words, the miracle recalls a virtuous past, and more the hermit’s than Gawain’s. At the battle of Salisbury Plain, Arthur thrusts his lance through Mordred’s body, and “l’estoire dit que aprés l’estordre del glaive passa par mi la plaie uns rais de soleill” (245) [the story says when the lance was withdrawn, a ray of sunlight shone through the wound, 7:126]. In the Lancelot Proper, a white-robed monk destines a prophetic letter to Mordred that says of this wonder “ceste merveille mosterra Diex seulement en toi” (5:223) [God will produce this miracle in you alone, 5:286]. The Mort Artu’s narrator, on the other hand, abstains from such forthrightness. He attributes the claim to a lesser authority: “cil del pais distrent que ce avoit esté sygnes de corrouz de Nostre Seigneur” (245) [the people of that country say that it was a sign of Our Lord’s wrath, 7:126].
of the will to resist their destiny, represented by the turning of the Wheel.” However, the Wheel of Fortune metaphor does not appear until the narrative is four-fifths complete. If the author wished to suggest that some force manipulates events, presumably he would do so earlier. At this point in the narrative, all we can be sure of is that the supernatural that focused attention on moral choices in the Queste no longer holds sway. Perhaps the lack of adventure simply points to a more natural world, one including true contingency. To know whether or not some extrinsic force, such as Fortune, or in Pensom’s words “une autre intelligence” [another intelligence] supplants the supernatural and suppresses whatever agency the characters enjoyed previously, one must pay close attention to the events that follow soon after the Gawain’s public confession. What do we find in the way of accidents or what appear to be accidents, and what does the context suggest as the meaning of *mescheance* when the word arises?

Pensom characterizes Lancelot’s wound at the Winchester tournament as the first sign of the ineluctable physical punishment that follows from sin. But nothing in the narrative identifies the injury as a *mescheance*. Nevertheless, one might read the wounding as an accident in that Bors does not understand that he thrusts his lance into his cousin’s side. Then again, Bors purposely attacks the Red Knight who happens to be Lancelot, so the blow is certainly not inadvertent. Indeed, tournaments require violent encounters among knights, and injury represents a logical outgrowth of such meetings. In the Queste, when a spiritually inspired knight strikes a sinner, such as Galahad unhorsing Gawain, the result suggests a moral reproach or warning for the lesser knight (196) [6:122]. Although in that romance Bors represents one of the inspired, here he reverts to the role he plays in the Lancelot Proper, that of a facilitator for Lancelot’s and Guenevere’s clandestine affair. Moreover, the context in which Bors wounds Lancelot underscores their distance from the quest and its focus on celestial chivalry.


29 The romance never associates the word *mescheance* with a wound inflicted in a tournament or in battle.
The *Queste* features no tournaments. The event at Winchester is a mundane substitute that Arthur turns to in order to fill the void left by the disappearance of adventure. That Lancelot wins first place in the tournament—“enporta d’ambedeus parz le pris del tornoiement” (17) [it was the opinion on both sides that he was the best knight in the tournament, 7:12]—establishing himself once again as the finest knight—also seems designed to highlight more Camelot’s impoverished moral landscape than any sin in particular. Although his adultery features prominently in the narrative as a whole, here the author downplays his connection to the queen. She does not attend the tournament, and Lancelot gives her absence little thought. But his victory, like all other martial triumphs in this romance, implies his moral superiority over others and, by extension, the kingdom’s moral deficit. Pensom believes Lancelot’s wound evokes his sin because his encounter with Bors parallels an incident much later in the romance—“la blessure infligée involontairement par un ami” [the wound involuntarily inflicted by a friend]—where Lancelot kills Gaheriet without recognizing him.30 Lancelot inflicts that lethal blow in order to liberate his adulterous partner, the queen, from the execution pyre. Consequently, there is a connection between sin and bloodshed. However, the parallel extends no further, because the punishment falls in this case on an innocent party. Lancelot’s slaying of Gaheriet does not connect sinful behavior, mescheance, and bodily harm to the sinner. That pattern, so evident in the *Queste*, does not apply here.

When Lancelot and his companions depart from the tournament at Winchester, they leave behind “un de leur escuiers mort, que uns chevaliers avoit ocis par mesaventure d’un glaive” (18) [one of their squires, accidently killed by a knight’s lance, 7:12]. Participants in mock combat assume the risk of fatal injury, but those assisting them from the side lines do not. The death is both accidental and unexpected, and although such losses may have occurred in real tournaments, it is curious that the author sees fit to mention this detail. The possessive adjective “leur” [their] links the squire to

Lancelot, the adulterer, yet the author weakens this link by indicating earlier that this squire is from the household of the knight from Escalot who accompanies Lancelot. When the tournament begins, Lancelot asks his own squire to stay away from Winchester so that his presence will not jeopardize his master’s disguised participation (13) [7:10]. Furthermore, the squire is not the only incidental casualty in the aftermath of the tournament. When Gawain and Gaheriet pursue the Red Knight to learn his identity, they come across a dead knight, one with no connection to the events at Winchester. Those carrying him reveal that he was killed by a “uns pors sauvajes que il avoit acueilli a l’entree de cele forest” (20) [a wild boar that he encountered at the edge of the forest, 7:13]. No more blame attaches to this nameless victim than to the dead squire.31 In fact, of this second death, Gaheriet remarks “c’est granz domages; car il a bien persone d’ome qui poïst estre bons chevaliers” (20) [this is most unfortunate, for he looks like a man who could have been an excellent knight, 7:13]. Perhaps most revealing about the notion of causality the narrative creates is that neither of these deaths affects the course of subsequent events. Both are mere details, gratuitous ones at that, unless the author means for us to understand the casualties as bad luck and nothing more.

On the other hand, Lancelot’s wound has consequences. His recovery delays his return to court, allowing Guenevere to believe falsely that he has been unfaithful to her. Jealousy leads her to rebuff him on his return, he leaves Camelot, and his absence later puts

31 Pensom, “Les Avatars,” does not comment on the meaning of the squire’s death but he reads the knight’s wound as evoking Lancelot’s sin with the queen, claiming that “le texte fait appel à la conscience subliminale du lecteur/auditeur” (14) [the text appeals to the subliminal consciousness of the reader/listener]. As Pensom points out, there are similarities between Lancelot and the dead man; both are wounded knights. However, the nameless knight dies from his wounds, whereas Lancelot does not, so the parallel is less than perfect. In addition, his association of the wild boar with “concupiscence” requires reference to several other texts, most of which postdate our romance, and the suggestion that the nameless knight was wounded by the boar in the genital area--associating the injury with sexuality--requires quotation of two other poems, Béroul’s Tristan and Jean de Meun’s Roman de la Rose, where such a wound appears. Nothing in the Mort Artu hints at where the knight was mortally wounded, so it seems unlikely that the romancer wanted to draw the reader’s thoughts, however subliminal, to the groin area, 15-17.
her in mortal danger. Here we have part of what Lacy terms a destruc-
tive “interlocking sequence of events, held together in a chain of
causes and effects” that he compares to “falling dominoes, each
one toppling the next, until Camelot itself is ultimately destroyed.”

However, causes followed by effects do not by themselves suggest,
as Lacy implies, a lack of agency for the characters involved in the
sequence, particularly not when the narrative presents certain causes
and effects as falling outside of the chain. For example, while
Lancelot convalesces, he learns of a tournament at Taneburgh that
Guenevere will attend. Fearing he cannot meet her there, Lancelot
becomes agitated, and his wound reopens. He determines that he
will nonetheless make his way to the tournament, claiming that oth-

32 Lacy, “The Sense of an Ending,” 118. Pratt, “La Mort le Roi Artu as Tragedy,” sub-
scribes to a notion similar to Lacy’s interlocking causes, 97.

33 Frappier, Étude, 196-97.
Despite his position on free will in the romance, Hult offers a judgment of the episode similar to Frappier’s. He describes Avarlan’s crime as a clumsy pretext “pour relancer l’intrigue” [to relaunch the plot], a manifestation of what he terms “le destin romanesque” [romanesque destiny]—the force exerted on the author by his audience’s knowledge of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s History of the Kings of Britain and Wace’s Roman de Brut. According to Hult, the weight of that knowledge obliges the author to show Arthur’s kingdom following the same disastrous arc.

However, this episode has no antecedent in Geoffrey’s or Wace’s work and is superfluous as plot catalyst. At this juncture, Arthur has just returned from Morgan’s castle where she has shown him the illustrations Lancelot drew there of his love affair with the queen. Though not persuaded of the queen’s infidelity, the king nevertheless suspects her, and she is vulnerable because of Lancelot’s absence. Without Avarlan’s gesture, the ingredients for a new confrontation requiring Guenevere’s rescue are already present. If one sees Avarlan’s attempt on Gawain’s life as a means of relaunching the plot or as another piece in a line of falling dominoes, the episode proves troublesome. But if the author wishes instead to present a disorderly world filled with chance occurrences, the sudden appearance of a scheme with no connection to previous events makes more sense. That Avarlan fails to achieve his desired aim serves as an illustration of how easily one may mistake a world where contingency operates with a more orchestrated universe. When, for example, Lacy writes that the “romance insistently underlines the fact that not only Arthur, but other characters as well, are incapable of guiding the course of events” or that what happens “is beyond the control of individuals involved,” he is entirely right. As indicated earlier, the error lies in the assumption that the inability to control events reveals a narrative where the “emphasis is . . . on the irreversible forces shaping events.”

In passing the fruit to Guenevere, Avarlan

34 Hult, “Esquisses,” 34.
asserts his will, but Guenevere’s expression of her own will thwarts his design. For Avarlan, Guenevere’s choice represents an accident, a contingency that he did not anticipate and cannot overcome. His failure to kill Gawain does not suggest that a supernatural force deprived him of the ability to choose a course of action. The free will of some must on occasion frustrate the desires of others.

In this context, it is important to note the language used in the aftermath of the poisoning. When King Arthur enters the room where the death occurred, “dit que ci a trop grant mescheance et que trop grant vilennie a fete la reïne, se ele a ce fet de son gré” (76-77) [he said that this was a great misfortune and that the queen had committed a very great crime if she had done it intentionally, 7:42]. Arthur’s “ci” is so vague that one cannot be certain what it refers to. The “mescheance” may describe the predicament Guenevere finds herself in because she has precipitated Gaheris’s death rather than to the grief experienced by those who love Gaheris. Although the reader knows that the queen has not acted with malicious intent in passing along the poisoned fruit, perhaps the blame she suffers alludes to another transgression of which the reader knows her to be guilty. In that sense, “mescheance” may represent suffering she has brought upon herself. The narrator, speaking from the queen’s point of view, offers a similarly ambiguous thought: “La reïne ne set que dire, tant est esbahie durement de ceste mescheance” (77) [The queen did not know what to say, so dumbfounded was she at this misfortune, 7:42]. However, subsequent expressions of regret that include “mescheance” clearly indicate mourning for the deceased: “li rois . . . se seigne plus de mil foiz de la merveille que il a del chevalier qui est morz par tel mescheance” (77) [the king . . . made the sign of the cross a thousand times in his distress about the knight who had died through such misfortune, 7:42]; and “la reïne . . . commence a fere trop grant duel . . . quant par tel mescheance a ocis un

37 Here I have altered Lacy’s translation. No doubt, sensing the lack of moral connection between offering the fruit and the consequences of eating it, he renders “mescheance” as “tragedy.”

38 Here again, I substitute “misfortune” for “tragedy.”
si preudome” (77) [the queen . . . began to lament loudly . . . since she had accidentally killed such a noble man, 7:42].\(^39\) Nothing in the narrative hints at opprobrium attaching to Gaheris. The author presents him as an innocent bystander who suffers through no fault of his own, so here we find yet another instance in this romance where “mescheance” means an unfortunate chance occurrence rather than retribution for sinful behavior.

From this accident, the narrative immediately turns attention again to Lancelot. His wound finally healed and distressed by Gue-nevere’s rebuff on his return to court, he seeks to isolate himself. When Bors voices concern about the risks of traveling alone, Lancelot insists he has nothing to fear, claiming that God “ne souferra pas par sa grace que il me meschiee en leu ou ge soie” (74) [by his grace . . . won’t allow any harm to come to me wherever I go, 7:41]. Soon after he expresses this belief, a hunter’s arrow penetrates his left thigh. Pensom reads this wound, like the first Lancelot suffers at Taneburgh, “comme le châtiment de son péché adultère” [as the punishment for his adulterous sin]. According to Pensom, the location of this second wound reinforces the rapport between misfortune and sin, given that the thigh represents a “métonymie (synecdoche) des parties sexuelles” [metonymy (synecdoche) for the sexual organs].\(^40\) Pensom likens this metaphorical connection between leg wound and sin to that of the Fisher King in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Conte du Graal*. However, in that romance the reader learns of the connection through an explicit announcement. Perceval’s cousin tells him that had he not remained silent when he saw the grail procession, the king’s infirmity would have been cured. He said nothing because of his previous sin: “por le pechié, ce saches tu, / de ta mere t’est avenu, / qu’ele est morte de duel de toi.” [It befell you, understand, / because you sinned against your mother, / who died of grief on your account] (3559-61).\(^41\)

\(^39\) Lacy renders “par tel mescheance” as “so tragically,” for the sake of continuity and clarity, I alter his translation.


\(^41\) Chrétien de Troyes, *The Story of the Grail (Li Contes del Graal)*, or *Perceval*. 
No such pronouncement figures in the Mort Artu. The Maimed King in the Queste would seem to constitute a better analogy. There one realizes the connection between the king’s wound and the sinful nature of earthly chivalry when Galahad heals the sovereign’s legs by anointing them with blood from the holy lance (271-72) [6:166]. At this point in the narrative, the three successful questers journey together, united in their understanding of celestial chivalry. Thus, it is precisely the healing of the wound that underscores the metaphorical association between sin and bodily imperfection. If the author of the Mort Artu wished to associate the arrow through Lancelot’s thigh with his adultery, it is curious that the wound heals before Lancelot’s liaison with the queen ends. The transient nature of the wound, in this case and in that of Lancelot’s tournament injury, casts doubt on the symbolic meaning Pensom attributes to it.

After parting ways with Bors, Lancelot “gisoit chascune nuit chiés un hermite a cui il s’estoit fez confés aucune foiz” (78) [spent each night with a hermit who had once heard his confession, 7:43]. One may take this subordinate clause as a reference to the monk who hears Lancelot’s confession in the Queste and who persuades the knight to abjure his adulterous relationship with the queen (66-67) [6:42-43]. The context, a suffering knight in need of a hermit’s council, seems designed as an allusion to that romance. It is the only such meeting before Lancelot retires to a hermitage at the end of the Mort Artu. But even without the allusion to the previous romance, that Lancelot confesses to this hermit indicates the latter is aware of the hero’s sins, yet the prudhome offers no reproach for the sinner. He merely advises Lancelot to abstain from the next tournament because “n’i feriez vos riens qui vos tornast a enneur” (81) [you could not win honor there, 7:44]. As Alfred Adler puts it, the “spiritual advisor does not explain his illness as a sign from Heaven, but as a droite mescheance, an unfortunate incident . . . a reality in
its own right, no *figura.*” Given how we see the word *mescheance* employed shortly before in the narrative, where Gaheris is poisoned, Adler’s translation of the old French term seems entirely appropriate. If one is inclined to read Lancelot’s wounds as a sign of some retributive power at work, two accidents involving the same hero in fairly quick succession may seem one coincidence too many.

However, the juxtaposition of the two episodes has a purpose other than to suggest free choice as an illusion. In the first instance, when the wound he receives at the tournament reopens, Lancelot behaves prudently following the physician’s advice and avoids doing himself further harm. In the second, where Bors warns his cousin of the dangers of traveling alone, Lancelot acts impulsively and pays the price. The contrast of the two decisions underscores the link between choice and consequence. In this instance, the consequence of the stray arrow is not far reaching. Lancelot convalesces with the hermit and misses yet another tournament, but he still arrives in time to defend Guenevere against Mador’s accusation that she killed his brother treacherously. After Lancelot’s triumph in the duel, the queen’s jealousy abates and so does her husband’s suspicion of her. For the moment at least, the dominoes stop falling. The chain of causes and effects is interrupted.

Restarting the destructive cascade requires the intervention of Agravain who once again urges Arthur to spy on Lancelot. Even Lacy acknowledges the deliberateness of this gesture, writing “Agravain’s action is one of the few . . . in the romance that are the result of choice.” Nevertheless, Lacy quickly attenuates this acknowledgement by suggesting that Agravain’s behavior may not count as a freely-made decision: “if indeed his jealousy of and hatred for Lancelot really left him any choice in the matter.” This is a common approach for those who see the *Mort Artu* as a model of determinism. Faced with a lack of evidence of an outside force act-

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42 Adler, “Problems of Aesthetic versus Historical Criticism,” 940. Frappier, Étude, reads both of Lancelot’s wounds as “un avertissement céleste” [a celestial warning], 233.

ing on the characters, one searches for proxies to fill the void. As Lacy puts it, “the text leaves no doubt that inclination, passion . . . as well as notions of duty . . . and family honor, have deprived the characters of the normal ranges of behaviors and have determined that they must act precisely as they do.”

Madeleine Blaess makes a similar assertion: “the figures” are “driven by character, environment, heredity, upbringing;” as does Artie Zuurdeeg: “they [the characters] are not . . . fully independent creations. Their behavior is prescribed by the codes of chivalry, courtly love, and family honor.” No doubt, the characters in this romance find themselves constrained by their values and influenced by their environment. If they were not, they would hardly seem human, but constraint and influence fall far short of the absolute control these critics suggest.

44 Lacy, “The Sense of Ending,” 119. I elide “accident” from this list to avoid confusion because Lacy believes there are in fact no accidents in the romance. As he explains later, “In reality, what appear to be narrative accidents in this text are of course an illusion created in large part by the inability of characters to determine the direction of events. Apparently unmotivated occurrences—accidents—are a specialized expression of the force of fate or Fortune, whose turning wheel links events so as to propel the text toward its predictably catastrophic ending,” 121. The notion that all behavior is determined for the characters leads Lacy to make the odd claim that the narrator must fabricate dramatic tension: “The characters in this romance, though unable to act other than as they do, are none		
thless capable of fervor, and the narrator maintains the appearance, the fiction, of decisive action. Although readers know that Lancelot cannot fail to return to rescue Guinevere when she is condemned to death, his doing so is presented as a matter of bold resolve,” 122. At this point in the narrative, Lancelot has no infirmities and faces no obstacles to rescuing the queen, other than the armed knights who anticipate his arrival, so one cannot say that the author meant create any suspense surrounding the queen’s liberation. It is the unintended consequences of the rescue—the killing of Gaheriet and Guerrehet—that give the episode emotional resonance.

45 Blaess, “Predestination,” 18; and Zuurdeeg, Narrative Techniques, 4. See also Pensom, “Rapports du symbole,” who asserts: “Le thème central du roman est la limitation du libre-arbitre imposée par les passions et par la nature même de l’existence physique. En effet, l’attitude de l’auteur envers le libre-arbitre sent l’averroïsme, quoiqu’il ne témoigne aucune envie d’en exposer la théorie de manière systématique ainsi qu’avait fait l’auteur de la Queste del Saint Graal de ses doctrines cisterciennes. Le développement de chacun des personnages principaux se termine par la reconnaissance de la limitation de sa liberté,” 404 [The central theme of the romance is the limitation imposed on free will by passions and by the very nature of physical existence. Indeed, the attitude of the author toward free will hints of averroism, although he betrays no desire to expose the theory in a systematic way as the author of the Queste del Saint Graal had done with his Cistercian doctrines. The development of each of the principal characters ends with the acknowledgement of his liberty’s limitation].
The only affirmative indications of a manipulative force, prior to the appearance of Lady Fortune fourth-fifths of the way through the narrative, come not from the narrator but from the mouths of characters. Bors, Gawain, and Arthur imprecate the goddess when faced with sorrow or contretemps. Although Lacy stops short of suggesting we take these invocations of Fortune as authoritative, he points to their frequency as meaningful.\(^{46}\) Whereas there are several in the *Mort Artu*, “the enormously longer *Lancelot Proper* mentions the word only a few times, and it never occurs in the *Queste del Saint Graal.*”\(^{47}\) But the numerical discrepancy does not validate the characters’ assignment of responsibility. The simpler explanation is that the heroes in the *Lancelot Proper* meet with less grief than their older selves in the *Mort Artu*, and in the *Queste*, the interpreters of adventure, the white-robed monks refuse to allow the questing knights to assign blame for their misfortune to any source other than their own unrighteousness. As Hult puts it, the blame that characters assign to Fortune represents a “symptôme d’un trait fondamentalement humain--la tendance à se traiter de victime, et par là à ne pas accepter sa propre responsabilité,” [symptom of a fundamentally human trait--the tendency to think of themselves as victims, and thereby not accept their own responsibility].\(^{48}\)

The love between Lancelot and Guenevere may represent something of an exceptional case in the characters’ exercise of agency. Their mutual affection certainly represents a force that contributes to the destruction of the Arthurian world, and perhaps we are to understand this passion as one that they cannot control, as Lacy and Micha claim. Almost as soon as Gawain finishes revealing his failures during the Grail quest at the beginning of the romance, the narrator announces Lancelot’s abandonment of chastity: “il ne demora pas un mois après que il fu autrei espris et alumez come il

\(^{46}\) Zuurdeeg, *Narrative Techniques*, on the other hand, accepts the characters’ assertions as authoritative, 27.

\(^{47}\) Lacy, “*The Mort Artu* and Cyclical Closure,” 89-90.

\(^{48}\) Hult, “Esquisses,” 51.
avoit onques esté plus nul jor, si qu’il rencheï el pechié de la reïne autrisi comme il avoit fet autrefoiz” (3) [not a month passed before he was as enamored and inflamed as he had ever been before, so that he again lapsed into sin with the queen just as he had done formerly, 7:4]. But when Lacy asserts that there is no “indication even that the lovers actually make a decision” to resume their adulterous relationship after the quest has finished and that “discretion is simply not a behavior that is available to them,” he makes too much of the narrator’s failure to reveal the lovers’ thoughts at that juncture.49 The romance distinguishes between the emotion the lovers feel and acts arising from that sentiment. Although Lancelot and Guenevere conduct themselves less prudently than before, at this early stage in the narrative, among the members of Arthur’s court only Agravain becomes aware of their assignations because he spies on Lancelot and “se prenoit garde de ses erremens que nus des autres” (3) [watched his comings and goings more attentively than any of the others, 7:4]. Arthur’s other nephews are so unaware of Lancelot’s surreptitious activities that when Arthur later shares Agravain’s accusation with Gawain, the latter responds: “ge sent Lancelot si sauf de ceste chose que il n’a el monde si bon chevalier, se il l’en apeloit, que ge n’en entrasse en champ encontre lui por Lancelot defiendre” (30) [I consider Lancelot so guiltless in this matter that I would take the field to defend him against any knight, no matter how good, who might accuse him, 7:18]. To all appearances this offer to serve as a champion for Lancelot is sincere, and all the more credible given that Gawain later indicates that he would not defend his own mother in single combat if doing so would bring him dishonor (101) [7:54].

Even after Lancelot successfully defends the queen against Mador’s accusation of treachery and we learn that Lancelot and Guenevere “se demenerent si folement que li plusieur de leanz le sorent veraient” (107) [conducted themselves so indiscreetly that many people there knew the truth beyond any doubt, 7:57], the narrative also indicates nothing the lovers do in front of Arthur arouses

his suspicion. The intervention of third parties, Agravain and Morgan, is required to bring the infidelity to the king’s attention. On the morning Agravain catches the couple together in the queen’s bedroom, the narrator tells us beforehand that Lancelot “se porpense comment il porra aler plus couvertement, si que nus ne le sache” [considered how he could join her so discreetly that no one would know]. When he asks Bors how he might achieve this end, his cousin tells him where he can find “la plus coie voie et la plus estraine de gent” (114) [the quietest and most deserted path, 7:61]. The precaution proves insufficient, because the trap is already set, but that failure does not annul the will to avoid detection. Evidently, Lancelot can act with a degree of discretion. He can exercise restraint as his absence from the tournament at Taneburgh demonstrates. Most important of all, after the Pope intervenes to end the war following Guenevere’s rescue from the execution pyre, Lancelot returns the queen to Arthur and leaves Logres with no intention of returning. His love for her endures but he chooses not to realize his desire.

Although following this turning point, the frequency of accident or mescheance diminishes, one major contingency remains. Arthur must fight the Romans, a battle no doubt inspired by events in The History of the Kings of Britain and Roman de Brut, as Hult suggests. In the narrative presented by Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace, Arthur crosses the channel in order to fight the emperor who responds to the king’s recent conquests of territory claimed by Rome. The battle is thus a foreseeable consequence of Arthur’s behavior. In the Mort Artu, by contrast, Arthur comes to Gaul to fight Lancelot. The conflict with Rome arises without connection to other events in the romance, and the fight would seem to have far reaching consequences given that its ravages deny Arthur the benefit of his nephew’s prowess in the struggle against Mordred. The narrator lets us know that despite the head wound he suffers in his duel

50 The word mescheance appears only twice in the second half of the romance (142) [7:75] and (227) [7:117].

51 Rome seeks to avenge a defeat Arthur inflicts on them years before, near the end of the Lancelot Proper. See Lancelot: roman en prose, volume 6:105, or Lancelot-Grail, 5:397.
with Lancelot, Gawain still has another productive battle left in him
“s’il ne fust einsi preudom li Romain n’eüssent pas esté veincu, por
gent qui encontre eus fust” (210) [if he had not been so valiant, the
Romans could not have been beaten by the army opposing them,
7:109]. But otherwise, the narrative becomes, in Lacy’s words, “in-
creasingly linear,” as cause and effect follow each other in a clear
sequence. However, this linearity by itself tells us nothing about
the source of causation. The narrowing of options does not indicate
a loss of free will for Arthur and Gawain.

Indeed, all of the prophetic voices in the final third of the
romance manifest themselves in scenes where the narrative suggests
not that Arthur and Gawain face a predetermined future but that they
must choose between alternatives. As MacRae points out, a very
old woman who knows of Gawain’s humiliation “chiés le Riche Roi
Pescheor” (169) [at the castle of the rich Fisher King, 7:88] attempts
to dissuade the king and his nephew from their project, telling them
that besieging the city will bring them shame and disgrace. The two
proceed with their project, but their stubbornness in the near term
does not indicate an inability to choose because, after two months
of fruitless effort, Arthur in fact heeds the woman’s admonition. He
insists that Gawain find an alternative for “nos i porrons plus perdre
que gaaignier” (182) [we have more to lose than to gain here, 7:94].
Though indecisive, Arthur evidently can exercise choice.

