ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: THE WHEEL OF LANGUAGE: REPRESENTING SPEECH IN MIDDLE ENGLISH NARRATIVE, 1377-1422

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This dissertation examines representations of speech in narrative poetry in English between 1377 and 1422, a four-and-a-half decade span marked by almost constant political, religious, social and economic upheaval. By analyzing the work that late medieval writers imagined the spoken word to perform – or, alternately, by examining how speech acts functioned performatively in medieval literary discourse – the author demonstrates how the spoken word functioned as a defining link between the Middle English text and the cultural tumult of the late medieval period. More important, by focusing on speech as a distinct category within linguistic discourse, the study allows for a reappraisal of the complicated relationships between text and cultural environment that have been illuminated by scholarship on the politics of vernacularity and the development of the English language.

Chapter one uses *The Manciple's Tale* to probe Chaucer's engagement with the nominalist philosophy of William of Ockham, a philosophy which opposed the *via antiqua* and threatened to overturn the linguistic, epistemological, and ontological hierarchies that had been prevailed in various forms since the writings of Augustine of Hippo. Chapter two analyzes representations of sacramental and priestly speech in the

anonymous *Saint Erkenwald*. By doing so, it redirects the critical conversation about the poem away from the role of baptism in redeeming the righteous heathen and toward the eucharistic theology that undergirds it, a critical that shift extends our understanding of the poem's engagement with the emerging Wycliffite heresy and with typological notions of medieval Christian identity. Chapter three focuses on the works of Thomas Hoccleve, fifteenth-century Privy Seal clerk and would-be court poet. By examining the overtly performative speech acts in Hoccleve's Marian lyrics, particularly "The Story of The Monk Who Clad the Virgin," it establishes the existence of an idiosyncratic economy of speech within the poet's canon, an economy that becomes paradigmatic for the mingled systems of monetary and interpersonal exchange that prevailed in the Lancastrian dynasty's early decades.

THE WHEEL OF LANGUAGE:
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by

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INTRODUCTION

"That whel wol cause another whel"

Just before it crashes to a premature and inconclusive end, the alliterative *Wars of Alexander* relates how its eponymous hero, having pressed his army well past the boundaries of the known world, reaches the shore of a vast ocean. There, at the ragged edge of the earth itself, the fated conqueror hears the sound of his own language lapped back at him by cold, monster-infested waves:

> [Alexander] ... cairis on forthire
>
> To þe Occyan at þe erthes ende, & þare in an ilee he heres
>
> A grete glauir & a glaam of Grekin tongis.
>
> Þan bad he kniȝtis þaim vnclethe & to þat kithe swym,
>
> Bot all at come into þat cole, crabbis has þaim drenchid.
>
>   Þan sewis furth þat souerayn, ay by þa salt strandis
>
> Toward þe settynge of þe son in seson of wintir.[1]

The potent blend of alterity and familiarity in this passage – the terrible crabs that drown Alexander's men and the accustomed speech of "Grekin tongis" – is enigmatic; the whole scene evokes nothing so much as the siren songs beckoning Ulysses on his journey home from Troy. But Alexander's odyssey is of a different sort than Ulysses's, and the voices

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[1] [Alexander carries on farther to the ocean at the Earth's end, and there, on an island, he hears a great chatter and a din of Greek tongues. Then he bade his knights to unclothe themselves and to swim to that place, but crabs drowned all that went into the cold water. Then the sovereign proceeds forth, always by the salt strand, toward the setting of the sun in the season of winter.] *The Wars of Alexander*, ed. Hoyt Duggan and Thorlac Turville-Petre, EETS s.s. 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 174 (ll. 5628-5634), translation mine.

that call to the Macedonian warrior king from the island at the end of the world seem to mock rather than entice, to confront Alexander with the futility of escape from his ignoble bloodline, the inevitability of his death, the senselessness his often violent conquests, and the utter impossibility of his martial aspirations.[2] Does Alexander send his men into the ocean to investigate the familiar speech from across the waves; or does he send them out, as he has done so many times before, to conquer what confronts him and subdue the words that echo from the edge of the earth? Whatever the reason, the attempt is ultimately futile. As his men drown horribly, Alexander can only turn the remains of his army toward the failing sun and toward a Macedonia he knows he will not live to see.

Alexander was not the only doomed king preoccupied with spoken language. On another island near the edge of the known world, Richard II struggled to maintain control of the English crown in the face of an increasingly aggressive cabal of appellants.[3] In the summer of 1397, he attempted to squelch those appellants once and for all by making them answer for the Merciless Parliament of 1388, a proceeding in which the appellants severely (if temporarily) circumscribed Richard's royal authority. Chief among those appellants was Richard's uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, the duke of Gloucester. Seized by Richard's forces and held captive in the English territory of Calais, Gloucester was eventually coerced into admitting wrongdoing; just before his death he issued a full

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[2] Christine Chism observes that "in teasing at the barrier between self, other, and monster, [these lines] suggest the monstrousness of Alexander's whole endeavor, the extremity of the desires that drive him." See Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 149.

[3] While it is impossible to assert with certainty the composition date for *Wars of Alexander*, most critics have located it between the years 1361 and 1450, thus making it possible that the literary struggles of Alexander coincided with the dynastic struggles of Richard II. For a brief, cogent analysis of the poem's authorship and date, see Duggan and Turville-Petre's introduction to *Wars of Alexander*, pp. xlii-xliii.

spoken confession, which was recorded and then read aloud to Parliament.[4] Among the

most serious articles in the confession was Gloucester's admission that he engaged in

treasonous speech:

> Also, in that I sclaundred my Loord, I knowleche that I dede evyll and
>
> wykkedly, in that I spake it unto hym in sclaunderouse wyse in audience
>
> of other folk .... Also, in that I was in place ther it was communed and
>
> spoken in manere of deposal of my liege Loord, trewly I knowlech wele,
>
> that we were assented therto for two dayes of three, And then we for to
>
> have done our homage and our oothes, and putt hym as heyly in his estate
>
> as ever he was. But forsothe ther I knowlech, that I dede untrewly and
>
> unknyndely as to hym that is my lyege Loord, and hath bene so gode and
>
> kynde Loord to me. Wherefor I beseche to hym naghtwythstondyng myn
>
> unkyndenesse, I beseche hym evermore of his mercy and of his grace, as
>
> lowly as any creature may beseche it unto his lyege Loord.[5]

Gloucester's groveling was for naught; the duke died, apparently of natural causes,

shortly after issuing his confession. The admission that he "spake sclaunderouse wyse"

and "in manere of deposal of [his] liege Loord," however, proved damning even after his

death – Gloucester was posthumously convicted and condemned by the crown. Two

other appellants met similar fates: the earl of Arundel was beheaded for treason; the earl

of Warwick, also deemed guilty of treason, was exiled and stripped of his lands and title.

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[4] For a thorough account of Richard's actions against the "Merciless Parliament" appellants, see Matthew Giancarlo, "Murder, Lies, and Storytelling: The Manipulation of Justice(s) in the Parliaments of 1397 and 1399," *Speculum* 77 (2002): 76-112.

[5] From the *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, quoted and translated in Giancarlo, "Murder, Lies, and Storytelling," 81.

Like Alexander at the far end of the world, King Richard had reached the zenith of his power. All that remained was for him to return.

Richard had waited nine years to exact retribution for the Merciless Parliament. By contrast, the remaining appellants' retribution for Richard's Revenge Parliament was stunningly swift. In July of 1399, Henry Bolingbroke landed in Yorkshire from his exile in France, and by September he had succeeded in exacting from Richard a spoken "confession" of his own. The King declared his "inability and insufficiency" to rule, and although he retained the "marks set upon his soul by sacred unction," he gave his assent for Bolingbroke (now Duke of Lancaster) to succeed him on the throne. Like Gloucester's confession of 1397, Richard's statement was read aloud to Parliament: according to the Parliamentary Rolls, "'the king himself willingly, as it appeared, and with a happy face' ... took the document and read it out loud himself 'distinctly' ... and in its entirety."[6] And so Henry, duke of Lancaster, with Richard's (coerced) spoken assent, became Henry IV. And so Richard II – whose aspirations to semi-divine status had once led him to demand extravagant forms of address from his subjects and even to boast that the laws of the realm existed "in his own mouth" – was brought low as a prisoner in Pontefract Castle. In a matter of months he would die there.[7]

I bring together these two examples – one historical and one literary – not necessarily to draw point for point comparisons among the *Wars of Alexander*, the deposition of Richard II, and the ascendancy of the Lancastrian dynasty. Rather, I want

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[6] Giancarlo, "Murder, Lies, and Storytelling," 93-94, 100.

[7] David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolute Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 297. For an analysis of the extravagant addresses upon which Richard insisted, see Nigel Saul, "Richard II and the Vocabulary of Kingship," *English Historical Review* 110 (1995): 854-77.

to suggest the importance of the spoken word in both literature and the historical record, and to posit the spoken word as a point of intersection between the two. With these examples, I also want to preview the general contours of this dissertation, a study that shows how representations of direct speech in late medieval narrative respond to and comment upon the political, religious, and economic upheavals that wracked England between the reigns of Richard II and Henry V. More specifically, I explore how the speech acts described in literary texts, such as the unspecified Greek voices that call to Alexander, both comment on and are contingent upon important cultural and political events in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, events that include the deposition of Richard II, the rise of the Lollard heresy, and the political machinations of the early Lancastrian dynasty.[8]

In order to do this, I apply the insights and vocabulary of modern speech-act theory – particularly the observations of J. L. Austin and John Searle – to the exigencies of the premodern text. By focusing on speech as a distinct category within linguistic discourse, I demonstrate that the efficacy and function of speech stood at the center of rifts within the Ricardian and Lancastrian periods, that the spoken word itself existed as a deeply contested cultural and sociopolitical site in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Questions of what speech could do and who was authorized to deploy it were closely linked to contemporary crises of sacramentalism, ontology, and dynastic authority. By analyzing the work that late medieval writers imagined the spoken word to perform – or, alternately, by examining how speech acts functioned performatively in medieval literary

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[8] I will use the phrase "early Lancastrian" throughout this dissertation as shorthand for the reigns of Henry IV (r. 1399-1413) and Henry V (r. 1413-22), the first two Lancastrian kings.

discourse – I show the spoken word to be a defining critical link between the Middle English text and the tumult of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English nation.

Throughout this dissertation, I will argue that speech was central to the social and cultural environment of the Ricardian and early Lancastrian periods; here I want to elucidate the specific contexts upon which I will focus and to explain why I bring them together. The first of these contexts is the linguistic and epistemological intervention of the fourteenth-century Oxford philosopher William of Ockham. Perhaps best known for his so-called "razor," Ockham's chief contribution to the philosophical milieu of his own time was his argument against the existence of universals, transcendent constructs that realist scholastic philosophy held were the "principal, stable and immutable forms or reasons" upon which all individual forms were predicated.[9] Ockham posited that universals were not transcendent, divinely-ordained constructs but existed only as "thought-object[s] in the mind," gleaned through observation and knowledge of individual forms.[10] This ontological shift – a *de facto* reversal of centuries of scholastic theory – had an enormous impact on late medieval understandings of speech and the functions that speech could perform. In traditional scholastic thought the spoken word was inert and representational, wholly subordinated to the universal through a stable and specific hierarchy. By obviating the universal, however, Ockham destabilized that hierarchy and opened the possibility for speech to function not only representationally but creatively. To put it crudely, under Ockham's nominalist philosophy, speech became immensely powerful,

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[9] Augustine, *On Eighty-Three Different Questions* in Paul Vincent Spade, *A Survey of Medieval Philosophy, Version 2.0* (1985), 383, <http://www.pvspade.com/Logic/docs/Survey%202%20Interim.pdf>.

[10] From Ockham's *Ordinatio*, in William of Ockham, *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Philotheus Boehner (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 41.

capable not only of communicating our understandings of reality but also of altering our perceptions of reality itself, even of creating individual realities by interfering with the "thought-objects" upon which knowledge of reality is predicated. For Ockham and his followers, the world was contingent upon speech rather than speech being contingent upon the world.

Ockham's nominalist philosophy affected fourteenth- and fifteenth-century understandings of the position of all speech within an overarching ontological system; in contrast, the fourteenth-century theologian John Wyclif was particularly interested in a specific kind of speech, that associated with the sacraments. The dissident theologian's arguments against sacramental speech roughly delineate the second cultural context with which this dissertation will engage. Taking aim most vehemently at the sacrament of the Eucharist, Wyclif, who was as much a realist as Ockham was a nominalist, argued that the orthodox explanation of transubstantiation was a logical impossibility. Even after the sacramental words of consecration were uttered, he asserted, the body of Christ could not entirely replace the substance of bread and still leave behind bread's sensual trappings, or accidents. The accidents of bread, in other words, could not stand alone without their substance; as Wyclif writes, the "power þat prestis han standeþ not in transsubstansinge of þe oste, ne in makyng of accidentis for to stonde bi hemsilf."[11] Wyclif proposed instead that priests could, by uttering the appropriate sacramental words, add Christ's essence to the substance of bread, but under no circumstances did he allow for the wholesale substitution of former for the latter. Thus, at the very heart of Wyclif's attack on the Eucharist, we find a question about the efficacy of speech: can a priest's spoken

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[11] Wyclif, "Of Confession," in Wyclif, *The English Works of John Wyclif*, 345.

utterance make the accidents of bread stand miraculously alone without their substance (the orthodox position) or can that utterance merely add the essence of Christ to the substance of bread (the position held by Wyclif)?

Wyclif's theological break from the orthodox medieval Church and the anti-clerical stance that the dissident theologian often assumed helped to engender England's first native heretical group, the Lollards. Emerging in the mid 1370s and 80s and declining precipitously after the Oldcastle rebellion of 1414, Lollardy (or Wycliffism) was perceived as a very real threat to the social fabric of England in the Ricardian and Lancastrian periods. In 1395 that threat prompted Roger Dymmok to present Richard II with an anti-Lollard book reiterating the full and exclusive presence of Christ in the consecrated host. Dymmok also warned that failure to affirm "the sacramental sign of bread and wine currently maintained by the Church [would] destroy civil society" and lead to an anarchic "destruction of the community, whether this [community] is a city or a kingdom."[12] By the early 1400s, the usurping Lancastrian kings seized upon such anti-Lollard sentiment. The sacrament of the Eucharist itself – and particularly the belief that spoken priestly consecration enacted an orthodox transubstantiation – was held to be a "litmus test of orthodoxy"; denial of transubstantiation and of the priest's efficacious speech was the very root and definition of heresy.[13] In this political and religious climate, the fundamental question of what the spoken word could and could not do became the central issue of the central rite of the central organizing body in medieval England.

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[12] David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 9

[13] Paul Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation 1399-1422* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 47.

In the early years of Lancastrian kingship, the threat posed by Wycliffism collided with the exigencies of William of Ockham's nominalism. In his struggle to legitimize the uneasy crown he usurped from Richard II, Henry IV positioned himself as a champion of orthodoxy and scourge of the Lollards, effecting the 1401 passage of the statute known as *De Haeretico Comburendo* (which advocated the punishment of heretics by burning) and quelling heterodox writing with Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1407-09. Paul Strohm documents that such resistance to Lollardy was important to the upstart Lancastrian dynasty for several reasons: by fashioning themselves upholders of the orthodox Church, Henry IV and his supporters hoped to gain broad public support for Henry's claim to the Crown. But Lancastrian resistance to Lollardy also had an important intrinsic rationale. The very transformation of the host that Lollards denied also served as the theological and metaphorical underpinning for the project of Lancastrian kingship: just as the sacramental words of the Eucharist transformed bread into body, so too did the sacral coronation oath transform Henry, Duke of Lancaster into Henry IV, King of England. Strohm writes:

> The Lancastrian commitment to ideas of transformation, so intense that it
> may be considered obsessional, is justified and defended by a strategy of
> doubling or division. Good transformation – that is sacral transformation,
> elevation of inward properties without outward or apparent change – is
> reserved to the king .... The Lancastrian program was reliant upon signs
> and more signs: more efficacious, more numerous, more motile and
> transferable. Lollards (whose heightened respect for the spiritual

encourages respect for matter's stubborn resistance) ... pose a ... threat to

the Lancastrian symbolic.[14]

In this respect, the efficacy of the speech act that turns bread into body is of critical

importance to the Lancastrian dynasty; the invisible but substantive change that

sacramental speech effects is in crucial ways analogous to the coronation oath taken by

Henry in 1399, an oath that had the power to "*transform* a claimant into a king" despite

the absence of visible, physical change.[15]

Anathema to Wyclif and the Lollards, the transformative potential of sacramental

language was necessary to Henry IV and Henry V in the wake of Richard II's deposition.

So too, it seems, were the less miraculous transformations that Ockham's nominalism

suggested could be enacted by speech – the manipulation of those mental "thought-

objects" upon which human knowledge of reality is predicated. The first two Lancastrian

kings embarked on a project of what we would now call propaganda (or what George

Orwell might call "newspeak"): they manipulated written chronicles and prophesy, legal

writings, and even gossip in order to bolster their claim to the throne. The Lancastrian

attempt to secure power by controlling language – and particularly by controlling the

explicitly spoken language of gossip – resonates strongly with the precepts of nominalist

thought. Indeed, by controlling the speech that helped create public understanding of the

political realities of Lancastrian usurpation, the new dynasty clearly attempted to control

the contours of reality itself, restructuring it in their own favor.[16] This political

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[14] Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, 141.

[15] Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, 139.

[16] See Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, 2-3.

manipulation of language constitutes the third overarching social context with which this dissertation engages.

Bringing together these cultural and political contexts, this dissertation demonstrates that questions about the efficacy of the spoken word were central to the Ricardian and early Lancastrian periods. More important, however, it investigates how such seemingly disparate issues as Ockham's theories on the signifying and creative functions of speech; Wyclif's denial that priestly, sacramental speech could effect the miracle of transubstantiation; and Lancastrian manipulation of rumor, gossip, and other forms of linguistic expression are in fact related by a shared understanding that the spoken word can perform work, that speech contains the potential to affect directly, even to effect, its specific cultural environment. Although such a notion is not wholly unique to the period I cover in this dissertation, the 45 years spanning the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V stand at a confluence of events that heighten the importance accorded to the spoken word. These events include the increasing centrality of *Corpus Christi* to the medieval Church, the social displacements and hierarchical shifts (partly precipitated by the Black Death) that occurred in the mid- to late-fourteenth century, and the new social and political relevance accorded to the vernacular (an issue I will discuss in more detail below).[17] Finally, the years covered by this dissertation are, as Anne Middleton has shown, years in which "poetry was to be a 'common voice' to serve the

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[17] For the growing prominence of Corpus Christi in the medieval Church, see Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993); Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991). The shifting hierarchies of the later fourteenth century are succinctly detailed by Paul Strohm in *Social Chaucer*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), especially chapter one, "Chaucer and the Structure of Social Relations," 1-23.

'common good.'"[18] Poetry itself, then, in its "public" capacity as social mediator, was necessarily understood not to be inert and reflective but functional, active, and alive. In this respect, it is telling that Middleton's discussion of public poetry frequently emphasizes the metaphorical poetic "voice" over written words: "public poetry generally," Middleton argues, "speaks 'as if' to the entire community – as a whole."[19]

Individually, the chapters of this dissertation generally correspond to the three cultural contexts cited above. Chapter one, "'A wikked tonge is worse than a feend': Nominalism, Speech, and Power in the *Manciple's Tale*," probes Chaucer's engagement with the nominalist philosophy of William of Ockham. I demonstrate that Chaucer's preoccupation with Ockham's nominalist ideas reaches its apogee in *The Manciple's Tale*, a work that shows the poet considering both the epistemological ramifications of nominalism as well as the unsettling possibilities raised by the potential for language to alter reality or, in its most extreme form, to create it anew. In chapter two, "'And chaungit cheuely hor nomes': Eucharist, Baptism, and Sacramental Utterance in *Saint Erkenwald*," I analyze representations of sacramental and priestly speech in the anonymous *Saint Erkenwald*, a fourteenth-century alliterative poem that dramatizes the posthumous salvation of a righteous heathen by the poem's titular saint. This analysis redirects the critical conversation about the poem away from the role of baptism in redeeming the heathen and toward the eucharistic theology that undergirds it, a critical shift that extends our understanding of the poem's engagement with Wycliffite heresy and brings the poem into conversation with issues of eucharistic theology and medieval Christian identity. Chapter three, "'Seye it eek with good deuocioun': Economies of

[18] Anne Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," *Speculum* 53 (1978): 95.

[19] Middleton, "Idea of Public Poetry," 98.

Speech and Redemption in the Works of Thomas Hoccleve," builds on recent studies that consider Hoccleve's often conflicting roles as Privy Seal bureaucrat and would-be court poet.[20] By examining the speech acts in the critically overlooked Marian lyric, "The Story of The Monk Who Clad the Virgin by Singing Ave Maria," I establish the existence of a specific economy of speech throughout Hoccleve's Marian works, one in which supplicant and Virgin are locked in a system of mutual dependence predicated on the causative potential of the spoken word. Furthermore, I show how this economy of speech becomes paradigmatic for the systems of economic and interpersonal exchange that Hoccleve develops in his better known works, including *La Male Regle* and the five-poem cycle known as *The Series*. By bringing together Hoccleve's Marian lyrics and autobiographical works in this way, I illuminate the collision between traditional devotional culture and emergent fifteenth-century bureaucratic systems, a collision that fundamentally informed the poetic production we associate with the Lancastrian dynasty.

When we consider the importance of speech to the philosophical, theological, and sociopolitical contexts that prevailed between Richard II's ascension in 1377 and Henry V's untimely death in 1422, we see an England deeply and actively invested in the potential of the spoken word to effect change. But the specific linguistic issues identified above must themselves be put into the context of the increasing prominence of the English vernacular in the later Middle Ages. Although England was (at least) a trilingual nation in the medieval period, "between 1300 and 1420," as Nicholas Watson notes, "the position of English writing within this trilingual literary culture became much more

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[20] Ethan Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Nicholas Perkins, *Hoccleve's Regiment of Princes: Counsel and Constraint* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2001).

important." English texts appeared "in far greater quantities than previously, gathering to themselves a new sense of their importance and undergoing a degree of standardization, as writers tried both to articulate their growing consciousness of the distinctiveness and coherence of English language and culture and to give the language a closer status to that of French or Latin."[21] This heightened consciousness – and increased production – of writing in English is a signal development in the literature of the fourteenth century, one rife with implications for England's burgeoning "national [and] cultural identity," as well as for "the spread of literacy and learning both down the social scale and across the gender divide."[22]

The development of the English vernacular in the fourteenth century is closely linked to medieval practices of translation; indeed, the vast majority of Middle English texts – as well as the majority of texts that this dissertation engages – have their germ in Latin originals or texts written in other European vernaculars such as French or Italian. Chaucer provides examples of both: his *Manciple's Tale* is a close redaction of the story of Phoebus and the crow from Ovid's Latin *Metamorphoses*; his *Knight's Tale* is based upon Boccacio's Italian *Tessida*; and his early dream visions have their root in French models such as *The Romance of the Rose*.[23] Recent studies have shown translation into

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[21] Nicholas Watson, "The Politics of Middle English Writing," in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Brown, et. al. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 333.

[22] Watson, "The Politics of Middle English Writing," 331. See also *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 485-487; also, *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, ed. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), especially the preface (ix-xiii) and Watson's introduction (1-13); David Aers and Lynn Staley, *Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

[23] In addition, the *House of Fame* draws heavily from Dante's *Commedia* and includes passages translated from Boethius's *De Institutione Musica*; *Saint Erkenwald* is a loose translation of the Latin Trajan legend, found in such sources as Jacobus de Voraigne's *Aurea Legenda*; and large portions of Hoccleve's *Series* are drawn from the *Gesta Romanorum*. See Piero Boitani, "What Dante Meant to Chaucer," in *Chaucer*

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the vernacular to be more than simply an effort to maintain consistent meaning between the "original" and the vernacular translation. Rather, translation has been more accurately understood as an act of interpretation and criticism, "a site where cultural relations of dominance and subservience might be played out."[24] Rita Copeland in particular has demonstrated that vernacular translation serves to transfer not only specific texts into the mother tongue but also the cultural and social cachet those texts carried with them. "Translation," Copeland posits, "was also a primary vehicle for vernacular participation in, and ultimately appropriation of, the cultural privilege of Latin academic discourse."[25] Thus, texts like Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale* or the translations of the *Gesta Romanorum* in Hoccleve's *Series* were not simply engaged in bringing Latin texts into the vernacular. Rather, they were engaged in a wider effort to translate the prestige of Latin and Latinity into the English tongue. Understood in these terms, translation becomes a deeply political project, and written translations themselves highly charged political texts.

The political dimensions of translation were nowhere more strongly felt than in the Englishing of that most central of written texts, the Bible. Indeed, if we understand the project of translation as "the means by which cultural value and authority was [sic] transmitted from one period to another," the translation of the single most important book in medieval Europe not only promised to accord an incommensurate prestige on the

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and the Italian Trecento, ed. Piero Boitani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 115-139; Gordon Whatley, "Heathens and Saints: *St. Erkenwald* in its Legendary Context," *Speculum* 61 (1986): 330-32; Roger Ellis's introduction to Thomas Hoccleve, *"My Compleinte" and Other Poems*, ed. Roger Ellis (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001), 8.

[24] Ruth Evans, Andrew Taylor, Nicholas Watson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Brown, "The Notion of Vernacular Theory," in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 317. See also Alistair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, UK: Wildwood House, 1988).

[25] Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.

vernacular itself, it also posed a genuine threat to the medieval Church, whose claim to authority rested largely on its exclusive access to and interpretation of the Latin scriptures.[26] In the period that this dissertation covers, the issue of biblical translation is centered around the Wycliffite Bible, which appeared in at least two versions in the last decade of the fourteenth century.[27]

The two-part response that these biblical translations engendered – the Oxford Translation Debates of 1401-07 and the promulgation of Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* in 1409 – underscores the threat that they posed to the ecclesiastical establishment. Of the barbed attacks on biblical translation that the Oxford debates generated, one particularly dramatic forecast of the consequences arising from an English Bible is worth repeating here at length:

> Translation into the mother tongue ... will bring about a world in which the
> laity prefers to teach than to learn, in which women (*mulierculae*) talk
> philosophy and dare to instruct men – in which a country bumpkin
> (*rusticus*) will presume to teach. Translation will also deprive good priests
> of their prestige. If everything is translated, learning, the liturgy, and all
> the sacraments will be abhorred; clerics and theology itself will be seen as
> useless by the laity; the clergy will wither; and an infinity of heresies will
> erupt. Even the laity will not benefit, since their devotion is actually

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[26] Evans, et al., "The Notion of Vernacular Theory," 317.

[27] David Lawton, "Englishing the Bible, 1066-1549," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, 454. Also, see Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), especially chapter 5, "Lollard Biblical Scholarship," 227-277. For c. 1390 as the date of one version of the Wycliffite Bible see the appendix of Nicholas Watson's "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70 (1995): 862.

improved by their lack of understanding of the psalms and prayers they say.[28]

The fears expressed in this admittedly alarmist response to Wycliffite biblical translation are, to a certain degree, fears over the corrupting influence of the vernacular itself, a "barbarous tongue ... grammatically and rhetorically inadequate as a vehicle for truth."[29] But on balance, the concerns that Watson outlines are not so much about scriptural purity or dilution of theological truth as they are about upending the established ecclesiastical hierarchies – the relative positions of teacher and student assumed by the clergy and the laity, the "prestige" enjoyed by "good priests" over women and "country bumpkins," the "usefulness" of clerics to lay people. As David Lawton rightly observes, the contests over English biblical translation were less contests over theological issues than contests over "authority and who [had] access to it."[30]

These recent studies on the vernacular have highlighted the tremendous cultural and political work performed by language in the later Middle Ages, particularly in the politically dynamic reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V. Although that scholarship has recognized that the vernacular "bore a close resemblance to the spoken word," it has not engaged with the parallel work performed by speech in the later Middle Ages, preferring instead to focus on text and writing.[31] On one hand, such a focus is logical: we do not have direct access to the medieval spoken word as we do to the written text; medieval vernacular speech acts (like all speech acts) disappeared as soon as they

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[28] The account is by Richard Ullerston, an orthodox cleric at Queens College, Oxford. Quoted in Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," 843.

[29] Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," 842-43.

[30] Lawton, "Englishing the Bible," 457.

[31] Introduction to *The Idea of the Vernacular*, xv.

were uttered. On the other hand, the literature of the later Middle Ages presents us with texts that are explicitly and centrally focused on the spoken word – texts like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which chronicles a fictional storytelling contest performed by a group of pilgrims, and the alliterative *Saint Erkenwald*, which details a confessional dialogue between a reanimated pre-Christian corpse and a seventh-century London bishop. Moreover, we know that many of these texts were written for oral presentation. Joyce Coleman shows that Chaucer and his near contemporaries produced carefully nuanced, written verse for an audience that would often hear rather than see their words: "Aurality – i.e. the reading aloud of written literature to one or a group of listeners – was in fact the modality of choice for highly literate and sophisticated audiences ... among the nobility of England, Scotland, France, and Burgundy from (at least) the fourteenth through the late fifteenth century."[32] This "aurality" is evidenced in the text I used to open this introduction; *The Wars of Alexander* begins, "When folk ere festid & fed, fayn wald þai here / Sum farand þinge eftir food to fayne þare hertis."[33] So while we may not be able to recapture medieval speech acts themselves, the texts that we call literature (from the Latin *littera*, meaning *letter*) may themselves be seen as records of speech, and the speech acts represented therein may be understood as verbal utterances in their own right. Though I will be focusing specifically upon the representations of speech within these literary texts, it is useful to recognize that those representations were articulated speech acts in their own right.

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[32] Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-2.

[33] [When folk are feasted and fed, they enjoy hearing some foreign thing after food to make glad their hearts] *Wars of Alexander*, 1 (ll. 1-2), translation mine.

Many of the works I examine in this dissertation have been previously analyzed in terms of their engagement with language and with writing. *The Manciple's Tale*, for example, has been approached "as an exploration of the nature of court poetry," and the Manciple's ventriloquizing crow has been described as a figure of the court poet himself.[34] As a hagiography, *Saint Erkenwald* has frequently been understood as a translation of the Latin Trajan legend or, similarly, in the textual context of poems like the *Anonymous Trental of Gregory*, Lydgate's *Augustine at Compton*, and the *Vita Sancti Erkenwaldi*.[35] Even Hoccleve's Marian Lyrics, when they have been analyzed at all, have most frequently been understood in the terms of their relationship to other written Marian poetry and, more recently, to the written petitions that dominated Hoccleve's service as Clerk of the Privy Seal.[36] This focus on writing is surely justified. When we consider the "bryht golde lettres" that encrust the heathen's sarcophagus in *Saint Erkenwald*, the relationship between the Monk's prayer regimen and Hoccleve's Formulary in "The Story of the Monk who Clad the Virgin," or the Manciple's repeated exhortations to "reed Salomon, ... reed David, ... reed Senekke," we see details that underscore a self-conscious engagement with emerging paradigms of writing, translation and textuality.[37]

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[34] Louise (Aranye) Fradenburg, "The Manciple's Servant's Tongue," *English Literary History* 52 (1985): 86.

[35] Whatley, "Heathens and Saints," 330.

[36] See Beverly Boyd, "Hoccleve's Miracle of the Virgin," *The University of Texas Studies in English* 35 (1956): 116-122 and *The Middle English Miracles of the Virgin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964); Ethan Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 129-157.

[37] *Saint Erkenwald*, ed. Clifford Peterson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), l. 51. The Formulary is a massive compendium of the many letters and petitions required by the Privy Seal clerks on a day to day basis. See Elna-Jean Young Bentley, "The Formulary of Thomas Hoccleve," PhD dissertation, Emory University, 1965. For an analysis of the relationship between the Formulary and Hoccleve's poetic output see Ethan Knapp, "Bureaucratic Identity and The Construction of the Self in Hoccleve's *Formulary*

But analyzing these works only in terms of those textual and written paradigms provides an incomplete picture. Along with the bright gold letters that we see in *St. Erkenwald*, we *hear* the baptismal words that Erkenwald speaks over the corpse. Hoccleve's Monk is asked by the Virgin Mary to speak a series of prayers aloud "after hir doctryne and enformynge."[38] Chaucer's Manciple reminds his fellow pilgrims *ad nausiam* that "God of his endelees goodnesse / Walled a tonge with teeth and lippes eke, / For man sholde hym avyse what he speeke" (IX 322-24). These details demonstrate that while Chaucer, the *Erkenwald* poet, Hoccleve and others wrote with an eye fixed on an emerging written, literary, vernacular tradition, they also wrote with an ear attuned to the resonances of the spoken word. They were acutely aware of the centrality of speech to the political, social, and religious conflicts of their day. This study recognizes the "spoken-ness" of literature in the Ricardian and early Lancastrian periods, and in that recognition it presents a revised picture of the political and cultural work that poetry was able to perform. By revealing the centrality of the spoken word for these medieval writers, this dissertation suggests new critical avenues for investigating the often public functions of poetry in the later Middle Ages.

Performativity, Modern and Medieval

One theoretical construct important to my examination of speech in Middle English narrative is the "performative utterance." As proposed by Oxford philosopher J.

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and *La Male Regle,*" *Speculum* 74 (1999): 357-376. All quotations from Chaucer's works are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., gen. ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Hereafter, they will be cited in the text by line number and, if necessary, abbreviated title. The lines cited above are from IX 344-45.

[38] Thomas Hoccleve, *"My Compleinte" and Other Poems*, ed. Roger Ellis (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001), 90, l. 88.

L. Austin in his series of lectures *How to Do Things with Words*, performative utterances are speech acts that "[a] do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, [b] are not 'true' or false'..." and in which "[c] the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action." By this definition, statements such as "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*" or "I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow" are performative utterances.[39] Austin distinguishes performatives from constatives, utterances that describe or report something and can ideally be declared true or false: "That ship is called the Queen Elizabeth" or "there are sixpence in my pocket" are constative utterances. As Austin continues his lectures, he blurs the distinctions between performatives and constatives, eventually developing a general theory of speech acts organized around the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary aspects of all utterances, constative and performative alike. The locutionary aspect refers to the "utterance of certain words in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a certain 'meaning'" – the vocal speech act itself.[40] The illocutionary force roughly corresponds to the way in which a speaker "means" his utterance to be understood, while the perlocutionary force is the actual effect that an utterance has, one not necessarily connected to the utterance's illocutionary intent. Thus, one locutionary act – let's say a dirty joke – can have multiple perlocutionary aspects: it can make me laugh; it can make me angry; it can offend me; it can put me at ease.[41] In the more precise vocabulary of Austin's general theory of speech acts then, a

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[39] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 2nd ed., eds. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 5.

[40] Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 94.

[41] Austin lays out his tripartite distinction between the three aspects of speech acts in Lecture VIII (pp. 94-107) and therein provides the following synopsis of his rubric: "We can ... distinguish the locutionary act 'he said that...' from the illocutionary act 'he argued that...' and the perlocutionary act; he convinced me that....' See Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 100.

successful performative is one in which the perlocutionary force of an utterance *is* its illocutionary force, in which the effect generated by speech act is identical to its intent.

Austin's work on performatives has been extended by John Searle, who focuses specifically on the philosopher's notion that spoken words have the potential to do work. Searle distinguishes performatives from constatives by what he calls "the direction of fit" between the word and the world.[42] In a constative or descriptive statement, the words uttered by the speaker fit the world; that is to say that the speaker's words reflect his perception of the world around him. Thus, if I see a couple that I know to be married, and I say, "You are married," I have uttered a constative statement. A performative utterance, on the other hand, is one in which the world fits the words uttered by a particular speaker, an utterance that does not simply describe the world but that actually alters it. When, under the proper circumstances, a justice of the peace says to my fiancé and me, "You are married," he changes the world to fit his words.[43] This definition of performativity even extends to the supernatural: Searle specifically proposes that "when God says, 'Let there be light!'… [He] makes the case by fiat that light exists," thus uttering the very model of a performative utterance.[44] As Saint Augustine of Hippo writes

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[42] Searle first discusses the fit between words and world in chapter 1 of *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979). He crystallizes and refines his position in "How Performatives Work,' *Linguistics and Philosophy* 12 (1989): 535-558.

[43] The utterance "you are married" is among the classic examples of the relative functions of constative and performative speech acts. Searle discussed it in, among other places, "How Performatives Work," 547; Austin frequently discusses words related to marriage in *How To Do Things with Words* (see, for example, p. 5, 10, 16-17, and so forth).