As an alternative to the siege, Gawain decides to fight Lance-
lot in single combat. The young man whom Gawain asks to present
his challenge predicts that the duel will lead to nothing but shame and
death (182-83) [7:95]. Gawain claims that he must follow through
with his plan, but his own words end up calling that necessity into
question. At first, he claims to be confident of victory because he
fights with God on his side (183) [7:95], then moments later con-
fesses to another motivation: “pour a aise estre en aucune maniere,

53 MacRae, “Appearances and Reality,” 274.
ou morz ou vis, ai je empris ceste bataille” (187) [I have undertaken this battle so as to be somehow at peace, either dead or alive, 7:97].

To avoid fighting his former companion in arms, Lancelot offers to become Gawain’s vassal and spend ten years in exile as a penitent, but Gawain categorically refuses the gesture of reconciliation. If the author wished readers to attribute Gawain’s insistence on fighting Lancelot to codes, upbringing, or values, it seems unlikely he would underscore the astonished reactions of Gawain’s contemporaries to his refusal. Arthur begs him to accept: “Biaus niés, por Dieu, fetes ce que Lancelos vos requiert; car certes il vos offre toutes les resons que chevaliers puisse offrir a autre por ocision de lingnage; certes si preudom comme il est ne dist onques mes ce qu’il vos a dit” (191) [Dear nephew, in God’s name, do what Lancelot is asking; he’s certainly making all the amends that one knight can make to another for killing a kinsman; surely no man as noble as he is ever made such an offer, 7:99]; and Yvain reproaches Gawain for rejecting the offer: “Onques mais voir tex merveilles ne feïstes” (193) [Surely, you’ve never done anything so astonishing, 7:100]. Moreover, when Gawain feels death approaching, he reproaches himself for rebuffing Lancelot’s generosity: “ge li peüsse crier merci de ce que li ai esté si villains” (212) [I could ask his forgiveness for my cruel treatment of him, 7:110].

In Arthur’s dreams, the figure of his deceased nephew offers a more consistent message, calling for prudence much like the old woman and the young man outside of Gaunes. The narrative thus attributes greater authority to the late Gawain’s voice. First, he urges his uncle not to do battle with Mordred, a course of action Arthur rejects out of hand as dishonorable. But after momentarily disappearing, Gawain returns, beseeching his uncle to call on Lancelot for help, “car ce sachiez veraiement, se vos l’avez en vostre compagnie,

54. MacRae, “Appearances and Reality,” attributes Gawain’s animus to “mistaken observations” and assumes that Gawain’s “quest for his own death” is “subconscious,” 273. But Gawain’s words suggest a conscious effort of self-destruction. Without the accusation that Lancelot killed his brother treacherously, Gawain cannot oblige a judicial duel that could end his grief. For the distinction between simple and treacherous homicide, see Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law*, 36.
que ja Mordrés n’avra encontre vos duree” (225-26) [for you can be sure if you have him in your company, Mordred will never be able to hold out against you, 7:116]. According to Frappier: “la loi de l’honneur interdit à Artus de commettre une telle lâcheté, et même de faire appel à Lancelot” [the law of honor forbids Arthur from committing such an act of cowardice, and even to call upon Lancelot]. 55 Although avoiding battle with Mordred would evidently bring Arthur dishonor, nothing in the narrative—not even Arthur own words—suggest that it would be cowardly to ask for Lancelot’s help. Arthur refuses the suggestion instead out of fear that Lancelot would not comply “car il li a tant forfet qu’il ne quide mie qu’il venist a son mandement” (226) [because he had so wronged him that he did not think he would come if sent for, 7:116]. 56 However, the reader knows this fear to be unfounded because Lancelot has already indicated his desire to regain Arthur’s company. When he offers to go into exile in order to avoid fighting with Gawain, Lancelot asks that he be allowed to return to Camelot if he survives his banishment—a proposition Arthur then willing accepts. The king experiences a change of heart but one consequent to a change in circumstance. No doubt, we are to understand that, without Gawain’s company, Arthur cannot abide a reunion of Lancelot and Guenevere. He makes an anguished choice for reasons he hesitates to acknowledge. Though he indeed rebuffs his late nephew’s counsel, no “law” obliges him to do so.

In Arthur’s next dream, he finally encounters Lady Fortune. Lacy frames this vision as one would expect: “On the Wheel of Fortune, Arthur is beginning his descent . . . a reversal of the Wheel’s movement is inconceivable.” 57 Similarly, Frappier points to the downward turn of the wheel as indicating that Arthur “doit compren-

55 Frappier, Étude, 281.

56 Here I modify Lacy’s translation. He substitutes the “il” at the beginning of the sentence with “Lancelot.” However, after the pope imposes a truce on Arthur and Lancelot, Gawain, not Arthur, renews the hostilities. The king’s passivity in this renewal suggests that he is again uncertain whether Lancelot has wronged him.

dre que l’écroulement de sa puissance est conforme à une loi universelle” [must understand that the collapse of his power conforms to a universal law], because even the most powerful undergo an inevitable decline.58 In other words, whatever measure of choice may have been available previously, none can now remain for the king. Alternatively, Hult proposes that we understand Arthur’s dreams as the product of his anxiety on the eve of battle with Mordred rather than as a sign of an inevitable future sent to the king by a God or goddess. In his visions, Arthur contemplates:

les deux possibilités d’action qui se présentent à lui: la révision de sa stratégie, qui consiste en l’appel au secours de Lancelot; ou la continuation sur le chemin du désastre. Gauvain, en voix de la liberté d’action, articule la première option, mais la maîtresse même du destin . . . révise cette option en lui montrant de manière concrète que cette possibilité n’en est pas une.59

[the two possibilities of action that present themselves to him: the rethinking of his strategy that consists of the appeal for Lancelot’s help, or of continuing on the path to disaster. Gawain, as the voice of liberty of action, articulates the first option, but the very mistress of destiny . . . . revises that option by showing him in a concrete manner that this possibility is not one at all].

Hult’s contention about the source of Arthur’s visions makes perfect sense. It is doubtful that an author who has thus far avoided supernatural interventions would introduce one so late in his narrative.

One may, nonetheless, take exception to Hult’s interpretation of the dreams’ contents because it is far from clear that the visions of Gawain and Lady Fortune represent different voices. On the contrary, both figures seem to present the same message of choice. Although in general the wheel evokes an unavoidable downward trajectory as good luck turns to bad, in this particular manifestation, the author hints at something other than the wheel’s traditional course. Lady Fortune whisks Arthur from the earth and “illuec l’asseoit seur une

58 Frappier, Étude, 281.
roe. En cele roe avoit sieges dont li un montoient et li autre avaloi-
ent; li rois regardoit en quel leu de la roe il estoit assis et voit que ses
sieges estoit li plus hauz” (226) [there she set him upon the wheel.
The wheel had seats, some of which rose and others sank. The king
saw that his seat was in the highest position, 7:117]. The description
tells us that the wheel moves but not necessarily that it does so when
Arthur sits on it. Eliding the mechanical turn, Lady Fortune drops
Arthur in the highest spot. She then tells him: “tel sont li orgueil
terrien qu’il n’i a nul si haut assiz qu’il le coviengne cheoir de la po-
esté del monde” (227). [such are the effects of earthly pride that no
one is so highly placed that he can avoid falling from earthly power,
7:117]. If this warning were followed by the descent of Arthur’s seat
on the wheel, it would seem a premonition of doom indicating that
as an aging monarch he must unavoidably lose his grip on power, so
Gawain’s counsel can avail him nothing. But instead Lady Fortune
“le prenoit et le trebuschoit a terre si felenessemnt que au cheoir
estoit avis au roi Artu qu’il estoit touz debrisiez” (227) [took him
and dashed him to earth so cruelly that it seemed to King Arthur
that he was crushed, 7:117]. The lady removes him from the wheel
as brusquely as she placed him on it, a violent gesture suggesting
a pointed reproach, an indictment of something other than the sum
total of Arthur’s achievements.

Perhaps in this instance “li orgueil terrien” [earthly pride]
represents Arthur’s refusal to heed Gawain’s advice. Fortune intim-
ates that his unwillingness to call on Lancelot for help will bring
his downfall. The archbishop’s words, which Hult omits, certainly
support this reading. When Arthur asks the prelate to interpret these
visions for him, the wise man essentially repeats the late Gawain’s
warning “Ha! sire, por sauveté de vostre ame et de vostre cors et
del reigne, tornez arriers a Douvre, et toute vostre gent, et mandez
a Lancelot qu’il vos viengne secorre . . . . Car se vos assemblez a
Mordret” (227) [Oh, sir, for the salvation of your soul and body and
kingdom, turn back to Dover with all your army, and ask Lancelot
to come to your aid . . . . For if you attack Mordred, 7:117] disaster
will result.
Later, Arthur and the archbishop come across Merlin’s inscription predicting the battle of Salisbury Plain and Arthur’s death. That the prediction is etched in stone contributes to the impression that, as Lacy puts it, the end is “pre-ordained.” Even Hult ascribes to this idea, and not simply as a function of “romanesque destiny.” However, we cannot assume that the author has such an aim—a desire for the reader to understand Merlin’s knowledge of the future as ordaining the foreseen event.

Christian thought had long held that God’s foreknowledge of an outcome does not impose the result on those involved in the event. Such is the position Augustine maintains, for example, in On Free Choice of the Will (3.4.9.39). Boethius presents a more a limpid explanation of the question while separating the notion of foreknowledge from the divine. In The Consolation of Philosophy, Philosophy asks her interlocutor: “why then do you imagine that things are necessary which are illuminated by this divine light, since even men do not impose necessity on the things they see? Does your vision impose any necessity on the things which you see present before you?” (book 5, prose 6). In the romance, the archbishop’s reading of the inscription conforms to this understanding of pre-science. Once again, the king asks for an interpretation, a request

60 Lacy, “The Mort Artu and Cyclical Closure,” 94.

61 Hult, “Esquisses,” refers to the “caractère inexorable du destin, dicté . . . par les signes et prophéties inscrits dans le texte ” [inexorable character of destiny, dictated . . . by the signs and prophecies inscribed in the text], 39.

62 The character in the romance Merlin performs a different function. Composed after the Queste and the Mort Artu, the Merlin serves as preface to those romances in the Vulgate Cycle but presents an unorthodox notion of causality. As Sunderland, Old French Narrative Cycles, explains of the eponymous hero in the Merlin: “his job is to make sure that things happen as they are supposed to. The future is thus for Merlin both absolutely predetermined and contingent at the same time. Paradoxically, he has to ensure that events do occur precisely as they inevitably will occur,” 77.

63 Lombard, The Sentences Book I, attributes to Origen (ca. 185-232) the understanding of God’s foreknowledge not impinging on free will, citing the theologian’s On the Epistle to the Romans, 214-15. Matthews, Augustine, while designating Saint Augustine as the pre-eminent authority on the subject, indicates that Boethius “seems to have been the first philosopher to mark this modal distinction clearly,” that between an event occurring because God’s foreknowledge requires it to occur and God’s foreknowledge conforming to an occurrence. Matthews also indicates that Saint Anselm “makes completely clear that he understands the Boethian distinction” in De Concordia, 102-03.

64 Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, 91.
that in itself suggests the prediction is not as straightforward as it might appear. Whereas the prelate says: “vos i morroiz ou vos se-roiz navrez a mort; autrement n’en poez partir” [you will die or be mortally wounded there; you cannot escape that], he prefaces this certainty with a condition “se vos assemblez a Mordret” (228) [if you attack Mordred, 7:118]. In other words, Arthur has a choice. Provided that he calls on Lancelot for help, he may survive. If, and only if, the king fails to exercise the discretion available to him is he sure to perish at Salisbury Plain.65

Evidently, given the narrative’s end, the characters in this romance chose poorly, and those poor choices represent a degree of moral failure on the part of the decision makers. Yet the binary nature of the decisions—attack Mordred with Lancelot’s help or without—hardly signals that Arthur and the knights of the Round Table fall among the reprobate, such as Eugène Vinaver, Micha, and others suggest.66 They see the destruction of the Arthurian world as

65 Lacy, “The Mort Artu and Cyclical Closure,” himself asserts that “portents” and “dreams . . . are themselves entirely reliable and unambiguous in the Mort Artu,” 93. Yet at the same time, he does not accept the choices these prophetic voices offer as meaningful. In fact, he does not acknowledge their presence in the text. For example, despite the archbishop’s role in interpreting Arthur’s dreams and the inscription, Lacy claims that “in the Mort Artu, pronouncements that anticipate the future do not require interpretation,” 94.

66 Vinaver, The Rise of Romance, 89; Micha, Essais, 205. Adolf, “The Concept of Original Sin,” 21-29, attributes the end of the kingdom to Arthur’s incestuous union with his half-sister. Dubost, “Les dénouements dans La Mort le Roi Artu,” 85-111, writes in reference to Arthur’s accidental killing of Lucan: “n’est-ce pas une manière de signifier qu’en ce moment ultime le Ciel reste sourd et que la Providence se détoure du roi?” [isn’t this a manner of signifying that at this final moment Heaven turns a deaf ear and that Providence abandons the king?], 99. Zuurdeeg, Narrative Techniques, sees the climatic battle as evidence that “God has washed His hands of the fellowship of the Round Table,” 75. MacRae, “Appearances and Reality,” in the single instance where he sees a moral cast to the King Arthur’s predicament, interprets the message from the visions involving Gawain and Fortune thus: “overcome foolish, earthly pride and salvation will be guaranteed” and the reaction to it as “But Arthur does not,” 276. Failure to call on Lancelot will lead to ruin for the kingdom, but nothing in the romance hints that Arthur will be denied salvation for losing a battle. Sunderland, Old French Narrative Cycles, finds the cause at an earlier stage than other scholars: “God’s servant . . . . Galahad causes the destruction of the Arthurian world by rejecting all its moral coordinates and ripping to pieces the ideals that sustain it. The Queste thus reveals the holy will is not the highest good . . . . but a mask for evil.” 76. Black, “Violence in La Queste del Saint Graal and La Mort le roi Artu (Yale 229),” adopts a nuanced position on the question of divine retribution. Whereas she sees an “apocalyptic tone” in the romance, it “is tempered by an accompanying elegiac sense of regret for the loss of so many noble men and women” such that “the reader cannot take satisfaction from the destruction,” 162.
an indication that divine wrath or abandonment tears the kingdom asunder. But in this romance cycle, suboptimal choices do not lead inexorably to eternal hell fire.

Here again, a turn to the preceding romance proves instructive. Before the Grail leaves Logres, Josephus explains to the successful questers that the inhabitants of the kingdom “se sont torné a peor vie et a seculier, ja soit ore ce qu’il aient adés esté repeu de la grace de cest saint Vessel. Et por ce qu’il li ont si malement guerredoné les desvest ge de l’anor que je lor avoie fete” (271) [have turned to a dismal, worldly life, despite having once been nourished by the grace of this Holy Vessel. Because they have so poorly repaid the favor, I divest them of the honor I confirmed upon them, 6:165-66]. One could mistake this revocation of privilege with punishment, if not for a scene that precedes it. There Galahad and Perceval return to the castle where the previous day Perceval’s sister was exsanguinated in order to cure the leprous woman. The knights find all of the inhabitants struck dead by divine fury because an innocent was sacrificed for the benefit of an irredeemably wicked soul. The characters on which the Mort Artu focuses our attention turn to the “worldly life,” though not to the exclusion of all virtue. For instance, the successful quester, Bors returns in this romance to the role he plays in the Lancelot Proper, an intermediary between his cousin and the queen. Beloved by the common people for her generosity, Guenevere resists leaving Lancelot’s company when the Pope requires that Arthur welcome her back into his household. Before the battle of Salisbury Plain, she attempts to join a religious order but as an expedient rather than out of conviction. Lancelot displays great virtue in championing the queen during the first duel despite doubts about her innocence, in refusing to harm Arthur in battle, and in offering to exile himself rather than fight Gawain. Nonetheless, he finds himself in all of these situations because of his adulterous passion. These heroes are more human than Galahad, and thus fallible. As a result, they end up fighting each other, exposing themselves to the one moral analogue of the leprous woman in the Mort Artu, Mordred.
Because Hult overestimates the coercive weight of the supernatural in the *Queste*, he rejects any moral connection between that romance and the *Mort Artu*. In his words, “le sens moral de la *Queste* n’a vraiment aucune pertinence pour une interprétation de la *Mort Artur*” [the moral sense of the *Queste* has not the slightest relevance for an interpretation of the *Mort Artur*]. Frappier, however, takes a more measured approach in seeking to distinguish the religious complexion of this romance from that of its predecessor. He remarks on the rarity with which the characters confess their sins, how none takes communion, how secular clergy supplant the regular, and how this latter group, the *Mort Artu*’s bishops and archbishops “se contentent d’exercer le culte sans prétendre jouer le rôle de chefs spirituels” [content themselves with performing services without assuming the role of spiritual leaders]. Moreover, Frappier notes that the romance’s author “ne fait nulle part la moindre allusion au culte de la Vierge; il ne la nomme jamais; ce silence surprenant, mais absolu, suffirait à prouver qu’il ne s’inquiète pas de se conformer à la religion de La *Queste*” [no where makes the slightest allusion to the cult of the Virgin; he never names her; this surprising and absolute silence would suffice to prove that he does not concern himself with conforming to the religion of the *Queste*]. In a sense, Frappier makes a valid assertion. The cast of characters and their religious fervor differ from those of the previous romance.

But that difference should come as no surprise when one takes account of the *Mort Artu*’s narrative purpose. The author tells the story of the Arthurian world’s destruction. To populate that story with same white-robed monks urging righteous behavior, a pious Bors, and a penitent Lancelot would produce a confusing moral picture, one antithetical to the spirit that animates the *Queste*. The rarities and the silence to which Frappier refers suggest an author eager

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67 Hult, “Esquisses,” 60.
68 Frappier, *Étude*, 222.
69 Frappier, *Étude*, 223.
to harmonize the spirit of his romance with that of a much different narrative. The worldliness the romancer puts on display in the *Mort Artu* testifies to the moral drift of the characters rather than to his own secular leanings.

If this harmony of spirit escapes notice through much of the romance, as the *Mort Artu* reaches its very end, the author’s desire to frame his work as the sequel to the *Queste* again becomes apparent. Lancelot becomes a hermit, joining his cousin Blioberis and the archbishop of Canterbury, both “vestuz de robes blanches” (258) [dressed in white robes, 7:134]. Four years later when Lancelot, the priest, passes away, the archbishop dreams of angels escorting the hero’s soul to heaven. The vision assures the reader that the former sinner finds salvation, an outcome no critic attributes to forces beyond Lancelot’s control.70 One might argue, as Pratt does, that what occurs subsequent to the demise of the Arthurian world need not cohere to what brings about that end. She asserts that free will operates only in the aftermath of the final battle.71 However, the narrative suggests that, before Camelot has drawn its last breath, Lancelot’s closest companions also find heavenly peace. On the eve of battle with Mordred, Arthur dreams that the poor have “conquestee la meson Dieu” (225) [won the house of God, 7:116] for his nephew. Of Guenevere we learn that “onques haute dame plus bele fin n’ot ne plus bele repentance . . . qu’ele ne fist” (254) [never had a lady met a finer death or repented more nobly . . . than had she, 7:131]. A holy man assures Girflet that Arthur does indeed lie in the tomb that bears his name in the Black Chapel, a resting place on sanctified ground (251) [7:129].

70 According to Frappier, *Étude*, even before the hermitage episode, Lancelot “se dégage de la fatalité” [extricates himself from fatality] (267), whereas other characters lack that capacity “Mordret, Gauvain, Artus doivent rester, eux, sur la route de la fatalité” [Mordred, Gawain, Arthur must remain on the path toward fatality] (275).

71 See note 4.
These reassurances prove troubling for a number of scholarly interpretations of the romance, most of all for the notion of God smiting the kingdom in anger. Although Pratt accepts that Lancelot, Guenevere, and Gawain win their final repose, she refuses to recognize the suggestion of Arthur’s salvation as it would undermine her reading of the king as a tragic hero. Hult acknowledges all of these references to the afterlife, but seeks to diminish their importance citing the oblique manner in which the text delivers them: “on peut bien se demander pourquoi le narrateur ne voulait pas prendre à son propre compte ces événements surnaturels” [one may wonder why the narrator did not want to assume responsibility for these supernatural events]?74 The query is wrongheaded, particularly given Hult’s recognition that the author eschews supernatural interventions elsewhere his narrative. There is no reason at this moment for the author to abandon the lighter touch he gives to moral questions than the author of the Queste. To Hult’s thinking, for the characters in the Mort Artu to have free choice requires there be no divine element in the narrative, not even an understood presence: “le narrateur fait tout ce qu’il peut pour ne pas affirmer une force du destin extérieure et supérieure aux volontés et aux décisions des hommes” [the narrator does all that he can in order not to affirm a force of destiny exterior and superior to the wills and decisions of men].75 Whereas the narrator manifestly avoids indicating any divine manipulation of behavior, the words “superior to” extend Hult’s claim well beyond that measure. In essence, Hult would have us believe the thirteenth-century author, like Pelagius, sees grace as irrelevant to salvation.

72 Micha, Essais, acknowledges this gesture on the author’s part despite his contention about divine anger, 205. Laurent, “Le problème de la liberté,” comes to a similar conclusion: “il est implicitement souligné que ce sont les héros qui ont trahi la confiance; Dieu va donc les abandonner, comme déçu dans ses espérances” [it is implicitly underscored that it is the heroes who have broken faith; God will therefore abandon them, as if disappointed in his expectations], 22-23. Pensom, “Les Avatars de la justice divine,” acknowledges that the romance’s coda does not fit with his interpretation of the text, 25.

73 Pratt, “La Mort le Roi Artu as Tragedy,” 108.

74 Hult, “Esquisses,” 55.

75 Hult, “Esquisses,” 58.
On the other hand, Frappier, who assumes Arthur and Gawain lack free choice, attributes their happy ends to grace alone. However, we know that neither Hult’s nor Frappier’s understanding of grace conforms to Church doctrine in thirteenth-century Western Europe. Augustine’s insistence that grace and free choice work together became dogma, a position the later writings of Saint Anselm, Peter Lombard, and Bernard of Clairvaux make plain. If our thirteenth-century author wished to evoke a universe in which mortals were not responsible for their behavior, it seems unlikely that he would draw attention, however indirectly, to the question of salvation. If he wished to suggest that grace serves no prevenient function, it is doubtful he would encourage readers to think of the *Queste*—where grace figures so prominently—at the beginning and at the end of his own romance. Intimations of heavenly peace certainly have no precedent in the earlier versions of the kingdom’s collapse, those Hult characterizes as imposing a “romanesque destiny” on the *Mort Artu*. Both Geoffrey and Wace tell of Gawain’s death and burial, but without indicating where his body lies or offering any other hint of his soul’s destination. Their narratives preclude the question of salvation for Arthur by suggesting that, despite his mortal wound, he may return to rule Britain once more. Given the allusions to the *Queste* at the end of the *Mort Artu* and the suggestions of eternal life for the heroes, it stands to reason that the author wished to underscore an orthodox notion of free will and grace in the fictional world he vivifies. We know for certain that he presents us with a more disorderly world than the one we find in the *Queste* where holy men and adventure oblige questing knights to opt between vice and virtue. There the supernatural controls the journey in a way that leaves no room for accident that might distract from the moral decisions the questers contemplate.

In the *Mort Artu*, by contrast, the survivors of the quest lack such guidance, and *mescheance* assumes the meaning of accident. From early on the narrative emphasizes hazard with the deaths of non-combatants at Winchester. Lancelot’s injuries also underscore fortuity and the other element essential to free will—choice. When Lancelot’s first wound reopens, he listens to reason and recovers, whereas when he refuses to heed his cousin’s advice, he pays a price for his rashness. One may characterize these events as “a chain of causes and effects,” but they evoke a world where choice brings consequence rather than one where human will amounts to an illusion. Adulterous love, plays a destructive role in this romance, yet that passion hardly deprives Lancelot of all restraint. He controls his impulses in front of the king and attempts to avoid detection from other eyes. Moreover, to keep the peace, Lancelot and Guenevere accept a physical separation. After this act of self-denial, attention turns to Arthur and Gawain who assert that circumstances compel them to act as they do, but more authoritative voices contest these claims. Even Arthur’s dream featuring Lady Fortune becomes, in the archbishop’s interpretation, a warning of danger rather than a prediction of the inevitable. This concentration on choices and *mescheance* conjures a realm where characters have a say in determining their own fate. In the romance’s final folios, the author presents assurances that the souls of his heroes find paradise, personal codas not manifest in the previous iterations of Arthur’s disastrous end. Salvation for these representatives of the kingdom of Logres, despite their shortcomings, intimates not only that they enjoy God’s grace but also that they merit their final repose. Such a conclusion makes perfect sense in a romance that casts itself as a sequel to the *Queste*, a narrative function that Lancelot’s retreat from the world reinforces. The author wishes us to see the Arthurian world as collapsing from within rather than being crushed from without by God’s wrath or by another supernatural force. He would have us understand that this society suffers not from wickedness or irrationality but from the slow decay of moral weakness.
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*King Arthur fighting the Saxons.*

*From The Rochefoucauld Grail, 14th Century*
The Intersection of Music Philosophy, Performance and Genre
in the Middle English Breton Lay Sir Orfeo

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The Middle English romance Sir Orfeo is a dynamic and creative retelling of the classical Orpheus myth in which the wife of the English king, Orfeo, is abducted by fairies but eventually restored to her position and husband through Orfeo’s musical prowess. While any retelling of the Orpheus myth would necessarily contain references to music and would, therefore, likely use music as an important cue within the text, the poet of Sir Orfeo displays a sophisticated understanding of musical philosophy, composition and performance, as well as the Breton lay genre. The intersection of these elements all work together not only to create the impression of an actual performance within a written text, but also to emphasize the nature of music as a representation of cosmic harmony. By weaving music throughout the narrative, the poet reminds the reader that even in Orfeo’s most desperate moments there is order and harmony in the universe, an implied foreshadowing of the happy ending, itself wrought through the power of music.

The classical myth of Orpheus was a popular source for writers in the Middle Ages. The versions of both Virgil and Ovid were known to medieval readers, as well as Boethius’s retelling of the tale at the end of Book III of the Consolatio Philosophiae. In England, Alfred the Great’s translation of Boethius also became a widely known source of the Orpheus myth. As with most stories inherited from the classical tradition, medieval writers adapted and transformed

1 Virgil’s version of the myth is in Georgics, Book IV. The most comprehensive classical version of the Orpheus myth is contained in Books X and XI of Ovid’s Metamorphoses, which tells of Orpheus’s adventures as an Argonaut, the death of his wife Eurydice, his unsuccessful trip to the Underworld to recover her and his eventual death at the hands of the Maenads. Kelly, Love and Marriage, 91-92, asserts that Orpheus’s death finally reunites the lovers as he is not metamorphosed.