[44] Searle, "How Performatives Work," 549. The statement, "Let there be light" changes what Searle describes as a brute fact. Searle explores the distinction between brute facts and institutional facts in *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). In his estimation, brute facts are facts whose existence derives primarily from the natural sciences and empirical observation: "The paradigms vary enormously – they range from 'This stone is next to that stone' to 'Bodies attract with a force inversely proportional to the square distance between them and directly proportional to the product of their mass' to 'I have a pain', but they share certain common features" (50). Institutional facts, on the other hand, "are indeed facts; but their existence, unlike the existence of brute

in the *City of God*, "*Dei quippe sublimior ante suum factum locutio ipsius sui facti est inmutabilis ratio*" [For in fact the sublime speech of God in advance of his action is the immutable reason of the action itself].[45] The Word of God does not merely describe; it creates.

There have been a number of productive disagreements with the theories propounded by Austin and Searle, none more influential than Derrida's attack on the logical foundations of Austin's performative category itself. Specifically, Derrida takes issue with Austin's exemption of literary and artistic speech – the words "said by an actor on the stage, or ... introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy" – from his theory of performativity. Austin determines that artistic speech is "in a peculiar way hollow or void"; it can not be performative because it is "not used seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the etiolations of language."[46] In other words, Austin reasons that because it is predicated secondarily upon "normal" speech, the force of such derivative or "citational" speech is radically attenuated and cannot be performative. Derrida, however, reasons that by excluding literary language as "anomaly, exception, non-serious, citation," Austin effectively excludes the very thing that makes all utterances possible in the first place, the "general citationality – or rather general iterability – without which there would not even be a 'successful'

facts, presupposes the existence of certain human institutions. It is only given the institution of marriage that certain forms of behaviors constitute Mr. Smith's marrying Miss Jones" (51).

[45] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. T. E. Page, et al. and trans. Eva Matthews Sanford and William McAllen Green (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 5:36-37. Augustine's words resonate strongly with the definition of performativity proposed by Eve Sweetser: performative speech is speech in which "the words bring about the described world state, and are thus ontologically and causally prior to it." See "Blended Spaces and Performativity," *Cognitive Linguistics* 11 (2000): 310.

[46] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 22.

performative."[47] In other words, because all speech acts function precisely by virtue of their adherence or deviation from conventional constructs – because speech acts are necessarily "repetitions of an established procedure or formula" – it is logically inconsistent for Austin to cordon off literary or dramatic speech acts from "serious" ones.[48] Thus, Derrida determines that there is no difference between the "normal" performative and the "parasitic" performative: all performatives are similarly parasitic, all substantial speech acts are similarly hollow.

Unlike Derrida, who dismantles the fundamental logic of Austin's theory, Pierre Bourdieu attacks the idea of performative speech in relatively straightforward terms, arguing that Austin and Searle simply misidentify the thing that makes speech efficacious. According to Bourdieu, it is not the speech but the speaker that makes an utterance performative:

> By trying to understand the power of linguistic manifestations
> linguistically, by looking in language for the principle underlying the logic
> and effectiveness of language as an institution, one forgets that authority
> comes to language from outside.... In fact, the use of language, the
> manner as much as the substance of the discourse, depends on the social
> position of the speaker, which governs the access he can have to the
> institution, that is, to the official, orthodox, and legitimate speech.[49]

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[47] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northweatern University Press, 1988), 17. A thorough but still concise overview of Derrida's objections to Austin are in James Loxley, *Performativity* (London: Routledge, 2007), especially pp. 72-87.

[48] Loxley, *Performativity*, 74.

[49] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 109.

Thus, rather than existing within the speech act itself, the power that speech seems to contain – its ability to do work – should more accurately be understood as a reflection of the social status of the speaker. Bourdieu insists that social circumstances are always inseparable from the effective deployment of performative speech. The degree to which the speaker has access to the necessary social channels of authority determines the potential for that speaker to manifest the illocutionary – and perlocutionary – force of his speech.

The critical conversation surrounding performativity has been productive for some recent analyses of Middle English literature. Bourdieu's revision of Austin and Searle is particularly illuminating when we consider the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English court itself, a locus in which courtiers employed various kinds of spoken discourse in an ongoing struggle for authority, patronage, and royal favor. Lynn Staley has recently explored this issue, arguing that in the literary and documentary texts of the late fourteenth century we can see "an actual search for a language of power during the reign of Richard II."[50] Staley articulates a series of rhetorical strategies by which individuals within and around the royal court attempted to maintain (or enhance) their own positions of power: courtiers used a hierarchically coded "language of love" to describe not only romantic but also political relationships; rivals to Richard's power, often from the House of Lancaster, struggled to find a language that would circumscribe the king's royal prerogative while enhancing their own; Richard himself deployed a continentally inflected language of sacral kingship in order "to produce a royal image as magically endowed as that of the French kings," and he sought an appropriate and

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[50] Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), ix.

"meaningful ... language of princely address" to secure his monarchal authority.[51] Paul

Strohm embarks upon a similar project in his examination of the fifteenth-century

Lancastrian Kings. Like Staley, Strohm shows that the manipulation of language and the

manipulation of power were, in the Lancastrian court, coterminous acts.[52] The work of

both Staley and Strohm, which clearly demonstrates the relationship between the creation

of courtly power and the deployment of successful strategies of discourse in late

medieval England, accords with Bourdieu's response to Austin by showing the intimate

link between the efficacious utterance and the powerful speaker.

Derrida's discussion of iterability, as well as Austin's exclusion of "citational"

speech from "normal" speech, have also proven instructive for recent work on the Middle

Ages. In her examination of ecclesiastical regulation of medieval preaching practices,

Claire Waters determines that the logical inconsistencies concerning artistic and citational

speech that Derrida seized upon in Austin's theories of performativity are analogous to

Church concerns over the role of unlicensed preaching in the Middle Ages. Waters

reasons that authorized, licensed preaching in medieval England was itself based on

citation, specifically on a "lineage of ... priests and preachers whose words derived from

the words of Christ, who were supposed to follow and imitate him, and who were

authorized both by that point of origin and by the ongoing tradition of priestly office in

which they stood."[53] In other words, the power of the licensed preacher derived directly

from the citational relationship of his words to the words of Christ (an inversion of

Austin's sense that the power of citational speech is etiolated by virtue of its "parasitic"

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[51] Staley, *Languages of Power*, 57, 147, 165.

[52] See Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, especially pp. 128-52.

[53] Claire M. Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance, and Gender in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 18.

relationship to "normal" speech). The presence of unlicensed lay preachers and self-proclaimed prophets, however, threatened these official "chains of citation" precisely because such figures worked outside of the church hierarchy and "[claimed] a charismatic, personal authority ... that [was] much more difficult to regulate." Absent the citational authority claimed by licensed preachers, the preponderance of unregulated, lay preaching in the later Middle Ages threatened to create ecclesiastical contexts "without any center or absolute anchoring (*ancrage*).'" This Derrida-esque decentering of priestly authority was "anathema to medieval preaching theorists," and its specter drove ecclesiastical efforts to regulate preaching.[54]

A Derridian insistence on iterability is also implicit in Susan Phillips's *Transforming Talk*, particularly in the argument that medieval gossip was predicated not upon principles of "transgression" but upon "transformation." Phillips argues that far from being the exclusive (and exclusively transgressive) discursive domain of women in the Middle Ages, gossip in medieval England should be seen as a kind of speech that "influences and structures orthodox and literary practices," speech that "is both the obstacle and the tool of priests and pastoral writers [and] ... a device that enables vernacular poets to reinterpret Latin textual culture."[55]

My own analysis of the speech acts represented in Middle English narrative draws less from Derrida and Bourdieu than do the readings I discuss above. Where I invoke modern speech act theory in this dissertation, I more frequently use the interpretive vocabulary of Searle and Austin than the interventions of their post-structuralist critics.

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[54] Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures*, 18-19.

[55] Susan E. Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 6-7.

Despite the thorough dislocation of Austin's theory that Derrida performs, the distinction

that Austin and Searle draw between speech acts that shape their world and speech acts

that reflect their world's shape provides a useful interpretive framework for engaging

with the literature of the Ricardian and early Lancastrian periods. Moreover, if that

framework can also support the questions about power and authority that Bourdieu finds

implicit in the spoken word – and I propose that it can – so much the better. Where I do

find Derrida's intervention extremely useful, however, is in justifying the heuristic link I

draw between literary representations of speech and historical speech acts themselves.

The objection might be raised that we do not – nor can ever – have access to medieval

speech; thus, the speech we see represented on the page (and the work that authors

imagined it to do) are somehow inauthentic. In that argument, literary representations of

speech are necessarily pale imitations of actual speech; they can not attest to the "real"

functions that speech was understood to have in the Middle Ages since they are not the

"real" spoken words of the Middle Ages. Such an argument is, of course, a variation of

Austin's exclusion of the parasitic, citational and etiolated language of artistic expression

from his theory of performativity. What Derrida shows is that such citational speech is

no more etiolated than any other speech. It is structurally and functionally identical to the

speech we hear spoken, to the speech that Chaucer would have heard spoken, to the

speech that Hoccleve ventriloquizes in his *Series*, or even to the baptismal utterance that

the *Erkenwald* poet writes into his poem. Understanding speech in this capacity allows

us to engage with textual representations of speech on the same level that we might

engage with vocalized speech, even the vocalized speech recorded in the Rolls of

Parliament over 600 years ago. Thus, our engagement with literary representations of

Middle English speech can itself be seen as engagement with historical Middle English speech; the potential of one is the same as the potential of the other.

The Wheel of Language: Representations of Speech in the _House of Fame_

The "grete glauir & [the] glamm of Grekin tongis" that greets Alexander at the end of the world is reminiscent of another incomplete Middle English poem, a comic rather than an epic quest that likens the indistinct rumble of "speche and chidynges" (HF 1028) to the "betynge of the see... ayen the roched holowe" (HF 1034-5). Chaucer's _House of Fame_ is an unapologetically perplexing work, a dream vision that takes its reader (and its dreamer narrator, Geffrey) on a tour through glass temples and enormous wicker labyrinths comparable to the strangest architectural wonders described in the _Wars of Alexander_. Referred to by one critic as "the most bookish of Chaucer's books," the _House of Fame_ is deeply, often frustratingly, multivalent: it is simultaneously a rumination on the vagaries of fame and literary production, an inquiry into the nature of written and spoken _auctorite_, a genre-unraveling assault on the traditional medieval dream vision, and a focused assertion of the vernacular English text.[56] The poem has

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[56] A. J. Minnis, _Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems_ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 183. Minnis's text provides the most comprehensive and cogent introduction to the slippery critical discourse on the _House of Fame_. Among other important studies, Sheila Delany has argued that _The House of Fame_ enacts the struggle for "a balanced intellectual position, one that could accommodate traditional belief and the skeptical attitude toward belief that was the inevitable result of... logical investigations." The intellectual position on which the poem settles, Delany argues, is "skeptical fideism," a pragmatic philosophy that acknowledges the intractable conflicts within "the body of traditional knowledge that [confronts] the educated fourteenth century reader" even as it posits the supreme authority of the Christian faith itself to transcend them. _Skeptical Fideism_ has, to a large degree, provided a structural blueprint for much criticism to follow; later writers have largely affirmed Delany's argument that the poem deconstructs traditional textual authority but differed on what they put in its place. Options are as diverse as "the individual vision or voice" (Miller), the voices of women (Kordecki), the reader (Terrell, Amtower), the tension between orality and literacy (Arnovick), and even the disparity between the overarching "mythology of the middle ages" and the individual written "fiction" (Gellrich). See Sheila Delany, _Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism_ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 3, 6; Jacqueline Miller, The Writing on the Wall: Authority and Authorship in Chaucer's _House of Fame_,"

consistently stymied those who have tried to pin down its dominant philosophical and literary concerns; the *auctores* that Chaucer brings into conversation throughout the work are so numerous and so contradictory that they can not help but to undercut and subvert each other at every turn, guaranteeing a kind of poetic and philosophical mutually assured destruction. No one gets out of the *House of Fame* unscathed.

In addition to its many other facets, the *House of Fame* is also a primer on medieval theories of sound and speech, and it is in that capacity that I wish to discuss it here. At the close of the poem's second book, Geffrey is seized by a garrulous, telepathic eagle who whisks him into the ether and toward the titular House of Fame. On the way, the eagle provides the terrified dreamer with a lesson in acoustics, explaining what sound is ("soun ys noght but eyr ybroken" [765]), what speech is ("spech is soun... / And every speche that ys spoken, / Lowd or pryvee, foul or fair, / In his substance ys but air" [762-68]), and the analogous relationship between music and the spoken word ("whan a pipe is blowen sharpe / The air ys twyst with violence ... / And ryght so breketh it when men speketh" [774-780]).

The lesson reaches its climax when the eagle "proves" to Geffrey how "every speche, or noyse, or soun" (783) arrives at the House of Fame through a process of "multiplicacioun" (784):

"I preve hyt thus – take hede now –

Be experience; for yf that thow

Chaucer Review 17 (1982): 101; Lesley Kordecki, "Subversive Voices in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Exemplaria* 11 (1999): 53-77; Katherine Terrell, "Reallocation of Hermeneutic Authority in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Chaucer Review* 31 (1997): 279-290; Laurel Amtower, "Authorizing the Reader in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Philological Quarterly* 79 (2000): 273-291; Leslie Arnovick, "'In Forme of Speche' is Anxiety: Orality in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Oral Tradition* 11 (1996): 320-45; Jesse Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 168.

Throwe on water now a stoon,

Wel wost thou hyt wol make anoon

A litel roundell as a sercle,

Paraunter brod as a covercle;

And ryght anoon thow shalt see wel

That whel wol cause another whel,

And that the thridde, and so forth, brother,

Every sercle causynge other." (787-796)

Despite Chaucer's decision to put these words in the mouth of an enormous talking bird, the description is not mere poetic fancy; in fact, it is a close redaction of Boethius's description of the physics of sound in *De Institutione Musica*. Even its central metaphor of the stone dropped into the pool is a recapitulation of Boethius: "The same thing happens in sounds that happens when a stone, thrown from above, falls into a puddle or into quiet water. First it causes a wave in a very small circle; then it disperses clusters of waves into larger circles, and so on until the motion, exhausted by the spreading out of waves, dies away."[57] Thus, we can understand these concentric circles of "eyr ybroken" – these wheels of spoken language moving "from roundel to compas" (798) – to constitute for Chaucer's readers the scientific underpinnings of medieval theories of acoustics. They illustrate how speech works on a physical level.

There is a significant difference between the eagle's description of speech, though, and the scientific account provided by Boethius. The sixth-century philosopher describes a physics in which sound becomes increasingly weak as it travels outward from

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[57] Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, ed. Claude Palisca, trans. Calvin Bower (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 21. See also *The Riverside Chaucer*, 983-84 n.788-821.

its source, explaining that "[t]he latter, wider wave is always diffused by a weaker impulse."[58] Chaucer's fourteenth-century raptor, however, describes a physics in which speech "up bereth ... through multiplicacioun" (818-20), amplifying in affect and force, expanding ever outward. And when those concentric rings of twisting air reach the House of Fame, the eagle explains, they cease to be air at all but become the very physical incarnations of their very speakers:

> "Whan any speche ycomen ys
>
> Up to the paleys, anon-ryght
>
> Hyt wexeth lyk the same wight
>
> Which that the word in erthe spak,
>
> Be hyt clothed red or blak;
>
> And hath so verray hys lyknesse
>
> That speke the word, that thou wilt gesse
>
> That it the same body be,
>
> Man or woman, he or she." (1074-1082)

Contrary to Boethius, who describes the wheels of sound attenuating as they move away from their source, Chaucer describes sound that, at its furthest distance from its origin, manifests itself most robustly. The spoken word that leaves a person's mouth on the terrestrial plane is reconstituted in the form of its speaker in the House of Fame itself; those words, in turn, become active. They "stonden" (1214) and "tellen tales" (1198); they "pleyen on an harpe" (1201) and make "lowde mynstralcies" (1217) and "doon her ententes / To make ... ymages" (1267-69). In Austin's terms, we might suggest that the

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[58] Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, 21.

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perlocutionary force of the speech acts described by Chaucer is to embody their own speakers. Despite the poem's clear secular context, we might also recall John 1:14: *"Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis* [And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us]" – a perlocutionary act *sui generis*.[59] Whether philosophically or scripturally, Chaucer (through his narrative proxy Geffrey) clearly imagines a paradigm of speech in which the spoken word not only re-presents its world but re-creates it.

At the *House of Fame*'s Labyrinth of Rumor – a structure that Chaucer describes as a "Domus Dedaly ... ful of rounynges and of jangles" (1920, 1960) – the physics of sound and speech that the eagle describes are reenacted on the level of spoken narrative, the level of gossip and rumor and story. Within the whirling maze, utterances that have taken the forms of their speakers tell their tales (tell themselves?) to other embodied utterances, and those utterances in turn change and enlarge and amplify those tales until, like the wheels of language, they reach the edge of their wicker cage:

> When oon had herd a thing, ywis,
>
> He com forth ryght to another wight,
>
> And gan him tellen anon-ryght
>
> The same that to him was told,
>
> Or hyt a forlong way was old,
>
> But gan somewhat for to eche
>
> To this tydynge in this speeche
>
> More than it ever was.

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[59] Latin Vulgate cited from the *Biblia Sacra: Juxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. Robert Weber (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969). The English Translation is from the Douay-Rheims version, revised by Richard Challoner (1582-1609; repr., Baltimore: John Murphy, 1899).

...

　　And evermo with more encres

　　Than yt was erst. (2060-68, 2074-75)

As with the "sound waves" described by the eagle, the process of rumor within the labyrinth is a process of constant "encres" and amplification, one where narrative voices perpetually reproduce themselves, beget their own duplicates, and even create new embodied utterances – narratives of "fals and soth compounded" (2108). The embodied speech acts here are exposed as not only reflections of their speakers but as active, creative, generative agents. They are performative speech acts manifest, spoken words that, in the most literal possible sense, do work on their world.

　　What the eagle's account of the motion of sound toward the House of Fame implies -- both in the capacity of the human voice to break and rend the air with violence as well as in the more fanciful notion that speech "wexeth lyk the same wight" who spoke it on earth – is that the spoken word is an active, capable, powerful agent. As Chaucer's description of the chattering sounds in the Domus Dedaly indicates, speech not only repeats and reflects the world, it amplifies the world, changes the world, and sometimes (as the half-truths slipping through the wicker cage and back into the sublunary sphere show) creates new worlds that didn't exist before. And while I do not mean to suggest that Chaucer intended for his fantastic dream vision to be taken literally, I do argue that we can understand the *House of Fame* as arising from a perception in the Middle Ages that the spoken word was uniquely powerful, that speech both represented creation and created in equal measure. I propose, therefore, that we can see the concentric wheels of language that Chaucer's eagle describes as an apt metaphor for the speech that this

dissertation locates in the poetry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, speech whose power lies not only in its ability to travel and to communicate but also in its ability to "twyst" and to "break," to engender and to create.

In many ways it is appropriate that Chaucer provide us with a guiding example for understanding Middle English conceptions of speech. Certainly he is not alone in regarding speech as an efficacious and performative medium; as this study will show, both the *Erkenwald* poet and Thomas Hoccleve – as well other writers that I engage with more peripherally such as William Langland, John Gower, and the anonymous poet of the *Wars of Alexander* – similarly recognize the spoken word as a vehicle both for communication and for creation. But as his body of work shows, Chaucer is intensely aware of the preeminence of speech both as a representative medium and as a creative, performative one. The power of the spoken word is an issue that Chaucer deals with across his poetic *oeuvre*, from the self-generating speech of the *House of Fame*, to the consequences of oaths made and broken in *Troilus and Criseyde*, to the dialectical birdsong that pervades *The Parliament of Fowls*, and even to the curse in "Adam Scriveyn" that Chaucer utters to his own scribe: "thou most have the scalle" (3).

But it is, of course, the *Canterbury Tales* that seals Chaucer's reputation as a poet of speech, a poet who understands that people both make and are made by the words they speak. Marshall Leicester writes that the *Canterbury Tales* "concentrate not on the way preexisting persons create language but on the way language creates people. They detail how a fictional teller's text im-personates him or her by creating a personality, that is, a textual subject that acts like, rather than is, a person."[60] Indeed, just as the expanding

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[60] H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the Canterbury Tales*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 9-10.

wheels of language give form in the Labyrinth of Rumor to "shipmen and pilgrimes, ... pardoners, / Currours, and eke messagers" (HF 2122-28), so too does the speech of the Shipman, the Pardoner, the Canon's Yeoman, and the Manciple, ventriloquized through the *Canterbury Tales*'s pilgrim narrator, ultimately give form to the Canterbury pilgrims and to the fictive world they inhabit. In this respect, we can see the "congregacioun of folk" (HF 2034) within the *House of Fame*'s Domus Dedaly as poetic forerunners of the procession of "sondry folk" on the road to Canterbury. The creative speech that the eagle describes in Chaucer's early dream vision adumbrates the generative words of the poet's last major work.

Among the poets discussed in this dissertation, Chaucer is the poet of speech *par excellence*; in many ways his *House of Fame* and *Canterbury Tales* represent the alpha and omega of his engagement with the efficacy of the spoken word. Fitting, then, that in the first chapter of this dissertation we turn from Chaucer's early dream vision to the final poetic tale of his final, unfinished work – from the talking eagle of the *House of Fame* to the talking crow of the *Manciple's Tale*.

CHAPTER 1

"A wikked tonge is worse than a feend":

Nominalism, Speech, and Power in *The Manciple's Tale*

Near the beginning of his tale, Chaucer's Manciple draws a telling comparison between "Phebus, that was flour of bachilrie" (IX. 125) and "the kyng of Thebes, Amphioun, / That with his syngyng walled that citee" (IX.116-117) Ostensibly made to highlight the beauty of Phoebus's "cleere voys" (IX 115), the Manciple's comparison is important not only for what it includes but for what it neglects to mention – the role of Amphion's lyre in the construction of the city walls. The tradition that Amphion built the walls of Thebes by playing his lyre was readily available to Chaucer and his contemporaries, and it was one that the poet undoubtedly knew well. In Boccaccio's *Teseida* – Chaucer's primary source for the *Knight's Tale* and the *Anelida* –Amphion "call[s] upon the surrounding mountains to protect Thebes with the sweet song of [his] skillfully played lyre"; in Statius's *Thebaid*, the Thebans tell "of stones that crept to the sound of a Tyrian lyre and Amphion animating hard rocks."[1] More to the point, Chaucer himself alludes to Amphion's skill as a harpist in the *Merchant's Tale*: his description of January and May's lavish wedding feast includes an account of "instrumentz of swich soun / That Orpheus, ne of Thebes Amphioun, / Ne maden nevere swich a melodye" (IV 1715-17). Michela

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[1] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Theseid of the Nuptials of Emilia (Teseida delle Nozze di Emilia)*, ed. and trans. Vincenzo Traversa (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 440, Italian at 134; Statius, *Thebaid*, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey for *The Loeb Classics Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 21, Latin at 20, 22. Richard Hoffman argues that Chaucer also would have known the role of Amphion's lyre from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. See *Ovid and the Canterbury Tales* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 152.

Grudin has rightly noted that the Manciple's description of Amphion's voice is among those passages in the *Manciple's Tale* "that point us to the general area of speech, poetry, and song, but in light of Amphion's conspicuously absent lyre, her argument doesn't go far enough.[2] The Manciple's invocation of Amphion walling Thebes with his voice suggests the potential of the spoken word – and the spoken word alone – to perform work, to effect change within the physical world rather than simply to reflect that world in a representative fashion.

In modern critical parlance, we might refer to Amphion's song as a performative utterance – a speech act in which, as J. L. Austin writes, "the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action."[3] As a brief synopsis should demonstrate, such performative utterances are among the varieties of speech acts present in the *Manciple's Tale*, a work that, like the *House of Fame*, is self-evidently invested in the functions of spoken language. A wry recasting of Ovid's story of Apollo and the Crow, the tale told by the Manciple centers on Phoebus, the clear-voiced god of poetry, and a snow-white crow that he has taught to "countrefete the speche of every man" (IX 134). While his master is absent, the crow espies Phoebus's wife and her "lemman" as "they wroghten al hir lust volage" (IX 239). Upon Phoebus's return the crow first cries "Cokkow! Cokkow! Cokkow!" and then, less punningly, lays bare the wife's adultery using the human speech that Phoebus has taught him. This situation does not end well for anyone. The enraged Phoebus kills his wife with an arrow, then, too late, repents of his violence. He breaks his bow in grief, destroys "his mynstralcie," and – in an act of either wishful

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[2] Michela Paasche Grudin, *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1996), 151

[3] Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 5.

thinking, utter denial, or rampant self-delusion – declares his wife to be "ful giltelees" (IX 277) of her adultery. Finally, in a culminating act of destruction, Phoebus punishes the crow for his "fals tale" (IX 293): he plucks the crow's white feathers, turns him black, and strips him of the ability to speak.

Introduced by a prologue in which Chaucer's drunken Cook loses his own ability to speak, punctuated by the Manciple's sardonic observations on the relationship between the "word" and the "dede" (IX 208), and concluded by a paradoxically verbose call to silence, the *Manciple's Tale* offers a *de facto* exploration of the *potentia* of spoken language, an interrogation into the work that a verbal utterance might perform. And that work, the Manciple seems to tell us, is as dangerous as it is significant: the spoken word can build a city, expose a betrayal, turn a crow black, enrage a god, lead to murder. As Christopher Cannon has argued, for Chaucer – and certainly for his proxy the Manciple – "language was the kind of thing which might not only describe, but could make, a world."[4]

Tempting as it is simply to read the *Manciple's Tale* through the lens of modern speech-act theory, we must recognize that J. L. Austin and his followers were hardly the first to consider the fraught relationship between words and things. Chaucer's own fourteenth century witnessed to a seismic shift in philosophical inquiry, precipitated largely by the teachings of the nominalist thinker William of Ockham, which complicated medieval understandings of that very relationship. At the heart of this philosophical shift was Ockham's argument that "a universal is not something real that exists in a subject ...

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[4] Christopher Cannon, "Chaucer and the Value of Language" (paper presented at the inaugural London Chaucer conference, School of Advanced Studies, University of London, UK, April 2002). I am grateful to Christopher Cannon for generously providing me with a copy of his paper.

[but] has a being only as a thought-object in the mind."[5] Such a pronouncement was directly at odds with dominant strains of medieval scholastic realism – exemplified by the writings of Augustine, Boethius and, later, Aquinas – which held that universals "exist outside the mind as the essences of individual things in which they inhere, at once distinct from the individual itself and from other universals."[6] Ockham's rejection of universals and attendant emphasis on the ontological primacy of the individual had important consequences for late medieval thought. Linguistically, such a philosophical shift demanded a reappraisal of the relationship between the signifier and the signified because the signified was no longer understood as being predicated upon a larger, transcendent universal. Similarly, Ockham's theories called for a revised understanding of the very nature of God's power and of His relationship with mankind. To that end, Ockham reasoned that because the will of God was not fettered by a system of absolute universals, God's ordained power (*potentia dei ordinata*) was superseded by His more robust (and more erratic) absolute power (*potentia dei absoluta*).

Chaucer's own views on Ockham's philosophy are, as the self-contradictory critical record shows, notoriously difficult to discern; it is impossible to say with certainty if (or to what degree) Chaucer himself had nominalist leanings. We do know, however, that Ockham's writings profoundly influenced many of the leading philosophical and intellectual figures of the fourteenth century, including Robert Holcot, John Wyclif, and Ralph Strode, very likely the same "philosophical Strode" (*TC* 5.1857) mentioned in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. We can reasonably assume, therefore, that Chaucer

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[5] From *Ordinatio*, in Ockham, *Philosophical Writings*, 41.

[6] Gordon Leff, *William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1975), 104.

knew of the nominalist debate and that he engaged with it in his work.[7] In this chapter, I

contend that the *Manciple's Tale* – a work often overlooked in discussions of Chaucer

and nominalism – stands as the apogee of that engagement within the *Canterbury Tales*.

More specifically, I will argue, first, that the aspects of performative speech we find in

the *Manciple's Tale* are central to Chaucer's exploration of nominalist thought and,

second, that the linguistic and ontological systems Chaucer develops in the tale are

themselves logical extensions of the philosophy propounded by Ockham. Finally, an

analysis of Chaucer's Boethian lyrics and *Treatise on the Astrolabe* offers a new

perspective on the poet's own position within the realist-nominalist debate by

demonstrating his fraught position between two colliding and mutually exclusive

linguistic and ontological systems.

Ockham and Chaucer: the Philosophical and Critical Background

Ockham's nominalist intervention in medieval philosophy must be understood not

only in terms of what it proposed but also in terms of what it overturned: specifically, the

prevailing current of scholastic thought known as the *via antiqua*. A synthesis of patristic

writings, Neoplatonic thought, and Aristotelianism, the *via antiqua* both "recognized a

harmony of faith and reason in theological issues" and "conformed to the tradition and

beliefs of a Christian society."[8] Among its metaphysical underpinnings was a belief in

the existence of universals, divine constructs described by Augustine as the exemplary

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[7] For a thorough analysis of ways in which Chaucer might have come into contact with nominalist
philosophy see Russell Peck, "Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions," *Speculum* 53 (1978): 743-744, and
John Micheal Crafton, "Emptying the Vessel: Chaucer's Humanistic Critique of Nominalism," *Literary
Nominalism and the Theory of Rereading Late Medieval Texts: A New Research Paradigm* 1 (1995): 117-
19.

[8] Helen Ruth Andretta, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde: A Poet's Response to Ockhamism* (New York:
Peter Lang, 1997), 21.

"forms" or "species" from which all individual forms were derived. The existence of these universals (as well as their predicatory relationship to individuals) formed the core of what is known as scholastic realism:

> We can call the Ideas "forms" or "species." ... For Ideas are certain principal, stable and immutable forms or reasons of things. They are not themselves formed, and hence they are eternal and always stand in the same relations, and they are contained in the divine understanding. And although they neither arise nor perish, nevertheless everything that is able to arise and perish, and everything that does arise and perish, is said to be formed in accordance with them.[9]

The Platonism implicit in such thinking is clear: Augustine posited the existence of a stratum of perfect and unattainable ideals, divine models that existed beyond the senses but upon which all known individual things were necessarily based. To know something, Augustine reasoned, was to know the universal, not the individuals derived from it. And since these universals were beyond the sensory apprehension of humans, that knowledge was ultimately gained through a process akin to divine illumination. Indeed, Augustine proposed that knowledge was granted directly by the will of God, that with His power, the "inner and intelligible eye" was "drenched in a certain way and lit up by that intelligible light."[10] We know a thing because God reveals its universal essence to us, because He illuminates the universal that is always the basis of the individual.

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[9] Augustine, *On Eighty-Three Different Questions*, 383-4. A concise description of scholastic realism appears in Robert Myles, *Chaucerian Realism* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 2-3.

[10] Augustine, *On Eighty-Three Different Questions*, 384

The ontological system articulated by Augustine gave form to a similarly situated

epistemology of language, one in which the signified and the sign assumed the same

relative hierarchy as the universal and the individual: the sign was always predicated

upon the signified. Within this hierarchy, the function of speech was, quite simply, to

signify – to state and to communicate the knowledge granted by God's illumination.

Moreover, Augustine argued that speech signified by convention; the spoken word was a

sign that related to its signified not by some intrinsic relation but by external correlation.

In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine wrote that words existed exclusively in the service

of such signification. As a sign, a word "is a thing which of itself makes some other

thing come to mind"; the subordinate relationship of sign to signified was a part of the

"permanent and divinely instituted system of things."[11] In *De Magistro*, Augustine

expanded this argument, proposing that "things signified are of greater importance than

their signs" and that "the knowledge is superior to the sign simply because it is the end

toward which the latter is the means."[12] Such passages show how the subordination of

the individual to the universal made explicit by Augustine's Platonist ontology was

recapitulated in the subordination of the individual verbal sign to the universal signified.

A century after Augustine, Boethius's translations of Aristotle precipitated the

development of a similar theory of universals as well as a similar linguistic epistemology.

Central to Boethius's approach was the idea that "spoken sounds are symbols of

affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds," a formulation,

originally propounded in Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, that posited the existence of

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[11] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 57, 113.

[12] Augustine, "De Magistro," in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans John H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 87-88.

mental, spoken, and written signs.[13] Boethius maintained that mental signs (also called

conceptual signs) bore a natural and intrinsic relationship to the things they signified. By

contrast, spoken language consisted of a system of conventional signs, not natural ones.

Speech was seen as signifying "only derivatively, by a conventional ... correlation with

concepts"; it was, thus, a system of signifiers subordinated first to natural mental signs

and then to the universals that they signified.[14] Indeed, in his translation of Aristotle,

Boethius explained that words "spoken in isolation are names and signify something. For

he who speaks [them] establishes an understanding and he who hears [them] rests."[15]

The capacity of the spoken word to function – to signify a mental concept – was therefore

entirely dependent upon the shared linguistic conventions of speaker and hearer. Finally,

at the bottom of Boethius's hierarchy of signifiers was the written word, itself predicated

by convention upon speech. Writing, then, held a tertiary position in Boethius's

linguistic hierarchy; it was a conventional sign of a conventional sign (spoken) of a

natural sign (mental) of a universal.

Boethius's tripartite hierarchy accorded with the Augustinian notion that

universals both existed and formed the ontological basis for human knowledge. More

important, it reinforced the hierarchical relationships between sign and signified implicit

in Augustine's discussion of speech and language. But the frameworks proposed by

Augustine and Boethius did not mesh perfectly. Many philosophers influenced by

Boethius's translations of Aristotle, for example, rejected Augustine's epistemology of

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[13] Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1:25.

[14] Paul Vincent Spade, "The Semantics of Terms," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 189.

[15] Boethius, *De Interpretatione*, quoted in Spade, "The Semantics of Terms," 188.

divine illumination, preferring instead to see "concept formation dependent upon sense experience, and knowledge of intelligible realities subsequent to knowledge of sensible realities."[16] Linguistically, too, the two traditions were subject to some disjuncture. Was a spoken word a sign of the universal essence or was it the signifier for the individual derivation of the signified? Was language itself, as many Aristotelian thinkers proposed, important to the human ability to apprehend knowledge of universals or could such knowledge only be obtained by the illumination of God? Did spoken signs hold a natural relationship to things signified or a conventional one (a position advocated by neither Boethius nor Augustine but articulated in Plato's *Cratylus*)?[17]

Later thinkers, none more significant than Thomas Aquinas, struggled to align the many "small misfits" that occurred between the Augustinian and Boethian frameworks.[18] Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* taught that "words relate to the meaning of things signified through the medium of the intellectual conception.... We can give a name to anything in as far as we can understand it."[19] Such an assertion supposed, with Augustine, that the individual signifying utterance existed in an ordered, subordinate relationship to the thing it signified. It also suggested that language itself operated as "a rational, rule-governed system that ... [conveyed] the information necessary for organized knowledge," a position

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[16] Ashworth, "Language and Logic," 82.

[17] See Ashworth, "Language and Logic," 83-34; G. R. Evans, *Philosophy and Theology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 36-37; Spade, "The Semantics of Terms," 188-196. The position that signs existed in a natural relationship with their signified is a position known as "cratylic realism" or "cratylistic realism" and should not be confused with scholastic realism. See Myles, *Chaucerian Realism*, 2-3; Gérard Genette, "Valéry and the Poetics of Language," in Josué V. Harari, *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 359-363; Theresa Coletti, *Naming the Rose: Eco, Medieval Signs, and Modern Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 19-20.

[18] Evans, *Philosophy and Theology*, 37.

[19] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ed. and trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), 1:60 (I, q. 13, a. 1).

more in keeping with Boethius's Aristotelian leanings.[20] Aquinas also affirmed the

existence of universals – a precept common to both schools of thought – reasoning that

"the intelligible species is that which is understood secondarily; but that which is

primarily understood is the object, of which the species is the likeness."[21] Here too, the

knowledge of the derivative individual (the species) was subordinated to knowledge of

the universal (the object).