2 Boethius uses the myth to emphasize the moral that one should not look back, but always forward.

3 Alfred, King Alfred’s Version of the Consolation of Boethius. Alfred refashions his Orpheus as a medieval nobleman and expands on Boethius’s moral to exhort his readers to turn away from their former sin lest temptation lure them back into iniquity.
the Orpheus narrative to suit their needs. In the Middle English romance *Sir Orfeo*, the Greek musician becomes an English king whose wife, Heurodis, is kidnapped by a Fairy King and spirited away to the fairy world. Eventually Orfeo, now a dispossessed wild man of the forest, uses his music to make his way into the fairy realm where he successfully recovers his love. They both return to the human world and Orfeo regains his throne.

John Block Friedman declares *Sir Orfeo* the most sophisticated retelling of the Orpheus myth up to the fourteenth century due to its reliance on the author’s imagination instead of slavish dedication to the sources. An important aspect of that imagination is the artistic integration of music in a variety of forms. Scholars have long noted the intimate connection between music and this text. Erik Kooper uses this aspect of *Sir Orfeo* to illuminate its representa-

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4 See Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, for a comprehensive overview of the history of the medieval Orpheus.

5 *Sir Orfeo* is contained in three manuscripts: National Library of Scotland MS Advocates’ 19.2.1 (the Auchinleck Manuscript), British Library MS Harley 3810, and Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61. For a parallel edition of all three poems see Bliss, *Sir Orfeo*. The Auchinleck is the earliest, dating from the 1330s, and is considered the most accurate surviving form of the poem, Bliss, *Introduction to Sir Orfeo*, ix-xvii.

6 This version, considered by many critics to be an exemplary romance, has been examined in many ways. Some areas of scholarship are listed here. For information on the Celtic origins of *Sir Orfeo* see Severs, “The Antecedents of Sir Orfeo,” 187-207; Roger Sherman Loomis, “Sir Orfeo and Walter Map’s *De Nugis*,” 28-30; and Davies, “Sir Orfeo and De Nugis,” 94. Some critics, such as Baldwin, “Fairy Lore and the Meaning of *Sir Orfeo*,” 129-42, and Mitchell, “The Faery World of *Sir Orfeo*,” 155-159, have focused on the fairy aspects of the poem. Others have looked at *Sir Orfeo* as a Christian allegory in which *impe-tre* is interpreted as the Tree of Knowledge from the Garden of Eden and the Fairy King as Satan; Orfeo then becomes Christ performing the Harrowing of Hell. On these Christian aspects see Grimaldi, “Sir Orfeo” 147-161, for the combination of the Celtic and the Christian. See also Friedman, “Eurydice, Heurodis, and the Noon Day Demon,” 22-29, who examines *Sir Orfeo’s* connection to the Genesis story. See also Knapp, “The Meaning of *Sir Orfeo*,” 263-273; and Masi, “The Christian Music of *Sir Orfeo*,” 3-20. Psychological interpretations include a general perspective in Veldhoen, “Psychology and the Middle English Romances,” 101-28. For a Jungian representation of the anima and the shadow see O’Brien, “The Shadow and the Anima,” 235-54; and Martin, “Sir Orfeo’s Representation as Returns to the Repressed,” 29-46; as well as Mumford, “A Jungian Reading,” 291-302. For *Sir Orfeo* as a possible representation of insanity see Cartlidge, “Sir Orfeo in the Otherworld,” 195-226.

7 Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, 178.
tion of medieval political ideology. E. C. Ronquist notes how the use of music helps to elevate the narrative, making its events more plausible to its audience. Along with Kooper, D. L. Jeffrey examines the symbolic importance of Orfeo’s instrument. Closer to the purposes of this study, Robert M. Longsworth and Roy Michael Liuzza have discussed the performance aspects embedded within the text and their effect upon the narrative. Although any retelling of the Orpheus myth would necessarily contain references to music and would, therefore, likely use music as an important cue within the text, the poet of Sir Orfeo displays a sophisticated understanding of various musical elements including philosophy, performance and composition that he skillfully utilizes within the form of the Breton lay, a genre also grounded in music. The unique intersection of these elements within a single work functions not only to create the impression of an actual performance within a written text, but also to emphasize the philosophical nature of music as a representation of cosmic harmony, thus foreshadowing the happy ending.

In order to investigate the various layers of music in Sir Orfeo, some discussion of medieval attitudes and beliefs regarding music is first necessary. In the Middle Ages, music was considered a branch of mathematics, part of the standard education based on the trivium and the quadrivium. In De institutione arithmetica, Boethius asserts that the study of mathematics, grounded as it is in factual knowledge, serves to lead the scholar away from sense perception in preparation for philosophical study, seemingly an odd proposal for a musician, but one consistent with Boethius’s beliefs regarding music. His treatise, De institutione musica, (The Fundamentals

10 Jeffrey, “The Exiled King,” 45-60.
11 Longsworth, “Sir Orfeo, the Minstrel, and the Minstrel’s Art,”1-11.
13 Boethius, De institutione arithmetica, 7-12.
of Music) was the authoritative text on musical theory from the time of its composition in the fourth century until well into the Renaissance. While much of the text explicates complicated ratios and terminology, the underlying purpose is philosophical in nature. According to Boethius, the study of mathematics is the search for absolute truth. Music is unique in that, unlike the other branches, it penetrates to the soul; therefore, the study of music and music theory is the search for the indisputable truth of the soul. Boethius’s most enduring contribution to the study of music is the connection of technical ratios to such philosophical principles, which, according to Henry Chadwick, makes the second chapter of Book I Boethius’s most influential passage outside the Consolatio Philosophiae.

Boethius’s ideas were grounded in his belief in three types of music based upon the concept of the music of the spheres. The highest form is musica mundana, the music of the cosmos, in which the universe is arranged in a series of fixed modulations and perfect ratios that are in the same proportions as musical harmonies. Boethius’s next level of music is musica humana, human music, the harmony that exists in the balance and symmetry of the body and between body and soul whose joinings are accomplished by the exact same ratios and modulations that hold the cosmos together.

14 This work is available in one modern translation, Boethius, Fundamentals of Music.

15 Boethius, De institutione musica, 184-6. In this section of his treatise, Boethius draws examples from the everyday to prove the connection between music and soul. Male and female, young and old, people from different stations in life, all enjoy music. Furthermore, music has the power to express and excite human emotions.

16 Chadwick, Boethius: The Consolations, 81

17 This system of classification was highly influential in music theory throughout the Middle Ages.

18 Although there was some argument among philosophers regarding the concept of heavenly music, Boethius believed quite deeply in it and based many of his principles upon its existence. See Bukofzer, “Speculative Thinking in Mediaeval Music,” 165-180, for a nice summary of the two sides of the musica mundana debate and its influence on medieval music (165-66). Bukofzer discusses ways in which the influence of Christianity changed the debate and elevated music to a means of spiritual salvation.

19 Boethius, De institutione musica, 185-6.
“Tota nostrae animae corporisque compago musica coaptatione coniuncta sit” (The whole structure of our soul and body has been joined together by means of musical attachment). Boethius’s third category is *musica instrumentalis*, instrumental music, which also includes the human voice. Although this is the lowest form, it reflects the more divine types in that pleasing harmonies employ the same ratios as the cosmos and the joining of body and soul. For this reason, music has great power over people.

Because of music’s connection to the divine, Boethius’s ultimate goal in his discussion of music theory is not the composition of pleasing songs, but an explication of truth that leads the music theorist away from the wavering judgment of sense perception to a method of discernment based upon divine ratios. For Boethius, music should be judged according to these principles, not according to how it sounds to the individual. Citing Plato, Boethius asserts that music that does not utilize the appropriate musical proportions, especially ones that are rough, uncivilized or lascivious, can induce a degeneration of morality and the downfall of the republic. Boethius admits that a song might sound good to the ear without the proper ratios, but for him, it would not change the fact that such music is a corruption of divine forms. For these reasons, Boethius exhorts students to study and understand the mathematical principles and ratios that constitute music theory:

Sicut enim in visu quoque non sufficit eruditis colores formasque conspicer, nisi etiam quae sit horum proprietas investigaverint, sic non sufficit cantilenis musicis delectari, nisi etiam quali inter se coniunctae sint vocum proportione discatur.

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20 Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 186.
21 Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 186.
22 Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 187.
23 Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 195-96.
24 Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 181.
25 Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 187. Boethius admits that the sense of hearing has a role in musical judgment, but he also asserts that, due to the inconsistent nature of personal preferences, reason is the truest method of discernment.
(Indeed, just as in seeing it is not sufficient for the learned to discern colors and figures unless they have also investigated their special qualities, so it is not sufficient for musicians to take pleasure in songs unless also acquiring knowledge of how they are joined together by means of the proper relation of tones.)

Such understanding allows the student of music theory to reach further within to understand the nature and order of the soul and of the cosmos. This is the crux for Boethius. It is not a method of creating pleasing entertainment, but a method of judging artistic works based upon a deeper philosophical purpose, one in which the music underscores the harmony of the soul and the universe. For this reason Boethius prioritizes the theorist over the performer and composer.

Boethius’s beliefs were highly influential. In explicating music as an art grounded in mathematical and divine principles and not in the fleeting aspects of performance, Boethius secured it a place in the medieval curriculum not given to the other arts. Even as music and the study of music evolved, at times rendering the technical aspects of *De institutione musica* outdated, the philosophical principles of Boethius continued to hold a strong influence well into the Renaissance. Boethius’s ideas were disseminated through formal education in mathematics and philosophy, as well as through less academic instruction for composers and performers who would have been exposed to Boethian music philosophy, if not his technical explications of music theory. We know nothing of the poet


27 Works of music theory and performance, as well as works of philosophy continued to reference Boethius’s triad, sometimes modified according to purpose and audience, whether intended for the writer or the performer of music or for the philosopher who required a theoretical knowledge of Boethian principles. See Seay, *Music in the Medieval World*, 22-3. *De Institutione Musica* became the foundation of music and according to Seay, “It is always clear that the essential framework is Boethian and that it is his doctrines that have determined the attitude,” *Music in the Medieval World*, 20. As music evolved, Boethius continued to remain relevant. Atkinson, “Some Thoughts on Music Pedagogy” 37-51, demonstrates Boethius’s relevance in his examination of ninth-century library catalogues. Additionally, Boethius’s “venerated status” is confirmed in his being the most cited music theorist of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Williams and Balensuela, *Music Theory from Boethius to Zarlino*, 25-6. They list at least forty-six subsequent music theorists who were strongly influenced by *De Institutione Musica* including Guido of Arezzo (c. 991-after1033) who is credited with the development of the musical staff, Roger Bacon (1214-1292), Johannes de Muris (c. 1290-after 1344) whose *Musica Speculativa Secundum Boetium*, which comments on select passages of *De Institutione Musica*, was used as a textbook in Paris and Oxford, and the humanist and leading Italian musician of the Renaissance Gioseffo Zarlino (1517-1590).
who composed *Sir Orfeo* or of the poem before its appearance in the Auchinleck Manuscript, probably compiled in London in the 1330s, but the text of *Sir Orfeo* argues for a poet who received education in these concepts and in composition and performance.

Although utilizing a written medium, the poet of *Sir Orfeo* represents music within the narrative in specific ways that replicate its aural nature, thereby imbuing the text with a musical quality that emphasizes a belief in the ordering aspects of harmony in the universe. He draws upon it as a form of characterization and plot device, embeds performance cues within climatic scenes and references the oral tradition of the written genre, the Breton lay. The intersection of these many aspects of musical forms in one text is unique, even in the corpus of the musically-based genre of the Breton lay. Because *Sir Orfeo* is in a written form and not an oral form, by embedding Boethian philosophy within the musical motif and by using textual cues and forms related to music, the poet keeps the harmonic and ordering aspects of harmony prominent in the mind of the reader, not only foreshadowing the eventual resolution of the tale, but making it a necessary alteration.

The most obvious use of music in *Sir Orfeo* is as a key component in the characterization of Orfeo and as a specific element of his journey to recover his wife and kingdom, setting the multi-layered importance of music to the text. Particular plot points illustrate this importance. At the beginning of the lay, Orfeo and his kingdom exist in a state of harmony, which is intimately connected to Orfeo’s


29 Commonly accepted texts of this genre include: *Sir Orfeo, Degaré, Sir Gowther, Emare, The Erle of Tolous, Lay le Freine, Sir Launfal*, and Chaucer’s *The Franklin’s Tale*. As discussed below, however, the Breton lay can be a difficult genre to define and the inclusion of some of these texts is uncertain. See Note 67.

30 The present discussion is based solely upon an analysis of the text as a written form. Fletcher, *The Presence of Medieval English Literature*, discusses *Sir Orfeo* in terms of medieval discourses and examines the political and social purposes of an actual performance event of this text. While I do not dismiss the possibility of a public or private reading of *Sir Orfeo* to an audience large or small, such readings would not be conducted as a musical performance, *per se*.
use of music. The narrative opens in Winchester, the capital of Orfeo’s kingdom, and he is introduced as a lover of music who himself is the greatest of harpers.31 The poet’s description of the king displays the role of music in Orfeo’s just rule:

In the world was never man born
That, onus Orpheo sat byforn
And he myght of his harpying her,
He shulde think that he wer
In one of the joys of Paradys
Suche joy and melody in his harping is.32 (33-39)

Orfeo’s music mirrors the melodies of “Paradys,” affirming the connection between heavenly and earthly harmony that, according to Boethian principles, helps to preserve peace and concord among Orfeo’s subjects and within society. This harmony extends to his marriage; Heurodis’s impassioned pleas after the visitation of the Fairy King exhibit their unity and closeness. When, after his wife’s capture by the Fairy King, Orfeo feels compelled to leave Winchester with only his harp, the outcry against his departure resounds in court and town emphasizing both a universal love for Orfeo and a need for the stability he creates. It is notable that the most obvious skill the poet attributes to Orfeo is his musical abilities. While his actions later in the poet display his quick wit and political astuteness, the poem highlights Orfeo’s musical abilities as if they are the main source of his kingly authority. Although the poem quickly moves into a state of disintegration, the opening supplies enough information to depict a connection between Orfeo’s role as a harper king and the harmony of his world. As Alan J. Fletcher articulates, “Harping performs social normality for Orfeo, Heurodis, and their kingdom”33

31 The harp has a kingly tradition and is most notably associated with Apollo and King David. Fletcher, The Presence of Medieval English Literature, 80-81, discusses the high status of harpers in fourteenth-century England.

32 Sir Orfeo quotations are taken from Sir Orfeo, in Middle English Romances, ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd, 174-190.

33 Fletcher, The Presence of Medieval English Literature, 79.
an assertion that is born out in the resolution of the narrative, later accomplished through Orfeo’s music.

This characterization situates Orfeo within Boethius’s three categories of musician: performer, composer and theorist. The text states explicitly that Orfeo is an exemplary performer and his speech near the conclusion, to be discussed below, shows his skill as a composer. The theorist, however, is the highest category as the theorist relies upon cold reason, not the sense of hearing. While there are no direct statements of Orfeo as a music theorist, his ability to propel his listener into the ‘joys of Paradys” displays Orfeo’s understanding of divine harmonics. In addition, the resolution of his tale through his skill in music argues for his reliance upon the ordering aspects of harmonic ratios.

In the middle section of the poem, the poet creates a disintegration of Orfeo into a wild man of the forest while continuing to use music as an important plot point and aspect of characterization. Orfeo’s ten-year, self-imposed withdrawal into the wilderness emphasizes the loss of his wife and is illustrated by his collapse into the wild man condition as articulated by Richard Bernheimer. As a man brought low due to extraordinary circumstances, a wild man will lose some of his humanity, but these deficiencies are replaced by powers that other humans do not possess.

34 Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 224-25. Boethius asserts that harmonics, the faculty that distinguishes between high and low tones, is a mental function that employs reason in order to make sense of the jumbled sounds received aurally, 352-53.

35 Sir Orfeo’s retreat into the wilderness at this point is an expansion of a short addition in Alfred the Great’s version of the story. The poet accounts for this expansion by Orfeo’s desire to escape the company of women: “For now Ic have mi Quen y-lore, / The fairest levedi that ever was bore, / Never eft I nil no woman se” (209-11).

36 Other wild men of medieval romance include Lancelot, Tristan and Ywaine.

37 In *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* Bernheimer describes the wild man as a hairy combination of human and animal traits, but most definitely a human reduced to this state by “outrageous hardships” and certainly not an ape or some separate species. A wild man will live alone on nuts, berries, sometimes raw meat, sleep in wild places and become very hairy.” 1-8.

For Orfeo, the poet intertwines the wild man and the musician, heightening Orfeo’s already remarkable skills. Not only is music Orfeo’s only source of comfort: “his harp, whereon was al his gle” (267), a common aspect of wild man stories, it also impacts his interactions with the forest wildlife, since, when he plays, the animals gather about his hollow tree. Although a common aspect of the Orpheus myth, this particular power does not manifest itself in Sir Orfeo until he has spent many years as a wild man in the wilderness. This state, therefore, heightens Orfeo’s musical abilities and creates a bridge between worlds, highlighting the nature of the forest as a mysterious borderland between realms. The details regarding the animals mark Orfeo’s transcendence beyond the human state. In his newly heightened condition, Orfeo sees what he could not see before when he had futilely attempted to protect Heurodis with a shield wall. Now, he is able to perceive the fairies in the forest. When he sees Heurodis among them, he follows them into the fairy realm. Although his transcendence as a wild man in the forest enables him to find Heurodis, his music, as a representation of order in the universe, is the key to winning her back.

Orfeo’s journey into the fairy realm puts him face to face with the very force that has created the degeneration of his world. The fairy realm “is neither an afterworld nor an underworld. It is actually a counter world which exists side by side with the world of man” resulting in parallels and doubles that emphasize the sinister aspects of the fairy realm. The Fairy Kingdom has a king and queen,

39 Music is a common source of comfort to the wild man as shown in the Vita Merlini by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Its soothing powers are demonstrated in the Old Testament when King David calms Saul with his harp (I Kings 16:16-23). Likewise, Boethius points to the calming powers of music, De institutione musica, 186.

40 In romance, the forest functions as the location of mysterious trials that allow the knight to prove himself outside the human world and beyond the calculated risks of the court. See Harrison, Forests: The Shadow of Civilization.

41 Other wild men who develop mysterious powers include the Welsh prophets Lailoken and Merlin from Vita Merlini.

42 Friedman, Orpheus in the Middle Ages, 190.
a palace and subjects like the world of Orfeo and Heurodis as well as many heavenly elements:

Within ther wer wide wones,  
Al of precious stones—  
The werst piler on to bholde  
Was al of burnist gold.  

Bi al thing him think that it is  
The proude court of Paradis. (368-68, 375-76)

But Orfeo must also pass by figures kept in a state of suspended animation, contorted and mutilated, reminiscent of Dante’s *Inferno*, creating a sense of unordered chaos. 43 Among these figures is “Dame Heurodis, his lef liif, / Slepe under an ympe-tre” (406-7), 44 just as she had been the last time he saw her, even wearing the same clothes, although it has been ten years. In its depiction of the fairy realm as a twisted reflection of the human world, the text stresses the threatening aspects of this hidden kingdom, already displayed in the kidnapping of Heurodis and the collapse of society in the withdrawal of Orfeo into the forest.

A lack of music, the element that represents divine order, highlights the threatening aspects of this eerie kingdom. Boethius warns that crude rhythms and tones lead to a degeneration of civilization, but here, a complete absence of song marks a hellish society that threatens the stability of the human world. The fairy land is a visual domain, as opposed to Orfeo’s world of music, described in blinding terminology: “as bright so sonne on somers day” (352). The castle is “clere and schine as cristal” (358), and is made of red and burnished gold, precious stones, and crystal (355-68). Due to the ever-radiating nature of these materials, night never comes to the fairy world:


44 The exact significance of the *impe tre* is unclear. Sitting under a tree close to midday seems to be an invitation to a fairy visitation in medieval romance as evidenced by *Sir Launfal, Sir Gawther*, and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*. Christian readings see the tree as significant in identifying Heurodis with Eve (see note 6). Also see Jirsa, “In the Shadow of the Ympe-tre,” 141-151.
Al that lond was ever light,
For when it schuld be therk and night
The riche stones light gonne
As bright as doth at none the sonne. (369-72)

Even the clothes of the Fairy King and Queen “schine so bright / That unnethe bihold he hem might” (415-16). The blinding, visual aspects of this world stand in sharp contrast to Orfeo’s musical intentions and even to the auditory features of the human realm represented by the trumpets, tabors, harps, and minstrels of the court in Winchester. Orfeo gains admittance to the fairy court by identifying himself as a traveling minstrel, though, from the Fairy King’s surprise at Orfeo’s visit, it is apparent that music and musicians are a foreign concept in this land. Orfeo must explain that minstrels travel so that “we mot proferi forth our gle!” (434). If music mirrors and reflects the ordering principles of the universe and the former harmony of Orfeo’s kingdom, the lack of music in the fairy world denotes a sinister society that is out of sync with the harmonious principles of divine organization.

Once admitted to the court, Orfeo uses his skill in music to begin the process of restoring order to his world. Where military tactics had failed in protecting Heurodis, music provides the opportunity of rescuing her. Orfeo penetrates into a magical world and uses the magic of music to conquer it. His playing is so remarkable that the Fairy King grants Orfeo anything he would like; Orfeo asks for Heurodis, but the Fairy King does not immediately relinquish her. Instead he attempts to persuade Orfeo to a more suitable choice:

“Nay!” quath the king, “that nought nere!
A sori couple of you it were—
For thou art lene, rowe and blac,
And sche is lovesum, withouten lac;
A lothlich thing it were, forthi,
To sen hir in thi compayni.” (457-62)

45 See Lerer, “Artifice and Artistry in Sir Orfeo,” 92-109, for more on the visual ornamentation of the fairy world.

46 The steward’s hall is full of music (521-25) and minstrels are always welcome (515-19).

47 Veldhoen, “Psychology and the Middle English Romances,” 118.
The fairy world’s emphasis on the visual prevents the Fairy King from seeing that Orfeo and Heurodis are a perfect match even though Orfeo’s appearance has so deteriorated. Although the Fairy King recognizes the beauty of the music, his lack of true comprehension, the fact that Orfeo’s music does not actually change the king or alter his perspective, perhaps reflects the fairy world’s reliance upon the senses in judging the performance rather than any true understanding of divine ratios, counter to Boethius’s injunctions. It also displays the non-human nature of the fairies. Boethius asserts that the human soul and body are joined according to the same ratios as the cosmos and as pleasing music, which explains music’s power over mankind. The Fairy King’s resistance of the ordering aspects of music displays his threatening Otherness. Orfeo, instead, must insist that the king fulfill his rash promise and the lovers are finally reunited. Although Orfeo achieves his wife through a loophole, music, nevertheless, is his tool for success.

Orfeo regains his wife, but to complete his quest to restore harmony, he must return to the human world and restore order to his kingdom. Still in disguise, he and Heurodis travel to Winchester where, once again, music is his admittance to a court where he can regain what he has lost. Although he is allowed into the court because he is a minstrel—the steward asserts that minstrels are always welcome in honor of King Orfeo—even when he sings in the hall, Orfeo is not recognized. Instead, the harp he carries is identified as the one belonging to the long-lost king. The recognition of the harp, and not the man, not only reemphasizes the importance of music to the text, but also reaffirms the connection between musical performance and the action of the poem as well as reasserting the former nature of Orfeo’s just rule as being intimately connected to his role as a harper-king. After testing the steward’s loyalty, Orfeo stands up and tells the court his story, discussed below, reclaiming his position.

48 As Fletcher, *The Presence of Medieval English Literature*, 85, notes, the reluctance of the Fairy King to honor his promise is another example of the visual veneer of the fairy world where pretty words are spoken without regard to their underlying consequence.

49 For more on Orfeo’s harp see Jeffrey, “The Exiled King,” 45-60.
After restoring Heurodis, music now restores order in the kingdom, which follows Boethius’s assertion that music is a force of preservation of the republic. The plot of Sir Orfeo demonstrates not only the importance of music to the design of the narrative, but also the ways in which music is employed as an integral aspect of the narrative, characterization, and setting of the text. The poet creates a version of the Orpheus tale that relies on Boethius’s philosophical principles of music as a force that maintains and restores harmony in a hostile world rather than the original myth’s insistence upon human futility in the face of death.

Sir Orfeo also contains within its written text cues of musical performance that are not just vestiges of any possible oral transmission, but an integral aspect of the written text used to underscore the importance of music to the narrative and the ordering aspects of harmony in an uncertain world. The rhyming couplets and rhythm of the poem mimic elements of song, while other specific narrative techniques and plot points recall components of performance. As already demonstrated, the narrative itself, in which art prevails over threatening forces, places a high value upon performance and its ability to restore and heal. According to Ronquist, the prologue of Sir Orfeo, which will be discussed in greater detail below, partly serves to prepare the reader to view the poem in some ways as if it were an actual performance due to its use of direct address and personal pronouns. Also, the first key that Orfeo, through his wild man period of disintegration in the forest, is on the verge of restoring harmony and regaining his wife comes just before he plays for the Fairy King when he “tempreth his harp, as he wele can” (437). Likewise, before his performance for the steward, “He toke his harp and tempred schille” (526).

50 Fletcher, The Presence of Medieval English Literature, 84.
The tuning of his instrument symbolizes the bringing of the various aspects of his life, and, in the instance of the court, society, back into harmony. Furthermore, these elements represent important aspects of a real performance that readers would identify as the prelude to musical entertainment, making the performances in *Sir Orfeo* more realistic by connecting them to an imagined aural event. For Boethius, tuning is more than just a practical matter. He defines consonance, or harmony, as a mixture of high and low sounds that blend together as opposed to dissonance in which intermingled sounds do not blend creating harshness. Since consonance is dependent upon adherence to strict ratios, which can only be maintained through the proper tuning, it is an important prerequisite for harmonious music. Therefore, tuning, literally and symbolically, signals Orfeo’s return to his former harmonious life.

The only detailed performance in the poem is Orfeo’s speech at court that reveals his true identity. None of the songs that Orfeo sings are preserved in the poem; therefore, this speech is the clearest indication of his gifts and abilities as both a performer and composer. He begins by saying, “Lo, Steward, herkneth this thing” (556-7). This opening of his speech, a call to attention for both the listeners in the hall and the reader anxiously awaiting a resolution, resembles the opening of a narrative song that might be sung by a bard in a royal hall as if Orfeo’s own story is an epic tale. Notable is Orfeo’s use of the subjunctive voice in which he announces his return in hypothetical statements:

52 Kooper, “Two-fold Harmony,” 126.
53 Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 195.
54 Romance heroes generally experience a transformative event that prepares them for the completion of their quests. Orfeo’s ten years as a wild man in the forest is a sort of period of “tuning” that heightens his skills and gives him the ability to see the fairies.
Lo,
Steward, herkne now this thing:
Yif Ich were Orfeo the King,
And hadde y-suffred ful yore
In wildernisse miche sore—
And hadde y-won mi Quen o-wy
Out of the lond of fairy—
And hadde y-brought the levedi hende,
Right here to the tounes ende,
And with a begger her in y-nome—
And were miself hider y-come
Poverlich to the, thus stille,
For to asay thi gode wille,
And Ich founde the thus trewe—
Thou no schust it never rewe!
Sikerlich, for love or ay,
Thou schust be King after mi day—
And yif thou of mi deth hadest ben blithe,
Thou schust have voided, also swithe. (556-574)

His speech gives all the details of his journey, yet always remains conjectural.\(^5\) He leaves it to the audience of the court to make the connection between the story and the truth. Ronquist feels that this interaction shows the relationship between any poet and audience in which the poet creates a fiction and the audience willingly participates in that fiction.\(^7\) Furthermore, the use of the subjunctive represents that aspect of a performance in which the audience can choose to either make that connection, by participating in the imagination required to enjoy the performance, or by willingly resisting the imagined world created by the poet. Here, the audience of the hall not only participates in the imagination of performance, but also

56 The role of lyrics in music is not directly discussed by Boethius in *De institutione musica*. He does label the voice as an instrument implying that it functions in concert with other instruments and he does categorize three types of vocal performance: continuous, as used in speaking and recitation, singing and an intermediate form between the two used for heroic poetry, 199. The only conclusion is that Boethius expects the voice to function within his explication of music theory and philosophy. It is not clear, however, how he views the messages conveyed through the words vocalized. In *Consolatio Philosophiae*, Lady Philosophy banishes the Muses of Poetry, and yet, Boethius continues to use meters throughout the work, which may imply ambivalence towards the function of poetry and therefore lyrics.

accepts the truth of the tale and restores Orfeo to his throne. The reader, presumably, has already chosen to suspend disbelief and participate in Orfeo’s tale, but experiences the suspense of the moment through the conjectural nature of his discourse. The reader knows the truth of the speech, but is forced to wait to see if the court will accept it. The poet creates not only an act, like the tuning of the harp, that would be a familiar aspect of performance, but also a textual representation of the verbal, aural, and imagined aspects of such an entertainment. As the poet employs this speech to call-up a performance situation, he also embeds the echo of musical presentation, thereby emphasizing the order that harmony represents as Orfeo is finally, after this performance, restored to all he has lost.

Self-awareness in the process of musical composition and performance as displayed in the generic form of Sir Orfeo is the final element that completes the poet’s saturation of the text with markers of musical philosophy. Often considered one of the best and most entertaining of the Middle English romances, Sir Orfeo is also clearly a Breton lay,\(^{58}\) a form that contains embedded within it a rich heritage and strong basis in musical composition with important distinctions between the lai, Breton lai and Breton lay.\(^{59}\) In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, short, lyric poems on traditional and legendary themes called lais were composed in France.\(^{60}\) Although none of these lais survive, A. J. Bliss draws upon evidence from Wace and the Roman de Tristan, to describe them as short, lyric songs performed on the harp or rote in which the music is as important as the lyrics.\(^{61}\) Constance Bullock-Davies uses similar evidence to additionally assert that the term lai could also refer to the performed melody, not just the lyrics and could sometimes exist

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58  The Breton lay is generally considered a sub category of the romance genre. Vial, “The Middle English Breton Lays,” 175-191, identifies the Breton lay as a separate genre.


61  Bliss, Introduction to Sir Orfeo, xxviii.
separate of any lyrics, placing more emphasis on the music than the words. Through references in Floire et Blanceflor, Lai de l’Espine, and the Prose Lancelot, it is clear there was at least one oral, lyric lai composed on the myth of Orpheus.

The lai form evolved into the genre later used by the Orfeo poet. Towards the end of the twelfth century, Marie de France, writing in Old French, although in England, adapted the lai, and wrote in the genre known as the Breton lai, which is a narrative that draws upon Celtic and Arthurian subject material that involves fairies and supernatural elements and that emphasizes faithful love. English writers in the fourteenth century adapted this form into the Breton lay, using an Anglicized spelling. Although some of the Breton lays, such as Sir Launfal and Lay le Freine, have French antecedents in the form of the Breton lai, no such source survives for Sir Orfeo, though Bliss feels that circumstantial evidence argues for one. It is an expression of this complete process from oral song to written narrative that Claire Vial identifies as the key to a true Breton lay and the Breton lay genre. Additionally, she identifies a three-step process of a lived adventure, a song commemorating the adventure and the bestowment of a title upon the song. Such a process is

63 Bliss, Introduction to Sir Orfeo, xxx-xxxi. Using similar methods, Bliss also identifies lost lais devoted to Chevrefoil, Guirun, Tristan, Graelent, Merlin, Arthur, Brandon, Tintagel, Thisbe and Dido.
66 Bliss, Introduction to Sir Orfeo, xl-xlvi. Stewart, “King Orphius,” 1-16, recognizes the similarities between Sir Orfeo and the sixteenth-century Scottish King Orphius. Although not the focus of her argument, much like Bliss’s hypothesis, she admits the possibility of a lost French language version. Lyle, “Three Notes on King Orphius,” 51-68, revisits the relationship between the two texts and the search for a lost common antecedent.
67 Vial, “The Middle English Breton Lays” 176-77. Vial makes a distinction between the earlier, true Breton lays and the later, false lays that claim the form but do not show an awareness of the process of composition. She labels the following as false: Emare, Sir Gowther, and The Erle of Tolous. Degaré she labels as problematic and a possible parody of the genre. Chaucer’s Franklin’s Tale, she classifies as a clever forgery but not a true Breton lay.
detailed in both the prologues and epilogues of *Sir Orfeo*, *Lay Le Freine*, and *Sir Launfal*, displaying an authorial awareness of the generic requirements and the progression of the terms as discussed above.

In this trajectory from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, the myth of Orpheus probably traveled through several versions of these forms to arrive at the Breton lay *Sir Orfeo*. Although the other forms do not survive today, textual evidence argues that *Sir Orfeo* has embedded within it a long tradition that began in the oral lyric. As Vial asserts, this process emphasizes the originality of the new form while also calling upon the authority of the past forms.68 Vial uses this layering to define the Breton lay, but it also emphasizes the poet’s choice of a very specific genre for a tale that probably originated in a performed piece that included music, and therefore, would conform to harmonic principles.

Within the poem, the generic conventions of the prologue and the epilogue mimic the act of oral performance, reinforce the other musical elements within the narrative and exhibit the process of composition necessary to the Breton lay genre.69 The prologue, lines 1-38,70 provides a conduit into the narrative by telling of the ability of music to describe wondrous stories and that Bretons, especially, liked to turn marvelous events into lays:

68 Vial, “The Middle English Breton Lays,” 181-82.

69 Seay notes the close connection between language, poetry and music inherited from classical works. He sees this connection as the basis of Western music. “Classical Metrics and Medieval Music,” 59-67.

70 While the Auchinleck manuscript contains the definitive text of *Sir Orfeo*, it is missing the prologue to the poem. The accepted practice, supported by Bliss and Shepherd, is to reconstruct the prologue from *Lay le Freyne*, also contained in the Auchinleck manuscript, supplemented with readings from Harley 3810 and Ashmole 61. Other studies of this prologue include Guillaume, “The Prologues,” 458-64, as well as Foulet, “The Prologue of *Sir Orfeo*,” 46-50.
In Breteyne bi hold time
This layes were wrought (so seith this rime)
Of aventures that fall by dayes—
Wherof B riftouns made her layes;
When kinges might our y-here
Of ani mervailes that ther were,
Thai token an harp in gle and game
And maked a lay and yaf it name.
Now of this aventours that weren y-falle
I can tel sum, ac nought alle—
Ac herkneth, lordinges that ben trewe,
Ichil you telle *Syr Orphewe*. (13-24)

While this opening fulfills the generic requirements of the self-aware Breton lay as defined by Vial, it also uses the performance cue of direct address to prepare the reader for the performance aspects of the poem. In addition, it foreshadows the resolution of the tale in that Orfeo will experience a marvelous adventure and a song will be composed about it. Within the narrative proper, Orfeo’s speech to reveal himself in the steward’s hall, as given above, creates a meta moment in mirroring this same process of composition in that he himself had lived through a noteworthy experience that he then transformed into a poetic performance. This displays not only the poet’s knowledge of the genre, but also his projection of that same process onto his main character, creating a multi-dimensional layering of the generic conventions that are themselves grounded in musical composition. While Orfeo’s speech is not sung, the prologue does make the connection between these commemorative performances and music explicit. Within the world of the poem, Orfeo’s speech functions as his own Breton lay; for the reader, the surviving Breton lay *Sir Orfeo* functions as the commemorating song.

Likewise, the epilogue concludes the lay by applying the generic process given in the prologue to the narrative of the text, completing the final step in the creation of the Breton lay *Sir Orfeo*:
Harpours in Bretaine after than
Herd hou this mervaile bigan,
And made her-of a lay of gode likeing,
And nemned it after the King.
That lay Orfeo is y-hote—
Gode is the lay, swete is the note!
Thus com Sir Orfeo out of his care;
God graunt ous alle wele to fare. Amen. (597-604)

In addition to the self-aware conclusion, the poet binds together the narrative and the history of musical performance crucial to this genre, even though this is a written text: “Gode is the lay,” the written word, “swete is the note,” the performed music (602). The prologue and the epilogue, then, bracket the narrative with a reminder of the relationship of a former lai by “harpours in Bretaine” to the current text and to the use of music and performance cues within the narrative itself. While Boethius is silent on the role of lyrics within his system of harmonics, the Orfeo poet’s connection of the verbal aspect of a performance to the aural representation of divine harmony within a tale that itself employs music as a representation and agent of order implies the importance of the lyrics to the integrity of the performance. These elements all replicate features of music within a written medium underscoring a belief in the harmonizing aspects of music.

According to Longsworth, Sir Orfeo is about the assertion of order in the face of circumstances that cause disorder. In the end, Orfeo’s skills restore harmony within the world of the poem by returning both Heurodis and the kingdom to the hero. Due to its consistent presence within the text, however, music also functions as a reminder of divine order, underscoring the eventual happy ending. If the poet had received even a basic education in musical principles,


the resulting influence of the Boethian musical philosophy of completion and harmony makes the poet’s changes to the Orpheus myth necessary. Since music represents order, the “greatest of harpers” should have the ability to restore order by regaining his wife and kingdom: “By rearranging of the details, a tragic story about the impotence of art against the processes of nature, becomes a celebration of the powers of harmony over the unregenerate forces that threaten society.”\textsuperscript{74} In a Christian world where all must succumb to divine will, music, believed to represent celestial order, triumphs over the sinister forces that threaten a just society. \textit{Sir Orfeo} is a confirmation of hope and faith in divine providence.

\textit{Sir Orfeo} is a musical text on many levels, the synergistic effects of which work together to reinforce the deeper principles of the poem regarding the loss and reestablishment of internal harmony both personal and social and a belief in the divine ordering of the universe. By weaving music throughout the narrative, the poet reminds the reader that even in Orfeo’s most desperate moments, there is a greater force at work in the cosmos, assuring that the completion of the tale, wrought through the power of music, will restore harmony to the hero and the land. All together these components fulfill Boethius’s injunction to artists to rise above the merely pleasant in their works by representing divine forms of harmony.

\textsuperscript{74} Veldhoen, “Psychology and the Middle English Romances,” 116.

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First page of Sir Orfeo
from the Auchinleck MS, c. 1330
Visual Representations of Prester John and His Kingdom

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The mythical figure of the priest-king known to late medieval and early modern Europeans as Prester John fascinated literate Europeans for many centuries. Historians have weighed in on textual depictions of the legendary figure, but visual interpretations by European artists of the physical appearance of this eastern potentate have not been examined in any significant depth. These portrayals primarily took the form of map and book illustrations, and this essay examines the evolving visual representations that European artists developed of Prester John. In general, there was a gradual evolution over time in European artistic depictions of the legendary Prester John, and changes in European portrayals of reflected concurrent changes in European understandings of Africa and Asia.

Commenting on the textual validity and accuracy of early European accounts of the Americas, Stephen Greenblatt notes that the only certainty scholars can derive from these works is that they “can be certain only that European representations of the New World tell us something about the European practice of representation.”1 These are also useful guidelines to follow in examining the visual representations that late medieval and early modern Europeans created with regard to the legendary Prester John. The mythical priest-king spawned a wide variety of literary and cartographical works that elaborated on the many facets believed by Europeans to be found in Prester John’s legendary kingdom. Concurrent with the mythical rhetoric is a significant body of visual interpretations of the physical appearance of this eastern potentate by European artists. These primarily took the form of map and book illustrations. This essay examines the evolving visual representations that European artists developed of Prester John.

In general, there was a gradual evolution over time in European artistic depictions of the legendary Prester John. Earlier images tended to illustrate the mythical priest-king with facial features and skin colors similar to Europeans, while later representations began

1 Greenblatt, Marvelous Possessions, 7.
to depict Prester John with the more “exotic” features imagined to be associated with people in Africa or eastern Asia. Yet there are a few exceptions to this generalization, and visual depictions by European artists of Prester John reflected their creators’ own assumptions about the manner in which Prester John was portrayed. Many of these depictions tell modern observers more about the ways the European artists wanted Prester John to look as opposed to what these artists thought he looked like.

This article examines a series of scanned images from texts representative of the body of late medieval and early modern literature related to the legend of Prester John. Relevant images are then analyzed for evidence of particular cultural biases as well as indicators of assumptions that the requisite illustrators may have possessed as they created their depictions of Prester John and his mythical kingdom.

The Map of Fra Mauro (1459)

Among the most significant late medieval visual representations of the kingdom of Prester John are those found in the mappamundi created by Fra Mauro, a fifteenth century Camaldolese monk and mapmaker in Venice. King Afonso V of Portugal commissioned Mauro to create this cartographic masterpiece, though the copy sent to Portugal has not survived. In one lengthy inscription Mauro claimed that he used Portuguese maps from fifteenth century explorations of the Atlantic coast in the preparation of his mappamundi.2 This makes perfect sense, as his Portuguese connections meant that Mauro had access to the most advanced geographical and navigational information of the middle fifteenth century. The Mauro map serves as a kind of intellectual barometer that measures the state of late medieval European beliefs about global geography.

Mauro’s map is a circular planisphere drawn on parchment that has been set by curators in a wooden frame, and the entire map stretches about six feet in diameter.3 The map is oriented with the

2 Falchetta, Introduction.

3 Summers, 106.
south at the top and the east on the right as the viewer stands in front of it, as seen below:

![Figure 1 - Front view of Fra Mauro map](image)

The land of “Abassia” (Mauro’s term for Abyssinia), which Mauro identified in his map as the central region of the immense kingdom of Prester John, merited considerable textual attention on the parchment by the cartographer-friar. Abassia is depicted in the map with large castles and palaces that exceed those of any other African potentate in opulence, size, and quantity. In addition, the country of Abassia possessed agricultural wealth to match its royal prosperity, and the following Mauro inscription is reminiscent of Paradise in its expression of the earthly splendor and bountiful harvests in Prester John’s realm:
In the woods of this Abassia there is such a great quantity of honey that they do not bother to collect it. When in the winter the great rains wash these trees, that honey flows into some nearby lakes and, thanks to the action of the sun, that water becomes like a wine, and the people of the place drink it in place of wine.4

Likely anticipating that some of the information about the continent of Africa contained in his map might be criticized by others, Mauro included an inscription on the map that outlined his arguments against such criticisms. The Venetian mapmaker argued that his map drew from some of the best available sources, and that classical geographers simply possessed outdated knowledge. In the following passage Mauro defended his work and offered readers a brief summary of the sources that he used in the preparation of his mappamundi:

4 Mauro, 10-I 26. The alphanumeric codes used in the following Fra Mauro footnotes refer to the standard coordinates assigned in the 1956 edition of the map.
Because to some it will appear as a novelty that I should speak of these southern parts, which were almost unknown to the Ancients, I will reply that this entire drawing, from Sayto upwards, I have had from those who were born there. These people are clerics who, with their own hands, drew for me these provinces and cities and rivers and mountains with their names; all these things I have not been able to put in due order for lack of space.

In this aesthetically appealing and highly detailed map, Mauro provided quite a few inscriptions that offer insights into the nature of the contemporary European views about Prester John’s kingdom. Mauro wrote that “Prester John has more than 120 kingdoms under his dominion, in which there are more than 60 different languages.” Indeed, the mapmaker depicted perhaps as much as two-thirds of the continent of Africa being subject to Prester John, and according to the inscriptions, a number of the other African monarchs paid tribute to Prester John. One of the newest areas added to the realm of Prester John, according to Mauro, was a “most fertile region” conquered by the “great king of Abassia” somewhere near the year 1430. Mauro located this land between the regions of Mogodisso and Sacara. Mauro identified and had much to say another tribute-paying land that fell under the authority of Prester John; in the following passage he discussed the violent and uncivilized nature of some of these peoples:

Above [that is, south of] the Kingdom of Abbassia there is a very savage and idolatrous people who are separated from Abbassia by a river and by mountains, at the passes of which the kings of Abbassia have built great fortresses so that these peoples cannot pass and do harm to their country. These men are very strong and of great stature and they pay tribute to Prester John, King of Abbassia, and certain thousands of these men serve him to his needs etc.

5 A land that Mauro placed just upriver of Nubia on the Nile.

6 This passage suggests that Mauro may have interviewed some of the Ethiopian dignitaries who traveled to Europe, representing the patriarch and attending the Council of Florence in 1441.

7 Mauro, 10-16.

8 Mauro, 10-F37.

9 Mauro, 09-b35.

10 Evidently the Somalian city of Mogadishu and Saqqara, the necropolis of the Egyptian city of Memphis. The siting of these cities on Mauro’s map, of course, do not correspond well with their actual locations. Falchetta suggested that the Sacara name, which Mauro equated with “manna,” was an important region of sugar production.

11 Mauro, 10-A38.
In addition to the people of “great stature” mentioned above, Mauro described a number of unusual creatures common to medieval European traditions about lands beyond the Mediterranean basin. He noted that “various historiographers write of the source of the Garamantes, which is so hot at night that anyone putting their hand in the water would be scolded; whereas during the day, the water is so cold one cannot stand it.” Mauro also included information from classical writers on “the Panphagi, the Agriophagi, the Antropophagi and the Cinomolgi and their bestial customs.” Finally, Mauro indicated that the lands beyond Mediterranean Africa contained “certain monstrous animals - such as serpents, dragons and basilisks - and give other information I cannot mention here.”

Mauro noted that one of the reasons for the impressive power wielded by Prester John is due to “the numbers of his people, who are almost infinite.” This “almost infinite” population allowed Prester John to field tremendous armies, according to Mauro, and that “when this lord travels with his host of armies, he has with him one million men.” Mauro described the warriors of Prester John as men who “who go naked into battle, except that many of them wear crocodile skin in place of armor.”

12 The Garamantes were a a Saharan Berber-speaking people who lived in what is now modern-day Lybia. The Romans noted their presence south of what became the province of Africa Proconsularis. For more information about the Garamantes, see McCall, “Herodotus on the Garamantes,” 197-217 and Law, “The Garamantes and Trans-Saharan Enterprise,” 181-200.

13 Mauro, 17-C26.

14 Panphagi: “eaters of everything.”

15 Agriophagi: “eaters of the meat of wild animals.”

16 Probably anthropophagi, “cannibals.”

17 Probably cynamolgi, “dog-milkers.”

18 Probably cynamolgi, “dog-milkers.”

19 Probably cynamolgi, “dog-milkers.”

20 Mauro, 10-g8.

21 Mauro, 10-g8.

22 Mauro, 10-g8.
From his Ethiopian sources Mauro developed a cartographical image of the extent of Prester John’s realm. The persons with whom he claimed to converse indicated that “their territory is more extensive to the south of the sources of the Nile than to the north.” 23 Mauro indicated that his sources claimed that there existed “rivers there that are larger than the Nile, which amongst us is so famous for its size.” 24 The source of the Nile fell in the kingdom of Prester John, Mauro noted, and the friar-mapmaker was told that “at the time of their winter, between May and June, due to the great rains, these rivers swell and thus swell the Nile, which rises until it floods Egypt, as is well known.” 25

Mauro may have possessed some skepticism on the received knowledge of classical geographers, but he was cautious in any criticisms he might have made about the likes of Pliny the Elder and Ptolemy. He noted that there were “many cosmographers and most learned men who write that in this Africa - and, above all, in the Mauritanias - there are human and animal monsters.” 26 While providing his opinion on the monsters and wonders of Africa, Mauro wanted to make sure that readers did not assume that he was trying to “contradict the authority of these men,” 27 but because of “the care I have taken in all these years in studying all possible information concerning Africa,” he was reluctant to refute over a thousand years of classical knowledge. Nonetheless, Mauro seemed to have reservations about some of what he read in his studies:

And in all these kingdoms of the negroes I have never found anyone who could give me information on what those men have written. Thus, not knowing anything, I cannot bear witness to anything; and I leave research in the matter to those who are curious about such things. 28

23 Mauro, 17-A5.
24 Mauro, 17-A5.
25 Mauro, 17-A5.
27 Mauro, 23-B13.
**Prester John as Depicted in the Nuremberg Chronicle (1493)**

Hartman Schedel’s *Liber Chronicarum*, better known to the English-speaking world as the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, is an illustrated history of the world that serves as a compendium of European knowledge of human civilizations in the late fifteenth century. Not surprisingly, Prester John received a significant amount of attention from Schedel, whose writing reflected his reliance upon the standard literary and geographical works of the period. The illustrator who produced woodcuts for the *Chronicle* created an image of the legendary Prester John that evoked themes decidedly more religious than secular in describing the mythical priest-king. Below is a scanned image of the woodcut included in *Liber Chronicarum*:

![Figure 3 - Prester John illustrated in Hartmann Schedel's Nuremberg Chronicle, 1493](image)

The image depicts a seated Prester John performing the sacrament of the Eucharist with kneeling subjects receiving communion wafers. Interestingly, the artist provided Prester John with a halo, making the obvious connection that the legendary priest-king’s piety had elevated him to a status approaching the divine, or at least making him worthy of veneration as a living saint. The setting
of the scene is in a European-style church, and what appears to be a mural behind Prester John and the supplicants contain images of saints, who gaze upon the faithful with approving, beatific looks.

**Prester John and Giuliano Dati (ca. 1499)**

Italian poet Giuliano Dati, one of the premiere European poets of the late fifteenth century, composed a pair of poems to the mythical priest-king Prester John. The first of these poems was entitled *Treatise on the Supreme Prester John, Pope and Emperor of India and Ethiopia*, while the second poem bore the slightly less magnanimous title of *Second Song of India*. The frontispiece of the published poems depicts Prester John with decidedly European features, and the setting of the priest-king’s court is not unlike those found in Europe at the time.

![Figure 4 - Frontispiece to the poem “The Great Magnificence of Prester John, Lord of Greater India and of Ethiopia,” by Giuliano Dati](image)

29 Rogers, 94.

30 Dati, frontispiece.
The unknown artist who created the frontispiece illustration provided this Prester John with an impressive crown containing jewels in the shape of the *fleur de lis*. Prester John in this image appears to be blessing the supplicants who remain seated before him, and he holds up two fingers in much the same manner as does the Roman Catholic Pope. The image is suggestive of a ruler with both religious and secular authority, certainly in keeping with Prester John’s role as king and patriarch.

The people who surround Prester John in the image also bear similarities to depictions of Europeans in the late fifteenth century. Interestingly, Prester John finds himself holding court over twelve individuals, perhaps an apostolic tip of the cap to Christ. Eleven of the visitors to Prester John's court are bearded and wear cloaks and hats not unlike those of fifteenth century Franciscan prelates, while one person directly to the right of Prester John has decidedly feminine features and is wearing what appears to be a nun’s habit. One is tempted to draw parallels between the symbolism in this image and Leonardo da Vinci’s *L’Ultima Cena*: the timing fits, but there may be additional reasons why this image shares some similarities with the aforementioned Milanese mural of such historical renown. In this illustration to the chapbook’s frontispiece, the artist depicted Prester John’s court above seven steps, each of which contains an admonition to readers to flee (“FVGE”) the seven deadly sins:

![Figure 5 – Inscription of the seven deadly sins, Giuliano Dati](image)

31 Each of the cardinal sins is also associated in this illustration with a particular element; for example gluttony (*gulam*) in this woodcut was associated with lead (*plumbo*).
In keeping with existing beliefs about the exotic lands over which Prester John reigned, the Dati chapbook contains additional woodcut illustrations, and these perpetuated the fabulous elements of the Prester John legend. Not surprisingly, the influence of classical and medieval mythology can be noticed in this image. An example of one such woodcut provided European readers with a visual collection of freakish beings found in Prester John’s lands:

![Figure 6 - Woodcut illustration in chapbook edition of Treatise on the Supreme Prester John featuring monstrous beings that supposedly existed in the lands of the kingdom of Prester John](image)

The image contains three figures, including the *Monoculi* (one-eyed beings), *Cynocephali* (dog-headed beings), and a particularly graphic and peculiar image of a sexually dichotomized “Hermofrodite.” All of the mythical creatures bear some form of weaponry, reinforcing the dangerous nature of some of the territories controlled by Prester John. None of the figures wears any clothes, which is certainly in keeping with the exotic sexuality long associated by Europeans with distant lands. Interestingly, the figures of the *monoculus* and *cynocephalus* exhibit an element of modesty as they cover their genitalia in the woodcut, yet the hermaphroditic figure seems to show no such interest in shielding the viewers from
the sexual deviance that awaits those who leave the relatively safe confines of late medieval Europe in search of the lands of Prester John. Still, the presence of monsters and freaks likely served to at least pique the curiosity of European readers, even if they may have served to deter some would-be explorers from venturing overseas.