Because scholastic realism of the *via antiqua* was, broadly speaking, still the

prevailing philosophical framework in the fourteenth century, comparatively few critics

have argued specifically that Chaucer's work evinces a realist philosophy.[22] Indeed, the

vast majority of Chaucer's readers have silently, even unconsciously, accepted the poet as

a realist without overtly defending that assumption. Among those who *have* actively

advocated for a realist Chaucer, Gerald Morgan has cast the widest net, arguing that the

portraits in the *General Prologue* function as universal exemplars for the individual

pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales*. He argues that a philosophical discussion of universals

ultimately becomes "a sound basis for discriminating between the type and the

individual" in the *Canterbury Tales*, a critical position that effectively reads Chaucer's

entire poem as, on one level, an extended realist allegory.[23] David Williams sees

evidence of a realist ontology specifically in the *Friar's Tale*, reasoning that Chaucer's

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[20] E. J. Ashworth, "Language and Logic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 77.

[21] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1:434 (I, q. 85, a. 2).

[22] David Williams writes, "The debate concerning supposition is, then, a debate about the signifying power of language and about the nature of the real. Scholastic logic of the fourteenth century dominated that debate but not to the complete exclusion of other discourses." See "From Grammar's Pan to Logic's Fire: Intentionality in Chaucer's *Friar's Tale*," in *Literature and Ethics: Essays Presented to A. E. Malloch*, ed. Gary Wihl and David Willliams (Kingston, ON: McGill – Queens University Press, 1988), 83.

[23] Gerald Morgan, "The Universality of the Portraits in the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*," *English Studies* 58 (1977): 481.

story of a summoner damned by his own failure to perceive the universal intent behind an individual curse presents "a world in which the signified escapes false signs and reasserts an ontology of realism."[24] But by far the most strident proponent of a realist Chaucer is Robert Myles, who states flatly that "Chaucer's works reveal a foundational ... and linguistic realist"; within them, "signs, including ... language in particular, are, to some degree, a reliable means of knowing [an] extramental reality."[25]

The absoluteness with which Myles's declares Chaucer's realism, the unwavering certainty that he ascribes to the poet's philosophical position, need not tempt us to counter with a postmodern Chaucer (or as Myles puts it, a "schizophrenic" Chaucer). But we should nonetheless acknowledge what the vast majority of critics since E. Talbot Donaldson have shown and what Myles seems to overlook: that by cloaking himself in personae and alternately donning the masks of satirist, translator, and courtly apologist, Chaucer makes it extremely difficult for his readers to separate the "real Chaucer" from the many Chaucers projected by his works. To put such an argument into terms that resonate with this argument, we might say that readers have long struggled to distinguish the universal Chaucer upon which are predicated so many individual Chaucers. Even without access to the "universal Chaucer" though, elements of scholastic realism can be found throughout the *Canterbury Tales*. We might, for example, consider the *Knight's Tale* to extol an essentially realist philosophy, one expressed eloquently in Theseus's "Firste Movere" speech:

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[24] David Williams, "From Grammar's Pan," 90.

[25] Myles, *Chaucerian Realism*, 1. For other explicitly realist perspectives on Chaucer's work see Andretta, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*; Crafton, "Emptying the Vessel: Chaucer Humanistic Critique of Nominalism"; James I. Wimsatt, "John Duns Scotus, Charles Sanders Pierce, and Chaucer's Portrayal of the Canterbury Pilgrims," *Speculum* 71 (1996): 633-645.

"Wel may men knowe, but it be a fool,

That every part dirryveth from his hool,

For nature hat nat taken his bigynnyng

Of no partie or cantel of a thyng,

But of a thyng that parfit is and stable." (I 3005-09)[26]

Here, Chaucer redacts a Boethian ontology in which individual parts "dirryveth from his hool," and in which the whole in turn has "his bigynnyng" in a "thyng that parfit is and stable." Such a realist ontology receives a more Aristotelian treatment in the *Melibee*, a tale in which knowledge of the transcendent universals ordained by "God, of whom procedeth al vertu and alle goodnesse" (VII 1872) is attained not by sudden illumination bestowed by the "Firste Movere" but by means of a rigorous scholastic dialectic between Melibee and Prudence.

Evidence of scholastic realism also surfaces in the linguistic hierarchy that Chaucer develops in the *Canterbury Tales*, a hierarchy thrown into particularly sharp relief by the fates of those who attempt to violate it. Indeed, in several of the *Tales*, individual characters either fail to abide by or refuse to recognize the coherence between spoken sign, mental sign, and universal that defines scholastic realism – a failure for which many of them are punished. Williams implies just such a punishment when he suggests that the corrupt summoner of the *Friar's Tale* is damned to hell for his "erroneous and self-serving theory of signification," a theory in which "universals are only names made up from knowledge of particulars" and in which "signs have no

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[26] For the opinion that the overt realism of this passage constitutes an ironic (and therefore nominalist) statement on the arbitrary fates of Palamon and Arcite, see William A. Cozart, "Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*: A Philosophical Re-appraisal of a Medieval Romance," in *Medieval Epic to the "Epic Theater" of Brecht*, ed. Rosario P. Armato and John M. Spalek (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1968), 30-6.

necessary relation to their signified."[27] Williams's reading of the damnation of the

Friar's summoner is equally applicable to the Pardoner's "riotoures thre" (VI 661), who

seek out the "privee theef men clepeth Deeth" (VI 675) in order to slay him. Like the

Friar's misguided summoner, the Pardoner's three "riotoures" fail to see that the death

they seek is not an individual called Death but an immutable universal. Their failure – or

unwillingness – to apprehend the connection between a speech act (the word "death"

uttered in the tavern) and the universal transcendent concept that it necessarily signifies

ultimately leads the three men to murder one another, literally leads them to death.

Finally, we might consider the fate of the Apius, the corrupt judge of the *Physician's Tale*

who attempts to subvert the linguistic hierarchy of scholastic realism by verbally

declaring Virginia to be not Virginius's daughter (which, of course, all the major figures

in the tale know her to be) but Claudius's servant. By attempting to predicate the mental

sign of Virginia's identity upon his own speech act rather than *vice versa*, Apius threatens

to upend the relationship between speech and mental sign, even to trouble the relationship

between spoken language and the transcendent universal upon which it is constituted.

Ultimately, this transgression leads to Virginia's death, Claudius's exile, and Apius's

own suicide; and it places the *Physician's Tale* among the ranks of Chaucer's bloodiest

tales. In fact, the only character to emerge unscathed from the *Physician's Tale* is

Virginius himself, a figure whose faith in an inflexible universal order is so profound that

he beheads his own daughter rather than submit to Apius's attack on the linguistic

hierarchy of scholastic realism.

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[27] Williams, "From Grammar's Pan," 85-86.

The nominalist philosopher William of Ockham allows us to further unpack Chaucer's relationship to fourteenth-century theories of language; ultimately, his work will be central to our analysis of the *Manciple's Tale* itself. The position articulated by Ockham constituted a radical break from the realist philosophy of the *via antiqua*, but it shared with that philosophy an acknowledgement of the distinctions among mental, spoken, and written signs articulated by Boethius. Like most of his contemporaries – realist and nominalist alike – Ockham proposed that speech maintained a secondary relationship to the mental sign and, moreover, that speech signified the mental sign only by conventional correspondence. Ockham also accepted that mental signs – what Boethius would call "impressions of the soul" – signified the concepts upon which they were predicated naturally rather than conventionally: "[mental signs] reside in the intellect alone and are incapable of being uttered aloud, although the spoken words which are subordinated to them as signs are uttered aloud."[28] But Ockham diverged sharply from his contemporaries on the question of exactly what those mental signs were predicated upon. Scholastic realists insisted that mental signs were natural signifiers of transcendent universals, divine signifieds upon which all individual things were based. By contrast, Ockham argued "that every universal is one particular thing and that it is not a universal except in its signification, in its signifying many things."[29] In other words, the mental sign did not signify a divine, inviolate signified; rather, the mental sign signified yet another kind of individual sign, an "object of thought" that only seemed to be a universal.

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[28] William of Ockham, *Ockham's Theory of Terms: Part I of the Summa Logicae*, ed. and trans. Michael J. Loux (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 49-50. See also Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 71-75.

[29] Ockham, *Theory of Terms*, 78; Adams, *William Ockham*, 75.

By this logic, Ockham effectively conflated the universal and the individual; the former, he reasoned, was another iteration of the latter, a sign rather than a thing signified. More important, this logic also led Ockham to the conclusion that universals existed in name only and had no reality outside of the mind, a position that struck at the heart of the realist ontology:

> No universal is a substance regardless of how it is considered. On the contrary, every universal is an intention of the mind which, on the most probable account, is identical with the act of understanding. Thus, it is said that the act of understanding by which I grasp [the concept] "men" is a natural sign of men in the same way that weeping is a natural sign of grief. It is a natural sign such that it can stand for men in the same way that a spoken word can stand for things in spoken propositions.[30]

In effect, Ockham demoted the universal from a transcendent signified to an individual cognitive construct, one which was itself predicated on human experience and observation. As such, the concept that realists called a "universal" was, in fact, coterminous with the mental sign. It was "an intention of the mind" based upon signifieds outside of itself; it was not, as the realists held, "capable of functioning [exclusively] as a predicate." Indeed, as Ockham finally concluded, "no [individual] substance is ever predicated of anything [universal]"; the universals that realists understood to be eternal predicates of all things simply did not – could not – exist.[31]

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[30] Ockham, *Theory of Terms*, 81. I have attempted to clarify this difficult passage by adding the bracketed words and by placing quotation marks around the word "men."

[31] Ockham, *Theory of Terms*, 81-82.

Although a full survey of the implications of Ockham's nominalism is outside the scope of this chapter, two issues arising from the philosopher's rejection of universals warrant further discussion for our analysis of Chaucer and, more specifically, of his *Manciple's Tale*. The first is the effect of that rejection on medieval understandings of the relationship between epistemology and speech. As we have already observed, Ockham concurred with his realist contemporaries that speech signified mental signs by conventional correspondence in much that same way that written words in turn signified spoken utterances: – "spoken words are used to signify the very things that are signified by concepts of the mind."[32] But whereas scholastic realism held that mental signs were in turn predicated upon transcendent universals, Ockham argued that those universals were themselves yet another "intention of the mind," coterminous with rather than generative of mental signs. For Ockham, the human knowledge derived from mental signs – and by extension the spoken expression of those mental signs – was as variable as the individual things that those mental signs portended to signify. To know a thing was not tantamount to understanding the transcendent universal behind it but merely to understanding that individual thing as it was represented by a particular mental sign. To speak of something, therefore, did not mean to signify a mental sign anchored inexorably to a perfect and immutable signified but to signify a mental sign predicated solely upon other signs, including other spoken utterances. Thus, Ockham's nominalist philosophy of language detached both knowledge and speech from a stable, overarching cohort of universals and radically redefined them as subject wholly to the internal mental processes of the individual thinker.

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[32] Ockham, *Theory of Terms*, 50. Regarding speech, Ockham writes, "The same sort of relation I [Ockham] have claimed to hold between spoken words and impressions or intentions or concepts holds between written words and spoken words."

Such a shift goes well beyond the assertion, made by many who discuss

Chaucer's relationship to nominalism, that Ockham's linguistic philosophy simply

overturned the argument that language bore a natural, rather than a conventional,

relationship to the things that it signified, a position known as cratylic realism.[33] In fact,

the vast majority of scholastic realists, including Aquinas and Duns Scotus, rejected

cratylic realism, as, of course, did Ockham. Ockham's intervention was *not* an assertion

that speech signified mental signs by convention but rather that mental signs themselves

were disconnected from a transcendent universal signified, a position which meant that

knowledge was finally "not the result of generation, but of abstraction, which [was] only

a kind of mental picturing."[34] Predicated upon the inherent vagaries of individual

"intentions of the mind," the mental sign was contingent only upon the individual

creating it, a flimsy predicate indeed when we compare it to the immutable universals of

realism. Speech was similarly destabilized. As one critic has pointed out, for Chaucer

"Words could no longer be assumed to fit the shape of reality because of their origin in a

real world of ideas beyond the mind. Language [was] no longer a shadow pattern of the

real, but [had] become a skewed grid that may not fit the scheme of reality."[35] Within the

strictures of Ockham's epistemological model, then, what a person thought he knew of

reality, he did know of reality. More radically, we might also suggest that because

mental signs were predicated not upon universals but only upon other signs, including

signs of speech, spoken words could fundamentally change that knowledge of reality and

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[33] See Myles, *Chaucerian Realism*, 2-3.

[34] From *Ordinatio*, in Ockham, *Philosophical Writings*, 41

[35] Holly Wallace Boucher, "Nominalism: The Difference for Chaucer and Boccaccio," *Chaucer Review* 20 (1986): 215.

even could, for the individual thinker, alter reality itself. In other words, at the extreme

limit of Ockham's nominalism, we see the ontological potential for performative speech.

The same rejection of the universal that necessitated a shift in thinking about

language and epistemology also had significant ramifications for nominalist

understandings of God, a point underscored most emphatically by Ockham's emphasis on

God's absolute and unmediated power – *potentia dei absoluta*. Following the theological

distinction popularized by (though not original with) Albert the Great and reinforced by

John Duns Scotus, Ockham held that God's power, though essentially singular in nature,

was of two species – *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta*.[36] *Potentia ordinata*, God's

ordered power, referred to the power that God has to act without directly contradicting

his own precepts, or, as Ockham put it, to act "according to the laws that are ordered and

instituted by God."[37] *Potentia absoluta*, on the other hand, referred to the absolute power

of God to act outside and even in contradiction of His own laws. In Ockham's nominalist

ontology, God Himself became the only real measure of such ideals as truth, right, and

good – ineffable concepts that scholastic realists held to be derived from transcendent

universals. By extension, physical laws, too, were predicated solely upon the will and

power of God. Without universals to govern the laws "ordered and instituted by God,"

His *potentia ordinata* effectively collapsed into His *potentia absoluta*: there was simply

no space between the expression of God's will within His laws and the expression of

God's will without them. In this way, Ockham's ontology finally "[rendered] all

creatures and things utterly contingent upon their creator not only for their existence but

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[36] Adams, *William Ockham*, 1186-87 (for Albert the Great), 1190-93 (for Duns Scotus).

[37] William of Ockham, *Quodlibeta*, quoted in Adams, *William Ockham*, 1198.

also for the circumstances that [governed] their existence."[38] By unbinding the individual

from the universal, Ockham was forced instead to bind it to the unfettered and absolute

power of God.

Ockham's insistence on God's absolute power has become a locus of Chaucerian

criticism. In one of the first significant studies of Chaucer and nominalism, Robert

Stepsis writes that Walter in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* should be understood not as "a

human being, but as God, a God whose only recognizable trait is the absolute, unbounded

freedom of His will." Griselda, in turn, should be read as "an emblem of the patient

human soul in its ideal response to the adversities visited on it by God."[39] Thus, the

disturbingly sadistic *Clerk's Tale* becomes an Ockhamist allegory demonstrating the

inviolable and unconditional nature of *potentia dei absoluta* – "the freedom of the divine

will and the absoluteness of God's power."[40] More recently, Roger Moore has linked

nominalist concerns to Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* for similar reasons, noting that the

tale "displays little evidence that God's will is just, merciful, *or* rational; it merely

postulates that such a will exists, and remains silent as to its inherent character."[41]

Although Ockham's concept of *potentia dei absoluta* must be taken into account when

considering Chaucer's approach to nominalism, I maintain that *potentia dei absoluta* is

for Chaucer secondary to Ockham's rejection of the universal and to the linguistic and

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[38] William H. Watts and Richard J. Utz, "Nominalist Perspectives on Chaucer's Poetry: A Bibliographical Essay," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 20 (1993): 148.

[39] Robert Stepsis, "Potentia Absoluta and the Clerk's Tale," *Chaucer Review* 10 (1975): 139, 129. Similar arguments are articulated in David Steinmetz, "Late Medieval Nominalism and the *Clerk's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 12 (1977): 38-54, and Elizabeth Kirk, "Nominalism and the Dynamics of the *Clerk's Tale*: Homo Viator as Woman," in *Chaucer's Religious Tales,* ed. C. David Benson and Elizabeth Robertson (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 111-20.

[40] Stepsis, "Potentia Absoluta," 143.

[41] Roger Moore, "Nominalistic Perspectives on Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale,'" *Comitatus* 23 (1993): 85.

epistemological differences that stem directly from it. To be certain, Moore's argument

does mention the nominalist epistemology in which "human reason can gain true

knowledge only of particular, individualized objects," but both Moore and Stepsis finally

place God's *potentia absoluta* at the very center of their analysis of nominalism,

marginalizing the most fundamental aspects of Ockham's intervention in the process.[42]

In other words, by largely ignoring questions of language and epistemology and focusing

only on God's power, Stepsis and Moore approach nominalism at its periphery, seldom

engaging with the fundamental issues at its heart.

A separate and more fruitful line of critical inquiry, however, has developed

around those very epistemological and linguistic aspects of the nominalist intervention,

aspects that assert themselves strongly in what Russell Peck calls Chaucer's "literary

world ... filled with glossers and verbal manipulators who trick others and themselves

with semantic disjunctions." Peck writes that in Chaucer's work, "nominalistic thought

makes one aware of the limitations of human perception and the likelihood of one's being

prisoner to his own ideas."[43] This observation resonates with the core proposition of

Ockham's philosophy: those things that are held to be transcendent universals are, in fact,

"mentally fashioned and abstracted from singular things previously known."[44] P. B.

Taylor also links Chaucer to nominalism; however, unlike Peck, who flatly declares

Chaucer to be a nominalist thinker, Taylor portrays Chaucer as a frustrated realist who

sees the tenets of his philosophical beliefs threatened by nominalist ideals. Taylor

suggests that while Chaucer "aspires toward a linguistic realism in which intent informs

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[42] Moore, "Nominalistic Perspectives," 86.

[43] Peck, "Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions," 755, 757.

[44] From *Ordinatio*, in Ockham, *Philosophical Writings*, 43.

deeds through the ministry of words," that realist aspiration is repeatedly undercut both by "the practice of the real world" and by the tales of his own pilgrims, which frequently "[mock] the idea that words should reflect intent."[45] Along these lines, Holly Boucher has suggested that Chaucer writes in full consciousness that "concepts and the words which expressed them had become relative" and that "the firm bonds between signifier and signified ... had unraveled." In the face of such nominalist notions, Boucher concludes, Chaucer had to concern himself with "the new power of words to create autonomous worlds."[46]

Boucher's discussion of "words" and worlds" provides a felicitous conjunction with the work of John Searle, particularly the distinction he draws between the performative utterance and a constative utterance based on the direction of fit between the word and the world.[47] It is my contention that the connection between Ockham's nominalism, which posits the "power of words to create autonomous worlds," and the performative speech act, in which words create the world they describe is not a suggestive anachronism; rather, it is fundamental to our understanding of the full implications of nominalism and its resonances in Chaucer's poetic output. Indeed, performativity is implicit in the very linguistic and epistemological structures upon which nominalism insists. By predicating knowledge upon unverifiable and individual acts of "mental language" rather than upon a set of stable and transcendent universals, Ockham lays the groundwork for an ontology in which to think something is to know it, in which to know something is not necessarily to know it, and in which to speak of something can

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[45] P. B. Taylor, "Chaucer's Cosyn to the Dede," *Speculum* 57 (1982): 325 - 26.

[46] Boucher, "Nominalism," 215.

[47] See chapter 1 of Searle, *Expression and Meaning* and "How Performatives Work," 535-558.

make it real. Within this radically disjointed ontology, the individual speech act becomes

exceedingly powerful. Persuasive speech becomes performative speech; to have one's

mind changed by another's words is to have those words alter the very fabric of reality.

In the proper circumstances, then, spoken words have the potential to create discrete

individual realities for separate characters – realities that we as readers may deem false,

but that are nonetheless valid by the standards of Ockham's nominalist paradigm.

  The Canterbury Tales provides no shortage of situations in which characters use

spoken words to make individual realities out of otherwise objective falsehoods. In the

Miller's Tale, for example, Nicholas's description of "a reyn, and that so wilde and wood

/ That half so greet was nevere Noes flood" (I. 3517-18) makes the coming of the second

flood a reality for the carpenter John, and eventually, the single word "water" is enough

to bring that same reality (quite literally) crashing down around John's head. More

darkly, a priest in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* is convinced that base metals can be

transformed into gold by the speech of an unscrupulous canon, a belief so real to him that

he spends the exorbitant sum of forty pounds for the fraudulent secret. The *Canterbury*

Tales offers countless other examples in which words more generally perform work:

Chauntecleer is first trapped by the fox's flattering words and then extricates himself by

putting words into the fox's mouth; a friar is bound by verbal contract to divide a fart

evenly twelve ways; a loathly lady provides a rapist knight with the words that will both

save him from death and bind him to her; Dorigen traps herself into a liaison with

Aurelius through her rashly pledged troth. Indeed, as a series of stories told by individual

tale-tellers, the entire Canterbury project takes on the mantle of performative speech.

The "reality" of the tales, after all, is solely a linguistic one; the words written on the

page – the words spoken by the pilgrims, as it were – causally precede the reality that they create. Who is Dorigen, for example, but the creation of a particular Franklin, and who is that Franklin but the (re)creation of the pilgrim narrator, himself the creation of Chaucer? The repeated layering of author and authored, the very hallmark of the *Canterbury Tales* itself, becomes both an exercise in performativity and an exploration of the principles of nominalist thought, an experiment in using words to create and recreate the divergent, individual worlds of the tales' speakers.

Nominalism and the Manciple: "The Word Moot Nede Accorde with the Dede"

The Russian playwright Anton Chekhov famously remarked, "If there is a gun hanging on the wall in the first act, it must fire in the last." Temporal distance from the *Canterbury Tales* notwithstanding, Chekhov's aphorism is illustrative for the structure of the *Manciple's Tale* and provides a useful framework for analyzing Chaucer's investigation of both the spoken word and the questions raised by Ockham's nominalism. I contend that the Manciple's allusion to Amphion's voice is one of a number of passages that, as Chekhov might say, hang the gun of language upon Phoebus's wall. It is an allusion that implies the potential (even the inevitability) of speech to function performatively, but it does not actually demonstrate or enact that particular function. Another passage that suggests a potential function of speech (and a function vastly different from that implied by Amphion's song) is the Manciple's digression on the futility of restraining those things "that nature / Hath natureelly set in a creature" (IX 161-2):

Taak any bryd, and put it in a cage,

And do al thyn entente and thy corage

To fostre it tendrely with mete and drynke

Of alle deyntees that thou kanst bithynke,

And keep it al so clenly as thou may,

Although his cage of gold be never so gay,

Yet hath this brid, by twenty thousand foold

Levere in a forest that is rude and coold

Goon ete wormes and swich wrecchednesse.

For evere this brid wol doon his bisynesse

To escape out of his cage, yif he may.

His libertee this brid desireth ay. (IX 163-174)

The Manciple amplifies his source text for this aside, Jean de Meun's scholastic *Romance of the Rose*, to insist that "nature" is paramount in determining the caged bird's actions, a point that becomes critical to what seems to be an affirmation of the ontological underpinnings of scholastic realism. In the Manciple's discussion of nature, we can see a tacit acknowledgement that the bird is predicated upon a transcendent universal – an immutable ur-bird that serves a model for the individual and that determines its "lust[s]" (IX 181), and its "appetit[s]" (IX 182). Derived from and predicated upon a stable universal, the nature of the bird is something over which we have no control; it cannot be altered by "mete and drynke" (IX 165) or by a "cage of gold" (IX 168).

The Manciple does not explicitly discuss language in this passage, let alone speech in particular. Nonetheless, the realist ontology that he presents is important to the range of possibilities that he develops for the spoken word in his tale. This connection

becomes clear when we consider the affinities between the hypothetical "bryd" of the

Manciple's digression and the other bird in the tale, Phoebus's crow. In his digression,

the Manciple describes a bird "put... in a cage" (IX 163) and expounds upon the futility

of trying "to fostre it" (IX 165) with meat, drink, and other human luxuries. Such

"deyntees" (IX 166), the Manciple promises, will never stop the bird from longing for its

freedom, nor will they curb its "appetit" for "wormes and swich wrecchednesse" (IX

171). Like the Manciple's "bryd," Phoebus's crow – whose propensity for eating worms

and wretchedness might be extrapolated from the crow's identification as a "worm-foul"

in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* – hangs always in a cage.[48] Moreover, the crow

ultimately obtains the freedom that the Manciple's "bryd" so desires when Phoebus slings

him "out at dore" (IX 306).[49] Rather than being "fostred" with "mete and drynke"

however, Phoebus's crow is fostered with speech:

> Now hadde this Phebus in his hous a crowe
>
> Which in a cage he fostred many a day,
>
> and taughte it speken, as men teche a jay.

The linguistic and structural parallels that the Manciple draws between his "bryd" and

Phoebus's crow imply analogous parallels between the "mete and drynke" with which the

"bryd" is fostered and the "speche" (IX 306) with which Phoebus fosters his crow. Thus,

when the Manciple emphasizes the subordination of the meat and drink to the things

nature has put in the bird ("Lo, heere hath lust his dominacioun" [IX 181]), he implies the

concomitant subordination of speech. Like the cage of gold and the dainties offered the

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[48] See PF 358-364. Also interesting in relation to the *Manciple's Tale*, the Cuckoo is regularly the bird that speaks for the worm-fowls (PF 505-09, 603-09).

[49] For the crow's banishment by Phoebus as an escape to freedom, see Hugh White, "Chaucer Compromising Nature," *Review of English Studies* 40 (1989): 157-78.

bird, the spoken language in which the crow is nurtured is finally ineffective in the face of the lusts and appetites predicated upon the universal; it becomes a part of the faulty arsenal by which one might attempt to "destreyne a thyng which that nature/ Hath naturelly set in a creature" (IX 161-62). In this metaphorical construction, speech is, at best, a secondary representation of a universal signified. At worst, it is a means of mendacity and deception, a false signifier that attempts (but fails) to obscure that which is predicated upon nature.

Inert and ineffective, the brand of speech that the Manciple's discussion of the bird implies is a far cry from Amphion's performative, city-building utterances. Rather, as speech that cannot effect change in the world – speech that, to borrow Searle's vocabulary, cannot fit the world to the word – it is constative in function. In terms more historically appropriate to the late Middle Ages, the Manciple invokes a model of speech that accords with the linguistic hierarchy of scholastic realism, a model in which the spoken utterance cannot change those affections within the bird because they are themselves predicated upon a stable, guiding universal – upon nature. And though it might stretch this analogy too far to suggest that those things "which that nature / Hath natureelly set in a creature" function here as *de facto* mental signs, there is an important parallel between the two: both are predicated entirely upon transcendent, universal constructs. Those things put into the bird by "nature" assume a hierarchical position that is analogous to that of the mental sign. Like Boethius's "affections in the soul," they are derived from "nature" through a process of natural correspondence.

If the Manciple *implies* the inviolable realist hierarchy of universal over mental sign over spoken word in his digression on the bird, he invokes it explicitly in his second

long aside, his now infamous analysis of the "lady" and the "lemman." The Manciple

tellingly prefaces that analysis with a dictum from Plato's *Timeaus*, probably redacted

second hand from Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*:

> The word moot nede accorde with the dede.
>
> If men shal telle proprely a thyng,
>
> The word moot cosyn be to the werkyng.[50]

The relationship between word and deed articulated in this brief passage aligns neatly

with the mainly ontological distinctions developed in Manciple's discussion of the bird.

More important, the passage allows the Manciple to shift the ontological distinctions

developed in the bird digression firmly and overtly into the realm of the linguistic. The

word is contingent here; the word must *accord with*, must be *cousin to*, the deed just as

the bird must accord with nature. The "werkyng" is signified; the word is sign.

From this Boethian-Platonist beginning, the Manciple articulates his most explicit

case for a realist linguistic hierarchy. Specifically, this is a hierarchy in which the spoken

word signifies the mental sign and the mental sign in turn signifies the overarching

universal:

> Ther nys no difference, trewely,
>
> Bitwixe a wyf that is of heigh degree,
>
> If of hir body dishonest she bee,
>
> And a povre wenche, other than this –
>
> If it so be they werke bothe amys –
>
> But that the gentile, in estaat above,

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[50] See Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, 319-20 (ll. 47-49); also, *Boece* III pr. 12, 206-7 (in *Riverside Chaucer*).

> She shall be cleped his lady, as in love;
>
> And for that oother is a povre womman,
>
> She shal be cleped his wenche or his lemman. (IX 212-20)

It is most fruitful to unpack the realist hierarchy that the Manciple depicts by starting at its top, at the universal. The Manciple insists that there is no difference between the two adulterous women in question *except* for their difference in status. The two social stations that the Manciple invokes here, I propose, function as universals, as overarching constructs that scholastic realists regarded as inviolate truths. For the purposes of clarity, we can follow the Manciple in referring to those universals as "gentile" and "povre," but even as we do that, we must recognize that our naming of these constructs is a matter of rhetorical convenience; as universals, they have no existence in language. From the universals "gentile" and "povre" two distinct mental signs are derived. These "thought objects" or "affections in the soul" signify "gentile" and "povre" naturally rather than by convention, and like their universal signifieds, they have no existence in the linguistic sphere. Finally the mental signs act as predicates for the spoken signs that the Manciple's hypothetical wommen are "cleped" (from "clepen" meaning "to speak; call, shout").[51] Those spoken signs of "lemman" and "lady" signify their respective mental signs only through conventional correspondence; the words themselves, while based on mental signs, are derived by a kind of cultural or social consensus. What is most important, however, is that even if they signify by convention, the spoken signs are predicated firmly upon mental signs that are in turn predicated upon stable universals: because one

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[51] Middle English Dictionary, s.v. "clepen" v., 1(a).

woman is "povre" she is called a "lemman"; because the second woman is "gentile" she is called a "lady."

But how stable are those universals? Certainly, the Manciple constructs this careful hierarchy of signs and signifieds upon what appears to firm realist ground, but his initial assertion that "Ther nys no difference" between the two women resonates with unusual force throughout his digression, undercutting the very scholastic realism it portends to support.[52] Indeed, the proposition that the two adulterous women are essentially identical is dangerous to the realist ontology the Manciple develops precisely because it suggests that "gentle" and "povre" – the universals from which the spoken signs "lady" and "lemman" ultimately derive – may not really be universals at all, that they are not "at once distinct from the individual itself and from other universals."[53] In fact, the stated sameness of the two women displaces what initially appear to be universals, rendering them not inviolable signifieds but another set of mental signs, themselves predicated upon other signifieds. The key to understanding this slippage lies in the relationship between the mental sign and the universal, specifically in the question of whether the mental sign signifies a universal signified (the realist approach) or whether it signifies other individual signs that, in the aggregate, *seem* to be a universal (the nominalist approach). What the Manciple reveals, even as he argues from an ostensibly realist ontology, is that the mental signs informing our speech are not as firmly grounded in the universal as scholastic realism insists. Rather, the universal itself may be subject to interference from other signs; it may not be a universal at all. Ultimately, the Manciple

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[52] Formally and syntactically, Chaucer emphasizes the phrase "ther nys no difference" (IX 212) both by repetition ("Ther is no difference" [IX 225]) and by separating it from the restrictive phrase "oother than this" with several additional clauses.

[53] Leff, *William of Ockham*, 104.

raises the possibility that, as Donald Howard has remarked, "the only real difference [between the two women] is a difference of language" – a nominalist philosophy.[54]

Practically, the Manciple's description of the "lady" and the "lemman" presents us with something we might anachronistically refer to as a linguistic feedback loop: the difference in status between the two unfaithful women ensures that the noble woman is called a lady while the poor woman is called a lemman; however, the speech acts "lady" and "lemman" themselves reify and make palpable such a status difference, even when the two women are essentially identical in their action. The Manciple's own actions underscore the notion that speech functions in this circular capacity, that it simultaneously signifies and generates the distinctions upon which mental signs are based. It is, after all, his own utterance of the word "lemman" to which the Manciple reacts so strongly – "Certes this is a knavyssh speche!" (IX 205) – not the act of adultery itself, which he discusses at length without apology (IX 187-195). In this "feedback loop," we can see the Manciple proposing a brand of speech that is neither wholly performative in nature nor wholly constative, a brand of speech that exists between the two on a continuum of verbal efficacy. Moreover, the power that the Manciple shows the spoken sign to have upon the mental sign allows us to identify the beginnings of an encroaching Ockhamist thread within the *Manciple's Tale*.

The three passages examined above – the allusion to Amphion walling Thebes with his voice; the Manciple's discussion of the things "which that nature / Hath natureelly set in a creature"; and the comparatively complex discussion of the "lady" and the "lemman" –

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[54] Donald Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 302. See also A. S. G. Edwards, "Chaucer and the Poetics of Utterance," in *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1991), 66-7.

suggest a range of possibilities for speech, from the inert to the radically performative and to intermediate points in between. Taken together, they represent what Chekhov might call the gun on the Manciple's wall, the range of functions accorded to the spoken utterance in the *Manciple's Tale*. And true to Chekhov's words, that gun will fire by act five.

While Chekhov's dramaturgical truism offers a heuristic for understanding the *Manciple's Tale,* the idea behind the Russian playwright's metaphor, that the second part of a literary work brings the first part to fruition, is not unique to him; scholars of medieval literature have used similar metaphors to describe the narrative structure of poetry in the Middle Ages. A. C. Spearing, for example, argues that many medieval poems are "comparable to ... a pictorial diptych" in that they consist of two equally sized "leaves" which "when put together... incite the reader to participate in the creation of a meaning that is larger than either possesses in isolation."[55] Spearing cites Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and the alliterative poems *Patience* and *Awntyrs off Arthure* as such diptych poems; other critics have expanded that list to include *Saint Erkenwald*, *Pearl*, and Chaucer's *General Prologue*.[56] Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale* also exemplifies this diptych structure: the first leaf develops the potential of speech and the second leaf shows its deployment. Even more than the image of the diptych, however, Chekhov's metaphor articulates the movements of invocation and completion, of potential and kinetic energy, that undergird the tale's larger structure.

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[55] A. C. Spearing, "Central and Displaced Sovereignty in Three Medieval Poems," *Review of English Studies* 33 (1982): 249.

[56] See Colin Wilcockson, "The Opening of Chaucer's *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*: A Diptych," *The Review of English Studies* 50 (1999): 345-50.

Just after the midpoint of the *Manciple's Tale*, Phoebus's crow sings, "Cokkow! Cokkow! Cokkow!" (IX 243), an outburst that is important for two reasons. First, it begins to reveal the philosophical underpinnings of the Manciple's linguistic philosophy; second, it starts to fulfill the potential that the first portion of the tale accords to speech – to fire the gun.[57] Their obvious punning aside, however, the three words alone might be understood as nonsensical birdsong, as *vox* rather than *dictio*, sound rather than sense.[58] When Phoebus presses the crow on the meaning of his speech ("What, bryd?" quod Phebus. "What song syngestow?" [IX 244]), the crow eliminates any ambiguity, reporting "by sadde tokenes and by wordes bolde, / How that [Phoebus's] wyf had doon hire lecherye" (IX 258-59). Initially, the crow's utterance appears to be a constative one, a statement that is subordinated to a stable truth (the wife's infidelity) and that accurately reflects the mental signs predicated upon that truth (the crow's knowledge of the wife's infidelity). In fact, the Manciple endorses just such an interpretation by describing how the crow had stood mute witness to the very act of infidelity: "the white crowe, that heeng ay in the cage, / Biheeld hire werke, and seyde never a word" (IX 240-241). In this respect, the crow's damning utterances evoke a realist linguistic ontology, one in which the spoken word is fully subordinated both to the mental sign and to the universal that backs it up. In relation to Phoebus, however, the statement functions differently. Rather than following the linguistic hierarchy described by the realists, where spoken language signifies a mental sign that itself always signifies an inviolable universal, the

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[57] The crow sings "Cokkow! Cokkow! Cokkow!" at line 243; the mathematical midpoint of the *Manciple's Tale* is line 233.

[58] In the terminology of classical grammarians, *vox* can be defined simply as "vocal sound," something that even animals had the power to produce; *dictio* can be defined as "word." See *History of Linguistics, Volume II: Classical and Medieval Linguistics*, ed. Giuilo Lepschy (New York: Longman, 1994), 10, 97.

crow uses his speech to alter the terms of Phoebus's mental signs, to alter the things

Phoebus knows to be true. This ontological reversal violates the strict epistemological

and linguistic hierarchy upon which scholastic realism insists. Instead of being

predicated upon a stable universal, Phoebus's mental signs are shown to be contingent

upon the crow's speech: the mental sign that causes Phoebus to kill his wife is

engendered by the crow's utterance, "on thy bed thy wyf I saugh hym swyve" (IX 256).

In this way, the *Manciple's Tale* evokes a nominalist linguistic paradigm, one in which

the mental sign is not connected to a transcendent universal but is derivative of other,

more flexible signifieds.