**Verdadeira Informação das Terras do Preste João das Indias (1540)**

Lisbon publisher Luís Rodrigues produced in 1540 a one-volume folio of the narrative of the Portuguese missionary Francisco Álvares, who visited Ethiopia in 1540. The text was entitled *Verdadeira Informação das Terras do Preste João das Indias* ("A True Relation of the Lands of Prester John of the Indies"), although Beckingham and Huntingford observed that only a portion of the *Verdadeira Informação* wound up in this first printing of the writings of Álvares. Born somewhere around the year 1465 in the Portuguese city of Coimbra, Álvares served as a priest in the court of Portuguese king Manuel I. It was during his role in this capacity that Álvares was selected to join a delegation that was sent to the Emperor of Ethiopia, who the Portuguese had equated with Prester John. The group departed from Lisbon in 1515, but they did not actually reach the imperial court until 1520.

The vignette created by the unknown artist on the cover of the folio edition of the *Verdadeira Informação* is decidedly late medieval European in style and content. The artist likely was influenced as much by the traditional beliefs he held regarding the fabled kingdom of Prester John as much as he was by the text itself. The following scanned image of the folio cover offers some clues into the ways in which early sixteenth century Europeans viewed the legendary Prester John:

32 Beckingham and Huntingford, 13.
The Prester John in this image, not surprisingly, looks as though he would not be out of place in an Iberian royal court. This depiction of Prester John takes on a decidedly military bent, as the legendary priest-king is astride an armored mount and is accompanied by knights, pages, and squires. Prester John and his attendants exhibit distinctly European features: light skin, aquiline noses, and contemporary European hair styles. The clothing and armor worn by Prester John and his followers are typical for Europeans in the late medieval period, and there is considerable use of Christian iconography in the woodcut. One gets the impression that the Prester John imagined by the artist responsible for illustrating *Verdadeira Informação das Terras do Preste João das Indias* might...
be heading out to face an enemy in the Alentejou or Extremadura, rather than leaving for a battle against the likes of the fearsome beasts such as the Cynocephali that purportedly populated the lands of the kingdom of Prester John.

The buildings in (and setting of) the court of Prester John in this depiction also demonstrate a decidedly Iberian influence. There is an interesting blend of Asturian, Romanesque, and Mudéjar styles in this illustration. Of particular interest is the red ceramic barrel-tile roof on buildings in the compound from which Prester John is departing on his armored horse, long a staple of Iberian architecture and one that followed the Spaniards and Portuguese in their colonial endeavors. The walls of the compound appear to be composed of either white brick or white clay plaster, both commonly found in Iberian architecture and in particular buildings influenced by the Mudéjar style. Yet above all the court of Prester John imagined by the artist who created the cover folio for Verdadeira Informação das Terras do Preste João das Indias was one with a primarily military function. The structures contain quite a few accoutrements typical for a late medieval castle: siege towers, arrow slits, curtain walls, and battlements. This Prester John, it seems, was a military-minded sort whose royal court and buildings were built for a war footing.

One might argue that the artist who created the folio illustration was simply influenced by the world in which he lived, and used the nearby buildings, people, and environment for convenient models upon which to base this artwork. Yet to make this argument is to ignore the role of imagination in art: the artist who designed this image believed that Prester John lived in a world much like that of the European monarchs for whom he had at least tangential knowledge. A depiction of Prester John that uses contemporary motifs indicates that the artist believed that the legendary priest-king was more similar to than he was different from his European counterparts. In large measure this was a function of Prester John’s supposedly Christian faith, as it would be unseemly to create an image of a powerful Christian leader (and potential ally against the forces of Islam) who did not possess the expected characteristics of such a ruler.
Gerardus Mercator – 1569

The revolutionary mapmaking techniques employed by sixteenth century Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator need not be retold in their entirety. The genius of Mercator, as one historical geographer described, “lay in designing a chart which at first sight had no novelty other than its elimination of a gross error.”

For the purposes of this dissertation, though, Mercator commands considerable interest, for this innovative and influential cartographer steadfastly included the kingdom of Prester John on the maps he produced in the late sixteenth century, a time when – according to the traditional historiography – Europeans had supposedly dismissed the legendary priest-king as a fanciful myth. One author offered the following assessment of Mercator, held in so high esteem by many as exemplary of evidence of the more scientific approaches to geography and cartography:

[H]ere is Mercator, groping for truth, forced to rely on the opinions of such remote men as Juba, Pliny, Ptolemy, Solinus. His more recent authorities are William of Tripoli, a Dominican convert of about 1250; Marco Polo, always called Ven.[etus], 1254-1324; Sir John Mandeville, circa 1332…These it will be observed are none too “recent,” even to Mercator’s own times. He must have known of the discoveries made during the time of Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460), and later by Vasco da Gama (1469-1524); and such he accepts tacitly. Apparently he knew of no recent explorers to help him about India, China, northern Asia, or the interior of Africa. He gives us a long discussion "about the true location of the Ganges and the Golden Peninsula," trying to distinguish the Ganges from a stream called Guenga; in the end he seems inclined to put the Ganges in what we should call eastern China!

Pictured below is a scanned image of the African continent as Mercator understood it:

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33 Taylor, 202. The problems with previous maps, according to Taylor, included the treatment of north-south rhumb lines as parallel equidistant meridians, and the tradition of plotting coast lines without taking into consideration any compass variations.

34 Hodgman, 128-129.
Though Mercator largely ignored ornamentation and decoration in the production of this 1569 map, the cartographer did see a need to include an image of Prester John in his depiction of Africa. Below is an image of Prester John as conceived by Mercator:

Mercator’s Prester John is depicted by the mapmaker as seated on a royal throne and holding up a cross, symbolizing his dual role as temporal and spiritual leader of his empire. The inscription reads *Prete Giam magnus imperator Abbissini* (“Prester John, great emperor of the Abyssinians”). Interestingly Mercator imagined the
kingdom of Prester John as being centered on the upper Nile River, evoking earlier traditions of the mighty priest-king possessing the power to regulate or shut off the flow of the life-giving Nile.

Though this image of Prester John lacks detail, viewers can easily discern that Mercator imagined the Abyssinian ruler as being European in physical form. The priest-king’s skin was not darkened by the mapmaker, and Prester John wears Renaissance-style clothing, making him look more like Lorenzo de’ Medici than an African, Arabic, or Turkish ruler. More importantly, the fact that Mercator chose to present only one illustrated ruler on the continent of Africa – Prester John – suggests an imagined sense of geopolitical primacy toward the legendary priest-king on the part of the Flemish cartographer.

This importance in maintaining the kingdom of Prester John at the physical and figurative center of Africa was shared by Mercator’s grandson, also named Gerardus Mercator. His 1628 map of Africa included an illustrated depiction of the seemingly ageless Prester John; in this scanned image, one can observe that the passing of almost six decades between grandfather and grandson resulted in few changes to the ways in which Prester John had been imagined by European cartographers:

Figure 10 – image of Prester John on Mercator map, 1628
The 1628 Mercator map again depicts a seated Prester John with a cross, and the mythical potentate still faces east. The priest-king in this image wears a flowing royal robe instead of what appears to be a mandilion on Prester John in the 1569 map. On the head of Prester John is a more elaborate crown in the 1628 image, implying at least a sense of continuity in the perceived importance held by the illustrator toward the priest-king in continental and regional affairs. Both Mercator maps (as well as the range of maps produced by members of the Mercator family and employees of the family business during this period) provided a prominent place for the kingdom of Prester John. While some Europeans in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had begun the process of moving away from a strong belief in the power and wealth of Prester John, clearly the notion of this mighty priest-king remained a source of fascination for many learned Europeans. The Mercator maps serve as evidence of this continued allure. Yet despite his innovative techniques, Mercator and his work remained relatively unknown beyond a small circle of geographical and cartographical experts. It would take the efforts of another Flemish cartographer to bring Mercator’s projections to a wider audience.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{Abissinorum sive Pretiosi Johannis Imperii (1606).}

The Flemish engraver and cartographer Jodocus Hondius first made a name for himself producing illustrations based on the voyages of Francis Drake. Hondius, however, is better known to modern historians for his 1604 purchase of the copper plates and publishing rights of the Mercator maps.\textsuperscript{36} Hondius did not waste time in bringing the Mercator maps to the burgeoning European map market, and he added a few missing maps to create a collection that offered purchasers an up-to-date view of the world. Below is a scanned image of the map of the kingdom of Prester John in the set:

\textsuperscript{35} Keuning, 43.

\textsuperscript{36} Keuning, 44.
The map of Prester John’s realm is largely based on the account of Duarte Lopes (1591) and its transcription by Filippo Pigafetta. It is worth noting that Hondius believed that the kingdom of Prester John merited its own page in the atlas, one of the few kingdoms that was so honored.

The map is typical for early-to-mid-seventeenth century maps in its presentation of the kingdom of Prester John. The area reserved to Prester John’s realm is approximately 30 percent of the land mass of the African continent, suggesting the primacy of the legendary priest-king over sub-Saharan Africa. The map’s annotations describe the wealth and power of Prester John, and there is no sense that Hondius does not take at face value the still-prevailing notion that Prester John is an important Christian monarch.

Nicholas Visscher and Prester John

The English ecclesiastic Peter Heylyn’s 1652 Cosmographie represented yet another attempt by to produce a comprehensive work that described the known world. Heylyn was a fellow and lecturer at Magdalen College, Oxford, and his first foray into geography was
the 1621 Microcosmus (“a little description of the great world”).

A staunch Anglican and Royalist, Heylyn transitioned from the field of divinity in 1647 near the end of the English Civil War. Gilbert notes that Heylyn was able “to settle at Minster Lovell and returned from theology to the study of geography and history, which he had loved in his youth.”

Heylyn spent the next five years composing the Cosmographie, a work that reflected his interest in Ptolemy, Pliny, and the earlier geographical work of George Abbott. Gilbert suggests Heylyn was also influenced by the writings of German writer Bartholomäus Keckermann as well as those of French legal scholar Jean Bodin and French poet Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas. The Cosmographie went through many editions, including a highly regarded sixth edition in 1682, and the work remained a standard geography text into the eighteenth century.

Among the specialists retained by London publisher Henry Seile to provide maps for Heylyn’s Cosmographie was Dutch cartographer Nicolas Visscher. Born in 1618 in Wenns, Austria, Visscher inherited in 1652 the Amsterdam mapmaking business created by his father Claes Janszoon Visscher, and the Visscher family developed a reputation as elite cartographers in the Dutch Golden Age.

Yet despite the fact that Visscher possessed the most up-to-date European geographical information - especially given his work with the VOC - Visscher maps of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries reflect a continued reliance upon classical and medieval traditions. This is in decided contrast with the assumptions

37 Gilbert, 494.
38 Gilbert, 495.
39 See especially George Abbot, A Briefe Description of the Whole World, 1599.
40 Gilbert, 495.
41 Gilbert, 495.
42 Welu, 9.
of some scholars who take for granted a level of modernity that did not necessarily exist among sixteenth and seventeenth century Europeans. Brodsky noted that much like his contemporaries Visscher continued to place value on the Bible as a literal source of geographical information, and that he typically included locations in the modern Levant for the Pentateuchal city of Dan on his maps. Depicted below is the Visscher representation of the continent of Africa, which included the placement of the kingdom of Prester John at the continental center in keeping with the discoveries and embassies of the Portuguese:

Figure 12 - New, Plaine, & Exact Mapp of Africa (1652), in Heylyn’s Cosmographie

Visscher’s map of Africa possesses a fairly accurate depiction of the outlines of the continent, though its sense of

43 Brodsky, 430-440. Dan is mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament, including Genesis 14:14 (“And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.”) The city is generally considered by biblical scholars to have been northernmost town of the Kingdom of Israel, and previously served as a center for the Tribe of Dan.
scale and proportion are somewhat skewed. Visscher imagined the Sahara Desert to be much smaller than its actual size, and the map contains quite a few imagined mountain ranges and interior bodies of water that bear no similarity to the true topography of the continent of Africa. Interestingly, though, the Tropic of Capricorn, the Tropic of Cancer, and the Equator correspond quite well with their geographical counterparts on modern maps. This suggests an intuitive proposition that distances relatively far removed from African coasts remained largely imagined spaces to Europeans until well into the nineteenth century.

It is the manner in which Visscher depicted the interior of the African continent, however, that is of interest to this study, and the mapmaker’s understanding on the societies and states that inhabited the regions farther removed from the coasts is in contrast should best be described as almost medieval in nature. In many ways the Africa understood by seventeenth century Europeans such as Nicolas Visscher is not incompatible with the beliefs held about Africa by medieval and even classical Europeans. Chief among the European geographical traditions that Visscher included in this map is the presence of a powerful Abyssinian ruler who possessed vast domains in the African continent.

Figure 13 - Prester John as depicted in New, Plaine, & Exact Mapp of Africa (1652)
The figure of Prester John ("King of Abissines") depicted on Visscher’s map shows evidence of an evolution in European visual representations of the legendary priest-king. The skin color of Prester John is decidedly darker in color than in earlier European representations of the priest-king (though lighter in tone than many contemporary depictions of sub-Saharan Africans), and the facial features of the subject possess characteristics substantially more African than European. Yet Prester John also wears an elaborate European-style crown bedecked with precious stones, implying that the artist believed that this monarch was a king of substantial wealth and power. Moreover, Visscher’s Prester John is arguably more European-like in depiction than any of the other monarchs chosen for the map. The four “African” kings are depicted wearing an array of exotic headgear featuring items such as feathers and horns, while the “King of Morrocca”44 wears an enormous round turban similar to the headpiece worn by the Ottoman sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. By contrast, the Prester John as depicted by Visscher even has ornamentation similar to the fleur de lis so closely associated with the heraldry of the French.

The spatial positioning of Prester John by Visscher and the geographical depiction of Abyssinia on the map is also worthy of examination. Visscher imagined that Africa contained six kings worthy of mention ("Abissines," "Conga," "Guinea," "Morrocca," "Madagascar," and "Mozambique"), and Prester John occupies the top right hand corner of the map. This implies primacy of importance for Prester John, as the depicted African kings are not arranged in any order that reflects geography. In addition, the space allotted to Abyssinia on the map encompasses approximately one-third of the African continent’s total area and perhaps slightly more than half of sub-Saharan Africa.

44 The actual ruler of the regions historically known as “Morrocco” at the time of Heylyn’s Cosmographie was the sultan Moulay Ali Cherif, founder of the Alauite Dynasty.
It is also within the imagined boundaries of the kingdom of Prester John that Visscher included quite a variety of mythical and legendary items believed by late medieval and early modern Europeans to exist in Africa. Visscher included a “Zair Lake” from which the Congo and Nile Rivers supposedly emanated, which was a body of water that Visscher claimed was “where ye Tritons and Mermaids are said to be.” The southern borders of the land of Prester John are the location of the Mountains of the Moon, also believed by Europeans to be the source of the Nile River; the aforementioned “Zaire Lake” appears to be at the northernmost reaches of this mythical mountain chain. To the east of “Zair Lake” Visscher placed “Fungi Cafates,” a region where “the Amazones are said to inhabit as also in ye kingdoms of Zet and Gavi Cafates.”

Merian Map (1630)

The seventeenth century engraver and mapmaker Matthäus Merian der Ältere – born in Basel and working most of his life in the city of Frankfurt – produced a world map in his 21-volume Topographia, a work that went through many editions and found popularity throughout Europe. Merian was the son-in-law of noted publisher Peter Overstadt, and his work can be considered to be representative of what has become known as the Cologne school of cartography. Below is scanned image of his depiction of the kingdom of Prester John, whose imperial territory in the mind of Merian spanned approximately one-third of the land mass of the African continent:

45 Visscher, in Heylyn, Cosmographie.
46 The idea of the Mountains of the Moon traces its origin back to classical writers such as Diogenes and Ptolemy.
47 Visscher, in Heylyn, Cosmographie. Many of these features also correspond with the 1650 map by Ortelius, suggesting that Visscher was at least acquainted with the earlier map.
48 Meurer, 39.
The boundaries of the kingdom of Prester John as imagined by Merian are somewhat smaller than earlier European maps. This may be indicative of the beginnings of a mid-seventeenth century trend toward a reduction in the size of Prester John’s kingdom as being a function of the gradually decreasing sense of importance that Europeans held toward the legendary priest-king. One might also argue that the concurrent belief in the kingdom of Monomatapa may have also contributed to a perceived reduction in territorial holdings of Prester John. Still, the territory believed to be controlled by Prester John in this map is approximately one-fourth of the land mass of the African continent.

49 The kingdom of Monomotapa (or simply Mutapa) encompassed the regions around the renowned site of Great Zimbabwe. There was an early modern belief among many Europeans that the Monomotapa empire possessed vast goldmines, and this morphed into the idea that the goldmines of Monomotapa were the legendary mines of King Solomon. The region certainly had access to gold, though the dreams of an African Eldorado were unfulfilled, at least if one ignores the nineteenth century Witwatersrand gold strike. For more information on the Mutapa Empire, see Beach, “The Mutapa Dynasty,” 1-17. On European fascination with the goldmining potential of the Mutapa Empire, see Ames, “An African Eldorado?” 91-110.
Yet Marian’s map is indeed highly typical of seventeenth-century European maps, which continued to depict central and eastern Africa as the “home” of the kingdom of Prester John. It is not until the late seventeenth century that the legendary priest-king began to disappear from contemporary maps. While some scholars might dismiss the continued presence of Prester John on maps as either rote adherence to traditional forms or as archaic artistic embellishments, the fact that the kingdom of Prester John remained a cartographic staple for so many centuries suggests that – for many Europeans – the legendary priest-king remained an imagined fixture in the Earth’s cosmography.

**Baltazar Tellez**

The Jesuit writer and priest Balthazar Tellez compiled a book on the kingdom of Prester John that was published in Frankfort in 1682. Tellez made extensive use of the histories of Manuel Almeida, Jeronimo Lobo, and Alfonzo Mendez in the production of his *Historia Geral de Ethiopia a Alta ou Abassia do Preste Ioam*.\(^{50}\) The text displays the gradual decline in the perceived importance of Prester John in the minds of Europeans, and the priest-king as depicted by the author is not nearly as powerful as earlier textual descriptions.

The writings of Tellez continued to interest Europeans well into the eighteenth century. In 1707 the *Académie Royale des Sciences* disputed the claim by Tellez that the island of Meroe did not exist. While acknowledging that Tellez had “well considered all that the missionaries of his [Jesuit] society have written upon Ethiopia,”\(^{51}\) the *Académie* was of the opinion that “it is strange that anyone could doubt the existence of the island of Meroe, after what has been noted by the ancients with relation to it.”\(^{52}\) Among the most important of the ancient writers whose opinions mattered most to the *Académie* with regard to Meroe and Ethiopia was none other than Pliny the Elder.

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50 Tellez, 13.

51 Académie Royale des Sciences, 134-135.

52 Académie Royale des Sciences, 135.
The Prester John imagined by the unnamed artist who designed the frontispiece to *Historia Geral de Ethiopia* retained some of the European features of earlier artistic renditions of Prester John and his kingdom, but the trend in this image is toward a sort of Africanization of the legendary character. Prester John’s skin tone is darker, and many of his subjects wear simple clothing while walking barefoot. The setting of Prester John’s court appears to be rather tropical, with palm trees surrounding the royal throne. Prester John is dressed in clothing that would not be considered typical for a seventeenth century European monarch, and is depicted wearing what appears to be a leopard-skin shawl and light-colored leather boots. Not present in this image, however, are the earlier material signs of opulence and power.

53  *Frontispiece from Baltazar Tellez, Historia Geral de Ethiopia a Alta ou Abassia do Preste Ioam e do que nella obraram os Padres da Companhia de Jesus: composta na mesma Ethiopia pelo Padre Manoel d’Almeida, natural de Viseu, Provincial e Visitador, que foi na India. Abreviada com nova releiçam, e method.*
The artist imagining this scene chose to emphasize the spiritual rather than military powers of Prester John. Approaching the throne are a group of ecclesiastical figures, including one individual who might be characterized as a bishop or archbishop. These might be missionaries, as the depicted scene contains quite a few representations of Christogram IHS, which is incorporated into the seal of the Society of Jesus. Completing the religious theme of the illustration is the inclusion of winged cherubim floating above the throne of Prester John.

The illustrations in *Historia Geral de Ethiopia* are representative of the changing nature of the imagined Prester John. Visual depictions of the legendary priest-king evolved from a late medieval emphasis on the decidedly European nature of Prester John to seventeenth century perceptions of a ruler more African than European. Yet into the eighteenth century this mythical figure continued to fascinate Europeans. Even if the size of his perceived empire began to shrink, Prester John remained a source of inspiration to European minds.

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John Bale’s *Kynge Johan* as English Nationalist Propaganda

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John Bale is generally associated with the English Reformation rather than the Tudor government. It may be that Bale’s well-know protestant polemics tend to overshadow his place in Thomas Cromwell’s propaganda machine, and that Bale’s *Kynge Johan* is more a propaganda piece for the Tudor monarchy than it is just another of his Protestant dramas.

Introduction

On 2 January, 1539, a “petie and nawghtely don enterlude,” that “put down the Pope and Saincte Thomas” was presented at Canterbury.1 Beyond the fact that a four hundred sixty-one year old play from Tudor England remains extant in any form, this particular “enterlude,” John Bale’s play *Kynge Johan,*2 remains of particular interest to scholars for some see Johan as meriting “a particular place in the history of the theatre. It is the half open chrysalis, the morality-play whence the historical drama is about to emerge.”3 In a similar manner, Honor McCusker calls the play a “landmark in the development of the English drama for students who will never be interested in his [Bale’s] other achievements.”4 In other words, Johan deserves attention because it is the earliest English history or chronicle play. Beyond that, Johan is generally seen as representing an early attempt at Protestant propaganda. In this vein, scholars such as Jesse Harris present Bale as a “dramatist of the new learning”

1 Cramner, *Writings and Disputations,* 388.

2 Adams, Cox, and McCusker all agree that this “enterlude” was most likely Bale’s play *Kynge Johan,* however, we lack evidence to prove the issue either way.

3 Emile Lugouis, quoted in Harris, *John Bale,* 91.

and part of the propaganda machine Thomas Cromwell was using to push the English church closer to the reformed churches on the Continent.\(^5\)

While none of these arguments is mutually exclusive, they tend to overlook the fact that Bale’s original intentions may have been more attuned to Henry VIII’s desires to aggrandize the monarchy than a play designed purely as protestant propaganda. Whether this was Bale’s original intent probably never will be known definitively; however, it is probable that elements scholars identify as blatant protestant propaganda may well have been attached to the script at a later date. We know that Bale revised *Kynge Johan* several times between 1539 and the reign of Elizabeth.

Scholars generally associate “Bilious” Bale with the English Reformation, rather than the Tudor government. He is seen as zealous reformer rather than political hack—yet he may have been both. The process of his conversion from Carmelite monk to full-blown protestant revolutionary remains unclear, but because of his later protestant polemics, historians may have underestimated Bale’s importance in Cromwell’s political propaganda machine. Jesse Harris notes that: “In order to popularize his own policies and discredit those of the opposition, Cromwell adapted various propagandistic devices to suit his purposes. Makers of propaganda were employed by him to slander the Pope and the Catholic Church,”\(^6\) Nonetheless, Harris, like many other historians discussing Bale, makes the mistake of lumping Cromwell’s policies fostering the royal supremacy together with the aims of religious reformers. Therefore, Harris and others discuss *Kynge Johan* as Protestant propaganda, overlooking the fact that the play focuses more on the dangers of an international episcopate and the need for royal supremacy than on religious reform per se.

In terms of the play, Honor McCusker calls *Kynge Johan* “an interesting political document as well as a morality: and notes:


6 Harris, *John Bale*, 27.
That Bale thought of it as an instrument of propaganda, and that he had very precise views to set forth, is indicated by the fact that the end of the play he borrows several pages from William Tynsdale’s *Obedience of a Christian Man*, and puts them, in versified form into the mouth of Veritas. 7

The question is what kind of propaganda? If examined in the light of both Bale and Cromwell, of author and Crown, the play becomes a very pragmatic step in a period of very pragmatic religious beliefs—along the path of Bale’s conversion. If Bale was truly a scholar and antiquarian as well as a reformer, *Kynge Johan* can be read as Tudor propaganda written by a man on the path to conversion. Through placing both Bale and *Kynge Johan* within the historical context of the reign of Henry VIII, especially as he sought means to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, I suggest that *Kynge Johan* was Bale’s attempt on, at the behest of Thomas Cromwell, then Lord of the Privy Seal and “the indisputable technician of the English Reformation,” 8 to use a play loosely based on the reign of John Lackland as deliberate propaganda for the necessity of an English church governed by an English king to replace an international church ruled by an Italian pope. The play’s importance as a piece of Protestant propaganda came later when Bale revised the original. Further, I believe that the relationship that existed between Cromwell and John Bale is more significant than scholars credit.

**Tudor Literature as Propaganda**

The concept of Tudor era literature as deliberate propaganda has been thoroughly explored both in terms of its use to promote a sort of early English nationalism and to promote the Tudor Dynasty. Honor McCusker goes so far as to state that “It has even been suggested that the interest in Arthurian literature evidenced by Leland’s *Assertio inclytissimi Arturij Regis Britanniae* (1544) and other works was fostered by the crown for political reasons. McCusker writes:


8 Smith, *Mask of Royalty*, 127.
Antiquarian research received official approval as early as 1533, when Henry VIII appointed John Leland King’s Antiquary. Anything that would strengthen national unity was valuable at this critical point, and the Tudor house had its own motives for establishing itself as true successor to the British kings.9

By 1536 men whom Jesse Harris has labeled as, “makers of propaganda” (including publishers such as John Rastell) were printing propaganda en masse. Allistair Fox notes that “one striking phenomenon about early Tudor literature is that it was almost invariable concerned with politics, either directly or indirectly, and that this political bearing had a major impact on the nature of the literary forms.”10 Granted, much of the political maneuvering in Tudor England dealt with the Church, however it must be remembered that the Henrician reformation was more of a reform of the command structure of the church than of doctrine and practice. Its primary purpose was to replace the Pope as head of the English Church with Henry VIII. Such an endeavor is a political exercise rather than a spiritual one, and the nature of the propaganda generated therein was political despite being clothed as religious.

**Kynge Johan: The Text**

Like all of Bale’s dramatic works, *Kynge Johan* was most likely written sometime between 1533 and his arrest in 1537. It is one of only five of his extant plays.11 *Kynge Johan* is the also only extant play of Bale’s in which the subject is of an overtly secular nature. As such, it provides valuable insight into the character of Bale himself that the other plays may not.