 After the enraged Phoebus murders his wife, the Manciple develops the

nominalist current implied by the crow's damning report still further. The words that

Phoebus speaks to the crow – an unvarnished assertion of his own wife's fidelity –

functionally invert the crow's earlier report of Phoebus's cuckolding:

 "Traitour," quod [Phoebus], "with tonge of scorpioun,

 Thou hast me broght to my confusioun;

 Allas, that I was wroght! why nere I deed?

 O deere wyf! o gemme of lustiheed!

 That were to me so sad and eek so trewe,

 Now listow deed, with face pale of hewe,

 Ful gilteless, that dorste I swere, ywys!" (IX 271-277)

Scholars have disagreed sharply on what exactly Phoebus is up to in this passage, though

critical responses tend to fall into two camps: some critics argue that Phoebus really does

think that the crow is lying; others argue that he willfully disagrees with the crow and

forces himself to believe his own rhetoric.[59] This critical debate points out how

Phoebus's reaction, or rather the motivation *for* Phoebus's reaction, is necessarily mired

in a subjectivity that has no clear universal predicate. Thus, in ontological and linguistic

terms, Phoebus's spoken defense of his wife offers a metatextual moment in which the

poem enacts for the reader the very nominalism that it develops within its own narrative.

Put another way, Phoebus's words – his oddly unjustifiable assertion that his wife is not,

in fact, an adulteress – are all we as readers have to go on.[60]

By his own report, then, Phoebus finally does believe in both his wife's fidelity

and the crow's mendacity; he *knows* his "deere wyf" to be "sad," "trewe," and "gilteless"

(IX 274-275); he *knows* the crow to be a scorpion-tongued "traitour" (IX 271). Peter

Herman writes that Phoebus denies the crow's words "in order to deny the truth and

make reality subject to his will."[61] I suggest that Phoebus not only attempts to make

material reality subject to his will, he creates a coexisting linguistic reality by the sheer

force of his utterances. In other words, Phoebus's speech creates Phoebus's world. Here,

as with the crow's initial report of Phoebus's cuckolding, speech stems from mental signs

that have no connection to an overarching universal, a paradigm that mirrors the

linguistic epistemology of Ockham's nominalism. Indeed, the only predicate for mental

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[59] For examples of the former, see Richard Trask, "The Manciple's Problem," *Studies in Short Fiction* 14 (1977): 114; L. A. Westervelt, "The Medieval Notion of Janglery and Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale*," *Southern Review* 14 (1981): 111; Jamie Fumo, "Thinking Upon the Crow," *Chaucer Review* 38 (2004), 361. The latter view is most eloquently expressed by Peter Herman in "Treason in the *Manciple's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 25 (1991): 324-5.

[60] Brian Striar writes, "What finally emerges from all this difficulty and confusion is not truth or the location of truth but power and the location of power: the power to exploit speech and poetry to fashion one's own truth or truths, as the crow does with Phoebus, as Phoebus does with the crow, as the Manciple's mother does with her son, as the Manciple does with his mother, the Cook, and the audience of pilgrims, and as Chaucer, through the Manciple, does with us" (197). See "The 'Manciple's Tale' and Chaucer's Apolline Poetics," *Criticism* 33 (1991): 197.

[61] Herman, "Treason," 324.

signs themselves is a host of other, less absolute signifieds including (as we also saw in the crow's initial report of Phoebus's cuckolding), speech itself. Without a stable universal to anchor the "affections in [his] soul," Phoebus can generate a reality with his own spoken utterances in which, if only for himself, his wife *is* chaste, *is* true, *is* guiltless.

The objection might be raised that the reality Phoebus creates is invalid, that the god's assertions of his wife's fidelity are little more than the disingenuous speech of a murderer trying to recuperate his wife's lapsed virtue and mend his shattered reputation. Such is the contention of Britton Harwood, who claims that the tale told by the Manciple reveals his disdain for "those who can be distracted from empirical reality by language, which creates a bogus reality of its own."[62] Although it may be true that Phoebus's reality is outwardly constructed of speech and that the reader, like the crow, sees a broader "empirical reality," such an empirical reality is itself constructed by the Manciple's own authority as a speaker in Chaucer's pilgrimage. In the literary world of the *Canterbury Tales*, a world in which nine and twenty "sondry folk" (I 25) tell stories to one another on horseback, the reality to which readers have access is always mediated by the fictional speech of the pilgrims. In this respect the "bogus reality" created by Phoebus's speech may comment not upon the potential of speech simply to deceive but rather upon the power of poetic language to create worlds within the poetic text. The efficacy of Phoebus's speech stands as an indication that Chaucer – a poet whose great unfinished work ventriloquizes the spoken voices of 24 pilgrims – was acutely aware of the potential for speech to create realities, to signify and to be signified, to engender the

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[62] Britton Harwood, "Language and the Real: Chaucer's Manciple," *Chaucer Review* 6 (1972): 268.

kinds of mental signs – "thought objects" – that nominalists argued were falsely perceived to be "universals."

In most of the *Canterbury Tales*, the reader and Chaucer are complicit in their understanding of this potential; indeed, Chaucer allows the reader to share in his authorial omniscience repeatedly through his work. Like Chaucer, we know that a second flood is not coming to sweep John away in the *Miller's Tale* even if the deceived carpenter does not; like Chaucer we know that Aurelius has not removed the "grisly rokkes blake" that obsess Dorigen (V 859), that May has not engaged in a "strugle with a man upon a tree" to restore January's sight (IV 2374), that the deceived priest of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* will never possess the formula for multiplying base metals into gold. What separates the *Manciple's Tale* from the other tales of the Canterbury pilgrimage – what separates Phoebus's "bogus reality" from John's and Dorigen's and January's and the priest's – is that Phoebus's speech acts expose for the reader the very engine that drives Chaucer's own poetic project. We see in Pheoebus's speech the creation of the world by the utterance of the word.

Never is this more clear than when Phoebus turns to his crow and says, "I wol thee quite anon thy false tale" (IX 293). Though early in the tale Phoebus was presented alternately as a courtly fop and a deceived husband, at this moment he makes good on his threat with startling and unsparing efficacy. He becomes not the cuckold but the quitter of tales, not the courtly fop but the god of poets and poetry. Phoebus uses his speech not to create an individual linguistic reality but to change the very nature of his world. Cuckold, bon vivant, and author – Phoebus speaks, and by speaking renders his talking crow mute, his white crow black:

Thou songe whilom lyk a nyghtyngale;

Now shaltow, false theef, thy song forgon,

And eek thy white fetheres everichon,

Ne nevere in al thy life ne shaltou speke.

Thus shal men on a traytour been awreke;

Thou and thyn ofspryng evere shul be blake,

Ne nevere sweete noyse shul ye make,

But evere crie agayn tempest and rayn,

In tokenynge that thurgh thee my wyf is slayn. (IX 294-302)

There is a fundamental distinction between the speech that Phoebus unleashes here to

punish the crow and the utterances he has used earlier to recuperate his wife. In the

latter, Phoebus's speech creates an individual reality distinct from the seemingly

objective, truthful reality of the reader and the crow. In the former, Phoebus's spoken

words transform the crow to fit their own image; they create a reality that exists not only

for Phoebus but for the crow and his offspring, for the reader, and even for the world

outside the text, where black crows fly about cawing discordantly. Phoebus says that the

crow and all his offspring will be black, and the crow and all his offspring are black;

Phoebus says that the crow will lose his beautiful voice, and the crow *does* lose his

beautiful voice; Phoebus tells the crow that his cry will stand as a harbinger of tempest

and storm, and so it does.[63] By turning the crow black and destroying its ability to speak,

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[63] It is important to note here that in addition to his curse, Phoebus does seize the crow and pull out his white feathers, an action manifestly physical and non-linguistic (IX 303-304). Nonetheless, the change of the color of the feathers from white to black, the destruction of the crow's voice, and the ongoing curse on all the crow's offspring are accomplished through Phoebus's speech alone. In short, Phoebus does physically alter the crow with his body, but the emphasis of the passage is still on his words and their effect.

Phoebus reverses the causal relationship between the spoken sign and the mental sign; Phoebus forces the "dede" – the crow becoming black – to accord with his words rather than fitting his words to the dede (IX 208). In other words, Phoebus puts the lie to what scholastic realists would call the immutable universal crow because he shows that "universal" to be predicated upon his own speech. Here, at last, speech functions in a fully performative capacity. Like Amphion, who uses his voice not to describe but to construct the walls of Thebes, Phoebus speaks not to describe the crow but to create it. Here, too, is Ockham's nominalist ontology extrapolated to its fullest extent, an ontology in which the spoken sign and the mental sign exist apart from an unseen host of transcendent universals, in which speech holds the potential not only to represent reality but to create reality in its own image.

Phoebus's crow-transforming utterance also underscores another important nominalist idea, the primacy of God's *potentia absoluta* over His *potentia ordinata*. Despite the Manciple's earth-bound presentation of Phoebus, he is first and foremost a god. Although I do not wish to suggest that Chaucer intends Phoebus to be a simple stand-in for the Christian God, Phoebus's creation and subsequent transformation of a speaking crow are, if nothing else, demonstrative of a God-like power. Moreover, that power, the Manciple seems to indicate, is absolute, even to the point that Phoebus can alter the crow's natural state from white to black. Realist thinkers like Aquinas and John Duns Scotus rejected the potential for God to contravene His own laws, to go against the universal constructs of His creation. Duns Scotus writes in his *Ordinatio* that "God can do whatever does not involve a contradiction," maintaining that God can not flout His established universal laws and that "absolute power does not absolutely exceed ... ordered

power, since it would be ordered according to another law."[64] Ockham, however, saw no

problems in God's apparent self contradictions. The *potentia absoluta* of God

superseded all such paradoxes; His will was all, and it was boundless:

> Just as God creates every creature merely from His volition, so He can do
>
> with creatures whatever pleases Him merely from his volition. Hence, if
>
> someone should love God and perform all the works approved by God,
>
> still God could annihilate him without any offense. Likewise, after such
>
> works God could give the creature – not eternal life – but eternal
>
> punishment without offense. The explanation is that God is debtor to no
>
> one.[65]

This is the very *potentia* that the Manciple's story of Phoebus and the crow enacts: just as

easily as Phoebus creates the crow by his own will, so too does he destroy the crow and

subject him to eternal punishment, slinging him "out at dore ... unto the devel" (IX 306-

07). As in the nominalist interpretation of the Christian God, Phoebus becomes "the final

source and guarantor of truth, just as He is the final source and guarantor of laws

governing physical bodies."[66] His power, as the crow painfully learns, is bounded not by

a set of ordained and transcendent universals but by the limitless capacity of his own

absolute will.

Phoebus's punitive series of overtly performative speech acts – evidence both of

the tale's commitment to a nominalist perspective on speech and of Phoebus's own

potentia absoluta – finally propels the Manciple into his lengthy harangue on the virtues

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[64] From John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, quoted in Adams, *William Ockham*, 1193, 92.

[65] William of Ockham, *In Libros Sententiarum*, quoted in David W. Clark, "William of Ockham on Right Reason," *Speculum* 48 (1973): 23.

[66] Watts and Utz, "Nominalist Perspectives on Chaucer Poetry," 148.

of silence. Over the course of 44 lines, the Manciple obsessively repeats maxims that his

mother taught him, each an admonishment to "restreyne and kepe wel thy tonge" (IX

333), each a small contribution to the Manciple's absurdly garrulous speech against

speech. The paradox created by the Manciple's prolixity is difficult to reconcile, and

critics have responded with a variety of interpretations. Perhaps this compulsive and

aggressive repetition demonstrates the Manciple's growing anxiety that, as Harry Bailly

implies, the Cook will reveal how the Manciple has "sette ... aller cappe" (I 586) of the

lawyers in his house; perhaps it even speaks to an unseen knot of psychological issues

that the Manciple has with his mother.[67] I contend, however, that in light of Phoebus's

final, transformative speech act, the Manciple's warning demonstrates a nominalistic

understanding of the terrible potential of the "rakel tonge." In repeatedly admonishing

his fellow pilgrims to "kepe wel thy tongue and thenk upon the crowe" (IX 362), the

Manciple not only asks them to consider the consequences of the crow's speech but of

Phoebus's speech as well. For while it is the crow's "jangling" that angers Phoebus and

brings about the crow's punishment, it is Phoebus's own speech act that brings the crow

to his woeful (and current) state, a speech act that both threatens vengeance and enacts it

in the same breath. In other words, in the Manciple's nominalist ontology the spoken

word is dangerous not only because it can bring to light an undesirable truth; it is

dangerous because it can create truth in its own right. And, as the voiceless, coal-black

crow demonstrates, the truth created by the word is not always a desirable one.

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[67] See Earle Birney, "Chaucer's 'Gentil' Manciple and his 'Gentil' Tale," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*
61 (1960): 257-267; Arnold Davidson, "The Logic of Confusion in Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale*," *Annuale
Mediaevale* 19 (1979): 5-12. Richard Trask sees the Manciple as a somewhat gentler, medieval Norman
Bates, ascribing the Manciple's repetition to a matrix of submerged "mother issues." See Trask, "The
Manciple's Problem."

The Manciple's final speech fully bears out this assertion; indeed, most of the aphorisms that the Manciple cribs from his mother discuss not what speech *is* but what speech *does*. The speech act – metonymically described as the tongue – is an active agent within the Manciple's nominalist ontology, something that "forkutteth and forkerveth" (IX 340), something that causes "muchel harm" (IX 337) and prevents "muchel reste" (IX 350), something that "serveth" and "gooth" and "kutteth freendshipe al a-two" (IX 339, 355, 342). The tongue becomes active speech literalized, the spoken word made flesh. In fact, only when he describes the "wikked tongue" as being "worse than a feend" (IX 320) does the Manciple describe speech for what it is rather for than what it does. It should come as no surprise, then, that in the midst of his diatribe the Manciple presents us with an image that clearly evokes his earlier allusion to Amphion building the walls of Thebes. By stating that "God of his endelees goodnesse / Walled a tongue with teeth and lippes eke" (IX 322-23), the Manciple reinforces the ability of speech to perform work in the absence of universals, whether that work be constructive or, as the Manciple's crow so aptly demonstrates, destructive.

Nominalism and Geoffrey Chaucer: "The Righte Way to Rome"

The Canterbury Tales's engagement with nominalism – an engagement that reaches its apogee in the *Manciple's Tale* – prompts this question: "What is Chaucer's own perspective on Ockham's nominalist philosophy?" The Manciple himself, I have argued, both subscribes to a nominalist philosophy and understands the dangers implicit in it; Chaucer expresses a frustratingly ambivalent attitude toward the Manciple, however, and by extension, toward his nominalist views. On the one hand, Chaucer

implies an affinity between himself and the Manciple several times in the *Canterbury Tales*, including in the *General Prologue*, where Chaucer juxtaposes his own narrative persona with the Manciple on a single line: "Ther was also a Reve, and a Millere / A Somnour, and a Pardoner also, / *A Maunciple, and myself* – ther were namo"(I 542-44). Furthermore, because the *Manciple's Tale* interrogates so many of the issues explicitly raised by the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole – the relationship between "word" and "dede," the practice of "quitting," the balance between "sentence" and "solaas" – the Manciple emerges as a kind of poetic doppelganger for Chaucer, a figure within the fiction of the pilgrimage who engages with the same thematic issues the poet himself considers. Grudin has gone so far as to argue that the *Manciple's Tale* "explains and reinforces ... the poetic principles of the *Canterbury Tales*" and encapsulates "the foundation upon which Chaucer's poetics are built."[68] In that respect, the flexibility and power that the Manciple accords to speech would necessarily appeal to a poet who "relies on equivocal language" in order to investigate the relationship between word and world.[69]

On the other hand, Chaucer the author frequently disparages the Manciple despite connecting him so overtly to his own narrative alter ego. The poet includes the Manciple (along with the Reeve, the Miller, the Pardoner, the Summoner, and himself) in the gallery of churls at the end of the *General Prologue,* and he draws the reader's attention to the Manciple's penchant for bilking the lawyers at his inn of court by noting that "he sette hir aller cappe" (I 586). Chaucer also paints a highly unflattering portrait of the Manciple in the prologue to his tale, a piece of roadside drama in which the Manciple first insults the ale-sodden Cook to his face, then disingenuously denounces him to the

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[68] Grudin, *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse*, 151.

[69] Peck, "Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions," 760.

other pilgrims, then finally – after Harry Bailly implies that the Cook might exact

retribution by exposing the Manciple's dishonest "rekenynges" (IX 74) – self-servingly

plies him with wine until he can no longer speak. Even if we can imagine Chaucer using

this most duplicitous pilgrim to propose a philosophical outlook he actively proposes, the

choice of the Manciple as a philosophical mouthpiece raises as many questions about

Chaucer's attitude toward questions of nominalism as it resolves.

Chaucer's attitude toward nominalism gets no clearer when we move beyond the

Manciple's Tale and consider the final tale of the Canterbury pilgrimage, the treatise on

confession offered by the Parson. The links between the *Parson's Tale* and the

Manciple's Tale have long been recognized; Chaucer explicitly encourages comparison

by having both the Manciple and the Parson claim not to be "textueel" men (IX 235, X

57) and by placing the two tales back to back. Scholars who have read the tales in

tandem, however, have almost universally read them as antitypes. Mark Allen makes a

representative argument in this vein:

> [The *Manciple's Tale*] is markedly unpenitential, even antipenitential: the
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> central transformation of the tale – the change of the crow from white to
>
> black – ironically reverses the penitential change that the Parson describes
>
> at the end of his tale.... As the Manciple encourages the Cook's fall, so his
>
> tale encourages a similar fall for everyone who accepts his advice before
>
> the Parson's exhortation to penance. We need the Parson's speech to lead
>
> us to penance, and, as becomes increasingly clear, we need the penitential
>
> transformation that speech effects.[70]

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[70] Mark Allen, "Penitential Sermons, The Manciple, and the End of *The Canterbury Tales*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 9 (1987): 78. Also See Lee Patterson, "The 'Parson's Tale' and the Quitting of the

Allen reasons that the *Parson's Tale*, the last word of the Canterbury pilgrimage proper, effectively undoes the *Manciple's Tale*; thus, we might understand it to show Chaucer repudiating the nominalist excesses of the Manciple himself. On one level, that argument makes sense: the Parson's insistence upon penitential speech – his dictum that "Al moot be seyd, and no thing excused ne hyd ne forwrapped" (X.319) – offers a corrective to the Manciple's stifling call to silence. Moreover, The Parson's vision of speech as a blessing from God which brings spiritual salvation counters the Manciple's view of speech as predominantly dangerous. Most important for our attempt to discern Chaucer's relative ontological bent, the *Parson's Tale* maintains a distinctly realist viewpoint, both philosophically and linguistically. Informed by patristic writers such as Augustine and Ambrose, it evinces supreme confidence both in the "parfit knowynge of God" (X 1079) and in the ordained power of God to grant that "knowynge," with His grace, to the penitent soul. Even Harry Bailly's swipe at the Parson's would-be Lollard sympathies in the epilogue to the *Man of Law's Tale* – "O Jankin be ye there? / I smelle a Lollere in the wynd" (II 1173-74) – may suggest the Parson's realist outlook. Despite his flagrant heterodoxy, John Wyclif was, in fact, a realist who rejected Ockham's nominalist ontology.[71]

But Chaucer does not allow the *Parson's Tale* to serve as so straightforward an antidote to the nominalist *Manciple's Tale* (an alternative that would have made it far easier to assert the poet's realist *bona fides*). Despite their markedly different approaches,

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'Canterbury Tales,'" *Traditio* 34 (1978): 331-380; Chauncy Wood, "Speech, the Principle of Contraries, and Chaucer's Tales of the Manciple and the Parson," *Mediaevalia* 6 (1980): 209-229; James Dean, "The Ending of the Canterbury Tales, 1952-1976," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979): 17-33; Michael Kensak, "The Silences of Pilgrimage, *Manciple's Tale*, *Paradiso*, *Anticlaudianus*," *Chaucer Review* 34 (1999): 190-206.

[71] See Boucher, "Nominalism," 215.

the tales told by the Manciple and the Parson demonstrate a fundamental similarity in their understanding that language can do work, that speech has the potential to function performatively. Ultimately, both tales are about transformation and the ability of language to effect it, whether that transformation be triumphant, as in the *Parson's Tale*, or tragic, as in the *Manciple's Tale*. Even in the heat of his invective against speech, the Manciple pauses to exempt speech in the service of God, noting "thy tonge sholdestow restreyne / At alle tymes, but whan thou doost thy peyne / To speke of God, in honor and preyere" (IX 329-331). In much the same way, the Parson, though clearly an advocate of transformative sacramental speech, warns the pilgrims against "janglynge, that may not been withoute synne" (X 649) and against "idle words, that is withouten profit of hym that speketh tho wordes" (X 647); this is, tellingly, the same "janglyng" (IX 350) against which the Manciple intones in his final speech. The difference between the Parson and the Manciple, then, is a difference not in kind but in emphasis. Each recognizes that speech has the ability to do work, but while the Manciple most frequently stresses the destructive potential of speech over the constructive, the Parson stresses the potential for salvation over the equally present potential for damnation. Far from being antitypes then, the tales told by the Manciple and the Parson are, in fact, mirrors of one another – one dark, one bright, both demonstrative of the power of speech and the necessity of silence. The distinctions that many critics draw between the two tales become, in this regard, untenable. Despite the rival ontological and linguistic systems that each tale seems initially to represent – the Manciple's Ockhamist nominalism and the Parson's scholastic realism – the two tales are ultimately revealed to be two species of the same genus.

Those same ontological and linguistic cross currents complicate even Chaucer's "Retraction," a work whose rubric – "Heere taketh the makere of this book his leve" (rubric before X 1081) – promises some respite from the incessant layering of narrators and sub-narrators that vexes interpretation of the *Canterbury Tales*. We might at first be tempted to ascribe a realist outlook to the "Retraction." Indeed, Chaucer's assertion, "al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine" (X 1083) strongly suggests the subordination of conventional linguistic expression to transcendent universal truth upon which the realists insisted. From the works that Chaucer chooses *not* to retract, most pertinently his translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, we might additionally construe that he maintains a realist viewpoint. But in many respects, the very act of retracting itself is at odds with realist understandings of the signifying function of language: it presupposes that Chaucer can use words to alter his canon, that he can "revoke" (from the Latin *re vocare*, meaning "call back") works already in existence. More cynically, we might read Chaucer's list of retracted works as paradoxically speaking those works *into* existence, serving as a retrograde table of contents and reinforcing rather than diminishing their existence. For the modern reader, the case of Chaucer's lost "book of the Leoun" enacts such nominalistic performativity on an extra-textual level: the reference in the "Retraction" is all the evidence we have of that work; its reality for us is created solely by the linguistic signifiers used to express it. In other words, by "revoking" the Book of the Lion for himself, Chaucer effectively "re-vokes" it for his readers as well.

In addition to these internal contradictions, we cannot with confidence extract the "Retraction" from the Canterbury frame itself. The "makere of this book" specified by the rubric may (as is usually supposed) refer to Chaucer, the historical author of the

Canterbury Tales; it may, however, just as easily refer to the pilgrim / reporter that serves as Chaucer's narrative alter ego.[72] In other words, Chaucer does not unequivocally relinquish the narrative valences of the *Canterbury Tales* in his retraction. Therefore, we should not be surprised that Chaucer seems to follow the advice of the Parson and the Manciple in equal measure in the "Retraction," simultaneously offering the quasi-penitent language of the "Retraction" itself and retroactively withholding the dangerous language of "many a song and many a leccherous lay" (X 1087).

Our inability to extrapolate Chaucer's philosophical viewpoint from the *Parson's Tale* or the "Retraction" makes an *a fortiori* argument for our inability to do so from any other tale or from the Canterbury collection as a whole; the intricate authorial and narrative layering in the work is too complex to give us a clear window into Chaucer's own point of view. This observation is frequently made, of course, but it is also precisely the point of the *Canterbury Tales*: the nominalist language of the *Manciple's Tale* suggests that Chaucer is acutely aware of the nominalist underpinnings of his performative tale-telling project. If we move away from the highly self-conscious frame of the *Canterbury Tales* and consider Chaucer's lyric poetry, however, we can piece together a different philosophical outlook, one more consistently realist than Chaucer's final, unfinished work might suggest.

I do not mean to suggest that we should read Chaucer's lyrics as unvarnished authorial statements; these lyrics were written within a specific courtly setting and must be seen in the wider context of Ricardian structures of power and patronage. Nonetheless, the courtly lyrics can be said to represent Chaucer's *public* voice and are,

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[72] See Olive Sayce, "Chaucer's 'Retractions': The Conclusion of the Canterbury Tales and Its Place in Literary Tradition," *Medium Aevum* 40 (1971): 230-48.

therefore, significant to our understanding of the poet's views on nominalism. With its biblical refrain "And trouthe the shal delivere, it is no drede" (7), the short poem "Truth" strongly evinces the epistemology of scholastic realism:

That thee is sent, receyve in buxumnesse;

The wrastling for this world axeth a fal.

Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:

Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!

Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;

Hold the heye wey and lat thy gost thee lede,

And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede. (15-21)

We may initially want to read this passage, and especially its first three lines, as little more than the sage (if conventional) advice offered the courtier by the poet: "accept your good fortune humbly, for it will not follow you to your celestial home when this life is through." Yet, further consideration of the poem's language – particularly the phrases "receyve in buxumnesse" and "thank God of al" – reveal a deeply hierarchical paradigm, one in which the courtier obediently receives that which is given to him by god. Such a paradigm recalls the realist epistemology of revelation that Augustine develops in *De Magistro*, in which humans receive, also in "buxumnesse," the illumination granted by God. Augustine writes, "Our real Teacher is he who is so listened to ... namely Christ, that is, the unchangeable power and eternal wisdom of God. To this wisdom every rational soul gives heed, but to each is given only so much as he is able to receive."[73] It is logical, then, that after the admonition "Know thy contree" – a phrase which can mean

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[73] Augustine, "De Magistro," 95.

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both "know your terrestrial country" and "know that heaven is your true home" –

Chaucer asks the addressee to look up and thank God. It is God, from whom that

knowledge comes, God who will grant the universal truth that "thee shall delievere."[74]

Small wonder that this poem is situated in one manuscript next to the *General Prologue*'s

portrait of the Parson, a pilgrim whose faith in an orderly, hierarchical cosmos leads him

to lament that "in mannes synne is every manere of ordre or ordinaunce turned up-so-

doun" (X 259).[75]

     Chaucer's other so-called "Boethian Lyrics" imply a similar investment in the

linguistic and ontological precepts of scholastic realism.[76] In "Gentilesse," Chaucer

particularly asserts the objective universality of such concepts as "vertu" (4), "vice" (11)

and "vertuous noblesse" (17), while in "Fortune" he echoes the Parson's lament about

"ordre or ordinaunce turned up-so-doun" by bewailing "this wretched worldes

transmutacioun ... withouten ordre or wys discrecioun"(1-3). Most telling of all,

however, is "Lak of Stedfastnesse," which marries the other lyrics' concerns with

hierarchy and disorder to questions of speech and language:

> Somtyme the world was so stedfast and stable
>
> That mannes word was obligacioun,
>
> And now it is so fals and deceivable
>
> That word and deed, as in conclusioun,
>
> Ben nothing lyk, for turned up-so-doun

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[74] The MED defines "contree" both as "any geographic area or physiographic province" (n., 1) and as "the realm (of the air, the stars, heaven)" (n., 5). See also Note 19 for "Truth," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1085.

[75] See Leila Z. Gross's brief discussion of "Truth," in "The Short Poems" (introduction), *The Riverside Chaucer*, 635.

[76] For the grouping of "Truth," "Fortune," "Gentilesse," and "Lak of Stedfastnesse" as "Boethian Lyrics" see Gross, "The Short Poems," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 634-35 (introduction to "The Former Age").

>Is al this world for mede and wilfulnesse,

>That al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse. (1-7)

Although here Chaucer repeats his plaint that the once stable world has turned "up-so-doun," he gives that inversion a specific shape in the dislocation of word from deed, of sign from signified. As we have already seen in the *Manciple's Tale,* such a dislocation is implicit within Ockham's nominalist ontology: without universals upon which to predicate the mental sign, there can be no guarantee that even the most scrupulous and accurate verbal utterance correlates with a stable, transcendent reality. Subjective reality becomes the *only* reality. In such a world, "Vertu hath ... no dominacioun" (16) because "vertu" is merely a contingent signifier rather than an overarching universal sign. Similarly, "resoun is holden fable" because neither "resoun" nor "fable" is predicated upon a larger "trouthe" (15). As Liam Purdon writes, "the obvious result of the mutable and debased state of language and thought, according to Chaucer, is that vice reigns, while virtue and pity and mercy ... are either relegated to a state of insignificance or exiled."[77]

Although "Lak of Stedfastnesse" clearly deplores the encroachment of nominalism on an increasingly disordered cosmos, the corrective it supplies for an "up-so-doun" nominalist world is, in fact, startlingly reminiscent of Ockham's own philosophy:

>O prince, desyre to be honourable,

>Cherish thy folk and hat extorcioun.

>Suffre nothing that may be reprevable

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[77] Liam O. Purdon, "Chaucer's *Lak of Stedfastnesse*: a Revalorization of the Word," in *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature*, ed. Julian Wasserman and Lois Roney (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989), 147.

To thyn estat don in thy regioun.

Shew forth thy sword of castigacioun,

Dred God, do law, love trouthe and worthinesse,

And wed thy folk agein to stedfastnesse.

Directed to King Richard II, this envoy brings an overt political dimension to the lyric, making terrestrial the "up-so-doun" cosmic hierarchy described by the first three stanzas and investing the king rather than God with the power to right it. In urging the king to "shew forth [the] sword of castigacioun," Chaucer essentially argues for the royal equivalent of God's *potentia absoluta*: Richard is to "suffre nothing" that works against his regal authority, and he should not spare punishment in his attempts to wed his subjects back to the stable earthly hierarchy. Despite Chaucer's insistence that Richard "Dred God, do law [and] love trouthe and worthinesse," the effect of advice contained in the envoy is, as Paul Strohm flatly states, "to strengthen the king's hand; to urge him to stiffen up and be a king."[78] Where Ockham turned to the *potentia absoluta* of God to remedy the cosmic disorder threatened by the abandonment of stable universals, Chaucer turns to the *potentia absoluta* of the king to remedy the earthly disorder that prevailed at the close of the fourteenth century.

The envoy to King Richard that concludes "Lak of Steadfastnesse" is particularly suggestive for our reading of the *Manciple's Tale*. As a number of critics have pointed out, the bow-wielding Phoebus bears more than a passing resemblance to Richard II, a monarch whose increasingly tyrannical reign in the late 1390s was emblemized by his retinue of Cheshire archers and whose aspirations to semi-divine status are revealed in

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[78] Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, 174.

such visual works as the Westminster Abbey Coronation Portrait and the extraordinary Wilton Diptych.[79] Equally important, particularly in light of the power Chaucer accords to Phoebus's speech, is the power that Richard himself seemed to invest in the spoken word; among the articles of deposition drafted against the king in 1399 was the accusation that Richard proclaimed "the laws were in his own mouth ... and that he alone could change or establish the laws of his realm."[80] Recent scholarship has detailed a changing "vocabulary of kingship" toward the end of Richard's reign, in which the king demanded new and elaborate forms of royal address in order to encourage "a lofty, almost God-like, image of himself... as a distant, majestic and all-powerful figure."[81] Richard also manipulated the legal and parliamentary proceedings surrounding the "Revenge Parliament" of 1397, including the damning spoken confession made by the Duke of Gloucester just before his death. In these actions, it is possible to see Richard attempting – like Chaucer's Phoebus – to alter the world by altering the language used to describe it.[82] And while it is surely absurd to imagine Richard simply taking Chaucer's envoy to heart and assuming the mantle of royal *potentia absoluta* on its behest, it is not absurd to imagine Chaucer understanding Richard's tyranny as the only possible response to what he might see as England's descent into a nominalist dystopia. Nor is it absurd (or even difficult) to imagine Chaucer composing his *Manciple's Tale* mindful of both that descent and the increasing royal tyranny he may have associated with it.

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[79] For a discussion of Phoebus and the Cheshire archers, see Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 256-259. A good survey of scholarship on the Wilton Diptych, a work in which a kneeling Richard is depicted surrounded by saints and greeted by The Virgin, Christ, and a heavenly host, can be found in Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 304-08.

[80] Quoted in Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 297. See also Saul, *Richard II*, 248-250.

[81] Saul, "Richard II and the Vocabulary of Kingship," 876.

[82] Giancarlo, "Murder, Lies, and Storytelling," 76-112.

In the absence of the narrative and meta-narrative complexities of the *Canterbury Tales*, the Boethian lyrics demonstrate that despite the affinities between Chaucer and the Manciple, the world described in the *Manciple's Tale* – in which realist ontological and linguistic hierarchies are upended and the spoken word can function performatively without constraint or universal predicate – is not only a world that Chaucer decries and fears; it is a world that he sees manifest in the political and social landscape around him. Thus if Chaucer is a nominalist, as Peck and others have suggested, he is only the most reluctant of nominalists, simultaneously aware and fearful of the possibilities arising from an "up-so-doun" philosophy. P. B. Taylor more probably asserts that Chaucer "aspires toward a linguistic realism in which intent informs deeds through the ministry of words" but that " this aspiration is an ideal sullied by the practice of the real world."[83] Inasmuch as Chaucer believes that speech and the mental signs that precede it are – and should be – subordinated to universal truths, he is a realist. And yet, as a poet and a creator of fiction, Chaucer is also acutely aware of, and invested in, the *potentia* that nominalists like Ockham ascribed to spoken and written signs. The very world that Chaucer inhabited, which frequently throbbed with the *Sturm und Drang* of social discord, must have invited comparison to the upended hierarchies and arbitrary expressions of power manifest in nominalism.

Despite all of this – or perhaps because of it – Chaucer offers an optimistic expression of scholastic realism in one of his most unlikely literary endeavors. Ostensibly written for his ten-year-old son "Lowys," who had shown "by certeyne evydences [an] abilite to lerne sciences touching nombres" (*Astrolabe* 1-3), Chaucer's

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[83] Taylor, "Chaucer's Cosyn to the Dede," 325.

Treatise on the Astrolabe purports to provide in English (apparently Lowys's knowledge of Latin was "yit but smal") the "reules and ... trewe conclusions" (26-29) of the astronomical instrument. It also provides in its introduction a remarkable articulation of the linguistic principles of scholastic realism:

> This tretis, divided in 5 parties, wol I shewe the under full light reules and
> naked wordes in Englissh, for Latyn canst thou yit but small, my litel sone.
> But natheles suffise to the these trewe conclusions in Englissh as wel as
> sufficith to these noble clerkes Grekes these same conclusions in Grek;
> and to Arabiens in Arabik, and to Jewes in Ebrew, and to Latyn folk in
> Latyn; whiche Latyn folk had hem first out of othere dyverse langages,
> and writen hem in her owne tunge, that is to seyn, in Latyn. And God
> woot that in alle these langages and in many moo han these conclusions
> ben suffisantly lerned and taught, and yit by diverse reules; right as
> diverse pathes leden diverse folk the righte way to Rome .... And Lowys,
> yf so be that I shewe the in my lighte Englissh as trewe conclusions
> touching this mater, and not oonly as trewe but as many and as subtile
> conclusiouns, as ben shewid in Latyn in eny commune tretys of the
> Astrelabie, konne me the more thank. (25-55)

Chaucer's argument that English "sufficith" for "Lyte Lowys" just as Greek suffices for Greeks and Latin suffices for "Latyn folk" is most immediately relevant as "part of Chaucer's characteristic interest in the translator's role."[84] However, that same argument also implies – indeed is predicated upon – the universality of what Chaucer refers to as

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[84] Wogan-Brown, *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 9.

"trewe conclusions," concepts that exist outside the conventional signifiers of spoken language and from which those signifiers derive their truth value. Moreover, such "trewe conclusions" are the same not only in different languages ("Arabik," "Ebrew," "Grek") but for different peoples ("Arabiens," "Jewes," "Grekes"); they cannot, therefore, exist "only as... thought object[s] in the mind" but must necessarily be part of a set of overarching truths, of universal constants upon which first mental signs and then spoken signs are predicated.[85] Thus, Chaucer's dictum, "diverse pathes leden diverse folk the righte way to Rome" (39-40) encapsulates his realist beliefs: the diversity of speech and writing drawn from a diversity of individuals is nonetheless predicated upon a single "righte way," a universal that always comes from and leads to the same place.[86] It is fitting, then, that Chaucer echoes one of the more realist sentiments of the "Retraction" when, in the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, he describes translating the astrological work "in myn Englissh oonly for thy doctrine" (63-4).

But even beyond Chaucer's introductory ruminations on translation, language, and universals, *The Treatise on the Astrolabe* articulates a realist ontology. Indeed, the very choice of the astrolabe as a textual subject evokes the realist ontological hierarchy, expressed here as part of the "pervasive and ubiquitous medieval principle of the celestial dominance over terrestrial matter."[87] The very purpose of medieval astronomy (and of the more suspect interpretive art of astrology) was to glean "trewe conclusions" from the

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[85] From *Ordinatio*, in Ockham, *Philosophical Writings*, 41.

[86] Seth Lerer also comments on this passage in "Chaucer's Sons," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 73 (2004): 906-15. The phrase "diverse pathes leden diverse folk the righte way to Rome" is a clear echo of the proem to book II of the highly Boethian *Troilus and Criseyde*: "For every wight which that to Rome went / Halt nat o path, or alwey o manere" (*Troilus* 2.36-37).

[87] Edward Grant, "Medieval and Renaissance Scholastic Conceptions," quoted in Jennifer Arch, "A Case Against Chaucer's Authorship of the *Equatorie of the Planets*," *Chaucer Review* 40 (2005): 64-5.

observable phenomena of the heavens, to understand the universal truths that the motions of the stars and planets signified. When Chaucer introduces the Astrolabe to his son, he specifies its ability to illuminate truths beyond those known by human beings: "truste wel that alle the conclusions that han be founde in so noble an instrument as is an Astrelabie ben unknowe parfitly to eny mortal man in this regioun, as I suppose" (15-19). John Gower's confessor, Genius, makes a similar case for the transcendent truth of the heavens when he instructs Amans on the arts of astronomy in *Confessio Amantis*:

> "Benethe upon this erthe hiere
>
> Of alle thinges the matiere,
>
> As tellen ous thei that ben lerned,
>
> Of thing above it stant governed,
>
> That is to sein of the planetes."[88]

Although the practices and interpretation of astronomy do not always accord with the teachings of the Church (a point also made by Gower in the *Confessio*), the science nonetheless depends upon the core beliefs of realist thought. The science itself is "hierarchically ordered to the supreme purpose of knowing God," an Aristotelian attempt to know the universal through sense experience.[89] This, finally, is the ontology that Chaucer wants to pass onto his son Lowys; an ontology that may inform Chaucer's own thinking about the world he inhabits.

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[88] John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed Russell Peck, 3 vols. (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000, 2003, 2004), 3:279 (7.633-37). The Latin inscription that introduces the chapter suggests a commensurately realist ontology: *Lege planetarum magis inferiora reguntur, / Ista set interdum regula fallit opus. / Vir mediante deo sapiens dominabitur astris, / Fata nec immerito quid nouitatis agunt.* [Things lower down are ruled by the law of the planets, and sometimes that governance foils endeavor. With God's intervention the wise man will rule the stars, and the fates will not cause anything suddenly unfavorable.] (p. 3:279 [7.iv])

[89] Evans, *Philosophy and Theology*, 9.

Of course the world we desire to give our sons and daughters and the world that we fear they will inherit are two different things. When we think about the tumult that Chaucer witnessed in his sixty years – from the plague outbreak of his childhood, to his time in the Hundred Years war, to the mob passing by his Aldgate house in 1381, to his service in the Good Parliament, to the deposition and murder of King Richard during the final months of his life – we must also recognize that the orderly universe the poet describes to his young, mathematically inclined son was never the universe he knew. I wrote at the outset of this chapter that it is impossible to be certain of Chaucer's position on nominalism. Nonetheless, I have made the argument that Chaucer was a realist, albeit one who recognized an active tension between realism and the exigencies of an increasingly "up-so-doun" world. This is the tension that he enmeshes into his Boethian lyrics and that simmers menacingly beneath the surface of his *Manciple's Tale.* In some respects, it may seem naïve to suggest that this tension finds its primary expression in Chaucer's literary representations of speech. But as the *Manciple's Tale* shows us, the power that the poet accords to the spoken word is often monumental. Perhaps what we finally witness in Chaucer's poetry is a cry against the discord and entropy of the fourteenth century, a poetic call for the restoration of order amidst social and cultural chaos. And perhaps the *Manciple's Tale* itself – in its depiction of a topsy-turvy, unhinged world – is nothing less than a *speculum mundi*, a mirror reflecting both Chaucer's own disjointed world and the poet's pleas for it to be set right again.

CHAPTER 2

"And chaungit cheuely hor nomes":

Eucharist, Baptism, and Sacramental Utterance in *Saint Erkenwald*

It is with good reason that critics have focused so persistently on the sacrament of

baptism in their readings of *Saint Erkenwald*: even in the frequently outlandish universe

of medieval alliterative verse, the poem's climactic spectacle of a miraculously preserved

and reanimated corpse crumbling to dust at the moment of its christening is a remarkable

one. Generally recognized to be an English recasting of the legend of Saint Gregory and

the Emperor Trajan, *Saint Erkenwald* focuses on the discovery, during the construction of

Saint Paul's Cathedral, of a magnificent sarcophagus containing the inexplicably

preserved corpse. Unable to read the engravings on the sarcophagus or to determine the

identity or even the vintage of the body, London's increasingly agitated citizens summon

their bishop, Erkenwald, from clerical duties in Essex so that he might solve the mystery

and quell the growing civic unrest it has created. Erkenwald addresses the corpse,

commanding it in the name of God to reveal its secrets; and like some Celtic

Frankenstein's monster, it blinks its eyes and begins to tell its story. The corpse, it turns

out, was a judge who lived 500 years before Christ. Strict, honest, and unswervingly fair,

the judge was buried as a king for his flawless adherence to law; but as a heathen, his

soul was "dampnyd dulfully into þe depe lake" (302), unable to join in the great feast of

Heaven.[1] Deeply moved by the mournful tale, Erkenwald cannot help but weep, and he

wishes aloud that God could grant the virtuous pagan life once more, just long enough to

be baptized. If only such a thing were possible, the bishop exclaims, he would speak

these words: "I folwe þe in þe Fader nome and His fre Childes, / And of þe gracious Holy

Goste" (318-19). Despite the oddly conditional mode of his baptismal prayer (an issue to

which I will return), the words have their effect; as Erkenwald utters them, one of his

tears falls on the judge's face to complete the sacrament. The new Christian soul flies to

heaven; the body falls to ash. Bells ring in London. Order is restored.

Gordon Whatley identifies two, overarching critical responses to the poem. The

first, that the heathen judge achieves salvation by virtue of his good works and worthy

life, is a position that closely echoes Langland's treatment of the Trajan story in *Piers

Plowman*.[2] Implicit in such a response is the argument that "the poet's main concern is to

affirm the efficacy of individual merit and good works in the achievement of salvation,"

that the actions of the heathen judge alone are sufficient to engender the mercy of God.[3]

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[1] All quotations from the poem are from *Saint Erkenwald*, ed. Clifford Peterson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977). References to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text by line number. All translations of the poem are mine unless otherwise noted.

[2] Gordon Whatley provides an overview of critical responses to the poem's baptism of the virtuous pagan in "Heathens and Saints: *St. Erkenwald* in its Legendary Context," *Speculum* 61 (1986): 330-63. He also offers more general background on medieval redactions of the Gregory/Trajan legend in "The Uses of Hagiography: The Legend of Pope Gregory and the Emperor Trajan in the Middle Ages," *Viator* 15 (1984): 25-63. In Langland's version of the Trajan legend, told by the figure of Trajan himself, the path to redemption is explicitly neither baptism nor posthumous conversion to Christianity; rather it is ethical, just, and morally outstanding behavior. This is a clear deviation not only from many earlier versions of the Trajan story but from orthodox medieval theology itself. See William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The B Version*, ed. George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London: Athlone Press, 1975), 445-446 (B.11.140-157).   For a more complete analysis of the Gregory/Trajan legend in *Piers Plowman* and *Saint Erkenwald* see Frank Grady, "*Piers Plowman, St. Erkenwald*, and the Rule of Exceptional Salvations," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): 63-88. Recently, critics have attempted to place the poem's emphasis on conversion in a more historical context, particularly Ruth Nissé, "'A Coroun Ful Riche': The Rule of History in *St. Erkenwald*," *English Literary History* 65 (1998): 277-295; Frank Grady, "*St. Erkenwald* and the Merciless Parliament," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000): 179-211; and Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, 41-65.

[3] Whatley, "Heathens and Saints," 332.

Whatley himself offers a different analysis, suggesting that the poem demonstrates how salvation requires not only the sacrament of baptism, but also the authority of the Church to administer it. Since his influential essay, critics have tended to follow Whatley's assertion even as they have worked to refine it. Whereas Frank Grady finds that *Saint Erkenwald* occupies a kind of middle-ground between Langland's heterodox treatment of the Trajan story and a strict orthodox one, both Christine Chism and William Kamowski see the poem as profoundly orthodox and, more specifically, profoundly anti-Wycliffite. More recently, Jennifer Sisk has argued that even as it "overtly expresses traditional views," *Saint Erkenwald* finally "occupies an idiosyncratic position that uneasily negotiates the distance between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in a way we might better describe as both/and."[4]

Few critics have examined the nature of sacramental speech in *Saint Erkenwald*, which is surprising when we consider the poem's investment in – even obsession with – the speech-centered sacrament of baptism.[5] The first part of this chapter proposes to

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[4] Grady notes that although the *Erkenwald* poet takes a more orthodox position than Langland, the poem is not necessarily as conservative as Whatley maintains; Chism and Kamowski argue that the poem's emphasis on the spectacle and ceremony of the Church amounts not only to a reaffirmation of orthodox Catholic practice and ecclesiastical authority but to an argument against Lollard challenges to orthodoxy. See Grady, "Rule of Exceptional Salvations," 66-68; Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, 41-65; William Kamowski, "*Saint Erkenwald* and the Inadvertent Baptism: An Orthodox Response to Heterodox Ecclesiology," *Religion and Literature* 27 no.3 (1995): 5-27; Jennifer Sisk, "The Uneasy Orthodoxy of *St. Erkenwald*," *ELH* 74 (2007): 108-09.

[5] Some exceptions are James P. Crowley, "Liturgy, Sung Prayer and Quest in the Middle English *Saint Erkenwald*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 93 (1982): 315-23, and William A. Quinn, "A Liturgical Detail and an Alternative Reading of *St. Erkenwald*, Line 319," *Review of English Studies* 35 (1984): 335-41. Crowley discusses the poem in the context of late medieval Catholic liturgy, particularly the singing of prayers by the choir, and suggests that the spoken (or sung) spiritual "seeking" by the choir supports Erkenwald in his efforts to baptize the heathen judge. Quinn posits that the phrase "and not one grue lenger" (319) underscores the necessity for precision in uttering the baptismal formula, an argument to which this essay will return. Also of interest is Stephen K. Wright, "*St. Erkenwald* and *Quem Quaeritis*: A Reconsideration," *English Language Notes* 31 no. 3 (1994): 29-35. Wright suggests that *Saint Erkenwald*'s phrase "queme questis" (l. 133), which seems to draw an anomalous comparison between the melodious chant of a cathedral choir (queme) and the baying of hunting dogs (queste), could be profitably emended to "queme quethes," a phrase meaning "beautiful words" or "lovely speech."

remedy that lack of critical attention by looking at baptism not simply as the means of

salvation for the pagan judge but as a sacrament whose reliance upon the spoken word

raises fundamental issues about the efficacy of sacramental language and about the

priest's role in administering it. Although this chapter gives baptism its due in the poem,

it ultimately seeks to look beyond baptism and to focus on another orthodox rite, one

similarly invested in the transformative power of the priest's words: the sacrament of the

Eucharist. As a number of recent studies have demonstrated, the Eucharist attained

immense cultural importance in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, even as it

came under increasing scrutiny, most vociferously by heterodox Wycliffite Christians.[6]

By denying the orthodox view of transubstantiation, Wyclif and his followers mounted an

attack on the Church that, taken to its extreme, seemed poised to "destroy Christianity

and unravel the very fabric of human community."[7] I argue that *Saint Erkenwald*, while

never explicitly referring to the Eucharist or the doctrine of transubstantiation,

nevertheless demonstrates its allegiance to orthodox eucharistic theology in its account of

the judge's conversion. In some respects, this argument comports with earlier criticism

showing how the orthodoxy of the poem is constructed through its explicitly baptismal

aspects; however, I depart from that criticism in two fundamental ways. First, I argue

that the key indicator of orthodoxy in the poem is not the judge's baptism *per se* but the

efficacy of Erkenwald's words both in the performance of the baptism and in the

miraculous reanimation of the heathen corpse. Second, I demonstrate that *Saint

Erkenwald* focuses on the efficacy of language in order to bind the salvation of the

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[6] For example, see Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, especially chapters 1, 3 and 4; Beckwith, *Christ's Body;* Rubin, *Corpus Christi*. The more overtly political ramifications of this issue are sketched out succinctly by Strohm in *England's Empty Throne*, 45-53.

[7] Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 54.

heathen judge to the defining sacrament of the Eucharist, a connection that allows the

poem to offer a far more comprehensive response to Wycliffite heresies, as well as a

more forceful affirmation of orthodoxy, than previous work on *Saint Erkenwald* has

acknowledged.[8]

The second part of this chapter takes a broader view than the first: it considers

Saint Erkenwald's anti-Wycliffite stance in the context of the Church's relationship with

its non-Christian forbears. I argue that the poem develops its immediate polemic against

Lollardy within a semantic and linguistic register that evokes a number of fundamental

theological issues: namely, the nature of orthodox eschatology, the foundational Christian

precepts of Old Law and New Law, and the typological model by which medieval

Christianity defined itself against paganism and Judaism. By again focusing on the

efficacy – and sometimes the stubborn inertness – of the spoken word within these

theological contexts, this chapter not only establishes *Saint Erkenwald*'s views on

Lollardy but also uncovers the poem's cultural anxieties over the origins of English

Christianity and its susceptibility to heterodox and heretical threats.

The Words of the Priest, the Body of Christ

The conditional mode of Bishop Erkenwald's baptismal prayer remains one of

Saint Erkenwald's most critically vexing details. Moved to tears by the corpse's story,

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[8] In late medieval England the word "Lollard" was not necessarily used to describe a follower of John
Wyclif. Often the word was simply a blanket term for those who deviated from any number of teachings of
the Church; its closest synonym today would simply be "heretic." Nonetheless, with the specific form of
heresy given voice by the teachings of John Wyclif, "Lollard" ultimately did become synonymous with
"Wycliffite"; therefore, I will use the two words interchangeably. For an overview of the connections
between Lollardy and Wycliffism, see Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 60-73. Also helpful is
Andrew E. Larsen, "Are All Lollards Lollards?," in *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval
England*, ed. Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens and Derrick G. Pitard (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press,
2003), 59-72.

the bishop laments the pagan judge's pitiable condition aloud and wishes he had the

power to perform a baptism:

> "Our Lord lene," quoþ þat lede [Erkenwald], "þat þou lyfe hades,
>
> By Goddes leue, as longe as I myȝt lacche water
>
> And cast vpon þi faire cors and carpe þes wordes,
>
> 'I folwe þe in þe Fader nome and His fre Childes,
>
> And of þe gracious Holy Goste' and not one grue lenger;
>
> Þen þof þou droppyd doun ded hit daungerde me lasse."
>
> Wyt þat worde þat he warpyd þe wete of eghen
>
> And teres trillyd adoun and on þe toumbe lighten,
>
> And one felle on his face and þe freke syked. (315-323)[9]

Since Whatley, most critics of *Saint Erkenwald* have read this passage as an affirmation

of the unconditional necessity of orthodox baptism for salvation. However accurate, such

an assessment does little to account for the fact that the baptism itself is an accident: the

baptismal tear is shed without what we might call baptismal intent. Even more

remarkably, the baptismal prayer is uttered only as a demonstration of what Erkenwald

would say if he thought it would do any good. Annemarie Thijms suggests that the

"accidental" nature of the baptism and Erkenwald's conditional prayer allow *Saint*

Erkenwald to skirt a problem that has often troubled the Trajan legend, namely the sticky

issue of an ecclesiast asking God to change His mind and grant salvation to a damned

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[9] "'Our lord grant,' said Erkenwald, 'that you had life, by God's leave, long enough that I might use water and cast it upon your fair corpse and speak these words: "I follow thee in the name of the father and his generous Child and of the gracious Holy Ghost," and not one word more. Then though you dropped down into death, it would trouble me less.' With those words his eyes became wet and tears trilled down and alighted on the tomb, and one fell on the face of the corpse and he sighed."

pagan.[10] I propose that the conditional bracketing of the baptismal words – "I *myȝt*

lacche water / And cast vpon þi faire cors and carpe þes wordes" – also serves a

metadiscursive function: it draws attention to the words of the spoken baptismal prayer *as*

words, divorced from their specific sacramental context. Even so, the words are

apparently efficacious; Erkenwald's baptismal prayer does perform its appointed work,

whether it is uttered conditionally, subjunctively, or with genuine intent to baptize. In

this respect, the poem shows the sacramental utterance itself to be important, not

necessarily the intent with which it is uttered. When the newly christened judge feels his

soul enter heaven, he places the responsibility for his salvation squarely on "þe wordes

þat þou [Erkenwald] werpe and þe water þat þou sheddes" (329): the words – as well as

the water – of baptism. Indeed, it is only "Wyt þat worde" (321) that the baptismal tear is

effective. As Peter Cramer argues in his recent study of baptism in the Middle Ages,

"The power of language, and especially of liturgical language, to 'make' those who speak

it, to invigorate the natural motion of the soul, is more than a philosopher's idea. It is one

of the fundamental reasons why sacrament *works*, throughout the Middle Ages and no

doubt beyond them too."[11]

Cramer's discussion of liturgical speech as language which "makes" those who

speak it is reminiscent of the work of Austin and Searle, whose identification of the

performative utterance provides a useful framework for looking at sacramental speech.

Almost by definition, the prescribed words of baptism fall into the category of the

performative: uttered in the proper social circumstances, the words, "I folowe the, or elles

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[10] Annemarie Thijms, "The Sacrament of Baptism in *St. Erkenwald*: The Perfect Transformation of the Trajan Legend," *Neophilologus* 89 (2005): 311-27.

[11] Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c.200 – c. 1150* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 109.

I crystene þe, in the nome of / the fader & þe sone and the holy gost," effect the fundamental change of christening the individual being baptized.[12] Moreover, the Word of God itself, from which, according to Aquinas, the baptismal prayer derives its efficacy, demonstrates speech at its most explicitly performative. After all, "the sublime speech of God in advance of his action is," as Augustine of Hippo notes, "the immutable reason of the action itself."[13]

W. A. Quinn further demonstrates *Saint Erkenwald*'s emphasis on the power of sacramental language by highlighting the poem's emphasis on specificity in sacramental language. Turning to John Mirk's well-known fifteenth-century instructions for parish priests to support his assertions, Quinn argues that the ambiguous phrase "and not one grue lenger" (319) following Erkenwald's recitation of the baptismal formula should be understood as "with no more words," an affirmation of the precise, Trinitarian, baptismal formula endorsed by the Church.[14] Specifically, Quinn highlights Mirk's insistence that priests recite the exact words of baptism and that they "[do] no more".[15] Such concern for the precise form of sacramental speech in baptism is also expressed in more doctrinal sources. Aquinas argues that "Baptism receives its consecration from its form…. Consequently the cause of baptism needs to be expressed in the baptismal form." He further ties the sacramental utterance to the Word of God itself: "The words which are uttered in the sacramental forms, are said not merely for the purpose of signification, but also for the purpose of efficiency, inasmuch as they derive efficiency from that Word, by

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[12] *John Mirk's Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Gillis Kristensson (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1972), 74 (ll. 127-128). This passage is also quoted in Quinn, "A Liturgical Detail," p. 339.

[13] Augustine, *City of God*, 5:36-37.

[14] Quinn, "A Liturgical Detail," 337.

[15] Kristensson, *Mirk's Instructions*, 74 (l. 125).

Whom all things were made."[16] Tellingly, Aquinas is far less stringent when it comes to

the physical procedures of baptism and even to the persons authorized to perform the

sacrament.[17] The work of baptism, he seems to recognize, is performed less by water

than by a specific and powerful sacramental formula, a formula that might be diluted,

corrupted, or even invalidated by the addition to or alteration of its language.

One critic has demonstrated that *Saint Erkenwald*'s insistence on orthodox

baptism and its strong affirmation of the baptismal utterance show the poem to be a

rebuttal of Lollard arguments to the contrary, noting that its treatment of the sacrament is

"antithetical to some of the most notorious and pointed Wycliffite challenges to the

Church's efficacy in salvation."[18] Lollards in general denied the absolute necessity of

baptism and also of the baptismal formula itself, two significant breaks from orthodox

theology. Some Lollards argued that children of Christians were christened *in utero*

through the faith of their parents and that a formal baptism would have been redundant.[19]

Wyclif himself writes in *De Ecclesia* that the act of baptism does not necessarily destroy

the taint of original sin; and in "Speculum de Antichristo," he issues an attack on

ecclesiastics who focus on baptizing the masses rather than preaching to them, suggesting

that since "god sent [the Apostle Paul] for to preche þe gospel & not to cristene men,"

ordinary priests should follow suit.[20] In all of these instances, both the necessity and the

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[16] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 4:2378, 2379 (III. q. 66 a. 5).

[17] Aquinas enumerates a number of methods by which one can be baptized (immersion, sprinkling, pouring), and posits that in certain circumstances, baptism can be performed by lay people, women, and even Jews and pagans. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 4:2373-2392 (III. q. 66 – III. q. 67).

[18] Kamowski, "Inadvertent Baptism," 11.

[19] See Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 291.

[20] John Wyclif, *De Ecclesia*, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Trübner & Co., 1886), 467-468; John Wyclif, "Speculum de Antichristo," in *The English Works of John Wyclif*, ed. F. D. Matthew, EETS o.s. 74

efficacy of the priest's baptismal prayer – in J. L. Austin's terms, the prayer's

performativity – are called into question. If God's grace alone is enough to christen the

soul, the words of the baptismal prayer become, at best, an outward sign of christening

and, at worst, an impediment to the true nature of the sacrament and a distracting

sideshow to what Lollards considered the real work of the Church.

But if *Saint Erkenwald* is to be a poetic bulwark against the encroaching threat of

Lollardy, it must do more than simply reinforce the need for orthodox baptism. Certainly

an affirmation of baptism *could* have been understood as an anti-Wycliffite gesture. Yet

the most sustained and coherent Wycliffite attack on the institutional Church was directed

at the sacrament of the Eucharist, not at baptism.[21] Because the eucharistic sacrament

invested the clergy with so much authority, Wycliffite "re-evaluation of the doctrine of

transubstantiation [was] ... an attack on the central mediating role of the priesthood, an

attack on its rights to be the exclusive handlers of Christ's Body."[22] In other words, the

Lollard assault on the Eucharist was also an assault on the Church in general, on its

exclusive ability to mediate between the celestial and the mundane, and, perhaps most

crucially, on its sole authority to effect salvation in the laity. The comprehensive nature

of such an attack was not lost on Wyclif's virulently anti-clerical followers. Nor was it

lost on the orthodox Church itself: by the end of the fourteenth century, the Eucharist had

become not only the spiritual focus of the Mass but also, as Paul Strohm points out, a

"litmus test of orthodoxy" and the point on which "the Lollards' heresy was effectively

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(London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1902), 112. See also Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 290-292.

[21] Anne Hudson notes that other than the Eucharist, "sacraments apart from confession... attracted little consistent notice or coherent redirection" by Lollards. See *The Premature Reformation*, 290.

[22] Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, 36. For a discussion of the authority granted to priests by their ability to perform the sacrament of the altar, see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, especially pp. 49-53.

founded."[23] To mount a true defense against the Wycliffite threat, *Saint Erkenwald* needed not only to assert the requirement of orthodox baptism but also to affirm the orthodox view of the Eucharist.

In an essay on Chaucer's poetic response to the Lollard controversies, Fiona Somerset shows how, in the "atmosphere of heightened concern over the division and multiplication of Christ's body and over lay interpretation of the doctrine of the Eucharist," *The Summoner's Tale* is able to comment on the fourteenth-century eucharistic debate without ever mentioning it by name.[24] Contemporary with the *Summoner's Tale*, *Saint Erkenwald* is also positioned to indulge in similar, if far more polemical, double meanings. The poem, I suggest, uses its discussion of baptism to engage in a tacit, though no less important, argument for the sacrament of the Eucharist. In point of fact, the connection that the poem generates between the two sacraments has scriptural precedent. The Gospel of John turns to the Crucifixion itself to show the common origin of the water of baptism and the salvific blood of Christ: "*sed unus militum lancea latus eius aperuit, et continuo exivit sanguis, et aqua* [But one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side, and immediately there came out blood and water]."[25] A number of alliterative works often associated with *Saint Erkenwald* also interrogate this common origin. In Langland's *Piers Plowman*, for example, the mortar of mercy in Piers's barn, Unity, is made of Christ's "baptisme and blood þat he bledde on rode"; and in *Pearl*, the Pearl Maiden tells the Dreamer, "Ryche blod ran on rode so

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[23] Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, 47.

[24] Fiona Somerset, "Here There and Everywhere? Wycliffite Conceptions of the Eucharist and Chaucer's Other Lollard Joke," in Somerset, Havens, and Pitard, *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval England*, 127-138.

[25] John 19:34.

roghe, / And wynne water; þen, at þat plyt, / Þe grace of God wex gret innoughe."[26] By pointing out the mutual source of baptism and the Eucharist, such passages suggest the intimate connection between sacramental water and sacramental blood and body.

But there is another, even more pivotal reason that *Saint Erkenwald* is able to enact a thematic shift from baptism to the Eucharist: both sacraments are thoroughly marked by the presence – even the necessity – of sacramental language. Just as orthodox baptism requires the attending priest to utter a precise sacramental form, so too does the sacrament of the Eucharist require the priest to intone specific, biblical words – *hoc est corpus meum* – in order to transubstantiate bread into the body of Christ. As is the case with the words of baptism, the form of the sacramental words used to change bread to body is important to the work that those words do. Once again, John Mirk's instructions provide a clear example of the precision demanded of those priests who uttered the eucharistic formula, in terms of the words themselves and even in terms of vocal inflection:

> Sey þe wordes of þat seruyse
>
> Deuowtely wyth gode a-vyse;
>
> Cotte þow not þe wordes tayle,
>
> But sey hem oute wyþowte fayle;
>
> Sey hem so wyþ mowþe & thoght,
>
> Þat oþer þynge þow þenke noght
>
> But al þyn herte and þyn entent
>
> Be fully on that sacrament.[27]

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[26] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 650 (B.19.323); *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 4th ed., ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 84 (ll. 646-8).

The precision with which the priest must recite the eucharistic formula is itself a testament to the inherent power of the sacramental words and a tacit acknowledgement that they contain the potential to effect substantive change in the world around them. Such an emphasis also demonstrates a reverence for the specific nature of the change taking place, a change in which the subject of the host is entirely replaced by the very body of Christ even as the accidents of the host – the physical signs that bread is bread – remain. Informed as they are by the Word of God, the words of the priest are not to be uttered carelessly. As the *Erkenwald*-poet himself might suggest, the words of consecration should be uttered, "and not one grue lenger" (319).

Recent historical and theological scholarship has confirmed the fundamental importance of the words of consecration to the Eucharist. David Aers emphasizes the roles of both priest and priestly language when he describes the doctrine of transubstantiation: "At the words of consecration, spoken by a duly ordained priest, the body of Jesus ... became present under what had become the appearance of bread and wine lacking their proper substance."[28] Similarly, Eamon Duffy calls the Eucharist a rite in which "only a priest might utter the words which transformed bread and wine into the flesh and blood of God incarnate," and Miri Rubin, in her exhaustive study of the sacrament, describes how "Christ's body was sacramentally made present though the words of a priest."[29] Rubin also enumerates many treatises, such as Mirk's instructions,

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[27] "Say the words of that service [the Eucharist] devoutly and with good counsel. Do not cut off the words' tails, but say them out without fail. Say them that way with your mouth and your thoughts, and do not think of other things, but put all your heart and your intent fully on that sacrament." Kristensson, *Mirk's Instructions*, 166-167 (ll. 1775-1782 [translation mine]).

[28] Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 2.

[29] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400 – c. 1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 109; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 53.

that were written to assist clergy in performing the sacrament correctly. The existence of such treatises strongly suggests the danger perceived in misspeaking the sacramental words. Arguing on grounds both theological and linguistic, Catherine Pickstock, ties sacrament to utterance even more closely: "Not only is language that which administers the sacrament to us, but conversely, the Eucharist underlies all language, since in carrying the absence that characterizes every sign to an extreme (no body *appears* in the bread), it also delivers a final disclosure, or presence (the bread *is* the Body), which alone makes it possible now to trust every sign."[30] Finally, in a formulation that brings together the Word of God, the words of the priest, and the incarnate body itself, Herbert McCabe argues that "the Eucharist is the creative language of God, his eternal word made flesh."[31] The sacrament of the Eucharist was central to the late medieval Church, and at the center of that sacrament were the words of consecration themselves.

Thus, we should not be surprised that as Wyclif and his followers leveled a general critique at what Rubin calls the "sacerdotal-sacramental efficacy" of the eucharistic sacrament, they also questioned more specifically the ability of the priest's words to effect transubstantiation.[32] Wycliffite positions on the Eucharist have been particularly well documented, but we should recognize that Wyclif himself held a far more nuanced position on the matter than is generally recognized. In brief, he argued that after the priest's sacramental utterance, the bread remained unchanged in both

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[30] Catherine Pickstock, "Thomas Aquinas and the Quest for the Eucharist," in *Catholicism and Catholicity: Eucharistic Communities in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Sarah Beckwith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999), 55.

[31] Herbert McCabe, "The Eucharist and Language," in Beckwith, *Catholicism and Catholicity*, 20.

[32] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 328.

subject and accident but that the spiritual essence of the body of Christ was added to it.[33]

Such an argument stood in stark opposition to Church teachings, which stated that the

sacramental words *hoc est corpus meum* did not affect the accidents – the outward,

sensual appearances – of bread; rather, they caused the Body of Christ to replace the

subject of bread altogether, leaving the bread's accidents intact. One critical difference

between the Church's view and Wyclif's, then, lay in the exact work that the sacramental

utterance performed: whereas the Church maintained that the priest's words caused the

miracle of transubstantiation, Wyclif, who considered it logically impossible for an

accident to exist without its subject, argued that those same words merely effected a

process of spiritual addition. In the face of this immensely important difference, Wyclif's

arguments against orthodox transubstantiation nonetheless grant considerable power to

the words of consecration. Indeed, in Wyclif's view the sacramental words spoken by the

priest do perform an action; it is simply not the action the Church claimed that they

perform. Wyclif writes: "crist haþ ȝyue power I-nowe to his prestis to teche his churche;

& enioyned hem siche office þat ȝyueþ hem not occasioun to synne. & þus power þat

prestis han standeþ not in transsubstansinge of þe oste, ne in makyng of accidentis for to

stonde bi hemsilf."[34] Rather than denying the power of the priest's words, Wyclif dilutes

their efficacy both in kind (because they perform an act of addition rather than one of

substitution) and in degree (because they ultimately lack the ability to make accidents

stand alone without their subject). The question suggested by Wyclif's formulation of the

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[33] See Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 282.

[34] Wyclif, "Of Confession," in *The English Works of John Wyclif*, 345.

Eucharist, then, is not, "Are the words uttered by the priest effective?" but rather, "What specific effect do those sacramental words have?"

In his assault on the Eucharist, Wyclif calls into question the ability of the priest's words to make accidents stand alone without their subjects; similarly, in his attacks on orthodox baptism, the dissident theologian obviates the necessity of the baptismal prayer in the act of christening. As I have argued above, the ability of language to enact transubstantiation and christening is a key point of contact between the two sacraments. Eucharist and baptism share yet another relationship – one particularly germane to *Saint Erkenwald* – that enables the latter to operate as an especially effective metaphor for the former: both are a means of conversion. Discussing how religious conversion in the Middle Ages was grounded in the metaphor of Christ's death and rebirth, Peter Cramer argues that "to be converted by baptism, or by the periodic 'conversion' of the Eucharist, [was] to take part in this metaphor, to pass with this metaphor from physical to spiritual being."[35] Moreover, the very term "conversion," as Cramer seems to recognize, suggests both spiritual conversion (heathen to Christian) and substantial conversion (bread to body). This association of religious conversion with transubstantiation also finds support in religious texts roughly contemporary with *Saint Erkenwald*. A fifteenth-century English translation of the *De Imitatione Christi*, for example, describes the act of conversion in Pauline terms that suggest nothing so much as the process of transubstantiation: "A man conuertyng him holy to god, is exute [stripped, divested] & taken fro þe body & chaunged into a newe man."[36] Here, conversion is not only

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[35] Cramer, *Baptism and Change*, 35.

[36] *The Earliest English Translation of the* De Imitatione Christi, ed. John K. Ingram, EETS e.s. 63 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1893), 44.

analogous to transubstantiation, it is mimetic of transubstantiation: the convert is

metaphorically taken from his own body – we might say his subject is removed from his

accidents – and "chaunged" into a new, Christian man. McCabe argues that "sacraments

are sacramental by their relationship to the Eucharist" and that the Eucharist becomes a

kind of arch-sacrament through which other sacraments gain their efficacy.[37] Such arch-

sacramentality is evident in *De Imitatione Christi*. It is not without reason that the

baptismal conversion described in that work assumes a distinctly eucharistic shape: the

transformative model of the Eucharist underlies the very act of conversion itself.

Crucially, *Saint Erkenwald* begins with an act of conversion *sui generis*, the

Christianization of England and its Saxon inhabitants by Saint Augustine of Canterbury:

Þen wos this reame renaide mony ronke ȝeres

Til Saynt Austyn into Sandewiche was sende fro þe pope;

Þen prechyd he here þe pure faythe and plantyd þe trouthe

And conuertyd alle þe communnates to Cristendame newe.

He turnyd temples þat tyme þat temyd to þe deuelle

And clansyd hom in Cristes nome and kyrkes hom callid;

He hurlyd owt hor ydols and hade hym in sayntes

And chaungit cheuely hor nomes and chargit hom better:

Þat ere was of Appolyn is now of Saynt Petre,

Mahoun to Saynt Margrete oþir to Maudelayne;

Þe synagoge of þe Sonne was sett to oure Lady,

Jubiter and Jono to Jhesus oþer to James.

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[37] McCabe, "The Eucharist and Language," in Beckwith, *Catholicism and Catholicity*, 23.

So he hom dedifiet and dyght alle to dere halowes

Þat ere wos sett of Sathanas in Saxones tyme. (11-24)[38]

The sheer swiftness of Augustine's barnstorming conversion of England, suggested by the frenetic pace of the passage itself, practically begs us to ask how genuine and effective such a conversion could have been, a question that the poem's modern readers have been all too keen to ask. Christine Chism, for example, states that "the past is transformed by a cosmetic reversal more gestural and linguistic than essential; the temples are 'turned' but not fundamentally altered, 'clansyd' but not reconstructed."[39] The poem's description of Augustine's conversion, however, hews closely to the account given in Bede's eighth-century *Historia Ecclesiastica*, a text that treats the same event without the skepticism and anxious uncertainty that Chism locates in the alliterative poem. Most provocative is Bede's report of a message from Pope Gregory to Augustine and his fellow ecclesiastics in which the pope advises that the pagan temples be left standing.:

> *Uidelicet, quia fana idolorum destrui in eadem gente minime debeant; sed ipsa, quae in eis sunt, idola destruantur; aqua benedicta fiat, in eisdem fanis aspergatur; altaria construantur, reliquiae ponantur. Quia, si fana eadem bene constructa sunt, necesse est, ut a cultu daemonum in obsequio ueri Dei debeant commutari* [The temples of the idols in that nation

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[38] "Then was this realm renegade for many rough years until Saint Augustine [of Canterbury] was sent to Sandwich by the Pope. Then he preached here the pure faith and planted the truth and converted all the communities anew to Christendom. He turned temples that at the time belonged to the devil and cleansed them in Christ's name and called them churches. He hurled out idols and had in saints, and he chiefly changed their names and rendered them better: that once was of Apollo is now of Saint Peter, Mohammed to Saint Margaret or to Magdalene. The Synagogue of the Sun was set to Our Lady; Jupiter and Juno to either Jesus or James. So he dedicated them [the temples] and gave to all [the saints] the hallowed spaces that before were set to Satan in Saxon times."