Perhaps the most interesting fact about the play lies in its provenance. The extant manuscript of *Kynge Johan* currently is in the collection of the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California. It was purportedly found in the town records of Ipswich, and was


10 Fox, *Politics and Literature*, 3.

11 Bale wrote more than twenty plays for which the only extant evidence is in his own catalogs. See Blatt, *Plays of John Bale*, 20.
published in 1838 by Jeremy Collier. There is no earlier record of publication. The manuscript consists of two separate pieces. The first part (the “A text”) is in an unknown hand, probably belonging to what Happé calls an “an experienced scribe . . . who was transcribing from a copy, presumably by Bale himself.” Bale’s corrections can be seen with increasing frequency throughout the A text until the latter part (the “B text”) is reached. This section is in Bale’s own hand, and apparently is an entirely rewritten version.

Happé notes that it is probable the “two versions of the play may very well have been written at widely separated times in Bale’s life.” In terms of the date of composition, even though the title appears in all four of Bale’s catalogs of his works (the earliest of which, the Anglorum Heliades, appeared in 1536) there is no way to determine the exact date of composition of either the A or B text of the play. For one thing, there is evidence that Anglorum Heliades was revised as late as 1539—the year we think the play originally was produced.

Further, there is both physical and textual evidence that the B text was not written at the same time as its predecessor. Historians cite changes in Bale’s handwriting style as evidence. Additionally, there is physical evidence to support a date of 1558 for the B text in the form of a watermark on the pages in Bale’s own hand. Textual indications in the B text clearly place Bale’s revisions after Elizabeth’s accession in 1558, and perhaps as late as 1560, when Bale returned to England from his second exile, and was awarded a stipend at Canterbury. Lines 2626 through 2645 in the B text provide a clear reference to the Elizabethan policy on the Anabaptists and in a final speech, the character “Nobylyte” notes:

Englande hath a quene thankes to the Lorde above Whych maye be a lyghte to other princes all For the godly wayes whome she doth dayly move To her liege people through Gods wurd spesyall She is that Angell as saynt Johan doth hym call That with the Lordes seale doth marke out his true servauntes Pryntynge in their hartes his holy wourdes and covenautes.14

12 Happé, John Bale, 89.
13 Happé, John Bale, 91.
14 Bale, Kyng Johan, 102
Traditional Views of *Kynge Johan*

McCusker notes that *Kynge Johan* was “Bale’s most important play, and the only one for which we have evidence of frequent performance.” While it is that, there are also two other traditional niches that *Kynge Johan* occupies in the historio-literary continuum. First, it is generally regarded as the first English history play or “the first attempt at a chronicle play, the earliest example of a species which was later to become one of the most popular on the sixteenth century stage.” In a similar vein, in *Shakespeare’s Predecessors in the English Drama*, John Addington Symonds calls *Kynge Johan* a “hybrid,” but notes that it “is the earliest extent specimen on the history.” He explains:

> the interesting feature of the performance is that personifications, including the Nobility, the Clergy, Civil Order, the Commonality, Variety and Imperial Majesty are all introduced in dialogue with real historical beings. The Vice too, under the name Sedation, plays his usual pranks, while Dissimulation hatches the plot of the king’s murder.

A second view of *Kynge Johan* is that it is one of the earliest extant examples in English literature of the use of the drama as Protestant propaganda. Along these lines Symonds suggests that “*King Johan* must be read less as a history drama than as a pamphlet against Papal encroachment and ecclesiastical corruption.” Likewise, Charles Brooke, in *The Tudor Interlude*, while speaking of Bale’s other plays notes that “Bale’s concern is exclusively with the Papists, whom he makes responsible, not only for the burning of Christ’s law, but for the leprosy of the Law of Nature and blinding and laming of Moses of as well. . . Bale’s most famous play, *King Johan*, breathes the same spirit.” While all these views are undoubtedly correct, they overlook the necessity for the Tudor writers to adapt a practical attitude to their writing.

16 Symonds, *Shakespeare’s Predecessors*, 146.
17 Symonds, *Shakespeare’s Predecessors*, 146.
Of Bale’s relationship with Thomas Cromwell, little detail is actually known. In the *Scriptorum*, Bale noted of Cromwell:

> Exutus fortunis omnibus, ex concionead tribunalia mox trahebar, Eboraci primum sub Laeo, Londini postea sub Stokisleyo: sed pius Cromvuelus, qui regi Henrico ab intimus erat, ob editas comoedias me semper liberauit\(^\text{19}\) [Freely translated: As luck would have it, when I was placed before reactionary tribunals from York under the auspices of Archbishop Lee and from London under Bishop Stokesley, the pious (or upright, or dutiful) Lord Cromwell, an intimate advisor of King Henry, always had me freed because of the comedies that I wrote.]

At the very least, this confirms that Bales’ relationship to Cromwell was strong enough that on a number of occasions, including the two already mentioned, Cromwell protected Bale.

When coupled with Cromwell’s known connections to other literary personalities, a stronger relationship between the two men is suggested. Cromwell had dealings with Clement Urmston and John Rastell among others. Anglo notes that both men were involved in a print campaign using both published prose and imagery that was intended to present Henry to his subjects as a mystic being stronger than the Pope\(^\text{20}\). Additionally Cromwell’s dealings with John Rastell included the publication of at least one anti-papal book (*Book of Charge*) that was to be circulated and publicly read all over England so that the commoners would “have no faith in the pope nor his laws.”\(^\text{21}\) Furthermore, as both Urmston and Rastell were involved in the production of Henrician court masques in 1527, and as Rastell was a playwright who built a theatre on his own property, there would seem to be ample opportunity for he and Bale to have been acquainted prior to the events of 1537.

\(^{19}\) Bale, *Scriptorum*, 702.

\(^{20}\) Anglo, *Specticle*, 265.

\(^{21}\) Anglo, *Specticle*, 265. Bale knew Rastell by 1537. In fact, as the latter was an endorser on the former’s *Answer of John Bale...* and may have been party to the same charges. Whether Bale knew Urmeson is unclear, but it seems likely.
Kynge Johan as Tudor Propaganda

Perhaps the most important evidence of Bale’s work as a Tudor propagandist becomes evident upon examination of play in terms of political metaphor. At its very simplest, Kynge Johan tells a story that the English people, noble and commoner, are all familiar with.

There are, however a number of hints in the A text that Bale’s early intent is to support the Henrician monarchy. For example he addresses the divine right of the English King in several places. For example, in lines 100 through 104 the character Englande argues:

\[
\text{Englende; Trwly of the devyll they are that do onythyng} \\
\text{To the subdewing of ony christen King.} \\
\text{For be he goos or bade he is of Godes appoyntyng.}^{22}
\]

The King is of God’s choosing, not the Popes, and is thus subject only to God’s will. Another example can be found in the monologue that ends Act I. In this speech (lines 1087-1090) the Interpreter speaks immediately after the scene in which the Pope, Sedycon (Steven Langton), and Privat Welth plot the overthrow of John. The Interpreter states:

\[
\text{In thys present acte we have to yow declared} \\
\text{As in a myrrour the befynnynge of Kynge Johan,} \\
\text{How he was of God a magistrate appointed} \\
\text{To the governaunce of thys noble regyon,} \\
\text{To see maynteyned the true faith and relygyon.} \\
\text{But Satan the Devyll, which that tyme was at large,} \\
\text{Had so great a swaye that he coulde it not discharge.}^{23}
\]

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22 Bale, Kynge Johan, 32.
23 Bale, Kynge Johan, 57.
On one level this is straight anti-clerical diatribe. Yet on another John rules not at the pleasure of the Pope, or as his feudal inferior but as a sovereign monarch and “of God . . . appointed.” As the Pope has just left he is obviously being discussed as “Satan the Devyll,” but it is likely that the time being discussed refers not only to the internal time of the play, but also to that of the production. The statement thus becomes one in favor of the independence of England from Rome and the sovereignty of the Tudor monarchy. Further, as Bale may have played the role of the Interpreter himself, this speech can be interpreted as his direct commentary on the present situation.

There is symbolism inherent in the B text as well. Here the characters actually begin to present a very sophisticated political metaphor. Dissymulacyon, an agent of Rome, poisons King John. Upon discovering this fact, and as John is dying, Englanede responds “With the leave of God I will not leave ye thus. /But styll be with ye tyll he do take yow from us.” In other words, foreigners have poisoned the monarch, but the nation must stand behind the monarchy. John dies, yet the English monarchy is reborn, phoenix-like, in the person of Imperial Majesty. The king, suzerain to higher authority such as the Pope is replaced by an Imperial Majesty, sovereign in his own right in his own kingdom.

This notion of Imperial Monarchy would have a particular resonance to an elite audience such as probably witnessed the performance of King Johan in Canterbury. Medieval concepts of Roman Law differentiated between the suzerainty of kings, and the sovereign power of emperors. The lawyers of Philip II of France called him Philip Augustus not as a title of respect for his wisdom, but to symbolize that he held sovereign power in his own kingdom. He was not merely a king, suzerain over a feudal pyramid of nobles united by oaths of allegiance, but a sovereign with the rights to make

24 Happé, John Bale, 122. See note for line K1086 ff.
25 Bale, Kyng Johan, 86.
laws and proclamations that pertained to all his subjects. In other words, Imperial Majesty meant the Medieval and Early Modern equivalent of what we today call national sovereignty, the State, in this case of course personified by the English king, which possesses powers over its subjects, internal affairs, and very existence with which no outside power may interfere. Imperial Majesty, therefore, symbolized a totally independent England, and a king whose powers extended to all his subjects, which, in the literal sense of the word in Latin, meant he had the “right to command” any humans placed under his lawful jurisdiction. This seems almost a declaration that the King is the State, a declaration which means far more than that the English Church is no longer subject to the authority of the Bishop of Rome.

Further, if the A text and the B text were, as Happé suggests, written at separate times, it could well mean that Bale’s purposes for the play may have changed over time. That the play appears to have been updated and adapted to reflect further developments in the English Reformation, is only a stronger indication that the piece could have been originated as a play to help the Crown promulgate Royal Supremacy not just over the English Church, but over the entire nation, and all its subjects, be they high or low.

Conclusions

John Bale’s Kynge Johan remains important to historian and student for a number of reasons. Aside from being one of the few extant dramatic works of John Bale, it represents the earliest English history or chronicle play. It also certainly presents protestant propaganda as well. There is more to it than that, however. Not only does it provide another piece of evidence of the propaganda machine assembled by Thomas Cromwell to assist with the divorce of Henry VIII from Catherine of Aragon, it places John Bale as part of that machine.

26 Fawtier, Capetian Kings, 140-55.
Bale was, to put it mildly, one of the more vocal advocates of the English Reformation. As all of his extant plays come from the period of his life thought to contain his personal conversion, there appears to be good reason to argue that they are all related to The Reformation, and that *Kynge Johan* was intended as a Protestant propaganda piece.

Yet the so-called Henrician reformation was not aimed at a total reformation of the English church along Lutheran or Calvinist models. Although it provided a starting point for further Protestant reforms in England, Henry’s reformation was aimed at creating a secure secession to the throne of Henry VIII. It was this goal that saw the creation of Thomas Cromwell’s propaganda machine and its liberal use of all possible means of communication to move people away from loyalty to the Church of Rome. After all, the central message of *Kynge Johan* is that when England’s clergy subordinated its rightful loyalty to England and its lawful king to a foreign, Italian pope, the realm was plunged into civil war and ruination. When that message is coupled with John Bale’s relationship to Cromwell, it becomes clear that, regardless of Bale’s later intent, originally *Kynge Johan* deliberately aimed at the creation of popular sentiment to support King Henry’s “great matter.”

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Bibliography


"Public Shaming: Milton and the English People" discusses the role of shame and its performance in John Milton's First and Second Defence of the People of England. As Milton attempts to shame Salmasius and More, he focuses on bodies and their relationship to shame. For Milton, shame should be morally productive—it is meant to produce a sense of self-consciousness and an appropriate moral awareness. Milton argues that Salmasius and More are shameless and therefore not self-conscious or morally aware. Involved with shame and self-consciousness is a profound awareness of one's body and its relationship to others and to the environment. However, the shame that is performed on the part of Salmasius and More isn't the only shame that outlines self-consciousness. When Milton creates the discourse surrounding Salmasius' and More's shamelessness, his own sense of self is also called into play through the defense of himself and the English people.

When Charles I was beheaded publicly in January 1649, Oliver Cromwell and Parliament worked to fill in the space left by the execution of the English king. In the same year as Charles' execution, Milton was appointed to be the Secretary for Foreign Tongues, and one of his first assignments was to defend the English against polemic attacks on the regicide. With the publication of Eikonoklastes, Milton established his ability to defend England against such attacks raging about the execution of the king.

Milton continued to defend England, her new government, and her people with The First Defense of the English People, in response to an attack from Claudius Salmasius. Published in 1651, The First Defence of the English People began a public shaming that involved Milton, those he was writing in response to, Salmasius and More, and the larger bodies of the English people and those who opposed the ideals of the English Revolution. After this, in 1652, a new attack on the English people appeared, supposedly written by Alexander More, an associate of Salmasius. Milton responded with The Second Defence of the English People, published in 1654, attacking both the deceased Salmasius and his associate More, continuing
the public shaming that had begun in *The First Defence*. However, this second attack was not actually written by More. It was, instead, written by an English Royalist named Peter du Moulin. Milton’s mistake of directing *The Second Defence* to More rather than du Moulin was shameful, but it was a relatively small shame compared to the shame that many considered the regicide to be.

The production and analysis of shame in *The Defences* focuses on bodies. Although there are many bodies involved in *The Defences*, both physical and textual, the bodies that I will focus on here are the bodies of More, Salmasius, and Milton. The primary cause of shame is the body, particularly its connection with self and identity, or its position in the social sphere. Shame arises most often when the body’s performance of self and identity break down or when that performance fails to satisfy cultural expectations and standards. Milton seeks to project shame onto his opponents, but the examination of shame shows that Salmasius and More were not the only shameful bodies in *The Defences*. Milton’s body and thus his identity, too, were also potentially shameful,¹ even though he tried to portray himself as shamefast² and invulnerable. Milton’s position of writing *The Defences* was shameful, not only because he misdirected *The Second Defence*, but also because of his body and role as Secretary in Cromwell’s government defending a regicide. This raises questions of cultural or national shame. Milton was not merely defending himself against attacks meant to induce personal shame, but he also defended the body of English people against those same attacks that asserted regicide is a nationally shameful act.

¹ Shameless, as per the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), can be defined as: “lacking shame, destitute of feelings of modesty; impudent, audacious, immodest; insensible to disgrace.” Its etymology is Old English. Current uses of “shameless” suggest that it can be either a positive or negative thing (particularly since “shamefast,” see below, isn’t used anymore). However, I will be using “shameless” to describe a negative behavior.

² Shamefast, as per the *OED*, can be defined as: “bashful, modest. In a good or neutral sense: Modest or virtuous in behaviour and character. In a depreciatory sense: Shy, awkward in the company of others, ‘sheepish.’” It can also be defined as “ashamed, abashed, full of shame.” Its etymology is also Old English, and fell out of use predominantly after the Seventeenth Century, although there are recorded uses of it into the Nineteenth Century. “Shamefast” will be used to describe a positive behavior.
Salmasius, More, and Milton, as well as the larger bodies of the people they wrote for, were particularly invested in the performance of self. Because they were particularly interested and invested in themselves, one of their primary causes of shame centered around the body and the body’s connection with self and identity, particularly the position of the body, the self, and identity in a social sphere. Silvan Tomkins, one of the primary theorists of affect, argues in *Affect Imagery Consciousness* that shame arises when interest or excitement is interrupted. Tomkins holds that a few areas of interest particularly allow for shame.

One of his subtitles reads, “Work, Love, the Body, the Self as Major Objects of Investment of Interest-Excitement and Enjoyment-Joy and as a Major Source of Shame-Humiliation.” As the subtitle indicates, work, love, bodies, and selves are all objects or areas of our lives in which we invest much of our interest. For Milton, writing *The Defences* incorporated work, love, bodies, and selves. When interest in any of these areas was interrupted, shame entered. Because the bodies of Salmasius, More, and Milton were inextricably tied up with identity, multiple aspects of their bodies could trigger shame. Milton attempted to produce shame in Salmasius and More by accusing More of being a hermaphrodite. Yet, when Milton’s accusations failed to produce the expected shame, Milton attacked his enemies’ shamelessness. As Milton set Salmasius and More up as shameless, he attempted to construct himself as shamefast. However, in doing so Milton revealed his own anxieties about his own body and potential for shame.

Milton played on the body as shameful, constructing the bodies of his attackers as a vital source of shame. In *The Second Defence of the English People* Milton described a love affair between More and Pontia, one of Salmasius’ maids, which left Pontia pregnant and disgraced without any support from either More or Salmasius. It is a story Milton viciously and publicly wrote about, meaning to draw the reader’s attention towards the shameful, sexual bodies of Salmasius and More, particularly More. He wrote, “In the meantime, Salmasius, not unlike in face to Salmasis, (for as the

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name, so the tale is not inapt) unconscious that More, whom he had associated to himself, was an hermaphrodite, alike capable of procreation and of parturition, not aware of what More had begotten at home, he fondles in ecstasy what he had brought forth.™4 Because of this description, More was suddenly no longer male. However, he was not just ‘not male,’ but he was also ‘not female,’ either. More, rather than being relegated to femaleness—a culturally legible gender, if lower on the hierarchical structure than maleness—has become relegated to a liminal space. More was not ‘either/or,’ but was instead ‘hermaphrodite,’ an unacceptable combination of both. Ruth Gilbert, in her article “Seeing and Knowing: Science, Pornography and Early Modern Hermaphrodites,” writes that:

Hermaphroditic individuals evoked a mixture of disgust and desire, fear and fascination, which positioned them at the border of the human. As they occupied a vulnerable threshold between male and female, human and monstrous, fact and fantasy, hermaphrodites were in many ways the consummate objects of a scientific scrutiny which could not, however, be easily separated from the prurient curiosity of popular entertainments and erotic objectification.5

To be hermaphroditic—to be both—made More a physical, sexual, medical, scientific anomaly. More’s body, through Milton’s description, became something unexpected and disruptive. It does not matter if Milton was accurate in his description of their bodies; what matters here is Milton’s rhetorical ability to establish the attackers immediately as ‘other,’ a shameful positioning within society. While Milton emphasized More’s body throughout this quotation, the liminality that Milton ascribed to More extended to Salmasius, even though Salmasius was “unconscious” of More’s actions. By virtue of association with More’s hermaphroditic body, Salmasius became

4 Milton, Second Defence, 329. Milton manipulated his reference to the Salmacis / Hermaphroditos myth, allowing the audience to further contextualize the relationship between Salmasius and More. Milton feminized Salmasius by using this myth as well, because Salmacis was a water nymph, who attempted to seduce Hermaphroditos but was rejected. Salmacis asked (while attempting to rape Hermaphroditos) that they would never be separated, and so their bodies were blended into one.

liminal and shameful as well. The shamefulness and liminality of their bodies affected their identities as well, and so with Milton’s suggestion that Salmasius’ and More’s bodies were out of place and disfigured, their identities became out of place and disfigured.

Despite all of the shame that Milton attempted to heap upon Salmasius and More, they remained, according to Milton, impertinently shameless. Milton told Salmasius that he was a “shameless disreputable foulmouth!” Although “disreputable” and “foulmouth” are the obvious insults in this phrase, “shameless” operates as an insult as well. By labeling Salmasius as “shameless,” Milton insinuated that Salmasius and More should have been feeling shame, but were not. Shamelessness is a source of shame on its own, because being shameless when one ought to feel shame suggests that something is socially wrong. If, in a social setting, a person is behaving shamefully but is unaware of doing so, social relationships become strained and can disintegrate altogether. Furthermore, this state of being unaware means that the person who ought to be feeling shame is less than self-conscious and is inconsiderate of relationships with others. By using “shameless” to intensify the insult of “disreputable foulmouth,” Milton was compounding shame: disrepute and foulmouthed-ness are all conditions that should or often do cause shame. Yet, in this situation, Salmasius and More remained shameless, suggesting that they did not care about the other people that surrounded them.

This accusation of being shameless continues throughout other moments of The Defences, although Milton expanded on the reasons Salmasius and More should have felt shame. Milton wrote, “I should tell you perhaps, if you were not who you are, that you ought at length to be ashamed of your disgraceful double-dealing. But you can sooner burst than blush, who long ago cast off shame for profit.” Milton told Salmasius and More that they “ought at length to be ashamed of your disgraceful double-dealing,” but emphasized

6 Milton, First Defence, 248.

7 Milton, First Defence, 207.
that neither of them was actually ashamed. The “double-dealing”
that Milton identified was, like being disreputable and foulmouthed,
something that should have been shameful. Yet, somehow, Salmasius
and More were not ashamed of their actions and behavior.

Charles Darwin, in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man
and Animals*, suggests that “blushing is the most…human of all
expressions,” and so Milton’s accusation that Salmasius and More
could not blush begins to remove them even from the realm of the
human—or, at the very least, from having human emotions and
expressions. Milton continued to emphasize that this inability to
blush or be ashamed was ingrained into their essential selves: “if
you were not who you are … you ought at length to be ashamed.”
However, Salmasius and More have “long ago cast off shame for
profit,” foregoing a humanizing emotion for financial and perhaps
social gain. Such an accusation suggested that Salmasius and More
had sold their morals and prostituted their writing talents and reason
for money. Prostitution, in any fashion, is stigmatized and consid-
ered shameful.

Accusing Salmasius and More of prostitution was an insult
and a method of shaming that Milton continued to employ, comment-
ing, “This is what that gang of renegades hired you–and hired
you cheap – to write; so that I shall not trouble myself to answer
you, who babble what you know nothing of, but I will answer them
that hired you.” Not only did Milton note that Salmasius and More
had sold themselves, he also stressed that they had done so cheaply.
Because they were effectively prostitutes, Milton chose to bypass
them and attack those who had hired them. If having sold them-
selves cheaply was not shame enough, the fact that Milton did not
think them worthy of response emphasizes and builds that shame.
While he disregarded Salmasius and More, Milton also insulted and
undermined the people who hired them to write, painting the whole


9 Milton, *First Defence*, 236. Salmasius had been hired by Queen Christina of Sweden to
write the attack that led to *The First Defence*. 
opposing coalition as one held together by economic interests and labeling them as “that gang of renegades.” This phrase summarized the general feelings of the Royalists concerning the English revolutionaries after they had executed their divinely appointed king. By using it, Milton redirected onto Salmasius, More, and their employers the very shame they intended for the English.

While Milton attempted to shame Salmasius and More through both their shamelessness and their prostitution of themselves, he also attacked them for the deficiencies of their writing. Milton marked that Salmasius’ writing was not achieving its purpose of making the English people ashamed of their regicide, remarking that, “You seem to me to approach this eleventh chapter, Salmasius, though still unashamed, yet with some sense of your inefficiency.”

This certainly was not Milton’s only comment about Salmasius’ writing as a whole; Milton savaged Salmasius and More for their incorrect understanding of Latin grammar, the organization of their arguments, and their weak evidence. Although Milton did engage in vicious ad hominem attacks, he also worked through a careful analysis and deconstruction of his opponents’ arguments. In The First Defence, Milton wrote to Salmasius,

I am ashamed, and have long been weary, of your lies. Falsely you declare it to be a principle of the English “That enemies are rather to be spared than friends, and that because their king was their friend they ought not to spare him.” You impudent liar, what mortal ever heard this whimsy before you invented it? Yet we overlook it, for this chapter did not as yet present that most egregious worn-out rhetorical cosmetic of yours, which you now for the fifth time fetch out from the cabinets of your perfumery-shop, and which before the end of your book is to be fetched thence ten times – that stuff about the English being “fiercer than their mastiffs!” The English are not so much fiercer than their own mastiffs as you are hungrier than any mad dog whatsoever, who with your tough guts can bear to return again and again to the cabbage you have so often vomited.

10 Milton, First Defence, 293.

11 Milton, First Defence, 185.
This quotation, initially claiming Milton’s own shame, actually brings the shame back around to the audience that Milton directed *The Defences* to, and allows us to examine some of the moments which are meant to be shameful for that audience. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is Milton’s declaration that he was ashamed. It seems that Milton’s claiming of shame in this quotation is somewhat paradoxical, until we realize that Milton, by claiming what Salmasius and More *should* be feeling but are not, was able to emphasize his own openness to feeling shame and admitting his faults. By being ashamed of Salmasius and More, Milton was further attempting to shame them and convince them to perform shame, but because they refused to do so, Milton’s position would appear all the stronger.

Milton continued to belittle Salmasius and More by aligning Salmasius’ rhetoric with frivolities such as cosmetics and perfumes which were, to further the shame, “worn-out” and “egregious.” The shame associated with these worn-out cosmetics and perfumes was certainly gendered, because it suggests that Salmasius and More needed cosmetics and perfumes — items typically associated with women, who were lower in the social hierarchy than males. With the use of cosmetics and perfumes, Milton again called attention to his opponents’ liminality: they were men who preened like women. Cosmetics and perfumes were also used to cover up, and in some sense, falsify one’s already shameful body in order to make it less shameful either through being less ugly or less odorous.

The gendered moments in this quotation are not the only ones that are meant to cause shame, however. Milton incorporated food and eating habits, both of which connect to the body and its functions, as well as odors associated with food, eating, and bodily functions. The eating that Milton discussed here is particularly disgusting: a dog returning to its vomit, repeatedly. Food is often associated with cultural norms, and where those norms come into play, shame does as well. In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that,
Without positive affect, there can be no shame: only a scene that offers you enjoyment or engages your interest can make you blush. Similarly, only something you thought might delight or satisfy can disgust. Both these affects produce bodily knowledges: disgust, as when spitting out bad-tasting food, recognizes the difference between inside and outside the body and what should and should not be let in; shame, as precarious hyperreflexivity of the surface of the body, can turn one inside out – or outside in.\(^{12}\)

Although Sedgwick connects shame, interest, and positive affect, she also notes that these moments of conflicted interest lead to “bodily knowledges” of what is good or bad to eat. Sedgwick uses the rather general “bad-tasting food” but when we substitute the vomit that Milton used, we recognize that the bodily borders Sedgwick discussed are further confused. The food that Sedgwick mentions had not yet been incorporated fully into the body; the vomit that Milton mentioned had already been part of the body and had been rejected by it. The borders of outside/inside are made to be even more blurry when vomit becomes food. By suggesting that Salmassius and his associates were dogs and willing to eat their own vomit (repeatedly), Milton broke down both cultural norms of what was appropriate to eat, what it meant to be human, and what appropriately belonged to the inside and the outside of the body.