[39] Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, 65.

[England] ought not be destroyed; but let the idols that are in them be

destroyed; let holy water be made and sprinkled in the said temples, let

altars be erected, and relics placed. For if those temples are well built, it is

requisite that they be converted from the worship of devils to the service

of the true God].[40]

Later in the same message, Gregory argues that preserving the external form of the pagan

temples will make the conversion of the Saxons more rather than less effective:

Ut dum gens ipsa eadem fana sua non uidet destrui, de corde errorem

deponat, et Deum uerum cognoscens ac adorans, ad loca, quae consueuit,

familiarius concurrat. [The nation, seeing that their temples are not

destroyed, may remove error from their hearts, and knowing and adoring

the true God, may the more familiarly resort to the places to which they

have been accustomed].[41]

Such advice is followed to the letter by *Saint Erkenwald*'s Augustine, who quickly

renames temples churches, cleanses them in Christ's name, and replaces their idols with

saints. The linguistic changes that Augustine makes, though swift and largely invisible,

nonetheless simultaneously signify and allow for the deeper spiritual changes taking

place within.

Although *Saint Erkenwald* never mentions transubstantiation directly, the

mechanism behind the conversions effected by Augustine finds a clear parallel in the

mechanism of the orthodox Eucharist, a sacrament in which the subject of the body of

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[40] The Venerable Bede, *Historiam Ecclesiasticam*, in *Opera Historica*, ed. Carolus Plummer (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), 1:65; Translation from *Bede's Ecclesiastical History and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. J. A. Giles (London: George Bell & Sons, 1903), 55-56.

[41] Bede, *Historiam Ecclesiasticam*, 1:65; trans. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 56.

Christ entirely replaces the subject of bread even as the accidents of bread, those physical signs that tell our eyes and mouths that bread is bread, remain. As Monika Otter notes, "On the one hand [Augustine's conversion] asserts a radical change from paganism to Christianity; on the other hand, it asserts material continuity from one state to the other."[42] Otter's analysis, which takes into consideration both the spiritual rupture and the physical stability of Augustine's conversions, underscores these parallels. Like the priest performing the ritual of transubstantiation, the work that Augustine performs is mainly the work of sacramental speech. That the pagan temples are, externally, still pagan temples after Augustine has dubbed them churches is precisely the point; we can consider the consecrated pagan edifices to be temples in accident only, buildings that contain the subject of churches within. The poem reinforces this subject/accident binary when it relates how Augustine "hurlyd owt hor ydols and hade hym in sayntes" (17). Here, the saint within the temple becomes the holy subject within the profane accident, the body within the bread, the physical sign of the otherwise invisible change that the speech act has engendered.

The mechanism of change described in both Bede's *Historia* and in the alliterative *Saint Erkenwald* clearly echoes the act of transubstantiation; while explicitly invoking baptismal conversion, the poem also evokes the language used to describe the Eucharist in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. When *Saint Erkenwald* relates how Augustine "*turnyd temples þat tyme þat temyd to þe deuelle/ And clansyd hom in Cristes nome and kyrkes hom callid*" (15-16, emphasis mine), the poem employs a word frequently connected to orthodox descriptions of transubstantiation in Middle English

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[42] Monica Otter, "'Newe Werke': *St. Erkenwald*, St. Albans, and the Medieval Sense of the Past," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24 (1994): 387-414.

treatises: *turnyd*. Moreover, by including that word in a hyperalliterative line – aaa/ax rather than the usual aa/ax – the poet actively uses the form of the poem to call this key term to our attention.[43] As early as 1303, Robert Mannyng of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* refers to the Eucharist as a sacrament in which the words of consecration cause "þe lykënes of bred and wyne, / Yn flesshe and blode to *turne* hit ynne."[44] Later, a mid-fifteenth-century translation of *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* glosses the word "transsubstanciate" as "*turned* fro o kinde of substaunce to anothere."[45] Both of these instances suggest that "turned" was a common synonym for the more technical ecclesiastical term, but they are not alone in doing so. In his explicitly anti-Lollard *Reule of Crysten Religioun*, dated 1443, Reginald Pecock describes the sacrament of the Eucharist as "þe taking of breed and wijn... and þe blessing and halewing and *turnyng* of hem into cristis verry body and blood."[46] Similarly, in the early to mid-fourteenth-century translation of Guillaume de Deguileville's *Le Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*, the allegorical figure of Reason "*turned*... bred into quik flesh" and "wyn... into red blood"; a free translation of Grosseteste's *Chateau d'Amour* from the same period explains that "Thurgh the vertue of cristes wordes of the sacrament / That the prest reherces at his

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[43] I am indebted to Frank Grady for this bringing this particular point to my attention.

[44] *Robert of Brunne's "Handlyng Synne*," ed. Frederick Furnivall, EETS o.s. 119 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1901), 311 (ll. 9971-9972). The dates of the texts discussed in the following two paragraphs range from 1303 (Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne*) to 1443 (Pecock's *Reule of Crysten Religioun*). Such a wide range of dates only reinforces the availability of this eucharistic terminology to the *Erkenwald* poet, whose poem was likely written in the 1380s or 90s. That range also suggests the difficulty of affixing a specific date to St. Erkenwald. Although the question of the poem's exact date is outside the scope of this study, we can say with certainty that the *Erkenwald* poet had access to this sort of language describing the process of transubstantiation. For a general survey of opinions on the date of the poem, see Peterson's introduction to *Saint Erkenwald*, 11-15.

[45] *The Mirour of Mans Saluacioun: A Middle English Translation of Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, ed. Avril Henry (Aldershot, UK: Scolar Press, 1986), 105.

[46] *Pecock's Reule of Crysten Religioun*, ed. William Greet, EETS o.s. 171 (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 263.

messe with gode entent, / Brede in to cristes flescħ, & wyne in to his blode, / Sudanly is *turned*."[47] Most compellingly, an anti-Wycliffite sermon, probably delivered to a lay audience in London near the end of the fourteenth-century, extols "þe vertew of þe wordes þat þe preest seis at þe masse, þat þe bred *turneþ* in-to Goddes [fleshe] and his blode."[48]

The *Erkenwald*-poet also employs sacramental language in the phrase that emphasizes the primacy of Augustine's speech act in the conversion of the pagan temples: "And *chaungit* cheuely hor nomes" (18). A sermon on the Lord's Prayer dating to either the late fourteenth-century or early fifteenth-century relates how "ate þe bord, / þare *changede* bred to god alone, / þorw prestes wordes on þe auter stone," while a manuscript of Peraldus's *Summa of Vice* from the same period remarks, "þou3 it seme wonderful and a3eynes kynde þat brede *turne* into flesche and wynne into blode..., þat blessynge is above kynde, and of more my3t, and *chaungeþ* þinge out of o kynde into anoþer."[49] Even as *Saint Erkenwald* narrates Augustine's mass conversions of the sixth and seventh-centuries, the poem's linguistic register echoes contemporary language concerning the Eucharist.[50] In "turnyng" the temples and "chaunging" the idols that

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[47] *The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode*, ed. Avril Henry, EETS o.s. 288 and 292 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985 and 1988), 1:19; "The Myrour of Lewed Men (By a Sawley Monk)," in *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS, Part. 1*, ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS o.s. 98 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892), 428.

[48] "Sermon 22," in *Middle English Sermons*, ed. Woodburn O. Ross, EETS o.s. 209 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 129.

[49] "A Sermon on the Lord's Prayer," ed. Frank A. Patterson, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 16 (1916): 413-14 (ll.357-359); "An Illustrated Fragment of Perdalus's Summa of Vice: Harleian MS 3244," ed. Michael Evans, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 45 (1982): 67 (ll. 2273-2279).

[50] One difference between these two eucharistic keywords as they appear in *Saint Erkenwald* and as they appear in most parallels cited here is that in the parallels, the words are frequently found in prepositional verb phrases – "turne into" rather than simply "turne." I maintain, however, that the similarity in the words used to describe the two sacraments is significant. An earlier citation from this essay helps make this case:

dwell within them, Augustine performs much more than a simple "linguistic sleight of hand"; his conversion of those temples – indeed, his conversion of the entire island – adumbrates the very sacrament that would, by the first years of the fifteenth-century, become the central and defining feature of the liturgy in England.[51]

Against this semantic and intertextual backdrop, the issue raised by the opening lines of *Saint Erkenwald* involves not simply the validity of Augustine's harried conversion of England but the very nature of the priest's words in the sacrament of the Eucharist. More specifically, the poem seeks in its opening salvo to answer the two questions most crucial to the debate over the Eucharist, namely, (1) are the sacramental words effective, and (2), if so, do they do what the Church says they do: create the subject of Christ's body within the accidents – and only the accidents – of bread? As I have already suggested, the eucharistic terminology in the passage should allay doubt about the efficacy of Augustine's mass conversion; to emphasize its point further, however, the poem moves from Augustine of Canterbury to his ecclesiastical successor and heir apparent, Bishop Erkenwald.[52] This important line of descent asks us to understand Erkenwald as a kind of Anglo-Saxon Augustine, a figure whose confrontation and ultimate conversion of an individual pagan is foreshadowed by Augustine's mass conversions centuries earlier. In fact, such a lineal relationship finds ample support

"A man conuertyng him holy to god, is ... *chaunged into* a newe man" (Ingrahm, *The Earliest English Translation of the De Imitatione Christi*, 44). In this passage, where the subject is clearly conversion, we see the same verb-preposition construction as in the eucharistic references cited above. At the very least, the parallel vocabularies of conversion and the Eucharist allow the former to suggest the latter. It is such linguistic cross-referencing, I would argue, that helps facilitate the thematic move from baptism to the Eucharist in the poem.

[51] Nissé, "A Coroun Ful Riche," 277. On the centrality of the Eucharist to late medieval orthodoxy, see Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, 45-53.

[52] Again, Frank Grady has helped me both to clarify my thinking and to refine my prose here, particularly by observing that the "eucharistic keywords" in this passage serve to answer rather than to raise questions regarding the efficacy of Augustine's speech.

outside the poem. The twelfth-century *Vita Sancti Erkenwaldi* – which, along with

Bede's *Historia*, provides much of our knowledge of the historical Bishop Erkenwald –

opens with the conversion of England and the spread of Christianity throughout the

nation:

> Like a radiant beam of sunlight was this Augustine, and the first to teach
>
> the true way of life in the see of the church of Canterbury. From Kent he
>
> in turn dispatched Mellitus, his comrade in the sacred struggle, to the
>
> country of the East Saxons, whose capital city, London, was situated on
>
> the river Thames. There King Ethelbert built a church in honor of Paul,
>
> the preacher to the Gentiles, and there the aforesaid Mellitus performed
>
> the office of bishop. And thus it came to pass that a certain small boy
>
> named Erkenwald, young in years but mature in mind, would hasten to
>
> hear the teaching of Bishop Mellitus.[53]

Like the alliterative poem, in which Erkenwald is described as the bishop "of þis

Augustynes art" (33), the *Vita Sancti Erkenwaldi* posits a direct line of descent from

Augustine to Erkenwald. Indeed, while most editors of *Saint Erkenwald* gloss the phrase

"þis Augustynes art" as "this Augustine's district," the phrase has the additional sense of

"this Augustine's art," the techniques and principles of Augustine's position, the tools of

his salvific trade.[54] Thus, Erkenwald's confrontation and interrogation of the pagan

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[53] *The Saint of London: The Life and Miracles of St. Erkenwald*, ed. and trans. E. Gordon Whatley (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989), 87.

[54] The *Middle English Dictionary* defines *art* as "the principles and practices of such organized fields of knowledge and activity as law, medicine, theology, philosophy, literary composition, alchemy, astrology, and magic" and as "Knowledge or know-how as applied to a situation or a problem, ability to apply or practice an 'art.'" It also states that *art* can mean "a district or locality," a definition for which it employs line 33 of *Saint Erkenwald* as an example. (*MED*, s.v. "art" n.) The glossaries of three major, modern editions of *Saint Erkenwald* – those of Peterson (1977), Ruth Morse (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1975), and Henry Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1926) – uniformly follow the latter entry,

corpse, lying so perfectly preserved in his splendid sarcophagus that he appears to have "sodanly slippide opon slepe" (92), becomes a more intimate reiteration of the work already performed by his spiritual predecessor. We are invited to judge the validity of Augustine's earlier conversions by observing, in almost microscopic detail, the success of Erkenwald's later one.

The poem quickly establishes the efficacy of Bishop Erkenwald's speech. Upon returning to London from Essex, Erkenwald hears High Mass and prays for divine guidance in untangling the mystery presented by the corpse. Then he surrounds himself with the symbols of ecclesiastical authority, approaching the open sarcophagus with "mony maȝti men and macers before hym" (143), "riche reuestid" (139) in his priestly finery. Only with the full weight of his clerical authority quite literally upon his shoulders does Erkenwald finally address the preserved pagan judge:

> Then he turnes to þe toumbe and talkes to þe corce,
>
> Lyftande vp his eghe-lyddes he loused suche wordes:
>
> "Now lykhame þat þer lies, layne þou no lenger;
>
> Sythen Jhesus has iuggit to-day His ioy to be schewyde,
>
> Be þou bone to His bode, I bydde in His behalue." (177-181)

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defining *art* as "province" (Peterson) and "district" (Morse, Savage). In his translation of Peterson's edition, Casey Finch glosses the entire line as "Now Saint Erkenwald's bishop of Augustine's see." See *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, trans. Casey Finch, ed. Malcolm Andrew, Ronald Waldron, and Clifford Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 325. None of these translations takes into account that Augustine was specifically archbishop of Canterbury, while Erkenwald was the bishop of London, a fact that seems at odds with the traditional translation.

A cursory survey of fourteenth and fifteenth-century alliterative poetry bears out the second definition of art as "knowledge" or "principles and practices." In *Piers Plowman*, Anima tells the dreamer of "Astronomiens" who "alday in hir art faillen," a phrase in which art clearly means science or craft; and in *Wars of Alexander*, Alexander questions Anectanabus as he practices his quasi-religious "arte" of astrology. See Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 556 (ll. B.15.359); *Wars of Alexander*, 19 (l. 681). In addition, the poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* uses the word to describe the arts and practices of chivalry and courtly love: Gawain playfully tells the Lady of Hautdesert that she "weldex more slyht / Of þat art" than even he does. Andrew and Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, 264 (ll.1542-1543).

Though the passage notes that Erkenwald physically opens the corpse's eyelids, the emphasis in these lines is most explicitly on the force of his language, on the words "loused" on behalf of Christ Himself, the Word of God made flesh. The corpse confirms as much when he says, "þi bode is me dere. / I may not bot boghe to þi bone for bothe myn eghen" (193-4). It is Bishop Erkenwald's words that have enabled the pagan judge to speak, his words that are, in the parlance of modern linguistics, "ontologically and causally prior" to the action.[55] And while the utterance that reanimated the corpse is not connected to a specific sacrament *per se*, it is closely analogous to sacramental speech in that it is "bydde [bidden] in His behalue," (181) filled with the authority of God's Word itself. Erkenwald's command to the pagan operates in much the same manner as the sacramental formulae we have already observed. Like the utterances "I folowe the, or elles I crystene þe, in the nome of / the fader & þe sone and the holy gost" and "*hoc est corpus meum*," it effects change in the world into which it is uttered.

Following the reanimation of the corpse, the poem recounts Erkenwald's interrogation of the judge and the judge's own self-revelation. Although I focus in this chapter only on the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, it is worth pausing to consider other sacramental aspects of this scene, specifically its confessional connotations. Like baptism and the Eucharist, auricular confession is a sacrament marked by the presence of necessary speech, both on the part of the sinner (who verbally enumerates sins) and, more especially, on the part of the confessor (who grants verbal absolution). Donning his liturgical, clerical vestments, Erkenwald attends to the judge's story much as he might attend to the confession of a penitent; when the bishop at last

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[55] Sweetser, "Blended Spaces and Performativity," 310.

does press the judge to speak about the state of his soul, we learn that the judge, righteous

as he might have been on earth, is nonetheless guilty of that Original Sin of "Adam oure

alder þat ete of þat appulle / Þat mony a plyȝtles pepul has poysned for euer" (295-6). No

matter that the noble judge, born many years before Christ, was never in the position to

achieve Christian grace in his lifetime; like all sinners, he could not receive God's mercy

without "shrift of mouþ / to make to prest [his] synnis couþ / opinli ham to knaw."[56]

Such is the hard-line that *Saint Erkenwald* takes: in order for the judge to attain salvation,

the spoken words of confession must precede the cleansing of his soul. As a response to

Wycliffite arguments privileging the internal state of contrition over the externally

directed practice of oral confession, the poem's unwavering insistence on confession is

yet another affirmation of orthodoxy.

The judge's *de facto* confession brings us back to the climactic scene itself:

Erkenwald's conditionally sacramental, accidentally orthodox, tearfully baptismal

utterance. The efficacy of Erkenwald's sacramental speech, established by the

reanimation of the corpse and, to a lesser degree, Erkenwald's role as confessor, is

reconfirmed at the moment of christening. But to the challenges raised by Wyclif and the

Lollards concerning the Eucharist, the orthodox baptism and the efficacious words of

baptism themselves can only provide a partial response. As we have seen, Wyclif

concedes that the sacramental words uttered by the priest during his performance of the

Eucharist create the body of Christ within the host; he argues that they create "veri goddis

bodi in forme of breed."[57] What Wyclif denies is that the accidents of bread can exist in

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[56] *Cursor Mundi, Part 5*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS o.s. 68 (London: Oxford University Press, 1878), 1484 (Fairfax MS, 26,092-26,094).

[57] John Wyclif, "De Sacramento Altaris," in *The English Works of John Wyclif*, 357.

that same host if their subject has been wholly replaced by *Corpus Christi*. With this in mind, I want to suggest that the poem's final gesture toward orthodoxy – its thematic and linguistic masterstroke – is that the baptismal process through which the pagan judge passes becomes a metaphor for the sacrament of the Eucharist itself, a formulation that allows the poem to strike at the heart of the Wycliffite attack on orthodox doctrine.

The groundwork for this metaphor is laid with the event that precipitates the bulk of the narrative, the discovery of the sarcophagus in the foundation of Saint Paul's. Initially, the poem lavishes a great deal of attention upon the tomb's materiality, upon its "thykke ston thryuandly hewen" (47), its "gargeles... of gray marbre" (48), and the inscrutable "bryȝt golde lettres" (51) with which it is encrusted. When the lid is lifted, however, attention shifts to the body within, and the tomb is largely forgotten. Erkenwald is summoned, and, speaking in his capacity as bishop, he invests the ancient pagan with a kind of half-life, a state between the morbidity of the preserved corpse and the animated vivacity of Erkenwald himself.[58] But in the end, it is only in the moment of the baptism – when Erkenwald laments to God the pagan's lifelessness, speaks the baptismal formula, and baptizes the pagan's face with his tears – that the judge lives, that he joins the bodies politic and ecclesiastic that Erkenwald oversees. It is at this moment too, "as sone as þe soul was sesyd in blisse" (345), that the body disintegrates. Just as in the process of transubstantiation, one subject has replaced the other: the subject of bread is annihilated and replaced with the life-giving body of Christ; the corpse of the heathen is annihilated and replaced with the newly christened and eternally living soul. It is significant, therefore, that the pagan should describe the experience of salvation in terms

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[58] For a more thorough discussion of the corpse's life-in-death status, see William A. Quinn, "The Psychology of *St. Erkenwald*," *Medium Ævum* 53 (1984): 180-193.

reminiscent of the Eucharist and even of the Last Supper itself: once "Hungrie in-wyt helle-hole" (307) and unable to join in the communion of heaven, the newly christened judge now reports, "Ryȝt now to soper my soule is sette at þe table" (338). What remains unchanged through all of this is the physical artifact of the tomb, the sarcophagus that contained the body of the judge and in which his miraculous transformation took place. Covered with inscrutable messages and golden, "roynyshe" (52) letters, the sarcophagus becomes a hollow signifier, the physical vessel that remains after the corpse within has been fundamentally and subjectively altered. Here, remaining behind after the transformation and, indeed, the physical obliteration of its contents, is the accident without its subject, the logical impossibility that Wyclif and his followers sought so fervently to deny.

If the moment of the judge's conversion – the moment of the judge's transubstantiation – is to be read as both an answer to Lollard arguments and an affirmation of the Eucharist itself, the closing four lines of *Saint Erkenwald* stand as a testament to the communal power of that sacrament:

> Þen wos louynge oure Lorde wyt loves vp-halden,
>
> Meche mournynge and myrthe was mellyd to-geder;
>
> Þai passyd forthe in processioun and alle þe pepulle folowid
>
> And alle þe belles in þe burghe beryd at ones. (349-352)

Recent scholarship on the Eucharist has discussed the critical social work that it performed. Sarah Beckwith proposes that as "the medium though which social conflict is often worked out in social rite, ritual and drama," the sacrament of Eucharist "provides a language through which the relationship of self to society is articulated on a

individualized basis." More darkly, David Aers documents the alarmist view held in late medieval England that "any interrogation of the Church's current [orthodox] understanding of sacramental signs dissolves the union of the faithful in the mystical body of Christ, the Church, and consequently the order of the earthly city."[59] As both of these examples suggest, the Eucharist must ultimately be understood not simply as a sacrament that effects the salvation of the person or even of the congregation but "as an essential action within the Church which constantly reproduces the Church" and that, in turn, allows for the existence of an orderly, civil society.[60] In the conversion of the pagan judge, we witness the transformative potential of the sacrament for the individual, but in the conversion of the London citizenry from a "grete prece" (141) of agitated, nearly riotous citizens to the orderly "processioun" moving away from the site of the miracle, we see that potential writ large: body from bread; Christian from pagan; Church from rabble; society from mob.[61] Finally, in the very presence of the miraculous, *Saint Erkenwald* reveals to us the concordant civic body so menaced by the encroachment of Wycliffism. In so doing, the poem also allows us to glimpse, under the tolling bells of London, the potential of eucharistic community and the promise of sacramental orthodoxy fulfilled.

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[59] Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, 41; Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 9. Rubin makes a similar contention about the social function of the sacrament, arguing that "power and aesthetics turned the Eucharist into the battleground where the new vision of Christian society would be won or lost" in *Corpus Christi*, 22.

[60] Pickstock, "Quest for the Eucharist," 51.

[61] Aers (*Sanctifying Signs*, 74) writes that "the late medieval Church had made the reception of the bread and wine, the body and blood, a *supplementary* adjunct to the Eucharist, whose essence was now defined as the act of consecration." Such an argument resonates with *Saint Erkenwald's* image of the citizens of London watching, one can only imagine amazed, the miracle of the judge's own transubstantiation. For another discussion of the poem's final procession, see Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, 63-65.

Right and Truth, Law and Mercy

By focusing on efficacious language in the orthodox sacraments, I have argued that the alliterative *Saint Erkenwald* is a thoroughly anti-Wycliffite work, a poem with an aggressive, even polemical, orthodox agenda. In this capacity the empty sarcophagus and the redeemed judge become the metaphorical embodiment of *accidentia sine subjecto* and operate as a direct refutation of the Wycliffites' most pernicious argument. But the sarcophagus and the preserved pagan judge are also, quite literally, a sarcophagus and a preserved pagan judge; they are two trespassers from the pre-Christian past, suddenly and insistently brought into contact with a decidedly Christian present. Pulled from the earth into the living stream of history, these relics raise questions that transcend the poem's immediate stance *contra* Lollardy and ask us to consider the fraught relationship between the present and the past and, more urgently, between Christianity and its pre-Christian antecedents.[62]

It is no coincidence that the poem's culminating anti-Wycliffite images – the empty sarcophagus and the transubstantiated judge – so conspicuously recall the historical foundations of English Christianity. Indeed, the connections between Lollardy, pre-Christian heathenism, and the spoken word suggested by those images are crucially important to *Saint Erkenwald*'s wider poetic project. In the second half of this chapter I will investigate those connections further, identifying a strategy within *Saint Erkenwald* whereby the poet attempts to assimilate the threatening and novel Wycliffite heresies into the more familiar, typological schema by which medieval Christianity defined itself.

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[62] Chism (*Alliterative Revivals*, p. 41) argues that "the poem spotlights the tremendous desire and fear directed toward the revenant from the pagan past and the historical risk that any genuinely new work must transact." My own argument, predicated as it is on representations of speech and language, is significantly different than hers, though it owes a great debt to the ground she has already broken.

More specifically, I will show how the *Erkenwald*-poet explores these broad cultural and theological issues by considering the efficacy and function of speech. This mode of exploration is immediately evident in the figure of the pagan judge himself, an individual whose unerring verdicts of guilt and innocence ("I remewit neuer fro þe riȝt by reson myn awen / For to dresse a wrange dome, no day of my lyue." [235-236]) and whose spoken self-presentation ("Fyrst to say the þe sothe quo my selfe were..." [197]) provide pre-Christian counterpoints to Bishop Erkenwald's explicitly Christian, sacramental speech acts. The entire poem, I argue, operates within a linguistic register that highlights fundamental connections and disjunctions between the heathen judge and the seventh-century bishop, evoking at the same time theologically loaded concepts of law and truth that not only undergird the medieval debate over righteous heathens but inform medieval Christianity's relationship to its closest relative, Judaism.

Richard Firth Green's recent discussion of the word *truth* in late medieval England provides a point of departure for this analysis. Green argues that "in late fourteenth-century England *trowthe* was, in Raymond Williams's sense of the term, a keyword": more specifically, he establishes that by the fourteenth century *truth*, "had acquired a considerable range of meanings, that some of these meanings were felt to be new and difficult, and that the overlaps between them were complex and potentially ambiguous." Indeed, Green suggests that by the Ricardian period, *truth* had become "the archetypal keyword in English," a profoundly multivalent term that found currency in four separate semantic fields – legal, ethical, theological, and intellectual – and whose meaning was

both complicated and enhanced by these fields' mutual interpenetration.[63] Discussing the

word *truth* in *Piers Plowman* in these very terms, Frank Grady points to the sentence "Ne

wolde neuere trewe god bote trewe treuthe were alloued" as evidence that Langland is

"aware, and ready to exploit ... the word's overlapping senses and the permeability of the

boundaries between them."[64] We might also consider *Book of the Duchess*'s "trewly for

to speke of trouthe" (999) and *Confessio Amantis*'s "Som man, whan he most trewe

appiereth, / Thanne is he forthest fro the trowthe" as moments in fourteenth-century

literature when the semantic possibilities of *truth* are similarly developed.[65] In *Saint

Erkenwald*, however, the word *trouthe* appears only three times and its cognate *trew*

once. More to the point, the *Erkenwald*-poet seems to deny the semantic density of *truth*

that Grady describes in Langland's work and that we find in other late-medieval poetry.

Indeed, in light of works like *Piers Plowman* and *Confessio Amantis* that so

enthusiastically demonstrate the multiplicity that Green and Grady claim for the word,

the most notable feature of *truth* in *Saint Erkenwald* is its semantic stability and

directness: *truth* in *Saint Erkenwald* always signifies theological truth – the truth of the

Word of God.

The word *truth* first occurs in *Saint Erkenwald* when the *Erkenwald*-poet

describes how Saint Augustine "prechyd ... þe pure faythe and plantyd the *trouthe* / And

conuertyd alle þe communnates to Cristendame newe" (13-14). Here, the word clearly

operates in the theological sense: the "trouthe" that Augustine plants is the truth of

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[63] Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 3-9.

[64] Frank Grady, *Representing Righteous Heathens in Later Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 31; William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The C Version*, eds. George Russell and George Kane (London: Athlone Press, 1997), 487 (C.14.212).

[65] Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 1:132 (1.1198-1199).

Christianity, the truth of the gospels. The word next appears when the as yet unbaptized

heathen judge explains to Erkenwald how his body was preserved:

"Nay bisshop," quoþ þat body, "enbawmyd wos I neuer

Ne no monnes counselle my clothe has kepyd vnwemmyd

Bot þe riche kynge of reson þat riȝt euer alowes

And loues al þe lawes lely þat longen to *trouthe*." (265-268)[66]

Here, *trouthe* is more ambiguously associated with ideas of right and law. Insofar as it is

still linked with God's Word and His capacity for Christian mercy, however, *trouthe* in

this passage is still grounded in the theological semantic field, still associated with the

trouthe planted by Augustine. The theological sense of the word is further developed

when the judge, now saved by Erkenwald's baptismal tears, tells the bishop that his spirit

has entered "into þe cenacle solemply þer soupen alle *trew*" (336). Particularly when we

consider the baptismal and eucharistic scene that we have just witnessed – as well as the

de facto Corpus Christi procession that follows it – those "trew" to which the judge

refers are clearly the christened faithful, the true followers of Christ.[67] In fact, only when

Bishop Erkenwald asks the corpse to speak and to "councele [conceal] no *trouthe*" (184)

about his identity and his past does the word function primarily in an ethical rather than a

strictly theological sense; but even in this instance, where *trouthe* seems to pertain to

human veracity rather than to divine truth (e.g. "tell the truth!"), the word carries

theological overtones. For only in the context of his larger, Christian invocation does the

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[66] "No Bishop," said that body, "I was never embalmed, nor has any man's counsel kept my clothes unblemished except for the rich king of reason that ever allows reason and loves all the laws that belong wholly to the truth."

[67] See *MED*'s definition of "the true" as "the faithful" (s.v. "treu" adj., 6(c)).

Bishop ask the corpse to be truthful: – "Be þou bone to His bode, I bydde in His behalue. / As He was bende on a beme quen He His blode schedde, ... " (181-182).[68]

By arguing that *truth* carries a relatively limited range of meaning in *Saint Erkenwald*, I contend that the semantic consistency of the word is in keeping with the unflagging orthodoxy of the work itself and with its profound investment in salvation. The "trouthe" planted by St. Augustine allows for the process of conversion we see in the poem's opening lines; the unconcealed "trouthe" of the judge's confession and God's own love of "trouthe" lay the foundations for the redemption of the virtuous pagan. Ultimately, the poem asserts that the "trew" are the only souls for whom the great feast of heaven is available (340). In John 14:6, Christ tells Thomas, "*ego sum via et veritas et vita nemo venit ad Patrem nisi per me*" [I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me]. It is this biblical truth, this divine and transcendent truth, that forms the core of *Saint Erkenwald*'s rigid eschatology. And it is to this truth that the poem demands the judge submit. Whereas *Piers Plowman*, *Book of the Duchess*, and *Confessio Amantis* locate in the concept of *truth* questions that demand to be answered; *Saint Erkenwald* understands *truth* as the divine answer to all questions.

But crucially, *Saint Erkenwald* does still pose a question. It is the same question that lies at the heart of the righteous heathen problem itself, one articulated by the judge himself:

"Maȝty maker of men, thi myghtes are grete –

How myȝt þi mercy to me amounte any tyme?

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[68] The bishop's order that the reanimated heathen "councele no trouthe" also resonates with contemporary treatises on confession which advise the penitent, as Chaucer's Parson says, that "Al moot be seyd, and no thing excused ne hyd ne forwrapped, and noght avaunte thee of thy goode werkes" (X 319).

> Nas I a paynym vnpreste þat neuer thi plite knewe,
>
> Ne þe mesure of þi mercy ne þi mecul vertue,
>
> Bot ay a freke faitheles þat faylid þi laghes
>
> Þat euer þou Lord wos louyd in? – Allas þe harde stoundes!" (283-288)[69]

Initially, the complaint that the judge registers to God is explicitly – and wrenchingly – personal: How might Your mercy be made sufficient for me? His indignation at being left in the "helle-hole" (291) of limbo despite his evident righteousness is couched in terms that emphasize both God's absolute authority to grant mercy and his own inability, as a virtuous, pre-Christian pagan, to receive it. But the judge soon moves beyond these strictly personal questions and widens his rhetorical focus from "I" to "we."[70] Noting that he was damned because "Adam oure alder ... ete of þat appulle / Þat mony a plyʒtles pepul has poysned for euer" (294-295), the heathen asks,

> Quat wan we wyt oure wele-dede þat wroghtyn ay riʒt,
>
> Quen we are dampnyd dulfully into þe depe lake
>
> And exilid fro þat soper so, þat solempne fest
>
> Þer richely hit arne refetyd þat after right hungride? (301-304)[71]

Speaking now for all those unsaved souls who lived before "Crist suffride on crosse and Cristendome stablyde" (2), the judge proffers his central question: why wasn't the "wele-dede þat wroghtyn ay riʒt" sufficient to engender the mercy of God? Because, as Grady

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[69] "Mighty maker of men, your mercies are great. How might your mercy be made sufficient for me at any time – I, an unready pagan, that never knew your plight nor the measure of your mercy nor your powerful virtue, but always a faithless man that failed to worship you in the way that you were meant to be worshipped? Alas the hard times!"

[70] See Grady, *Representing Righteous Heathens*, 37.

[71] "What did we win with our good deeds, that always worked for right, when were are dolefully damned into the deep lake and exiled from that supper, that solemn feast where those that hungered for right are richly rewarded."

notes, the judge "suggests the possibility of a whole cohort left behind at the Harrowing," he questions the nature of salvation and the inherent justice of God's authority.[72]

Ri3t [*right*] is an important term here, both in the passage quoted above and in *Saint Erkenwald* as a whole. In fact, the word *right* or one of its cognates is used no fewer than thirteen times over the course of the poem, twelve times by the judge and once by Bishop Erkenwald.[73] These frequent appearances become even more startling when we consider that all of them fall within only 100 lines – approximately one third of the poem. And if such a concentration alone does not make *right* a keyword in the sense suggested by Green and Williams, that concentration nonetheless renders *right* "a strong, difficult and persuasive word" that that the *Erkenwald*-poet wishes to interrogate. Moreover, within the poem itself, the word *right* acquires "a considerable range of meanings" that are "complex and potentially ambiguous."[74] Just as the *Erkenwald*-poet consciously underdevelops the semantic potential of *truth* in order to emphasize the poem's absolutist theology, he similarly overdevelops the word *right* and to the same ends. *Right* rather than *truth* is *Saint Erkenwald*'s keyword. By probing the foundations of the word *right*, the poem articulates the questions that its absolutist understanding of *truth* answers.

The nine primary meanings that the MED delineates for the *right* can be linked heuristically to the four categories that Green identifies in his analysis of *truth*: legal,

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[72] Grady, *Representing Righteous Heathens*, 37.

[73] See lines 232, 235, 241, 245 (ry3twis), 256, 267, 269, 271, 272, 275, 301, 304, and 332. Of these thirteen appearances, only one deviates from the range of meanings I will suggest in the following paragraph, the judge's report that "Ry3t now to soper my soule is sette at þe table" (332). Here, the word functions as an intensifier, as described by the MED (s.v. "right" adj. 8).

[74] Green, *A Crisis of Truth*, 8.

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ethical, intellectual, and theological.[75] The largest of these semantic groups is the legal

category, in which *right* signifies a rule of conduct or law (MED, def. 3)*.* Chaucer's *Tale*

of Melibee illustrates this sense when Prudence counsels Melibee to "venge you after the

order of right; that is to seyn, by the lawe and noght by excesse ne by outrage" (VII

1529). In the legal sense, *right* can also be a judgment or sentence (4), a duty or

obligation (7), or a legal claim or entitlement (5 and 6); Chaucer's monk, for example,

relates how Darius occupied the throne of Belshazzar even though he "hadde neither right

ne lawe" (VII 2238). In the second semantic category – the ethical – *right* refers to that

which is morally right (1). It also signifies the abstract notions of justice and equity (2)

and, thus, overlaps somewhat with its legal uses. Chaucer's judge Apius, presiding over

a fraudulent case to determine the paternity of Virginius's daughter, darkly exploits this

ambiguity when he tells Virginius, "Thou shalt have al right, and no wrong heere" (VI

174). The third category of meaning falls within what Green would call the intellectual

semantic field (8).   In *Cleanness*, Balthazar promises Daniel great reward if he "redes ...

by ryȝt" – if he reads correctly – the words written by a monstrous hand.[76]

The fourth category of meaning – the theological sense of the word – is the

category that the MED develops least, a fact that becomes important when we consider

the uses of the word in *Saint Erkenwald*. In the theological category, the MED notes only

that *right* is an orthographic variant of the modern word *rite*: "er ye have youre right of

hooly chirche, / Ye may repente of wedded mannes lyf, / In which ye seyn ther is no wo

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[75] I develop these nine senses from MED s.v. "right" n., 1-8, 10, thus excluding place names, location indicators (right as opposed to left), and other miscellaneous uses. I focus here on the word as a noun, but the adjectival form of the word adheres to roughly the same senses. Within the text, I have cited parenthetically the applicable MED entry by number.

[76] *Cleanness,* in Andrew and Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (l.1633)*.*

ne stryf" (IV1662-64). But even where the overt meaning of the *right* falls into the legal, ethical, or intellectual semantic categories, the word often suggests a broader theological meaning. In *Pearl*, for example, the ghostly maiden tells the Dreamer, "al is trawþe þat He [God] con dresse / And He may do noþynk bot ryȝt," a pairing of terms that suggests both right and truth to be firmly within God's purview.[77] Similar theological overtones are at play in *Cursor Mundi*, in which God strives to "Brynge mon into state of riȝt."[78] Here, a "state of *riȝt*" seems to refer to both a state of high human morality and a divinely imparted state of grace, a near synonym for what *Saint Erkenwald* signifies with "trew." In these passages, *right*, to be sure, may not function as a denotative synonym for theological *truth*, but the theological connotations of the word, I argue, simmer beneath its overt legal, ethical, and intellectual meanings. Both as a word and as a concept, *right* implies and even invokes, but is not equal to, theological truth. In this respect, right has a markedly different relationship to the divine than does truth. We might say that in *Saint Erkenwald*, God's truth is necessarily and unimpeachably right, but right – legally, ethically, and intellectually – is not always God's truth.

In its attempt to query the relationship between Christianity and its pre-Christian forbears, *Saint Erkenwald* continues its thematic exploration of *right* and *truth* by engaging both concepts on a semantic level. As I have demonstrated, the poem quickly establishes *truth* as a theological absolute, a concept aligned strongly with both

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[77] "Treuthe, Reste, and Pes," in *Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems*, ed. J. Kail, EETS o.s. 124 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1904), 9 (ll. 9-10); *Pearl,* in Andrew and Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (ll.495-96).

[78] *Cursor Mundi, Part 1*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS o.s. 57 (London: Oxford University Press, 1874), 99 (Ms. Trinity 1586).

Augustine and Erkenwald and analogous to the Word of God itself. *Saint Erkenwald*

aligns *right*, however, with the reanimated heathen thereby rendering it a far more fraught

concept within the poem. The word first appears in the poem when the heathen provides

an account of his judicial career:

> Þe folke was felonse and fals and frowarde to reule,
>
> I hent harmes ful ofte to holde hom to *riȝt*.
>
> Bot for wothe ne wele ne wrathe ne drede
>
> Ne for maystrie ne for mede ne for no monnes aghe,
>
> I remewit neuer fro þe *riȝt* by reson myn awen
>
> For to dresse a wrange dome, no day of my lyue.
>
> Declynet neuer my consciens for couetise on erthe,
>
> In no gynful iugement no iapes to make
>
> Were a renke neuer so riche for reuerens sake.
>
> Ne for no monnes manas ne meschefe ne routhe
>
> Non gete me fro þe heghe gate to glent out of *riȝt*,
>
> Als ferforthe as my faithe confourmyd my hert. (231-242)[79]

All three of these uses of *right* adhere to what I have previously described as the legal

sense of the word, a reasonable sense for the judge to invoke as he has built his reputation

on his ability to adhere to the dictates of "reson" and to a specific legal code. Thus, we

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[79] "The folk were felonious and false and froward; I often faced harm to hold them to the right. But for neither risk of harm nor wealth nor dread, nor for mastery nor for reward nor for any man's awe, would I ever stray from the right of my own reason. Nor did I ever pronounce a wrong judgment any day of my life. I never deviated from my conscience for worldly gain; I never made judgments to gain wealth, no matter how rich or revered a man was. Nor did I fail to do the law for any man's menace or mischief or sorrow. Always my heart conformed to my faith."

can understand *riȝt* in this passage to signify *law*, the law to which the judge attempts to

hold his people and from which he never deviates.

The judge's speech also shows the *Erkenwald*-poet developing the ethical

dimension of *right*. Not only does the heathen adhere to and enforce the law, he also

holds himself and his community to an ethical and morally correct standard. I suggest, in

fact, that the judge conflates the ethical and legal senses of *right* in these lines. For him

the law is a moral certainty, an ethically derived code for managing a "felonse and fals

and frowarde" people. Indeed, it is because of his unswerving adherence to that legal and

moral certainty – because the judge was "ryȝtwis and reken and redy of þe laghe" (245)

and "rewardid euer riȝt" (256) – that the citizens of New Troy bury him as a king after

his death.

When the judge mentions that faith always "confourmyd [his] hert" (242) to

adhere to *right*, he adds theological connotations to the legal and ethical semantic fields

that dominate in his speech. As his dialogue with bishop Erkenwald continues, the judge

evokes such theological overtones more emphatically. For example, when Erkenwald

asks if he was embalmed, the judge replies, "enbawmyd wos I neuer / Ne no monnes

counselle my clothe has kepyd vnwemmyd / Bot þe riche kynge of reson þat riȝt euer

alowes / And loues al þe lawes lely þat longen to trouthe" (265-268). This explanation,

which implies that human laws are associated with ["longen to"] God's truth, suggests a

link between right and God, between human law and divine truth. The judge reinforces

that link by explaining that God granted his miraculous preservation for his adherence to

right: "if renkes for riȝt þus me arayed has / He has lant me to last þat loues ryȝt best"

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(271-272). In both passages the judge suggests that his legal righteousness equates not

only to a moral or ethical right but also to a fulfillment of divine truth, that the laws he

enforced in his lifetime were sanctioned by – even predicated upon – the very will of

God. Just as the poet's use of *right* conflated the legal and ethical sense, the judge's use

of the word in these passages conflates legal right with theological truth. In the judge's

own formulations, *right* is *law* is *morality* is *truth*. Even Bishop Erkenwald himself

seems momentarily to entertain this idea; when he finally commands the judge to speak

of his soul – "sayes þou of þi saule" (273) – he uses the word *right* for the first and only

time, apparently mindful of its troubling ambiguity and its full semantic multiplicity:

> "Quere is ho [your soul] stablid and stadde if þou so streȝt wroghtes?
>
> He þat rewardes vche a renke as he has *riȝt* seruyd
>
> Myȝt euel forgo the to gyfe of His grace summe brawnche,
>
> For as He says in His sothe psalmyde writtes:
>
> 'Þe skilfulle and þe vnskathely skelton ay to me.'" (274-278)[80]

As he interrogates the reanimated corpse, Erkenwald invokes at once the full range of

meanings that the poem accords to *right*. In this context, for a "renke" to serve right

seems to indicate that he serves the law, that he follows the moral and ethical dictates of

his own conscience, and (particularly given Erkenwald's apparent assumption of the

heathen's salvation) that he serves truth itself. Indeed, in asking the pagan judge about

the state of his soul, Erkenwald simultaneously questions the very meanings of right that

he has just posited. Could *right* really mean all that it seems to mean? Is the earthly

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[80] "Where is your soul placed and established if you worked so straight? He that rewards each man as he
has served right must not withhold the gift of a certain extension his grace, for as He writes in His true
psalms: 'the moderate and the harmless come always to me.'"

pursuit of law and morality tantamount to the pursuit of divine truth? Can it – does it –

merit the same rewards?

The answer, resoundingly, is "no": in the confines of the poem's soteriological

straitjacket – where salvation must be granted by the institutional church and even the

most virtuous of heathens molder "dulfully [in] þe depe lake" – law is not truth. But the

semantic dilation of the word *right* itself – the implication that right is truth on both a

linguistic and conceptual level – makes logical the incredulity of the judge at being left in

limbo even though he "after right hungride" (304) throughout his life. The very

possibility that right could replace truth as a means of salvation underscores the threat

that the righteous heathen poses to Erkenwald's ecclesiastical authority, a threat that, in

Chism's words, "[afflicts] the bishop with an ambiguous torment" and causes him

"misgivings about the necessity of his office."[81] However, the poem demonstrates – first

by expanding the semantic possibilities of the word and then by circumscribing them –

that *right* is a fluid and human construct, a watery reflection of divinely ordained *truth*.

This is not to say that right is without its own palpable rewards: just as England's pre-

Christian inhabitants grant their "ryȝtwis" judge a scepter and inter him as a king, so too

does God – "He... þat loues ryȝt best" (272) – preserve his physical body. But right lacks

the absolute authority that characterizes truth in the poem. Unlike the "trouthe" planted

by Augustine, right alone cannot confer salvation. Right proves to be a kind of half-

measure, perhaps even a half-truth; it is capable of leading to the judge's corporeal

preservation but not to spiritual salvation, capable of providing a legal and even moral

structure for a pre-Christian English society but not the transformative sacramental

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[81] Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, 61-62.

community that we see in the poem's closing lines. Significantly, when the heathen judge finally ascends to heaven and sups with the "trew," he never once uses the word *right* to describe his soul or his actions.[82] In moving from damned to saved – from limbo to paradise – the newly minted Christian learns that the authority of the church and the sacraments themselves, those very things that have precipitated his belated salvation, are predicated not on right, not on law, not even on justice, but on a divine and explicitly Christian truth.

I belabor the semantic implications of *right* and *truth* in *Saint Erkenwald* because the opposition that the poem presents between the two terms is indicative of the more overt collisions it dramatizes between judge and bishop and between England's pre-Christian past and Christian present. Indeed, one of the poem's most notable stylistic features is the careful series of parallels that it develops between Erkenwald and the heathen judge, parallels that extend in turn to Erkenwald's London and the judge's New Troy. When we first encounter Erkenwald in the poem, he is not only the bishop of Augustine's "art" but the teacher of "the laghe" in "London toun" (34), a position adumbrated by the heathen's career as judge of New Troy. Similarly, both figures are expected to maintain civic order within their communities: the judge presides with perfect jurisprudence over a "felonse and fals and frowarde" populace while Erkenwald returns from a progress in Essex to quiet the "troubulle in þe pepul" precipitated by the heathen's exhumation. These thematic correspondences between the two men also find more concrete expression: the judge's "rialle wedes" (77) hemmed with "glisnande gold" (78) and "mony a precious

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[82] The judge does use the word *ryȝt* in passing, but it is only as an intensifier: "ryȝt now to soper my soule is sette at þe table" (332).

perle" (79) are quietly doubled as Erkenwald walks to the tomb "riche reuestid" (139) in splendid clerical finery; the "semely septure" (84) that the judge holds in his coffin is repeated in Erkenwald's procession of "maȝti men and macers" (143). This striking doubling extends even beyond the confines of the poem. The fictional judge's "ferly faire toumbe" (45), whose discovery in the foundations of the city's "New Werke" precipitates the actions of the poem, will ultimately find its successor in St. Erkenwald's own shrine, itself located in a place of architectural and spiritual focus in St. Paul's Cathedral. [83] In fact, many critics believe that the increased veneration of that shrine in the late fourteenth century provided the occasion for the poem's composition.[84]

As *Saint Erkenwald* sets up these overt, even ham-handed, parallels, it also frustrates them at critical moments. Given the questions of linguistic efficacy that the poem raises, many of those critical moments, not surprisingly, involve the speech acts of the two men. We have already examined, in the context of the poem's immediate response to the Lollard threat, the unquestionable efficacy of Erkenwald's spoken utterances. By intoning a command "in His [God's] behalue" (181), Erkenwald reinvests the preserved heathen with life and compels him to reveal his history; by uttering the divinely sanctioned baptismal formula "and not one grue lenger" (319), the bishop effects not only the salvation of reanimated judge but also a miracle tantamount to that of transubstantiation. Even the Holy Ghost's speedy response to Erkenwald's request for a vision allowing him to "kenne / Þe mysterie of þis meruaile þat men opon wondres" (124-25) may be seen as evidence that the bishop's speech is nothing if not productive,

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[83] The shrine was located not in the physical foundations of the Cathedral but amidst the spitirual foundations – immediately behind the high altar itself. See Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, 49.

[84] A representative argument is Peterson, "Introduction," *Saint Erkenwald*, 11.

despite being uttered outside of an explicitly sacramental context. Such powerful performative speech acts reflect Erkenwald's position as a representative of the orthodox church. The authority of his words is predicated upon the authority of the Word of God and the Christian faith itself; the efficacy of his speech is a linguistic manifestation of his relationship to truth.

By comparison, the speech acts of the pagan judge, a figure whose affinities lie with right rather than truth, are marked not by their inherent performativity but by their inability to effect the kinds of change brought about by Bishop Erkenwald. For example, when we compare the heathen judge's attempts to bring about civic order to the orderly *Corpus Christi* tableau that concludes the poem, we can see how impotent his utterances really were. In spite of a long career in which he was never known to "dresse a wrange dome" (236), the righteous heathen was unable to control his "felonse and false and frowarde" (231) subjects. According to his own testimony, the citizens of New Troy were largely unaffected by his unfailingly right "domes," responding to them with "mede" (234), "meschefe" (240) and "manas [menace, threat]" (240).[85] Unlike Bishop Erkenwald, who creates civic order in London with a single prayer, the Judge cannot bring about such an ideal society in his own time, even over the course of "more þen fourty wynter[s]" (230) of justly executed verdicts. The judge's final plea for salvation similarly illustrates such verbal inefficacy. Despite his well-founded and emotionally persuasive complaint, the heathen cannot speak himself into heaven. Bishop Erkenwald, however, delivers the judge from limbo with a baptismal speech act uttered in the conditional, a performative that is not even intended to be performative. Such

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[85] Definitions from Peterson, glossary to *Saint Erkenwald*, p. 129.

comparisons reinforce the fact that within *Saint Erkenwald,* the efficacy of spoken language – the ability to utter a successful performative – is defined by the speaker's relationship to the Church, by submission to Christian truth rather than adherence to right and law.

It is, then, their relative relationships to *right* and *truth* that separate the judge's unproductive speech acts from the bishop's efficacious ones. But those speech acts in themselves are also emblematic of a larger division within the poem, one that is similarly suggested by the poem's discourse of right and truth – the division between Old Law and New Law, between Mosaic justice and Christian mercy. This point has not gone unrecognized by the poem's earlier readers. Arnold Davidson posits that *Saint Erkenwald* presents competing visions of "God's power and God's justice" and of "God's mercy, which is proved most by Christ's crucifixion."[86] Other critics aligned the two central figures in the poem still more absolutely with Old and New Law, reading the heathen primarily "as a representative of the Old Law" and Bishop Erkenwald "as a stand-in for Christ, sharing in Christ's unique priesthood and continuing Christ's priestly ministry in linear time."[87] Although William Kamowski has recently claimed that "the attempt to identify one or another virtue of character with either the Old or New Law distracts from the more intricate relationship the poem illustrates between justice and mercy," the tangible means by which the *Erkenwald*-poet connects right to the pagan judge and truth to Bishop Erkenwald, particularly through the relative efficacy of their

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[86] Arnold Davidson, "Mystery, Miracle, and Meaning in *Saint Erkenwald*," *Papers in Language and Literature* 16 (1980): 44.

[87] Lester Faigley, "Typology and Justice in *Saint Erkenwald*," *American Benedictine Review* 29 (1978): 386. Also representative of this critical approach is John Longo, "The Vision of History in *St. Erkenwald*," *In Geardagum: Essays on Old and Middle English Language and Literature* 8 (1987): 35-51.

respective speech acts, suggests that such a claim is not altogether justified.[88] *Saint Erkenwald* insists upon the heathen's identity as a man of law, an archetypal figure whose strict adherence to justice consistently overrules his sense of mercy, even "to [his] fader, þaghe felle hym be hongyt"(244) – even if justice meant that his own father would be hanged. The poem goes to equal lengths to show Erkenwald, weeping with pity for the judge's tortured soul, as a figure of mercy whose inadvertent baptism both fulfills and supersedes the baptismal precepts to which the judge is subject.

The intricacy that Kamowski locates in the poem's treatment of right and truth resides not in the respective identification of the characters with Old and New Law but in the vexed fate of the judge, in his thousand years of suffering and his belated salvation. On the one hand, the heathen is subject to the same strict adherence to rote legal dogma that he himself displayed in New Troy as a judge of the Old Mosaic Law; his fate, even in the time of Christ, is clearly predicated on a heightened idea of justice rather than mercy. Erkenwald, too, must submit to the legalistic exigencies of the judge's damnation, and the unflagging necessity of his Christian baptism is predicated on a hard-line orthodoxy that, in its lack of Christian mercy, is as suggestive of an Old Testament ethos as it is of a New Testament one. On the other hand, the fate of the judge is not just; rather, it seems to transcend any reasonable ideal of human justice. In this respect, the judge's fate is exemplary of the New Law. Indeed, the mercy of the Christian God – which, as the poem reminds us, is most fully evidenced in the suffering of Christ on the cross – must be understood apart from both justice and right. As *un*just as it might seem to those assembled in wonder before the sarcophagus – as *un*just as it seems to the tearful

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[88] Kamowski, "Inadvertant Baptism," 9.

Bishop Erkenwald himself – the mercy of the Christian God is not subject to justice. It

functions beyond the justice and morality that informs human law.

I have used the term *Mosaic* to describe the heathen's Old Law, thus suggesting

that the heathen judge is, in some sense, a Jew. *Saint Erkenwald* is emphatically vague

about England's pre-Christian faith, alluding to "Þe synagoge of þe Sonne" (21) in the

same polytheistic breath with which it refers to "appolyn" (19), "Mahon" (20), "Jubiter

and Jono" (22), and even "Sathanas" (24); the poem is so self-evidently invested in the

opposition of right and truth as Old and New Law respectively, however, that it all but

forces us to consider the relationship between Christianity and its most immediate

antecedent. Indeed those references to "appolyn" and "Sathanas" that would seem to

discourage us from identifying the judge as a Jew could also serve to suggest it. R. I.

Moore discusses the belief, common in medieval Christian thought, that "a special

association [existed] between the Devil and the Jews" and have detailed the widespread

belief that Jews were skilled in sorcery and other pagan rites.[89] Similarly, both Christine

Chism and Jeremy Cohen note that many medieval Christians believed there to be an

affinity between Jews and Muslims "in matters of law and ideology," a belief that might

explain the reference to "Mahoun" in *Saint Erkenwald*'s account of Augustine's

conversions.[90] Finally, simply by rededicating "Þe synagoge of þe Sonne ... to oure

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[89] R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 35.

[90] See Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*,172-175; quotation from Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 219-220. Connections between Jews and Muslims are also detailed in Frederick M. Schweitzer, "Medieval Perceptions of Jews and Judaism," *Jewish-Christian Encounters over the Centuries: Symbiosis, Prejudice, Holocaust, Dialogue*, ed. Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 136. Contemporary evidence for such a connection can be found in the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, in which a group of Jews frequently invoke "almyghty Machomet" (l. 149) as they desecrate the sacrament. See *The Play of the Sacrament* in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. Norman Davis, EETS s.s. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 62.

Lady" (21) and enacting a eucharistic transformation of heathen judge into saved

Christian, the poem necessarily invokes the theory of supersession that defined for

medieval Christians the position of Judaism vis-à-vis Christianity. Thus, in addition to its

baptismal and eucharistic concerns, *Saint Erkenwald* also displays a distinctively

typological strain of thought, a conviction that "persons, events or institutions of the past

prefigure and connect with persons, events or institutions of a later period, the second

encompassing or fulfilling the first."[91] In fact, the poem presents us with countless (and

sometimes anachronistic) layers of typology: Apollo to Adam to "Mahon" to Christ;

Temple to Synagogue to Church; Pagan to Jew to Lollard to Christian; Brutus to Hengist

to Gregory to Augustine; Bretons to Saxons to New Trojans to Londoners; pagan judge to

Christian bishop. In these typological crenellations of half-imagined history, *Saint*

Erkenwald finds some of its most thematically fertile ground.

Recent scholarship on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the

Middle Ages has much to tell us about the pagan judge in *Saint Erkenwald* and his

relationship to the Christian tradition that he confronts. This is particularly true of critical

considerations of Augustine of Hippo's doctrine of Jewish witness, a doctrine that was

still current in the fourteenth century and that remained important to Christian identity

well beyond the Middle Ages. Augustine's doctrine was a key feature in the

development of medieval and early modern anti-Judaism:

> Augustine argued that God preserved them [the Jews] for the sake of the
>
> Church, so that in adhering to the Old Testament they might witness the
>
> truth of and historical basis for christological prophesy, and so that they

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[91] Faigley, "Typology and Justice," 384.

might ultimately accept the implications of this prophesy by converting to

Christianity at the end of days .... The dispersion and derision of the Jews,

if insured by the regnant Church, would both alleviate the problem of the

Jewish encroachments upon Christianity and enhance the value of their

survival – by emphasizing the deplorable wretchedness of their error.[92]

In many respects, the purpose that Augustine prescribes for the Jews is analogous to the

purpose that *Saint Erkenwald* prescribes for the reanimated judge. Consigned by God to

limbo and, as Peter the Venerable suggests, "preserved in a life worse than death," the

pagan judge has seen the Harrowing of Hell and the promise of humankind's redemption.
[93] He recalls with vivid detail "þe blode of [Christ's] body vpon þe blo rode" (290), and

he relates to those still living the unending hunger of damnation. Brought forth from the

past and set among the living, the ancient judge stands witness to the miracles of Christ's

sacrifice and the truth of Christian doctrine. To the Christians gathered nervously at the

mouth of the tomb, he also reifies the urgency and necessity of their own faith: his life-in-

death suffering becomes a testament to his adherence to the Old Law; his eventual

salvation speaks of his acceptance of the New. Cohen might argue that the judge

embodies "Christianity's claim to validity," a validity that "hinged on the cessation of the

ceremonial laws of Moses and their replacement by – or more precisely, their symbolic

fulfillment in – the provisions of the New Testament."[94] Whatever the presumed identity

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[92] Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 20. Cohen expands his arguments regarding both Augustine's doctrine of witness and the larger issue of Judaism in medieval Europe in *Living Letters of the Law*, 23-65.

[93] Quoted in Schweitzer, "Medieval Perceptions of Jews and Judaism," 137. Peter obviously writes these words about Jews rather than pagans; they are, nonetheless, alarmingly appropriate to the experience of *Saint Erkenwald*'s judge.

[94] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 378.

of his shadowy "paynym" faith, the reanimated judge is, by the standards of Augustinian witness, a virtual Jew.[95]

    Saint Erkenwald is not alone among Middle English alliterative verse in interrogating the doctrine of Jewish witness. Prophetic Jews feature as guardians of Jerusalem in *The Wars of Alexander*, and Langland's *Piers Plowman* shows Jews functioning as both precursors of Christianity and living testaments to its truth.[96] Within the poems of the so-called Alliterative Revival, however, questions of Jewish witness are most forcefully considered in the *Siege of Jerusalem*, a work that considers the fraught relationship between Christianity and Judaism through the manifestly brutal lens of Titus and Vespasian's first-century assault on the city. Just as the pagan judge stands witness to the truth of Christian doctrine in *Saint Erkenwald*, so too do the citizens of Jerusalem in *Siege* stand witness to the destruction that Christ foretold in the Gospel of Luke:

> *Quia venient dies in te: et circumdabunt te inimici tui vallo, et*
>
> *circumdabunt te: et coangustabunt te undique ad terram prosternent te: et*
>
> *filios tuos, qui in te sunt, et non relinquent in te lapidem super lapidem: eo*
>
> *quod non cognoveris tempus visitationis tuae* [For the days shall come
>
> upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass
>
> thee round, and straiten thee on every side, and beat thee flat to the
>
> ground, and thy children who are in thee: and they shall not leave in thee a

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[95] The phrase "virtual Jew" is from Sylvia Tomasch, "Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew," in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: St. Martins, 2000), 243-260. Tomasch refers to the virtual Jew as a concept that "does not refer to any actual Jew, nor present an acurate description of one, nor even a faulty fiction of one; instead it 'surrounds' Jews with a 'reality' that displaces and supplants their actuality. In fact ... rather than being surprised at having to explain the continuation of English reference to Jews after the Expulsion, we might better acknowledge that Jewish absence is likely the best precondition for virtual presence." (p. 254).

[96] See Passus 7 of *Wars of Alexander*, 49-58; Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 568-70 (B.15.582-613).

stone upon a stone: because thou hast not known the time of thy

visitation].[97]

It is this very Christological prophesy that the poem so energetically and so horrifically

enacts, revealing its terrible ramifications, both for the city ("no ston in the stede

stondande alofte, / Morter ne mude-walle bot alle to mulle fallen") and all the more so for

its inhabitants ("Myght no man stande on the stret for stynke of ded corses. / The peple in

the pavymeny was pité to byholde / That were enfamyned and defeted whan hem fode

wanted").[98] As Elisa Narin van Court aptly notes, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, among other

late medieval texts, draws upon an Augustinian "theological formula in which the Jews

are accorded a role in Christendom: alive, but in servitude; alive, but socially and

economically degraded; alive, but as symbols of Christ's Passion."[99]

If the doctrine of Jewish witness suggests parallels between *Saint Erkenwald*'s

pagan judge and the typologically imagined Jew of the Christian Middle Ages, the

emphasis that the poem itself places on Erkenwald's successful performative speech acts

and the Judge's unsuccessful ones both confirms and extends these parallels.[100] We have

seen how Erkenwald's highly efficacious speech links the bishop to an explicitly

Christian ideal of truth and to the institutional Church itself. As a pre-Christian "lede of

þe laghe" (200), the judge is similarly linked to a cultural tradition that understood Jews

to be "the living letters of biblical law," repositories of the foundational Mosaic precepts

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[97] Luke 19:43-44.

[98] *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. Michael Livingston (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), 82 and 80-81 (ll.1289-90, 1246-48).

[99] Elisa Narin van Court, "*The Siege of Jerusalem* and Augustinian Historians: Writing about Jews in Fourteenth-Century England," *Chaucer Review* 29 (1995): 232.

[100] Kathleen Biddick uses the phrase "typological imaginary" in order "to indicate those bundles of fantasies that bind Christian-ness to supersessionary notions." See Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 6.

that Christ's New Law both fulfilled and superseded.[101] Like the pagan judge, "the Jews preserve the literal sense, they represent it, and they actually embody it – as book bearers, librarians, living signposts, and desks, who validate a Christological interpretation of the Old Testament."[102] Unwavering in his adherence to "þe riȝt" and "Enioynyd in gentil lawe" (216), the reanimated heathen is himself the Old Law reanimated, both a manifestation of it and a slave to its "literal sense." And though the invocations of Bishop Erkenwald allow him to speak, the judge is finally identified with the inscribed letter rather than the spoken word, an identity that is underscored by the inefficacious nature of his spoken utterances.

The connection between the pagan judge and the written word returns us once again to the image of the sarcophagus, specifically to the "bryht golde lettres" (51) that embellish its border. Wolfgang Seiferth notes that Jews in the Middle Ages were recognized for "their knowledge of languages," and in the minds of many medieval Christians, the continued adherence to the precepts of Mosaic law that Jews exhibited increasingly bound them to the written word.[103] Typical of such thought was Abrogard of Lyon, a ninth-century bishop who excoriated the Jews for their supposed belief "that the letters of their alphabet exist eternally and that ... the law of Moses was written many eons before the world came into being."[104] The close association of Jews and the written word is also suggested in alliterative poems contemporary with *Saint Erkenwald*. In the

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[101] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 3. The quotation is Cohen's paraphrase of prominent theologian Bernard of Clairvaux.

[102] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 59.

[103] Wolfgang Seiferth, *Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages: Two Symbols in Art and Literature*, trans. Lee Chadeanye and Paul Gottwald (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1970), 46.

[104] Abrogard of Lyons, *De Iudaicis Superstitionibus et Erroribus*, quoted in Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 129.

Wars of Alexander, for example, the prophesies of the Jews are tied directly to their

written texts.

> And Iaudus of Ierusalem, þe Iewis [fadir],
>
> Bringis out a brade buke & to þe berne reches,
>
> Was plant full of prophasys playnely all ouire,
>
> Of þe doctrine of Daniell & of his dere sawis.
>
> Þe lord lokis on [a lefe] & [i]n a l[yne] fyndis
>
> How þe gomes out of Grece suld with þaire grete miȝtis
>
> Þe pupill out of Persye purely distroy;
>
> And þat he hopis sall be he, & hertly he ioyes.[105]

In the context of the poem, the prophesy itself – both in its content and its accuracy – is

unsurprising; such prophesies are ubiquitous in *Wars* and help to propel Alexander's

relentless march East. But the prophesy of the Jews is unique in that it is written in a

"broad book," not simply spoken by a prophetic figure. Even in the vast and

heterogeneously populated world of the *Wars of Alexander*, Jews are marked by their

adherence to the written word.

A far more threatening contemporary perspective on Jewish language can be seen

in *Mandeville's Travels*, a text in wide circulation throughout the late Middle Ages. In a

rather startling exception to his generally tolerant approach to non-Christian peoples,

Mandeville describes the Jews who inhabit Gog and Magog as murderous comrades of

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[105] *Wars of Alexander*, 56 (ll. 1776-83). "Judas of Jerusalem, the Jews' father, brings out a broad book and hands it over to the man [Alexander]. It was full of plain prophesies all over, of the doctrine of Daniel and of his dear sayings. Alexander looks on a leaf and in a line learns how the men from Greece should with their great might utterly destroy the people of Persia. And he hopes that he shall be that man, and heartily he rejoices" [translation mine].

the Antichrist, noting with anxious repetition that the Jews "conen no langage but only hire owne þat noman knoweth but þei" and that "þei conen no maner of langage but Ebrew."[106] Mandeville hypothesizes that Jews learn their enigmatic language "in hope þat whan the oþer Iewes achull gon out, þat þei may vnderstonden hire speche & to leden hem in to cristendom for to destroye the cristene peple," a supposition that renders the Jews' mysterious alphabet "a tool of threat and conspiracy against Christians."[107]

The Jews of Gog and Magog – figures of abject menace – are not themselves recreated in *Saint Erkenwald*'s fair-minded heathen judge, but "Mandeville's "Ebrew" is closely analogous to the writing on that judge's sarcophagus:

> Bot roynyshe were þe resones þat þer on row stoden.
>
> Fulle verray were þe vigures þer auisyde hom mony,
>
> But alle muset hit to mouthe and quat hit mene shulde:
>
> Mony clerkes in þat clos wyt crownes ful brode
>
> Þer besiet hom a-boute noȝt to brynge hom in wordes. (52-56)[108]

Inscrutable, unpronounceable and incomprehensible, the figures on the casket echo Mandeville's "Ebrew" as well as the mystery presented by the corpse himself. But unlike that corpse, whose story is ultimately revealed by Erkenwald himself, the words on the casket remain untranslated. They are literally unspeakable, words that can not be brought "to mouthe." The unrest that those radically unknowable and unspeakable words foment

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[106] *Mandeville's Travels*, ed. P. Hamelius, EETS o.s. 153 (London: Oxford University Press, 1919), 177.

[107] Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary*, 29.

[108] "But the letters that stood there in a row were runish. Fully true were the figures that were examined by many, but all who pondered them could not speak them or discern what they meant. In that enclosure many clerks with broad crowns busied themselves around the words for nought.

within Erkenwald's London hints at the more pernicious forms of destruction threatened in Mandeville's account.

In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas posits that "all the differences assigned between the Old and New Laws" – between the laws of the Jews and the laws of the Christians – "are gathered from their relative perfection and imperfection.":

> Now the end of every law is to make men righteous and virtuous ... and consequently the end of the Old Law was the justification of men. The Law, however, could not accomplish this; but it foreshadowed it by certain ceremonial actions and promised it in words. And in this respect, the New Law fulfils the Old by justifying men through the power of Christ's Passion .... And in this respect, the New Law gives us what the Old Law promised.[109]

In the context of *Saint Erkenwald*'s typological sensibility, the reanimated heathen judge exemplifies this Thomistic vision of the Old Law, of the written commandments ultimately fulfilled and superseded by the New Law of Christ. The relative impotence of the Old Law – its inability to accomplish "the justification of men" that Aquinas describes – finds an analogue in the judge's own verbal inefficacy, in his failure to exact his salvation or to bring about the harmonious social order in New Troy through performative utterance.[110] It is left for Erkenwald himself, a figure aligned with the New Law of Christian truth, to do both of these things. Invested with the authority of Christ's

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[109] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2:1109, 10 (I-II. q.107 a.1, a2).

[110] John Hood describes the tension between the impotence of Mosaic law and the divinity of its progenitor in Thomistic thought, noting that Aquinas understands the law both as "a mechanism designed to inculcate virtue and true religion" even as he understands it to be "fundamentally impotent, incapable of producing righteousness." See John Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 42.

word the sacramental power his own voice, Erkenwald promises to complete and surpass the unfulfilled promise of the heathen.

As both a symbol of Old Law and a half-living revenant from England's pre-Christian past, the exhumed judge fills the Augustinian function of the Jew in the medieval Christian imagination, a figure who has both suffered and witnessed, who can attest to the truth of the Christian prophesy, and who offers a dire warning against ignoring the true Church. That implicit warning is one way in which the typological dimensions of *Saint Erkenwald* circle back around to the more specifically anti-Lollard tropes that I discussed in the first part of this chapter. Indeed, the very premise of Augustine's doctrine of Jewish witness – that the Jews' "biblical tradition offers cogent proof of Christian doctrine, enabling the Church to respond effectively to its enemies" – is no less applicable to *Saint Erkenwald*'s pagan judge than to Jews themselves.[111] The suffering of the pagan judge suggests not only the fate of those, like him, who sadly could not be Christians but also (and *a fortiori*) the fate of those born after Christ who would *choose* not to be Christians. In this way, the poem's virtuous heathen *cum* virtual Jew is aligned with the fourteenth-century Lollard; the typological discourse of the poem allows us to see both Jews and Lollards as taking the same counterproductive position in regard to the true Christian faith, as regressing from the spiritual fulfillment promised by the Church.

On a fundamental level, however, the connections drawn between Lollards and Jews in the later Middle Ages are also grounded in the distinctions I've examined above between the literal (read "written") word of the Old Testament – understood to be dead

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[111] Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 20.

and inert – and the word of the New Testament – alive, efficacious and transformative,

spoken and present. Despite their propensity for preaching and for glossing the

scriptures, Lollards were frequently excoriated for their strict adherence to the literal text

of the Bible and for their efforts to make it widely available through a program of

translation. Ruth Nissé discusses how the early fifteenth-century Dominican Thomas

Palmer "associated the Lollard translators, in their insufficient understanding of

Scripture, with the 'carnal' and stubbornly literal understanding of the Jews and the

disciples who 'went back' from spirit to flesh."[112] Similarly, the virulently anti-Lollard

bishop Reginald Pecock derided Lollards as "Bible men" and argued that the very root of

their heresy was in "over myche leenyng to scripture, and in such maner wise as it longith

not to holi scripture for to receyve."[113] More generally, the emphasis that Lollards

placed on the primacy of written scripture suggests the damning adherence to the literal

sense that also characterized popular medieval conceptions of Jews. The heathen judge's

acceptance of the living word of God – his salvation through the efficacious speech of

baptism and his recognition of the truth of the Orthodox church – provides more than just

proof of his righteousness; it also provides a pointed rebuke to Lollards and other heretics

who, unlike the pre-Christian judge, have the ability to accept this truth before their death

but actively choose to oppose it.

    Saint Erkenwald's typological and anti-Lollard discourses, suggested by the

distinctions between the bishop's efficacious spoken words and the dead letters on the

pagan judge's sarcophagus, finally coalesce around the central miracle of the poem, the

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[112] Ruth Nissé, "Reversing Discipline: The *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, Lollard Exegesis, and the Failure of Representation," *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 11 (1997): 181.

[113] Quoted in Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 228.

sacrament of the Eucharist itself. The Eucharist frequently found its way into the discourse surrounding Jews in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a discourse which, as Miri Rubin demonstrates in her exhaustive study of the matter, often assumed a decidedly dark cast: Jews on the continent were regularly accused of abusing the consecrated host in both mockery and reenactment of the Passion; many more Jews were murdered in the wake of such accusations by over-zealous Christians. Even in England, where Jews had been officially expelled since 1290, stories of Host desecration were commonplace, their increasing prevalence highlighting "a central strand within the culture, that which placed the Eucharist at the heart of a system which made the supernatural efficacious."[114] As Lester Little states, the "frontal attacks" launched against the Eucharist by Wyclif actually made such host desecration narratives more important to the institutional Church because they both "permitted [Christians] to project on to Jews their doubts about transubstantiation" and "served to bolster popular belief in the miracle of transubstantiation."[115] Thus, the resurgence of host desecration stories that we see in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can be at least partially attributed to a cultural perception connecting Lollards and Jews, a perception that was itself reinforced by Lollard denials of the eucharistic miracle.