After accusations of hermaphroditism, name-calling, and public shaming, Milton called down the wrath of God in order to further shame Salmasius and More, exclaiming,

Let me, I say, be so far a prophet as to tell you that the vengeance of God and man hangs over your head for so horrid a crime; although your casting down the whole human race under the feet of tyrants, which is naught else than, as far as in your lies, condemning them to be thrown to the beasts of the amphitheatre, - this monstrous wickedness is itself part of its own vengeance upon you; and whithersoever on earth you flee, and wheresoever you wander, will pursue you with its furies soon or late, and drive and harass you with madness yet worse than now you rave with.\(^{13}\)


\(^{13}\) Milton, *First Defence*, 238.
By involving religion and a vengeful God, Milton incorporated perhaps one of the most obvious performances of shame: religion.

If the social aspects of shame and shamelessness failed to work on a temporal level, the threat of an angry God might work on an eternal level. Milton calls to mind the religious aspects of performance: ceremony, prophets, false-prophets, miracles, etc. In asking to be considered a prophet, Milton immediately set himself up in a publicly performative situation that brought attention to the performer/prophet and allowed the performer/prophet to construct the performance of the public bodies surrounding him. According to the performer/prophet Milton, the bodies of Salmasius and More became wicked, guilty, and shameful. By contrast, Milton as prophet sets himself up as a shamefast individual; although a prophet may be flawed and mortal, he still presents and defends his God. This role of flawed but sanctified prophet was a role Milton fully embraced.

Finally, towards the end of The Second Defence of the English People, Milton noted of Salmasius and More, “Nor do they yet feel any shame.”

Despite all of Milton’s attempts to make Salmasius and More recognize the errors of their ways in attacking the English regicide, Salmasius and More failed to do so. Their failure to align themselves with the ideals of the English Civil War suggested to Milton that Salmasius and More were unwilling to be humbled and admit shame. Milton, then, made sure that his audience was aware of the flaws in Salmasius’ and More’s beliefs. Milton emphasized the role of bodies in order to establish his attackers’ shame. In doing so, he attempted to set up a strict binary of those who were shameful because they were shameless, as opposed to those who were shamefast.

Milton’s attempts to carry out this strict division continued throughout both Defences, although they have their moments of breaking down, particularly when Milton’s public shaming became

extravagant\textsuperscript{15} and began to reflect back on him and his own pride. When Milton accused Salmasius and More of “cast[ing] off shame for profit” and prostituting their writing talents, he created an awkward moment where his insults might potentially backfire. Although Milton did support the removal of Charles I, he wrote \textit{The Defences} not in the service of abstract idealism but at the behest of the Protectorate and its Parliament. Milton \textit{was} paid for his work – and even as his approval of the Protectorate waned, he retained his government position and pay. Having been commissioned to write \textit{The Defences}, Milton proclaimed, “Let me therefore enter upon this noble cause with cheerfulness grounded upon the assurance that on the other side are cheating, and trickery, and ignorance and outlandishness, and on my side the light of truth and reason, and the practice and theory of the best historic ages.”\textsuperscript{16} Although Milton argued that his position was more honorable than that of Salmasius and More, it is important to note that the binary Milton set up between shamefulness and shamefastness was not nearly as clear as he—or his audience—would have liked it to be.

Milton’s use of the body—albeit an abstract, biased, and oftentimes dismembered body—helped more clearly to emphasize the role of shame, both about his own body and the bodies of his opponents. Milton defended his own body in \textit{The Second Defence} as a site of shamefastness – his was a body that could not be shamed and was not a source of shame. He described himself to his readership,

\begin{quote}
No one, who has only seen me, has ever to my knowledge, thought me ugly: whether handsome or not, is a point I shall not determine. My stature, I own, is not tall; but may approach nearer to the middle than to the small size…In my countenance…there still remains a colour so very opposite to the bloodless and pale, that, though turned of forty, there is scarcely any one who would not think me younger by nearly ten years. It is equally untrue, that either my body or my skin is shrivelled.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} The \textit{OED} lists many definitions of “extravagant,” but one particularly helpful definition of extravagant is “widely divergent or discrepant (\textit{from}, \textit{to}); remote \textit{from}, irrelevant or foreign \textit{to} a purpose or subject” as well as “varying widely from what is usual or proper; unusual, abnormal, strange; unbecoming, unsuitable.” In many ways, Milton’s extreme shaming and attacking of Salmasius and More suggest that Milton is out of control or undisciplined.

\textsuperscript{16} Milton, \textit{First Defence}, 103.

\textsuperscript{17} Milton, \textit{Second Defence}, 337-8.
Milton trod a very, very fine line between defending himself from a shameful attack and revealing himself as a vain man. The revelation of vanity would have undermined Milton’s attempts to establish himself as shamefast. While Milton would not declare whether he was handsome or not (it “[was] a point [he] shall not determine,” after all), he made sure to emphasize that he was not ugly: he was not “bloodless and pale;” neither body nor skin was “shriveled;” and although he was not tall, he certainly was not short. Whether or not Milton was describing himself accurately, he was presenting a particular performance of himself. By describing himself (or himself as he would like others to see him), Milton projected his own body into the drama of the polemic, rhetorical war between him, Salmasius, and More. Rather than having an abstract author, the audience was given a real person. Through describing and emphasizing his body, Milton constructed and controlled his shame, even if he did tread the line between shame and pride.

One such source of shame for Milton was his blindness. By the time Milton wrote *The Defences*, he was nearly completely blind and would often blame the advance of his blindness on the work and the time he spent in writing *The Defences*. While we often laud Milton for the work he accomplished while blind—such as *Paradise Lost*—blindness in Milton’s time was much more stigmatized and shameful than what we now consider. In the early modern period, blindness was often associated with venereal diseases, particularly syphilis. Although Milton’s blindness was probably genetic—he notes that his mother had weak eyes and used spectacles—it allowed others to criticize him for frequenting brothels and lacking sexual self-discipline. It also meant that Milton was required to defend his body in addition to and as part of the English people. “Let us come now to the charges against me,” Milton wrote. “Can he [More] find any thing to blame in my life or manners? Clearly nothing. What does he do then? He does what none but a brute and barbarian would have done; he upbraids me with my person, and with my blindness.”

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Milton’s blindness was an intensely sore spot, something he returned to again and again throughout both of *The Defences*. Indeed, it was justly a sore spot: an accusation of a lack of sexual self-control was shameful, because it suggested Milton did not have control over his body, self, or identity. Milton’s suggested lack of control questioned his fitness to represent Cromwell’s government and even the moral status of the government as a whole. When an individual such as Milton failed to have proper self-discipline, shame found a window in which to appear. Milton’s blindness left a very large window in which shame did appear. Defending himself and his blindness, Milton added, “Let me intreat that I may not be misinterpreted, that I may not excite ill-will, that I may not give offence, if I have spoken before, and if I shall speak again more of myself than I could wish; that, if I cannot rescue my eyes from blindness, my name from oblivion or calumny, I may at least be able, in open day, to redeem my life from the dimness which is produced by a stain.”

Milton was very aware that his blindness was an open space into which his attackers could insert shame, and he attempted to perform his body as unashamedly stainless—without shadow, sin, or blush. The blush—one of the prime signifiers of shame—makes the blusher profoundly aware of his or her body. Furthermore, the body often reacts visibly to shame, besides just blushing. The body attempts to remove itself from sight, by hanging the head and attempting to minimize itself. Darwin describes the reaction of shame as such: “Under a keen sense of shame there is a strong desire for concealment. We turn away the whole body, more especially the face, which we endeavour in some manner to hide. An ashamed person can hardly endure to meet the gaze of those present, so that he almost invariably casts down his eyes or looks askant.” In a public and political setting, however, Milton could not conceal either his blindness or his body when they caused him shame. Instead, he had to find a way to work the shame into his performance of himself and use it to his benefit.


Milton had a profound interest in the way he performed himself and his body. However, bodies often do the unexpected, such as blush. The performance of self can conflict with the body’s imperatives and reactions. The performance of self does not always occur in concert with the body; instead, such performance can go against the body. Our interest in our performance of ourselves allows us the opportunity to feel shame. Milton had no control over his blindness, and so it interrupted his performance of himself. Because Milton’s blindness was visible to others, he was subject to his enemies’ judgmental gaze. What makes *The Defences* particularly interesting is that they combine both the private and the public. Private problems and relationships became inextricably connected with public problems and relationships. The objects that would have caused shame in a private sphere became objects that had the potential to cause shame in a public sphere, such as Milton’s relationship with his daughters, his marriages, or his blindness. His private shame became public shame, and his public shame became private; the public and the private both inhered in the body and thus shame moved between the two realms. Milton’s blindness could not be hidden because it was social. This sociality compounded the shamefulness of Milton’s blind eyes and restricted body. Milton could be looked upon, but he could not look upon others or respond to them visually.

The bodies of Salmasius, More, and Milton only begin to reflect the moments of shame within *The First and Second Defence of the English People*. The shame that Milton attempted to place on Salmasius and More was connected to the community of bodies that disapproved of England’s regicide. When he wrote *The First and Second Defence of the English People*, Milton assumed there was a larger body he wrote for. Milton not only wrote for the English people, but was part of the composite body he defended against a national and cultural shame that many other governments tried to push onto the English people. Because Milton wrote *The Defences* in order to explain and defend the English people’s choice to behead their monarch, he immediately acknowledged the possibility of shame. Indeed, there was shame associated with beheading one’s
king, particularly if the cultural belief was that the king was a divine representative. Deliberately violating the European cultural norm of having a monarch in charge of a kingdom was a prime moment for cultural shame.

Yet, Milton argued that the English people—himself included—should not have felt shame at that moment, because there was something even more shameful than removing the head of one’s king and country. Milton argued that Charles I was a tyrant and as such was a source of shame for England and her entire body politic. Had the English people allowed Charles I to continue to rule in all his corrupt glory, they too would have been incriminated in the cultural and national shame. Milton told Salmasius and More, “To commit to any mortal creature a power over themselves on any other terms than upon trust were extreme madness; nor is it credible that any people since the creation of the world, who had freedom of will, were ever so miserably silly as either to part with the power absolutely and entirely, or, having once entrusted it to their magistrates, to recall it unto themselves without weightiest reasons.”21 By removing Charles I as the head of the government, the English people were able to remove the source of shame and redeem themselves, reasserting their political free will. Such reasoning helped to defend against their cultural and national shame.

Milton’s position was, of course, unstable. Not only was he defending himself and the English people against most of the governments in Europe, but his own “English people” were by no means agreed that Charles I needed to be removed. Milton explained, “It was the people; and in so doing they threw an intolerable yoke of slavery from off their necks. Those very soldiers who you say did it were not foreigners, but our own countrymen, and a great part of the people, and they did it with the consent and at the desire of almost all the rest of the people, and not without the authority of Parliament itself.”22 For his argument, Milton had to pretend that the English

22 Milton, First Defence, 236.
people were mostly united and had come to a consensus concerning the removal of Charles I. However, the fact that The Second Defence was written in response to an attack from an English royalist (despite Milton’s beliefs that the foreign More wrote the attack) demonstrates that such unity was merely a rhetorical performance on Milton’s part. The construct of a unified English people was necessary for Milton’s case; if all of the English people did not agree that Charles I should have been executed, then his defense against shame would have become less convincing.

Although not everyone in a culture may accept cultural or national shame, many of the things which cause shame are culturally or nationally ingrained. In her book, Blush: Faces of Shame, Elspeth Probyn argues,

What makes shame remarkable is that it reveals with precision our values, hopes, and aspirations, beyond the generalities of good manners and cultural norms. For instance, sexuality is widely held as an area ripe for shame. But it’s not a site of shame, or not the same site of shame, for everyone…And those things that do make us ashamed often reveal deep worries and concerns. Again, interest is the key to understanding shame, and shame reminds us with urgency what we are interested in. Shame reminds us about the promises we keep to ourselves.

As Probyn notes, certain things do not cause shame in everyone or in the same way, but she significantly insists that, “Those things that do make us ashamed often reveal deep worries and concerns.” These “deep worries and concerns” are often more culturally widespread than they are individual. Such worries and concerns are often cultural expectations for how one’s body and self should be performed. What causes shame is often not just individual but is instead shared between groups of those individuals. Had the English people, as a conglomerate self, failed ethically in beheading Charles I, shame certainly would have been the result. Milton, however, argued that the English people did not fail and therefore should not have felt shame. The potential for shame, though, was clearly noted in Milton’s vehemence and in the need for a defense.

23 More was Franco-Scottish; Salmasius was French.

24 Probyn, Blush, x
As Milton attempted to defend himself against the shame others were trying to place on him, he also defended the bodies and the body of the English people against a cultural or national shame. While Milton attempted to force Salmasius and More to perform shame (and criticized and shamed them further when they did not perform shame to his satisfaction), he himself performed shamefastness, both on his own behalf and on behalf of the English people. Attempting to shame Salmasius and More, Milton read their bodies as shameful texts. However, these performances were not as strictly defined as Milton attempted to make them, and this led to instability in his binary opposition between the categories of shameless and shamefast. Milton’s two prose tracts emphasize the importance of shame in delineating the connection between bodies, selves, and identities in addition to the wider relationships of those bodies within a public and social sphere.

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Bibliography


The Delno C. West Award is in honor of Professor Delno C. West (1936-1998), one of the founding members of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. Professor West was Professor of History at Northern Arizona University where he served for a time as Chair of the History Department and Director of the Honors Program. Professor West was a president of the Association and the general coordinator of three annual meetings that were held in Flagstaff and at the Grand Canyon. His teaching centered on medieval Europe, and he published widely on the history of Christianity. His numerous books and articles include The Librio de las Profecias of Christopher Columbus (1991).

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The Pilgrim’s Intuitive Cognition in

Pèlerinage de la vie humaine

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This article maintains that the Pilgrim in Guillaume de Deguileville’s allegorical dream vision, Pèlerinage de la vie humaine, acquires a previously unrecognized importance through his cognitive abilities. Each personified figure’s significance depends not upon a general introduction, but the Pilgrim’s ability to identify those traits unique to their person. This mode of intellection mirrors the late Scholastic epistemology of intuitive cognition as championed by John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. This theory allows the Pilgrim to grasp a particular object’s certitude without relying upon universals. Since this philosophy extols intellectual surety, it serves as a framework for interpreting the Pilgrim’s kind of knowing.

Introduction

One constant in the Pilgrim’s journey toward the New Jerusalem in Guillaume de Deguileville’s Pèlerinage de la vie humaine is the specific mode of acquiring knowledge.\(^1\) While the personified figures whom he meets span the spectrum from virtue to vice, their literal value supersedes a mere confirmation of their physicality. The features distinguishing one from another affirm the Pilgrim’s ability to grasp their certitude without relying upon the universals underpinning their allegorical signification. His direct grasp of their person reflects the principles of the late Scholastic theory known as intuitive cognition. The epistemological surety provided by this theory allows him to demarcate a bold line between what can be known and what must rely upon faith. In a text that juxtaposes opposites to depict both the potentials and limits of drawing closer to the divine, this kind of knowing extols his cognitive powers as

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1 The poem was first written in 1331 before being revised and expanded in 1355. The revisions, which are relatively minor, key the poem to monasticism more explicitly. French readership, however, seemingly found the first more engaging since fifty-three copies survive compared to nine for the redaction. Since the original is the only one edited, this article follows this text.
integral in his pilgrimage. While scholars such as Sarah Kay claim that he struggles to “know the self as a content—as a nature present and available to itself”—this article asserts that he does not have to settle for a self-awareness founded upon an inability to possess that knowledge. By grasping each figure’s distinct qualities, he displays a cerebral ability that establishes his value as a thinker who is not conflicted about his own existence or that of others.

The immediacy of these personifications prevents them from being lost in an impersonal realm of abstraction. They come to life via human agency. The Pilgrim’s recognition of their specific identity makes him a vital participant in the allegorical exchanges. Distinguishing the polyphony of voices does not rely upon “the universalizing, systematic, monologic exegesis of reality in the tradition of Augustine,” but emerges from the certainty generated by the particular object as the basis of knowing. Despite the text’s complexity of the self, the knowledge of his own and other’s acts indicates an informed understanding of those issues seminal to their intellectual milieu.

**Epistemological Reflections of Late Scholastic Thought**

For all of its poetic sublimity, the impetus of the Pilgrim’s search onward parallels the key issues championed by John Duns Scotus (1265/6-1308) and William of Ockham (c. 1287-1347): grasping what one can know with certainty. This article understands the prevailing schools of thought in the late Middle Ages, namely realism and nominalism, as complementary, for the central factors of their epistemologies assert the primacy of the singular. Neither school rejects universals, but examines how we know them from different perspectives. John Duns Scotus, a moderate realist, examines what

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2 Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 91.

3 Nievergelt, “Paradigm, Intertext, or Residual Allegory,” 30.

4 Kay explores how the spatial dislocation and the Pilgrim’s interplay with the allegorical personifications address the philosophical issue of *cogito* as expressed by Augustine in *On the Trinity* and other works. From this position, she then discusses how this expression anticipates and achieves clarity in modern thought, specifically in the works of Descartes and Lacan (90-4).
makes these universal properties distinct. For him, these properties exist in matter itself, but are particularized by an individuating factor called “thisness” or “haecceity.”

He defines the fine line separating the universal and the individual as a formal distinction. For example, if one looks at a chair, that person knows that this chair is an individual because an intuitive grasp of its haecceity distinguishes it from an otherwise similar one. Although the universal and particular cannot exist without one another, Scotus maintains that a logical distinction delineates the two.

Whereas Scotus acknowledges the reality of universals, they are merely conceptual for his nominalist successor William of Ockham. He perceives universals solely as abstract entities. Subsequently, Ockham explains the individual not by reference to the universal but rather the opposite, to account for universals in a world of individuals. He disrupts the concord between concepts and reality. Although this disruption causes realists to fear the seeming incompatibility of faith-inspired knowledge with nominalism, he stresses the positive powers of the thinker. By following Scotus in making the individual object directly accessible to the intellect, Ockham also affirms the direct experience of particulars and the integral value of the intellect in providing certain knowledge. Neither Scotus nor Ockham supplants faith with intellectual knowledge.

Classic literary studies of how this kind of investigation enlightens our appreciation of medieval texts come to light most vividly in Chaucerian studies. Russell Peck and James Wimsatt demonstrate how ideas pivotal to Scotus and Ockham clarify questions underlying Chaucer’s oeuvre. Wimsatt shows how Scotus influences modern thinkers, particularly Charles Sanders Peirce and how the pervasiveness of Scotist thought seeps into literary thought. He employs this moderate realism to explicate how the Canterbury pilgrims can be seen as both common types and individuals. Peck


qualifies the salience of nominalist thought by stating that Chaucer “may not be interested in whether we can know with certitude only individual things, [but] he is profoundly interested in how we know individual things.” His qualification enables him to claim that a core appreciation of Chaucer’s poetry revolves around an exaltation of the human phenomena of experience. As the principles comprising this phenomenon parallel those of Ockhamist thought, an informed study of intuitive cognition enhances our understanding of Deguileville’s poem and its cultural dependence.

To posit that universals exist but that all we ever experience are individuals proves salient to a text so immersed in epistemological matters. It validates the Pilgrim’s reliance upon specific objects to identify the figures whom he meets. The reality within his dream vision is radically individual. It discards the traditional iconography of personified vices and remedial virtues to convey meaning, such as Cupid appearing as the baby angel. Each figure possesses a unique trait, specifically tailored to his or her purport. For example, Grace Dieu’s crown of stars and rubies depicts her divine origins. As they enable the Pilgrim to grasp their presence, this emphasis mirrors the epistemological view that the ultimate intelligible object is not the genus or species but the individual. For Scotus and Ockham, it begins with an unmediated cognitive act, which provides a simple, non-judgmental awareness of an object as existing and present:

9 Scotian and Ockhamist views, in accord with medieval thought generally, gave paramount importance to gaining knowledge about God, praising it as a laudable rational endeavor. Still, disputes arose in academic circles concerning how one acquires such knowledge. At the center of these disputes lay the problem of universals and the strong theological implications they raised. “Universals” are the general terms categorizing a multiplicity of individuals—such as the word “humanity,” applied to all humans, or “man” or “woman” applied to some. Until the Aristotelian revival in the thirteenth century, philosophers like Augustine commonly perceived universal natures as existing independently of the particulars whose natures they signify. Following the revival, however, medieval thinkers like Scotus and Ockham redefined this epistemology. Their revolution focused upon particular objects. See *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals*, ed. Spade, i-xii.
Intuitive cognition of a thing is cognition that enables us to know whether the thing exists or does not exist, in such a way that, if the thing exists, then the intellect immediately judges that it exists and evidently knows that it exists, unless the judgment happens to be impeded through the imperfection of the cognition.\(^{10}\)

Both the senses and the intellect can generate certain knowledge of specific objects. Each object is radically individual, an essence by itself, thus eliminating the notion that universals define reality. Ockham rejects any kind of intermediary or individuating difference between the object and the universal and, by doing so, asserts the ontological primacy of the singular.\(^{11}\)

On this point, he finds more in common with his Parisian confrère, Peter Olivi (1248-98), who believes that if a species were perceived in the cognizer, then it “would veil the thing and impede its being attended to in itself as if present, rather than aid in its being attended to.”\(^{12}\) Olivi’s influence of Ockham stems from the belief that the only act of cognition that matters is the one that perceives the object itself, which eliminates any need for any mediating act or species to interfere with the person’s object.

While his reliance upon Olivi concerning the refutation of species is unmistakable, it is “more significant because, whether Ockham had read Olivi’s *Sentences* commentary directly or knew his views only through some intermediary source, the Provençal Franciscan’s commentary was evidently not widely familiar to scholars in England.”\(^{13}\) Ockham was one of the first English philosophers to embrace the teachings of Parisian opponents of intelligible or sensible species as Peter Olivi, Henry of Ghent (c. 1217-93), and Gerard of Bologna (d. 1317).\(^{14}\) In turn, Ockham’s

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11 For Scotus, universals exist; they are not merely conceptual. While each object has the formal entity of singularity and that of a common nature, the two are “always formally distinct realities of the same thing” (John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 3, q. 6; *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals*, ed. Spade, 107). Scotus believes that the universal and particular, though distinct, cannot exist without one another. A logical distinction both divides and unites the two. This way one can claim that universals exist, but also maintain that all we ever experience are individuals.


writings became known and respected at the University of Paris in the late 1320’s, which arguably results from him leaving England and staying in Avignon from 1324 to 1328. Here he interacts with “an international community of scholars, many of whom had been trained in the more diverse intellectual environment of Paris.”\textsuperscript{15} These Parisian thinkers learn to receive his ideas with “a sensationalism born of an overly strict application of supposition theory in Arts and the restructuring of approaches in Theology through the use of sophisms and obligations.”\textsuperscript{16} This rapprochement between French and English thought attests to an active exchange of ideas.

**Allegory’s Immediate Presence**

With these ideas in mind, the issue before Deguileville’s protagonist is not if he can envision the New Jerusalem, but if he can establish its extant reality. The narrative opens with him looking into a mirror and seeing the New Jerusalem. Its dominant features resemble this world. It rests upon a stone foundation with high walls surrounded by mansions peopled occupying a cross section of society: lay and secular, clergy and religious, beggars and the needy (119-20). He even observes the members of established religious orders, such as the Dominicans and Augustinians, as well as eminent founders of their own orders, Sts. Benedict and Francis. Their presence affirms that scholastic learning paves the way towards the city.

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\text{En un miroir, ce me sembloit,}
\text{Qui sans mesure grans estoit}
\text{Celle cite apaceue}
\text{Avoie de loing et veue.}
\text{Mont me sembloit de grant atour}
\text{Celle cite ens et entour.}
\text{Les chemins et les aleees}
\text{D’or en stoient paves,}
\text{En haut assis son fondement}
\text{Estoit et son maconnement}
\text{De vives pierres fait estoit}
\text{Et haut mur entour la clooit (39-50).}\textsuperscript{17}
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\textsuperscript{16} Courtenay, “The Reception of Ockham’s Thought at the University of Paris,” 50.
\textsuperscript{17} Deguileville, \textit{Le Pèlerinage de vie humaine}. 
[In a mirror, it seemed to me that this city that I had seen from afar was large beyond measure. It was very ornate both inside and out. The paths and lanes were paved with gold. The foundation was set up high, the masonry was made of living stones, and a high wall enclosed it on all sides.]

Jerusalem celestial does exist, but the Dreamer/Pilgrim’s grasp of its immediacy is imperfect. He perceives only an image: streets paved with gold and people filled with joy. While familiar objects confirm a supernal reality, its existence rests upon an image, not an actuality. Still, these impressions embed itself upon the internal senses—the imagination and memory, spurring him onwards. Recognizable objects affirm and substantiate an existent relationship. Ockham maintains that the impressed quality of these objects rather than a species inclines the faculty to act.18 They prompt him to seek out their immediate presence because no matter what intensifies or clarifies this vision, it cannot cause an effect the same as the one it represents. The ensuing pilgrimage is thus predicated upon the desire to gain a direct vision of this city.

As depicted by these images, allegory utilizes different lines of signification—literal and figural, poetic and philosophic—to modify each other, enabling one to comprehend heaven. Frédéric Duval warns against interpreting every sign under the umbrella of universal symbolism and points out how one must constantly assess if the object operates as *le signe* or a thing.19 *Res*, the actual object, must not be ignored. The Dreamer/Pilgrim’s process of knowing is governed by a clear order of precedence springing from the particular to the universal in initiating movement between the actual and allegorical. Its surety ensures a solid foundation so that a fluid relationship can flow between these binaries. He must then embark upon a journey so that he can grasp the actuality of these objects. He desires a reality founded upon a material or immanent object to verify his cognitive abilities. At times, the objects he encounters are

18 Ockham, III *Rep.* q. 3; *OTh* VI: 114.

ideally suited to his experiential understanding; at other times, he struggles to appreciate their import. Nonetheless, his perceptions, as Susan Hagen notes, consistently stimulate an inner drive to pursue this celestial truth:

A view of an actual object, even an object seen spatially displaced, initiates stronger emotions than does a representation of it. Second only to a direct view of the Heavenly City, which the pilgrim cannot enjoy until the conclusion of his earthly life and journey, a mirrored reflection of the celestial Jerusalem remains the most compelling sight he can behold. It is little wonder, then, that it can so strongly stir him in his desire to set about his pilgrimage. Like nothing else within the poem, the city maintains an existence both inside and outside the narrative in much the same way as it appears both in and “outside its place.”

The mirror image of the New Jerusalem incites his aesthetic wonder to such a degree that the natural impulse is to confirm its verity. The only accurate measurement of certitude stems from a knowledge of existent, singular things. It establishes a connection between knower and object that was simple, direct, and true. Only a pilgrimage where he can interact directly with those figures bridging the two realms can his thirst for knowledge be quenched. These interactions center upon individual objects that can be directly apprehended by intuition and without the mediation of species. To maximize his potential, the Dreamer must then transition into a pilgrim.

The ensuing dream vision interlaces the spirit with the mundane through personifications. The first one whom the Pilgrim meets is Grace Dieu. As God’s daughter, she appears in a sensually vibrant, imperial garb. Adorned in gown of beaten gold, she wears a sash of green lamè and an auric crown encircled by shining stars. The explicit attention to the objects beautifying her person shows that she does not merely represent a transcendent being but a physical one too. While Philippe Maupeu views her allegorical import as superseding that of her extant reality, these stunning features stress that the field of inquiry begins with this reality. The Pilgrim’s observations draw a direct correlation between mind and matter,

20 Hagen, Allegorical Remembrance, 28.
21 Maupeu, Pèlerins De Vie Humaine: Autobiographie et allégorie narrative, 136.
spiritual instruction and human want. Via her tangible properties, he understands that such adornment conveys authority:

Vois tu comment sui paree
Et cointement sui atournee
D’escharboucles et d’esteles?
Onques ne veis plus belles,
C’est pour tous ceux enluminer
Qui de nuit veulent cheminer,
C’est pour ce que chacun me truist
Aussi bien de jour com de nuit
Et aussie bien de nuit com de jour;
A ce que ne facent folour. (305-14)

[Do you see how I am dressed, elegantly arrayed with rubies and stars? You have never seen any more beautiful. It’s to give light to all those who want to travel at the night, so that everyone can trust me, alike in the day or at night and not err.]

She emphasizes how her dress illuminates her importance, relying explicitly upon the Pilgrim’s ability to grasp the surety of these rubies and stars. Their radiating brilliance proves not only the underlying value of the material, but also how symbolic mediation reveals something greater. The light serves as a beacon of God’s love and exposes the emptiness of vice, disclosing the coexistence between intellectual and faith-inspired knowledge. Grace Dieu is a woman whose appearance renders the abstract visible. Her accoutrements both individuate and validate her person. She is, as Ockham states, “not a mere collection of parts of the same nature, like the unity of an army, city or heap of sand, but the coming together of parts having different natures and yet constituting something substantially one.”

22 Maurer, The Philosophy of William of Ockham, 453.

Her oneness springs from actual features, which enables him to confirm a transcendent goodness. The certitude of the conclusion depends upon the certitude of these objects and the evidence of the inference.

Although her regality suggests a wisdom surpassing the mind’s purview, those traits that she shares with the Pilgrim captivate his interest. He inquires about her country of origin and
qualifications. His questions illustrate a need to relate on a personal level. Cultivating such a rapport attests to a self-awareness of how to better his person. By asking her name, he wishes to lessen the hierarchical authority attached to her appearance and foster a constructive discourse that will enable him to succeed in his pilgrimage. Her name and visual image define her individuality. This link, however, poses certain analytical challenges. Paul de Man believes that labeling a figure in a fiction with an abstract name may generally categorize this kind of allegory, but her role as both friend and authoritative representative urges greater sensitivity to what the name signifies: the literal or metaphorical, the individual or universal, or both simultaneously. As her jeweled light verifies both her worldly and otherworldly existence, the Pilgrim’s query underscores her unique singularity.

Still, De Man points out that the allegorical metaphor must refer to another, preceding sign “with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority.” Although he does not address the philosophical question of universals, his belief that the “essence” must be shared by its opposite, marked either by its presence or absence, echoes the questions of universals raised by Scotus and Ockham. Both philosophers, though separating it from the particular, did not discount its existence. Ockham writes, “Insofar as it [the universal] can be predicated of many things not for itself but for these many, it is said to be a universal; but insofar as it is a particular form actually existing in the intellect, it is said to be a particular.” Grace Dieu’s presence signifies not only an individual entity, but also a truth beyond empirical evidence. An identifiable factor sparks the process of knowing. This process devalues neither pole; instead, it produces a frame of reference to grasp allegory’s dual structure and accord merit to those singular objects often perceived as secondary to the abstract import.

23 De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 188-220.
Cognizing Grace Dieu’s verity substantiates her being as much as the Pilgrim’s. As it lends credence to her words, it also affirms his response as genuine. He declares that knowing her will make him happier. He pleads, “Dame, pour Dieu merci vous pri/ Qu’a vous me vueilliez acointier/ Ne ja ne me vueilliez laissier” (380-2). [By God, I beg you to have mercy so that you may want to be with me and never want to leave me.] By expressing his longing to remain in her company, he strives to lessen the division between leader and follower, personalizing their bond. The pilgrimage is not founded upon an idealized abstraction. Sensory stimuli and the passion to foster the accompanying emotional connections intensify these interactions. They are not stoic exchanges of information, but vivifying dialogues which attest to the fact that God’s creation, though individually conceived, must operate communally to appreciate His full goodness. Sensory acts are apprehended intuitively by the interior sense. This inner awareness validates the subjective reactions of the Pilgrim as honest and worth pursuing. His connection with others depends upon the utilizing the spectrum of his cerebral faculties, acts of knowing as well as mental states, such as joy and sadness. By demonstrating a profound use of his cerebral abilities, the Pilgrim rises above the one-dimensionality of a garden-variety Everyman.

Attentive to his needs, Grace Dieu makes every effort to eliminate any doubt that could interfere with their burgeoning friendship: “Point ne vueil ester douteuse/ A toi ne souspeconneuse” (295-6). [I do not want to be at all puzzling or mysterious to you.] She recognizes his need for certainty. As God’s daughter, she explains the allegorical significance underlying her adornment. Her light gives sight to the blind and illuminates virtue’s path for those who have gone astray. She accordingly employs visually stimulating objects to ground her argument. She leads him to a house floating high in the air. Its steeples, fine towers, and expanse of water show how mundane objects can aid in understanding the heavenly (400-10). The house signifies the Church and the water

William of Ockham, Quaest. variae, q. 6, a. 9; OTh VIII, 255: 92-4.
denotes the trials of living in this world. These objects attest to an inextricable bond between the two realms, which intrinsically relies upon the knowledge already acquired by the Pilgrim. Furthermore, as pointed out by De Man’s notion of a preceding sign, these stately objects refer back to the first-order of the divine, namely the ultimate origin of their creation. Grace Dieu’s wisdom stems not only from her otherworldly source, but also her link with a concrete sphere of praxis. The vertical and horizontal axes comprising her allegorical construct, therefore, “continually intersect.”27 Her presence verifies the truth of her origins and invites the Pilgrim to respond to her as someone who can provide essential help. This kind of contact prevents the narrative from slipping into a speculative discourse and proves illustrative of her heritage.

Each subsequent encounter with a personified figure begins not with an introduction, but by identifying those accoutrements unique to that figure. They serve as the basis in defining his or her function.28 For example, Moses as a vicar of the Church appears with staff in hand and horns on his head: “Quar en sa main tenir li vi/ Une verge au bout crocue/ Et si’ avoit teste cornue” (514-6). [I saw that he had in his hand a staff with a crook at the end and that he had horns on his head.] These extant objects affirm not only their being, but also disclose how the spirit permeates this world. Yet, drawing the connection between object and idea is not founded upon religious devotion, but by the mind itself, which further underscores the Pilgrim’s powers. For example, Moses’ himself cannot make this connection explicitly until he meets Raison. Raison explains that the staff enables him to administer those sacraments requiring the use of Holy Oils: baptism, confirmation, and extreme unction. These anointed acts as effected by the crozier serve as the basis of ecclesiastical authority. The horns also signify such authority, but stem from mistranslation of Exodus 34:29 in the Vulgate of the Hebrew word, “cornuta,” which can mean either “beam of light” or


The only exception to these allegorical portrayals is Raison. However, this article contends that the Pilgrim himself is the distinct manifestation of this personification.
Despite this error, the tradition was so strongly ingrained that the twelfth century bishops’ miters had two points arranged like horns. Her explanation establishes the overt use of the mind in helping link the two realms, which implicitly elevates the value of human agency.

Later in Book I, the Pilgrim meets two women, Charity and Penance, whose defining features are a hand-held document and a broom in the mouth, respectively. The image of biting down on a broom as well as holding a hammer in the right hand and a switch in her left prompts C. S. Lewis to declaim these allegories as “monstrosities.” The bulky incongruity of such imagery, however, marks the ingenuity of Deguileville; it prioritizes the role of particular objects in the process of knowing. Her remarkable appearance captures the Pilgrim’s attention to such a degree that he cannot divert his eyes. Acknowledging his curiosity, she proclaims:

 Que bien regardés mon maintien,
 Mes bien croi que ne savez mie
 Que mon maintien vous senefie;
 Si venez prés, je le dirai,
 Ne ja de rien n’en mentirai (2040-4)

[I know that you are looking carefully at my array, but I think you have no idea what this array means to you. Come near and I will tell you. I will not lie to you about anything.]

While the act of reconciliation occupies a central place in Christian thought, her distinctive look demands that the Pilgrim acknowledge her inimitable existence. It shatters any preconceptions of what characterizes forgiveness. Yet, her actions support the orthodox tenets of confession. The mallet breaks the human heart with

29 “As Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the commandments in his hands, he did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant while he conversed with the Lord” (Exodus 34:29). “Cumque descenderet Moses de monte Sinai tenebat duas tabulas testimoni et ignorabat quod cornuta esset facies sua ex consortio sermonis Det.”


31 Lewis, The Allegory of Love. Upon reading such descriptions, “we can almost excuse the last century of criticism for rejecting allegory root and branch as a mere disease of literature (269).”
contrition when it is hardened with sin, the broom sweeps away its filth through a complete confession, and the switch chastises the Christian so that he remembers the pain inflicted by vice. As the external properties signify their internal worth, they illustrate her conceptual import. The Pilgrim’s focus shows that she is a complete intellectual nature that does not exist in another as in a subject and cannot form a substantial unity with something else as its part. She stands alone as the power effecting compunction.

For Charity, the document in her hands, the “testament de pais,” distinguishes her from the other personifications (2457). She never contemns the mighty or meek, but loves all people with her whole heart. She clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, and visits the sick. The document’s purpose is simple. It identifies those acts consonant with her character. Since love is one of the most expansive concepts in any language, this list work helps flesh out her person. While the multiplicity of roles attributed to her may seem at odds with being an individual, this written work is itself one particular thing and that it is not a universal except in the different lines of signification flowing from it. Her abundance of talents manifests itself in divers activities. Gordon Teskey believes that a “certain agency is attributed to abstractions that, in predicing themselves, overflow their limits and cascade into the world, where they take up a partial residence in things.” These “things” lie within the Pilgrim’s grasp and his cognition reveals that the knowledge he seeks possesses an actual existence, not a vague, ahistorical one. As Charity’s substance imprints itself upon these things, she allows each human to forge the best path towards New Jerusalem.

Although the text consistently relies upon distinctive features to identify each figure, one encounter deviates from this pattern. Raison appears with no fanfare or flourish. She simply descends

32 Teskey, Allegory and Violence. He cites Plato's Third Man argument to account for the idea that two opposites can share something that is separate from each. “This can be nothing other than a Third Man, which must in turn share something with the first two, and so on” (14).

33 Although Nature is also not assigned a feature unique to her person, old age separates her from the others.
the escarpment and begins speaking matter-of-factly to the Pilgrim. Conspicuous by its absence, this lack of a distinguishing trait causes the reader to pause. The answer lies in what she represents. She is the defining element of humankind, separating us from the animals (855). As the paragon of her nobility, the Pilgrim possesses intimate knowledge of her allegorical person. Raison, therefore, needs no ancillary trait. When Grace tells him her name, it merely affirms Raison’s integral role in God’s creative design. In addition, the closeness between these two genders metaphorically signifies a sacrosanct union. This bond comports with the tenets of intuitive cognition. Ockham explains that in the present life our intellect knows its own acts of knowing and willing intuitively without any preceding sensory intuition. 34 Humans form a contingent proposition about the intellect’s knowing and our willing, such as “I am knowing” and “I am willing.” The intellect’s self-awareness provides the evidence of the proposition. 35 Vision is not necessary to perceive something intuitively.

I concede that there is intuitive cognition in every sense, interior as well as exterior—that is, such cognition by virtue of which, in the aforesaid way, a thing is known to be or not to be; granted, this is not ocular intuitive cognition. And in this, many are deceived: for they believe that there is no intuitive cognition unless it is ocular, which is false. 36

Raison’s unembellished appearance proves that she is not known through ocular clues, but an internal awareness. No reason exists to inquire about her character since he already knows that she exists and what (s)he can do. She provides direct access to his phenomenological constitution.

Raison may not have immediate access to the ineffable, but she can explain how divine operates within this world. After delivering a discourse on the sacraments, she answers Moses’ question about the purpose for the horns on his head and the pointed staff. The staff

34 William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal I.14; OTh IX*: 78-82.
35 Ockham, *Quodlibetal I.14; OTh IX*: 79.11-16
recalls the shepherd’s duty to prod sheep onwards parallel a vicar’s responsibility to guide his flock towards a higher goodness. Its sharpness highlights the urgency to stay true to Christian ideals and protect his congregation from any dissolution of purpose. Raison’s extrapolation of how an evident judgment of existence can lead to a more expansive truth illustrates the movement from intuitive to abstractive cognition. Abstractive cognition refers not so much to the imagination as to a conceptual process of understanding an idea. The particular object serves as the basis to conceive a concept. Therefore, the horns and staff can signify not only those properties particular to Moses, but also to his ecclesiastical brethren and their duties.

According to Ockham, the origin of all experiential knowledge of contingent truths, and all abstractive and scientific knowledge of necessary truths derive from previous intuitive cognition. As Raison focuses upon the proof of existence to develop her discourse, she stresses how her power delineates humans from animals.

Je suis Raison par qui estes
Discerne des autres bestes.
Tant come avec vous m'avrez
Tant seulement homes serez,
Et quant sans moy voudrez aler,
Bien vous pouez de ce vanter
Que n'estes mais que bestes mues
Et que jumens qui sont vestues (855-62).

[I am Reason, by whom you are distinguished from the other animals. As long as you will have me with you, you will be real men, and you will want to try to go without me the only thing you can boast of is that you are nothing but naked beasts, mules dressed up in clothes.]

Her self-awareness mirrors that of the Pilgrim. He recognizes how she defines his self. Paradoxically, she both individuates and unites

37 Ockham, I Ordinatio prol. q. 1; OTh I: 23-4.
38 Ockham, I Ord. q. 3; OTh II: 483-521.
39 Ockham, I Quodl. Q.13; OTh IX: 72-78.
him with other humans. Thus, his mind accords him a respected place among those hypostatized figures of virtue whom he meets.

That he can apprehend with certitude specific truths in this world reveals the inherent goodness of God’s creation. “God communicates his goodness as something befitting his beauty, in each species and delights in producing a multiplicity of individuals. . . . And in those beings which are the highest and most important, it is the individual that is primarily intended by God.”\textsuperscript{40} The Pilgrim’s process of knowing testifies to the importance of the individual as both thinker and an object of knowledge in his pilgrimage. It establishes that he is singularly loved by the divine. Moreover, cognizing these objects reveals where he must supplant intellectual surety with faith. This becomes apparent when Raison admits that the transubstantiation as performed by Moses eludes her understanding.

\begin{quote}
Quar nulle chose je n’I sai;  
Cy me faut mon entendement  
Et mon sens tout outrement,  
Avugle sui, je n’I voi goute,  
Perdue (i) ai ma veue toute (1476-80).
\end{quote}

[“My understanding and my wits fail me completely here. I am blind. I cannot see anything. I have completely lost my sight.”]

Changing bread into Christ’s body and wine into His blood defies reason. However, these limitations are neither counterproductive to his search nor without precedent. First, seeking manifest proof of the New Jerusalem is a natural endeavor, not folly. It attests to the faith in the certitude generated by the mirror image of this spiritual city. Second, she openly acknowledges that carnal love also clouds her vision, citing the difficulties she experiences in \textit{Le Roman de la Rose} as an example (882). While on different ends of the spectrum, spiritual enlightenment and sexual passion operate in realms where different modes of knowing predominate, ecstatic and sensory, respectively. Raison acknowledges the bounds of her domain and

\textsuperscript{40} Scotus, \textit{Ordinatio II}, d. 3; \textit{Early Oxford Lecture on Individuation}, trans. Wolter, xxi.
uses this knowledge to address those matters most in line with her talents.

In Book II, she comes to the defense of the Pilgrim when a scowling, missshapen churl called Rude Entendement accosts him. Aptly, this philistine carries a club: “N’est pas baston bien avenant/ A preudomme ne bien seant” (5171-2). Unimpressed by her appearance, he questions her authority. Raison asks the Pilgrim to read a letter which clarifies her role as an executor of good deeds who must put a halt to Rude Entendement’s harassment of earnest wayfarers. Rude Entendement, as indicative of his allegorical import, fails to accept the missive’s veracity. Instead, he elects to rely upon what he overhears at the mill to define her character (5279-80). Since those buying the grain continually use the term “raison” to exploit the farmers selling their crops, he associates her with acts of disrepute and deception. Annoyed at this brutish accusation, she launches into a lengthy defense. She points out that selfish people often misuse the meaning of terms to advance their own agendas. This semantic abuse undermines her power. It is one thing to claim that it accords with reason and another thing to have that name: “Autre chose est ester Raison/ Et autre chose avoir son non” (5293-4). Her name is self-predicating. The people at the mill, however, are not bound by these principles. Their actions are not accurate measurements of integrity. The parameters of her very being prevent her from doing anything other than determining the existential surety of a particular object and extrapolate upon its conceptual importance. She protects the Pilgrim from earthly ne’er-do-wells.

Through his interactions with the personified allegories, the Pilgrim comes to understand that reality, either material or immanent, is radically individual and knowable. His manner of knowing operates within a specific epistemological framework consonant with the intellectual zeitgeist, namely intuitive cognition. In his study of French poetry and late medieval thought, Ullrich Langer observes that the literary and philosophical elements within a text operate as related but separate cultural phenomena:
Yet an emphasis on certain concepts, rather than on the impact of an individual’s or a school’s entire thought, seems heuristically more valid and more faithful to what literature is about. A literary text does not attempt to represent truthfully contemporary figures or their thought, but reworks key attitudes, experiences, sensation, and concepts into an imaginative whole that is in a sense incommensurable with the initial givens (though not unrelated to them).  

Literary discourse does not seek to posit a definitive statement of or resolution to a philosophical view. Rather, it dramatizes the issues presented, deepening the meaning underpinning its structure. The result provides a more nuanced understanding of the relation between the two discourses with the ultimate point of reference remaining with the poem. As such, Deguileville’s allegory gains clarity through those ideas which complement its design and advance its thematic purport. The “certain concepts” illuminating the text are those that promote individual abilities. The certitude generated by these individuals ensures that the counsel offered by the personified figures does not drift into abstruse speculation.

Encounters with these figures reveal and punctuate specific cognitive aspects of his person so that his identity emerges with a striking intensity. It testifies to an independent ability that refutes any suggestion that individuals do not pertain to the order of the universe. Such a statement devalues neither the theological nor soteriological premises underlying the pilgrimage, but rather supplements them. The epistemological stratagems reveal an intricate design of knowing that affords him a distinct value in discerning both the literal and figural import of the personifications. The systems of reference flowing between the literary and philosophical elements foster a dialectical, mutually defining relationship which produces an optimistic sense of what it means to be human.

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Bibliography


When designing a course, an appropriate question is how to end it. What great primary or secondary source will send students off into the larger academic world, outside the immediate class at hand with a better understanding of the period they had just been studying? The quandary is important in every medieval or early modern course; for example, does one end the medieval survey with Dante or Petrarch, or even Erasmus? The necessity for a capstone is no less great in classes that are entitled “England to 1688,” which populate many university course catalogues today. Many monographs and articles have been written about the Glorious Revolution, and many would serve as a good way to end a course on early English history.¹

One such text approaches the topic from a new direction, combining the events in England with the movement within the historical field towards a world-history approach. John E. Wills, Jr.’s *1688: A Global History*, explores the events that occurred in the entirety of the world in one year. In its pages one can see the context of the Glorious Revolution, even though England is not Wills’s focus. By examining one year throughout the entire globe, the book serves as a wonderful capstone by showing students new methodologies.

and one new approach to the study of world history, which still fits into the context of a course on England.

One might question the approach of considering a single year in time, but Wills is not alone in his approach. Several books have been written in the last few years that try to examine the world, or at least the known world at the time, in a single year. Before Wills’s effort, Olivier Bernier attempted a similar project focusing on the year 1800. Following both Bernier and Wills, Giusto Traina wrote *428 AD: an Ordinary year at the End of the Roman Empire* in 2009, which show that the empire was still alive in 428 and it was anything but an ordinary year. Incidentally, Traina’s work serves as a good launching point for a medieval history survey just as *1688: A Global History* is a good capstone for an early English history course. Finally, in 2014 Eric Cline examined the world in 1177 BC in order to ascertain why there was a Mediterranean-wide collapse in or around that year.

Wills’s *1668: A Global History* begins by tracing the sun as it moves across the world on January 3, 1688, from the Pacific across Asia and Australia to Europe and Africa until it reaches the Americas. This solar journey is Wills’s “Baroque Prelude.” Yet, the author readily admits, “This portrait of one day in one year is a somewhat artificial construct.” The arbitrary exercise of tracing a day is a reflection in microcosm of the arbitrary exercise of focusing on one year. Wills points out that many people in the world at the time would not have even referred to the year as “1688” at all, given the variety of systems of dating across the planet. Further, the very concept of the world is problematic when dealing with early modern history as lines of communication were slow and most people still had little sense of a greater world outside of their personal localities. This very arbitrariness allows for the first fruits of discussion

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3 Traina, *428 A.D.: An Ordinary Year at the End of the Roman Empire.*

4 Cline, *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed.*

with students. Questions of what the world actually is and how time is actually defined can challenge students to reexamine how they see the early modern world as well as their own. They can look at how communications and population density (two factors that Wills highlights to show the difference between 1688 and now) affect a consideration of history, and if that framework is arbitrary or intuitive. Even before the binding on the book is broken, the discussion can begin.

Wills proceeds to take the reader on a tour of the world. Part I, “A World of Wooden Ships,” places readers in the Americas: in Mexico, Potosí, and the Sonora Desert. In this first section the trip continues to Africa and then to Australia. Wills uses Part II, “The World of the Great Company,” as a link to “Three Worlds Apart,” (Russia, China and Japan), which is Part III, and discusses those regions to the east of England and the Glorious Revolution. Western Europe is the focus of Part IV as the political events there are discussed. Part V also deals with Europe as well, but its focus is the intellectual and literary history of the year. The figures discussed include the playwright Aphra Behn as well as Newton, Locke, and Leibniz. Parts Four and Five turn to the other great “Religions of the Book,” as Islam and Judaism are discussed.

This tour of the world in the year 1688 provides the backbone against which students can be asked serious questions not only about history, in general, but also about the practice of history. The book challenges the concept that history is a narrative told over time. Wills presents no overarching story in which he asserts arguments about causation. Wills in fact does not look at change over time, which many think to be the central job of the historian. This work is not made up of one narrative told over time; rather it is a series of narratives told of one time. In essence the work becomes a collection of micro-histories that, when combined, make up a macro-history. Students can consider both the parts and the whole, and explore the value of each approach to history. The use of a series of micro-histories can be compared to a monograph such as Eamon Duffy’s
Voices of Morebath, which is a micro-history in its own right and can be read earlier in the semester. By considering multiple texts and multiple approaches to history, both micro and macro, students can examine the nature of the historical enterprise, and define for themselves what makes an effective monograph. They can also explore the idea of what a historian actually is. Much value can be gained from tracing the issue of how historians have written about the past. A class on English history provides a great opportunity for this exercise, and Wills’s work can be a modern example of a trend that extends from Tacitus to Bede to William of Newburgh to John Foxe to other twentieth and twenty-first century monographs.

One of the greatest advantages of using 1688: A Global History is that it challenges ideas of chronology and periodization. Just as Avril Cameron claims in her introduction to 428 that Giusto Traina’s work undermines current writing on the periodization of the Roman Empire and late antiquity, so too does Wills challenge the periodization of British and European history. By examining the world as a whole, students are asked to assess why a single date can matter so much in one place and so little in another. They may indeed wonder why the course concludes in one place or with one particular event when another class about a different area of the world could continue to another, perhaps better, defining moment. Students may even question whether courses covering English history should culminate or begin with the year 1688.

Wills’s work does have its limitations. It is not a traditional monograph in the sense that there is no central thesis that drives the book and is supported by evidence throughout. This text should not be used if the goal is to have students identify arguments and to analyze the use of sources. Further 1688: A Global History contains many stories and many names. Students can get bogged down in the details and get lost easily as Wills shifts from one part of the world and one story to the next. In addition, in its Norton paperback form, the book does not have footnotes or a bibliography. As a result, the many individuals, events, places and topics are hard to find without

6 Duffy, The Voices of Morebath.
7 Traina, 428 A.D.: An Ordinary Year at the End of the Roman Empire, ix.
reading the entire book. The lack of footnotes also makes the book difficult to use as a jumping off point for more specified research. The text does however contain a very helpful “Sources and Further Reading” section, which supplements the chapters well.

The final limitation is that the book is not solely about Britain and the Glorious Revolution. The fact that this critical event takes up a mere thirteen pages may be seen as a large issue for some who teach a course entitled “England to 1688.” Yet, from the right point of view, the limited attention given to the exchange of monarchs is a jumping off point for fruitful discussions surrounding the actual importance of James II leaving England, and William and Mary arriving. Students can be asked questions about Eurocentrism and the role of Europe in the larger world of the late seventeenth century.

*1688: A Global History* does not conclude in the place that one might expect. Rather than closing the book by describing the last month of the year, the final chapter returns to the beginning of the year. The prelude of the book is a study of 3 January 1688; the last chapter takes place on 15 January 1688. Wills vividly paints the image of Henry Purcell playing his most recent musical composition before the king and queen in honor of her pregnancy. Purcell was the organist of Westminster Abbey and of the Chapel Royal, Composer in Ordinary to His Majesty, Keeper of the King’s Wind Instruments, and harpsichordist in the King’s Private Music. The work being performed, based on Psalm 128, gives praise to an event that may well have brought down the House of Stuart less than a year later. The scene lets students have a parallel moment to the one being described; they drift away from their course on English history until 1688 just at the voices drifted to the ceiling of the Chapel Royal with the final words of the book “O well is thee.”

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Bibliography