Such connections are fully manifest in the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, an idiosyncratic host desecration drama from the mid-fifteenth century which ends not with the death of the Jewish desecrators – the typical outcome in such narratives – but with

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[114] Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 39.

[115] Lester K. Little, "The Jews in Christian Europe," in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict: From Late Antiquity to the Reformation*, ed. Jeremy Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 287-288.

their conversion. Its "humane" ending notwithstanding, the play is still an exceptionally

bloody spectacle. Upon purchasing a consecrated wafer from a corrupt Christian, a group

of Jews led by the wealthy merchant Jonathas reenact the passion upon the host – first by

stabbing it, then by nailing it to a pillar, then by plunging it into a cauldron of boiling oil,

then by baking it in an oven – in order to determine if it really is "God, þat ys full

mytheti, in a cake."[116] At every turn, the host reveals itself to be divine, bleeding

copiously in response to the Jews' abuse and causing Jonathas to "renneth wood, with þe

Ost in hys hond."[117] In the play's climactic moments, the oven in which the Jews are

baking the host begins to "ryve asunder and blede owt at þe cranys," and the image of the

risen Christ appears and speaks to the Jews, finally engendering their conversion.[118]

Because of the Jews' fervent denial of the eucharistic miracle in the *Play of the

Sacrament*, a number of critics have suggested that Jonathas and his co-conspirators

function as stand-ins for Lollards. Cecilia Cutts argues that "the particular doctrines with

which the play is so concerned are those to which Wyclif and his followers objected,"

namely the sacrament of the altar, and that the play itself might have been written to

"[confirm] the people in the Catholic faith" and resist the threatening encroachment of

Lollardy.[119] More recently, Ann Eljenholm Nichols has shown the prevalence of

"Lollard vocabulary to characterize the non-believing Jews" within the play, particularly

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[116] *Play of the Sacrament*, 67.

[117] *Play of the Sacrament*, 73.

[118] *Play of the Sacrament*, 80.

[119] Cecilia Cutts, "*The Croxton Play*: An Anti-Lollard Piece," *Modern Language Quarterly* 5 (1944): 51.
See also Victor I. Scherb, "Violence and the Social Body in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament,*" in
Violence in Drama (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), 69-78.

in the words used to refer to the Eucharist such as "cake" and "bread."[120] Eamon Duffy

draws a direct comparison between the bloody spectacle of the *Play of the Sacrament* and

the *Legend of the Blood of Hailes*, in which a chalice boils over with the blood of Christ

when a Lollard priest enacts a heretical mass over it. Both works, Duffy argues, present

"an aspect of the Eucharistic reality which was only presented to sin and unbelief, to

those outside the household of faith" – to Jews as well as to Lollards.[121]

The point here is not that the Jews in the *Play of the Sacrament* should be read

primarily as Lollards; the Jews are clearly meant to represent Jews and are repeatedly

reinscribed as Jews by the play. However, we should also recognize that the particular

type of disbelief that the *Play of the Sacrament* ascribes to its Jews, the denial of the

Eucharist and of the priest's ability to engender the miraculous presence of "God, þat ys

full mytheti" within the accidents of a wafer, is essentially identical to the pattern of

disbelief ascribed to Lollards. And if the spectacularly bloody *Play of the Sacrament*

seems a strange bedfellow for the ostensibly kinder and gentler *Saint Erkenwald*, the *Play

of the Sacrament*'s strident defense of orthodox eucharistic sacramentalism, its effort to

absorb non-Christian others into the political and social fabric of a Christian society, and,

most tellingly, its implicit anti-Lollard positions can also be understood as holding a dark

mirror to the alliterative poem. Indeed, a recognition of the similarities between *Saint

Erkenwald* and the *Play of the Sacrament* reveals how those anti-Lollard concerns are

embedded within medieval understandings of the development of Christianity itself:

within the model of supersession that defined Christian identity and history; within

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[120] Ann Eljenholm Nichols, "Lollard Language in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," *Notes and Queries* 36.1 (1989): 23-24.

[121] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 104-06.

archetypal divisions between Old and New Law; and within an Augustinian doctrine of witness. Most crucially, however, *Saint Erkenwald* ensures that its anti-Lollard concerns are always embedded within the sacrament of the Eucharist itself, within the orthodox core of the medieval Church and the living, spoken word that enabled the miracle of transubstantiation and Christian salvation.

CHAPTER 3

"Seye it eek with good deuocioun":

Economies of Speech and Redemption in the Works of Thomas Hoccleve

Thomas Hoccleve's "The Story of the Monk Who Clad the Virgin by Singing Ave

Maria" is a deceptively straightforward miracle of the Virgin. Purportedly written to

teach the correct method for reciting Our Lady's Psalter, the poem focuses on a French

monk – the son of "a ryche man and a worthy" (23) – who each day says fifty *Ave Maria*s

in honor of the Virgin Mary.[1] One day, at the conclusion of his devotions, the Virgin

appears to the monk wearing a robe without sleeves. When the Monk asks the meaning

of this odd garment, Mary replies that he himself has made the robe for her: his

incomplete prayers, it turns out, have generated her incomplete clothes. To finish the

robe, the monk must henceforth recite 150 *Ave Maria*s punctuated after every tenth by a

Pater Noster. This, the Virgin explains, is the proper way to recite Our Lady's Psalter.

The monk dutifully follows the extended regimen, and one week later the Virgin

reappears, "fresshly arraied and wel" (90), in a garment with full sleeves. She thanks the

monk for his improved devotion and promises to reward him "in this lyf present, / And in

þat othir" (97-98): first, he is to be chosen abbot of his monastery where he will save

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[1] All quotations from "The Story of the Monk who Clad the Virgin by Singing Ave Maria," as well as quotations from *The Series*, *La Male Regle*, and a number of other religious lyrics are from Hoccleve, *"My Compleinte" and Other Poems*, ed. Ellis. They will henceforth be cited parenthetically in the text by line number and, where necessary, by name without further footnoting. The poem discussed above is titled "Item de Beata Virgine" in Ellis's edition, but I refer to it as "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" in order to avoid confusion with a different "Item de Beata Virgine" printed in *Hoccleve's Works: The Minor Poems*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and Israel Gollancz, EETS e.s. 61 and 73 (London: Oxford University Press, 1892 and 1925, reprinted in one volume, 1970).

many souls by teaching Our Lady's Psalter; then, at his death, he is to join the Virgin in heaven. Hoccleve himself provides a pat moral to the tale, suggesting that devout readers should "serueth our lady ... [who] souffissantly qwytith euery deede" (122-23) by scrupulously reciting Our Lady's Psalter in the manner prescribed by the monk.

The sparse critical discourse concerning Hoccleve's miracle of the Virgin has tended to affirm the work as a paean to traditional forms of Christian devotion. Both Beverly Boyd and Jerome Mitchell make independent but complementary claims for the orthodoxy of Hoccleve's poem, presenting it as an uncritical redaction of a Marian lyric from the Auchinleck manuscript; Mitchell specifically finds Hoccleve's religious verse "conventional" and locates within it "the characteristic expression of piety of the times."[2] More recently, John Bowers has argued that "the exemplum of a young monk rewarded for praying his Latin *Pater Noster* was implicitly anti-Lollard, since Wycliffites had insisted that it was better to say the prayer 'Our Father' in English without Mary's mediation."[3] Such readings may overstate the orthodoxy of the poem and the devotional practice it describes. A forerunner of the modern rosary, Our Lady's Psalter was a radical simplification, or more accurately an abbreviation, of the Book of Psalms. Anne Winston explains how it may have developed:

> In "Marian psalters" ... the antiphons that preceded each Psalm and
>
> announced its theme were replaced by verses that interpreted each of the
>
> 150 Psalms as a reference to Christ or Mary. Gradually the devotion was

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[2] See Boyd, "Hoccleve's Miracle of the Virgin" and *The Middle English Miracles of the Virgin*; Jerome Mitchell, *Thomas Hoccleve: A Study in Early Fifteenth-Century English Poetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968). Quotation from Mitchell, *Thomas Hoccleve*, 35.

[3] John Bowers, Introduction to "The Ploughman's Tale," in *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, ed. John Bowers (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), 24.

shortened to recitation of the antiphons and, in place of the Psalms, either

*Pater Noster*s or *Ave Maria*s. Without the Psalms, the connection that the

antiphons had to a specific theme was lost. As a result, the antiphons

themselves came to be replaced by rhymed free paraphrases or simply by

150 verses in praise of the Virgin.[4]

Among the most pared down of such devotionals, the prayer regimen advocated by

Hoccleve's monk would have adhered to the religious orthodoxy cited by Bowers; it

would have preempted lay engagement with the scriptures and reinforced through

repetition the central role of Mary as mediator. Indeed, the rosary itself, of which Our

Lady's Psalter was an important precursor, was eventually approved by Rome as a way

"to reinforce orthodoxy and to combat heresy."[5] But the development of Our Lady's

Psalter had connections beyond reinforcing orthodoxy; it "shaped, and was shaped by, the

demands of the laity for new, more individual and private forms of religious

observance."[6] These same demands were themselves instrumental to the spread of

Lollardy in fourteenth-century England, and they helped precipitate other forms of

heterodox devotion across the European continent.

      Thus, even if Our Lady's Psalter does hew to the orthodox church in many

respects, Hoccleve's allusion to the devotional practice is more complex in its

signification than most earlier critical opinions allowed. In this respect, Ethan Knapp's

somewhat more nuanced reading maintains that "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" is

essentially orthodox in substance but also presents a "self-reflexive arrangement"

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[4] Anne Winston, "Tracing the Origins of the Rosary: German Vernacular Texts," *Speculum* 68 (1993): 621.

[5] Winston, "Origins of the Rosary," 634.

[6] Winston, "Origins of the Rosary," 619.

between monk and Virgin that pushes the poem "beyond most orthodox meditative exercises in its suggestion that the deeds of a man like the monk might have a concrete significance in the reality of the Virgin's life." He also observes that Hoccleve's depiction of the Virgin as mediatrix resonates with the poet's secular and topical verse, in which "the issue of intercession, financial rather than spiritual, is a constant motif."[7]

Like the rest of Hoccleve's devotional work, "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" has been consistently overlooked by critical investigations in favor of *La Male Regle*, *The Regement of Princes*, and the five linked poems known as *The Series* – Hoccleve's putatively "autobiographical" works.[8] As a result, our understanding of Hoccleve's corpus has been dominated by readings of only a few poems; critics have either bracketed the religious lyrics from the autobiographical ones or, more often, ignored them altogether. In this chapter, I will seek to rectify that critical imbalance by looking closely at a number of the devotional lyrics, starting with "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin." More specifically, I will demonstrate that the relationship between supplicant and intercessor suggested in that work finds expression in several of Hoccleve's Marian poems, and that those poems in turn help define similar patterns of reciprocity in the poet's autobiographical works and in his dealings with the Lancastrian dynasty. The first part of this chapter redefines what Knapp calls a "self-reflexive arrangement" in

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[7] Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse*, 153-154.

[8] There are surprisingly few exceptions to this statement. Eva Thornley argues that Hoccleve's secular complaints, especially *La Male Regle*, are in themselves derivative of the penitential lyric, a point discussed at some length by John Burrow. See Eva M. Thornley, "The Middle English Penitential Lyric and Hoccleve's Autobiographical Poetry," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 68 (1967): 295-321 and John A. Burrow, "Autobiographical Poetry in the Middle Ages: The Case of Thomas Hoccleve," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982): 389-412. Jennifer Bryan also sees elements of devotional literature in Hoccleve's secular complaints as well as elements of the complaint in Hoccleve's overtly devotional literature in "Hoccleve, the Virgin, and the Politics of Complaint," *PMLA* 117.5 (2002): 1172-87. Knapp discusses many of Hoccleve's devotional works in chapter 5 of *The Bureaucratic Muse*, 129-157.

Hoccleve's religious verse as a specific economy of speech, a dynamic of exchange in which supplicant and intercessor are locked in a mutually dependent relationship predicated on the causative potential of the spoken prayer.[9] Turning my attention to Hoccleve's *Series*, I will then argue that the economic paradigms of speech Hoccleve develops in his devotional lyrics are critical to defining both the "wilde infirmite" (*Series* 1.40) that he describes in the "Complaint" and the path to recovery, both social and psychological, that he suggests throughout the linked poems. In these ways I will demonstrate that Hoccleve's entire oeuvre – both the devotional and autobiographical works – maintains a discursive integrity that has not yet been recognized, a common vision of verbal exchange that transcends the claustrophobic idiosyncrasies of Hoccleve's private turmoil and gestures toward the often public work ascribed to the spoken word within the mingled economic and political systems of the early fifteenth century.

Spoken Prayer, Philanthropic Giving, and Our Lady of Economic Increase

Ethan Knapp sees Hoccleve's devotional lyrics as betraying "a fundamental anxiety about the reliability of Mary as an intercessor ... most often represented through invocations of memory." He further asserts that Hoccleve's "Monk Who Clad the Virgin" is "founded on an act of memory, as the monk (like Chaucer's clergeon) must learn the proper way to sing the Ave Maria." That this learning takes place through

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[9] Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse*, 153. The phrase "economy of speech," which I will use throughout this chapter, is reminiscent of the phrase "verbal economy," a concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu and recently applied to Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes* by Nicholas Perkins. Perkins describes the "verbal economy" as a system "in which the value of speech, and indeed silence, fluctuated according to the status of the speaker and the attitude of the listener" (p. 5), a system that he examines in an effort to understand Hoccleve's major work as "public poetry." See Nicholas Perkins, *Hoccleve's Regiment of Princes: Counsel and Constraint* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, especially pp. 43-65.

repetition is significant in light of medieval models of memory, which would have

understood the recitation of 150 *Ave Maria*s as part of a process by which the monk

inscribed a set of mental images into his mind.[10] In addition to this obsession with the

function of memory, Knapp perceives in the work "the presence of a peculiarly self-

reflexive spirituality ... in which the agency of the intercessor and supplicant are

curiously mixed," a dynamic in which the Virgin will show her favor to the monk as long

as the monk remembers the Virgin and *vice versa*.[11] Both of these thematic impulses –

memory and self-reflexivity – coalesce in the poem around the *Ave Maria*. Clearly, the

monk's recitation of the *Ave Maria* is itself an act of Marian remembrance; the prayer not

only does "worsship and honour" (34) to the Virgin, it allows him to impress upon his

own mind the "mental imaging... [that] is a feature of trained recollection."[12] In this

respect, we might even understand the Virgin's appearance to be the manifestation of the

monk's own memory – the incarnation of his own mental picture, itself created through

the discipline of repetitive prayer. But beyond its mnemonic function, the spoken

devotional is also at the center of the circular relationship between the monk and Mary,

one in which the monk's devotional performance demonstrably affects the Virgin's

physical condition just as the Virgin's mediation demonstrably affects the monk's

heavenly and earthly circumstances. By insisting upon such an interdependent

relationship, the poem asks us to consider not only the monk's status absent the

intercession of the Virgin but also the Virgin's status absent the intercession of the monk:

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[10] See Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse*, 148. Knapp himself draws from Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For a discussion of Memory as the creation of mental phantasms, see Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 47-60.

[11] Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse*, 147-48, 153.

[12] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 59.

would Mary be dressed in rags without the initial fifty *Ave Maria*s uttered by the monk,

or would she be humiliatingly naked; would she even exist as spiritual intercessor

without his spoken homage? Knapp posits that "The Monk who Clad the Virgin" finally

questions the very nature of Marian intercession itself by showing the Virgin's identity to

be predicated upon the "supplemental action of worshippers."[13]

The "supplemental action" performed by those worshippers is more than simply a

mnemonic; it is, I contend, expressly and fundamentally the action of speaking. On this

point the poem is emphatic: the Virgin demands not only that specific prayers be recited

but that they be recited in a specific pattern and in specific numbers. Moreover, the poem

ties the physical recitation of the prayers inextricably to the creation of the Virgin's

garment; as Mary tells the monk, "This clothynge / Thow has me *youen*, for thow euery

day / L [50] sythe Aue Maria seyying, / Honoured hast me" (57-60). The dependency of

garment upon word here strongly suggests that the spoken prayers of the monk – not

solely his memory – are responsible for the clothes of the Virgin. And even if the monk's

performance of Our Lady's Psalter does not create the Virgin's clothing out of whole

cloth, it at least acts as a catalyst for such a creation. In this respect, the uttered *Ave

Maria*s of Hoccleve's "Monk Who Clad the Virgin" assume the properties of overtly

performative speech acts. Like the sacramental utterances that permeate *Saint Erkenwald*

and like Phoebus's punitive outbursts in the *Manciple's Tale*, the monk's spoken prayers

perform demonstrable work on the world around them.

We might argue that the monk's performative prayers serve the same purpose as

Bishop Erkenwald's baptismal and eucharistic utterances, namely that they provide

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[13] Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse*, p. 154.

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implicit support to the orthodox church by simultaneously demonstrating the authority of

an ordained ecclesiast and evoking a nexus of anti-Lollard associations. Such a reading

would shore up the critical consensus that "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" exemplifies

orthodox devotion and add to claims, often based upon Hoccleve's public rebuke of

Lollardy in the "Address to Sir John Oldcastle," that Hoccleve was himself a strident

anti-Wycliffite crusader.[14] Rather than focusing on the poem's orthodoxy, however, I

would like to examine the place of the *Ave Maria* in the economy of exchange that

Hoccleve develops between the Virgin and the monk, an economy that strongly recalls

the philanthropic practices of well-heeled English families in the later Middle Ages. Joel

Rosenthal describes such philanthropy as being particularly pervasive among (but not

limited to) the nobility during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: individuals and

families of means "were expected to give to the church and to the poor ... both to justify

their inequitable status in the social hierarchy and to buy prayers for their own souls."[15]

In "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin, Hoccleve specifically identifies the monk as the son

of "a ryche man and a worthy" (23), marking him as – if not necessarily a member of the

nobility – an individual with the means to participate in charitable practices.

Furthermore, the poem stipulates that the central exchange between Mary and the monk

takes place not within the abbey but in a devotional chapel on the monk's family estate, a

locus appropriate to the self-interested philanthropy of the upper-classes. While such

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[14] Thomas Hoccleve, "Address to Sir John Oldcastle," in Furnivall and Gollancz, *Hoccleve's Works: The Minor Poems*, 8-24. For analysis of the poem as an anti-Wycliffite work, see Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 183-86; Charity Scott Stokes, "Sir John Oldcastle, The Office of the Privy Seal, and Thomas Hoccleve's *Remonstrance Against Oldcastle* of 1415," *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie* 118 (2000): 556-570.

[15] Joel T. Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise: Gift Giving and the Aristocracy, 1307-1485* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 8. Also see Jenny Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverly and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 145-150.

details alone may not go so far as to render Mary the object of the monk's *noblesse oblige*, they nonetheless lay the groundwork for a model of Marian devotion predicated upon structures of charitable giving by the landed and the affluent, structures that themselves suggest a feudally inflected, vertically aligned hierarchy of exchange.

It follows that the language of the philanthropic gift is precisely the language Mary uses to describe her two exchanges with the monk. When she first appears in her sleeveless garment the Virgin tells him, "This clothynge / Thow has me *youen*" (57-58); later, when the monk has completed his longer set of prayers, she says "Beholde now / How good clothing and how fressh apparaille / That this wyke to me *youen* hast thow" (92-94). But the "fressh apparaille" is not given for nothing. In short order the Virgin reveals how she will "qwit" (97) the monk's generosity: "And soone aftir, abbot of þat abbeye / He maad was, as þat tolde him our lady. // ... his soule was betaght / To God. He heuene had vnto his *meede*" (115-16, 120-21). Like the monk's affluence and the poem's seigneurial setting, this *quid-pro-quo* arrangement conforms to expectations of late medieval philanthropic giving, a practice that "was primarily aimed at the spiritual welfare of the donor rather than at improving the worldly condition of the recipient."[16] Indeed, such an economic model – in which personal, spiritual reward is implicit in the act of giving – helps to explain the unusual, even paradoxical, degree of reciprocity that marks Mary's relationship with the monk. Conforming to the hierarchic structure of philanthropy, in which the donor was always of a higher social station than the recipient, as well as to traditional structures of Marian devotion, in which the devotee was but a

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[16] Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise*, 130.

beggar before the "queene of heuene" (78), Hoccleve 's monk both gives to and humbles himself before a Virgin marked at once by need and by noblesse.

The institution of philanthropy among England's upper classes was deeply rooted in the strict hierarchy and gross economic inequities of the feudal system, and in many respects it was dependent upon those very inequities for its preservation. Arguably, the philanthropic gift functioned less to improve the lot of its recipient than it did "to contribute to the affirmation of the lord [of a household] and his establishment" and to reify the seigneurial relationships that necessitated it in the first place.[17] As a result, we might be tempted to see the philanthropy of the upper classes as an essentially conservative economic practice, one that not only provided spiritual succor for donors in the form of prayers, chantries, and other such soteriological considerations but also enhanced "the social status of the givers" while "apply[ing] social control by the benefactor upon the beneficiaries."[18] But the precepts of philanthropic giving also simmered just beneath the surface of England's burgeoning money economy in the later Middle Ages; therefore, they must be understood not merely as a vestige of the fast-decaying feudal system but also as "part of a larger exchange, that of services and obligations in return for money and goods, which we recognize as the specialization of labor."[19] In point of fact, the institutionalized giving of gifts (or at least the pretense of such giving) often stood in for the regular payment of wages, and it facilitated the beginnings of modern practices of lending and borrowing. The gift even provided cover

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[17] Felicity Heal, "Reciprocity and Exchange in the Late Medieval Household," *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 180.

[18] Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise*, 129-30.

[19] Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise*, 10.

for the *de facto* charging of exorbitant interest, a practice that would otherwise have been considered usury.[20] Thus, even as philanthropic giving outwardly reinforced the vertical hierarchies of exchange that had prevailed in England for centuries, it simultaneously enabled horizontally aligned (and sometimes suspect) market transactions that, by the later Middle Ages, were radically dismantling such hierarchies.

The necessary but awkward overlap of philanthropy and wage capitalism was by no means irrelevant to Hoccleve's experience as clerk of the Privy Seal. A. L. Brown documents a seemingly regressive shift in the remuneration of the Privy Seal clerks during Hoccleve's tenure, a shift that saw the payment of daily wages replaced by the awarding of gift-like annuities.[21] Such a change meant that by 1399, the entire remunerative system for the Privy Seal clerks "was theoretically grounded on the independent largesse of the king" and was supplemented only occasionally by miscellaneous grants, bequests, and tips from other patrons.[22] Because of his long years of employment at the Privy Seal (c. 1387 - c. 1424), Hoccleve would no doubt have been intimately familiar with this change in remuneration as well as with the Janus-like countenance that the philanthropic gift more generally assumed.[23]

In "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin," Hoccleve develops the tension between the seigneurial (read vertically aligned) and mercantile (read horizontally aligned) structures

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[20] See Diana Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 185-88.

[21] A.L. Brown, "The Privy Seal Clerks in the Early Fifteenth Century," *The Study of Medieval Records*, ed. D.A. Bullough and R. L. Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 266-68. Hoccleve himself discusses the inherent problems of this system, with particular regard to the practice of tipping, in his prologue to *The Regement of Princes* (ll. 1499-533). See *Hoccleve's Works, III: The Regement of Princes and Fourteen of Hoccleve's Minor Poems*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS e.s. 72 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner: 1897), 55-56.

[22] Ethan Knapp, "Bureaucratic Identity and the Construction of the Self in Hoccleve's *Formulary* and *La Male Regle*," *Speculum* 74 (1999): 365.

[23] For a brief chronology of Hoccleve's years at the Privy Seal see Furnivall's introduction to *Hoccleve's Works: The Minor Poems*, vii-xxvii.

of exchange through the persistent use of economic language. At moments, this language resonates with the social and economic formations that we associate with feudalism, for example, when Hoccleve describes the monk's dutiful "worsship and honour / Of Goddes modir" (34-35), when he notes that the monk's prayers were uttered in a devotional chapel "maad and edified ... at our ladyes reurerence" (43-44), or when he proposes that in order to stay in the Virgin's good graces we must perform "seruice, honour and plesance" (20). At other times, the language displays a shift toward a more mercantile sensibility, as when Hoccleve writes "Betwixt God and man is [Mary] mediatrice / For our offenses mercy to *purchace*" (8-9). Most frequently, however, the economic terminology that Hoccleve employs evokes both the feudal and the mercantile at once, an indication that by the fifteenth century the linguistic registers defining these two systems – and, indeed, the two systems themselves – were so thoroughly intermingled as to be mutually inextricable. As an example, we might consider Hoccleve's use of the word "meede" (121) to describe the reward Mary will provide for the monk's spoken devotionals. Certainly "meed" can suggest the vertical systems of exchange that define the feudal economic hierarchy: in the popular fifteenth-century *Romance of Guy of Warwick*, a text roughly contemporary with Hoccleve's "Monk who Clad the Virgin," Sir Roholde is described as an Earl "who helde Warwick in hys honde" and who "gave gyftys and grete medys" to his grateful villeins.[24] In *Piers Plowman*, however, Langland personifies "meed" as a figure of abject duplicity, capable of co-opting the appurtenances of a feudal economic hierarchy ("Seruauntʒ for hire servyce, we seeþ wel þe soþe, / Taken Mede of hire maistres as þei mowe acorde") even as she enables the most

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[24] *The Romance of Guy of Warwick: The Second or 15th-Century Version*, ed. Julius Zupitza, EETS e.s. 25-6 (London: Trübner & Co., 1875), 1, 2 (ll. 28, 40).

fundamental aspects of mercantile exchange ("Mede and Marchaundiȝe mote nede go

togideres; / No wiȝt, as I wene, wiþouten Mede may libbe").[25]

In "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin," the word "quit," like the word "mede,"

occupies an ambiguous position between the poem's vertical and horizontal structures of

exchange. In the poem's authorial *moralitas*, Hoccleve invokes the sworn bonds of fealty

implicit in the practice of Christian worship when he writes, "Who serueth our lady,

leesith right naght. / Shee souffissantly *qwytith* euery deede" (122-23). Despite this

seigneurial context, however, the term "quit" itself, which also appears when the Virgin

promises to "qwit" (97) the monk for his labor, necessarily recalls the free-wheeling,

hierarchy-violating economic structure that organizes Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.[26]

While Hoccleve's *moralitas* may imply that the spiritual quittings of "The Monk Who

Clad the Virgin" are more staid than those of Chaucer's capitalist hurly-burly, we can

also see in those quittings echoes of the Summoner promising to "quiten [the Friar] every

grot" (III 1292), the "false chanon" asking a priest "Leene me a marc ... / And at my day I

wol it quiten thee" (VIII 1026-27), or even Palamon and Arcite, locked in a tower where

"ther may no gold hem quite" (I 1032). The Virgin's sufficient "quitting," embodies both

of these exchange models.

The mechanics of the final transaction between the monk and the Virgin

underscore and extend these complexities. Indeed, despite Hoccleve's clear insistence on

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[25] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* 283, 284 (B.3.217-18, 226-7).

[26] I base the phrase "economic structure" on similar language in R. A. Shoaf's *Dante, Chaucer, and the Currency of the Word: Money, Images and Reference in Late Medieval Poetry* (Norman, OK; Pilgrim Books, 1983), especially pp. 163-72. Shoaf argues that "Chaucer posits economics, 'quiting,' as the structure of relations in *The Canterbury Tales*" (168) and that "economics, or 'quiting,' structures the relations between tales" (169).

maintaining the language and ethos of seigneurial hierarchy in this passage, a number of

fundamentally capitalist elements still lurk behind the exchange itself:

> And euery day Aue Maria he [the monk]
>
> Seide aftir hir doctryne and enformynge.
>
> And, the nexte haliday aftir suynge,
>
> Our lady fresshly arraied and wel
>
> To the monk cam, beynge in þat chapel,
>
> And vnto him seide, "Beholde now
>
> How good clothyng and how fressh apparaille
>
> That this wyke to me youen hast thow.
>
> Sleeues to me clothynge now nat faille,
>
> Thee thanke I, and ful wel for thy trauaille
>
> Shalt thow be qwit heer, in this lyf present,
>
> And in þat othir whan thow hens art went. (87-98)

The gift the monk gives and the gift the Virgin receives are not the same: specifically, the

monk offers a regimen of spoken prayers while Mary gets from him "good clothyng and

fressh apparaille" (93). This disjuncture speaks to the performative efficacy of the

monk's speech by positing a direct and causal relationship between word and garment.

In the same breath, it also suggests the potential economic function of such performative

speech and its value in a system of mercantile exchange. In this respect, the monk's

spoken prayers become a kind of linguistic currency: they are the means by which Mary

gets her garment but not the garment itself, valuable for what they do rather than what

they are. We see a similar disjuncture when Mary promises to "qwit" the monk for his

"trauaille" (96) rather than for the garment she claims to have been given. Indeed, the

very notion of the Virgin repaying the monk for his *ad hoc* work is far more reminiscent

of a market economy based on contracts and specialized labor than it is of a seigneurial

economy based on fealty and institutionalized *noblesse oblige*, particularly when we

consider that Mary herself requested (would it be too tendentious to say "contracted"?)

the additional prayers.

   Finally, and perhaps most startlingly, we see in this passage a constant emphasis

on increase throughout the exchange: the monk's recitation of Our Lady's Psalter

provides good clothing for the virgin, and in return the Virgin installs the monk as abbot

of his order and assures him of "eternel blisse" (111). Later, as the Virgin stipulates, the

monk teaches his "couent ... to seye / My psalter as byforn taght haue I thee" (101-02),

and together they in turn teach it to "the peple ... in generaltee" (103). Because of all of

this work, the Virgin announces finally, "shal ther be many oon / Saued" (110-11). The

exponential degree of increase that the poem imagines – in both souls saved and prayers

spoken – is not unusual in narratives of spiritual redemption (itself a term with strong

economic valences); we might even argue that chain-reaction of salvations triggered by

Hoccleve's monk follows the same pattern as St. Cecilia's conversions in the *Second*

Nun's Tale or, just as appropriately, the secular and economically grounded flood of

forgiveness that concludes the *Franklin's Tale.* But in a poem where spoken prayers

become currency and where contracted "trauaille" is "qwit" with not just spiritual but

temporal reward, such eschatological increase begins to smack uncomfortably of

economic increase, even of compounding interest. Indeed, we might understand the

terms of the Virgin's arrangement with the monk – the monk teaches Our Lady's Psalter

to his fellow monks, who in turn teach it to the members of local community, who in turn

teach it to others, and so on – as amounting to a salvific pyramid-scheme, one that recalls

the dubious financial exchanges of the *Shipman's Tale* or the devious "multiplicacioun"

(VIII 849) of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* as readily as it recalls the Second Nun's

conversionary multiplication.[27]

Foucault's observation, "When goods can circulate (and this thanks to money),

they multiply, and wealth increases," is instructive here; so, too, is its corollary, "when

coinage becomes more plentiful, as a result of good circulation and favorable balance,

one can attract fresh merchandise."[28] Both of these statements speak to the exponential

increase that the Virgin's instructions to the monk engender. As it pertains to Christian

redemption, such increase clearly would have been understood as a net positive by

Hoccleve's readers. The economic model that Hoccleve proposes for such eschatological

increase, however, is more ambiguous in its moral implications because it echoes a

number of the abuses that prevailed in the developing marketplace of the fifteenth

century. Chief among these abuses was, of course, the sin of usury, which William of

Auxerre defines as "the will to acquire something above the principal of a loan" and

which John Gower, more colloquially, recognizes as the action of a man who "wol

ageinward take a bene, / Ther he hath lent the smale pese."[29] The discourse surrounding

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[27] For a related argument see Robert Adams, "The Concept of Debt in *The Shipman's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 6 (1984): 85-102.

[28] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, ed. R. D. Laing (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 178.

[29] William of Auxerre quoted in Odd Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992), 77; Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, vol. 3, ed. Russell Peck (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), 3:132 (5.4408-09).

usury is complex and often self contradictory, and I don't want state outright that

Hoccleve's monk and Virgin are engaged in usurious practices. But the economic model

of increase upon which their salvific program is based seems dangerously close to the

more unethical exigencies of a mercantile system of exchange. Even if the Virgin is not

an outright usurer, we can see that the seigneurial language deployed by Hoccleve's

poem is the same language by which annuities were able to stand in for the salaries of the

Privy Seal clerks, the same language by which the giving of "gifts" facilitated usurious

lending without the appearance of excessive interest. The economic language of

Hoccleve's poem is the self-same language that served both to elide and to allow for the

more dubious practices of market capitalism in the later Middle Ages.

Because economic language has a long history in the Marian lyric and in Christian

devotional writing more generally, Hoccleve is not alone in describing salvation in terms

of compounded interest. His inimitable contemporary, Margery Kempe, relates a vision

in which Christ describes salvation in similar terms of economic increase: "Dowtyr, I

schal be a trew executor to the and fulfyllyn all thi wylle, and for thi gret charyté that

thow hast to comfortyn thin even cristen thu schalt have dubbyl reward in hevyn."[30] But

even if, as one scholar notes, "the intersection of religious and economic themes and

tropes ... was a recognized commonplace in medieval discourses of redemption," the

uneasy tension that "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" develops between feudal and

mercantile structures of exchange is uniquely Hoccleve's own, that of a lifetime

bureaucrat caught up in "the long and uneven transition from household government to

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[30] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), ll. 471-73. Available at < http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/kemp1frm.htm>.

salaried administration."[31] At the center of this economic tension stands the *Ave Maria* itself, a prayer that becomes important as a charitable donation to the virgin and as an investment in the monk's soul, as the exercise of sacral fealty and as the completion of a contracted remembrance, as meed in return for devotion and as interest paid on a soteriological debt. But we must not forget that the prayer is first a distinct and specific spoken utterance, one that attains these layers of importance only by virtue of its unique ability to function meaningfully in both the spiritual manor house and the spiritual marketplace. Moving within the mingled economies of Hoccleve's devotional lyric – across strict vertical hierarchies reminiscent of the feudal system and increasingly lateral social arrangements like those that proliferated in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – the *Ave Maria* becomes a speech act whose importance is predicated on its ability to circulate and to perform work: to serve as a charitable gift, to engender a garment, to provide remembrance, to secure a position in a religious order, to purchase mercy, to redeem a single soul, to save a whole community. Be it as commodity or as currency, the *Ave Maria* is central to the spiritual economy of Hoccleve's poem because it is bought and traded, because it engenders increase. Such efficaciousness – such performativity – is what makes the *Ave Maria* so valuable a coin.

My argument about spoken prayer and economic exchange, namely that prayer functions as a kind of currency in the spiritual economy of Hoccleve's poem, has been anticipated by both structuralist and post-structuralist critics, specifically by Saussure and later by Derrida and Foucault. Saussure draws a direct parallel between the coin and the spoken word, one predicated on the idea that each has value because each "can be

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[31] Theresa Coletti, "*Paupertas Est Donum Dei*: Hagiography, Lay Religion, and the Economics of Salvation in the Digby Mary Magdalene," *Speculum* 76 (2001): 341; Ethan Knapp, "Bureaucratic Identity," 362.

exchanged for a certain quantity of something different" (he cites "bread" for money and "an idea" for words) and also "can be compared to something of like nature" (e.g. another coin or another word). Like money, "[t]he content of a word is determined ... not by what it contains but by what exists outside of it. As an element in a system, the word has not only a meaning but also – above all – a value."[32] Derrida builds on Saussure's observation by insisting that both language and money are always and inevitably metaphorical in nature; he notes that any object which "plays a role in the process of axiological and semantic exchange ... does not completely escape the general law of metaphorical value."[33] Foucault, whose observation that circulation engenders economic increase we've already examined, puts a still finer point on the connection between language and money. He states that because they are grounded in homologous systems of representation and signification, "theories of money or trade have the same conditions of possibility as language itself." As the *de facto* signifier in a system of commercial exchange, "money – if it is well regulated – ... function[s] in the same way as language."[34]

These post-structuralist views on money and speech are surprisingly evocative of similar medieval perspectives. Nicholas Perkins describes a "verbal economy" of late-medieval England in which "the coinage ... was the vocabulary of loyal advice, of instruction and of complaint." In this verbal economy, "words could themselves be exchanged for money and influence," an observation that calls to mind Foucault's link

[32] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Roy Harris (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1986), 113-114.

[33] Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," *New Literary History*: 6 (1974): 17.

[34] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 203.

between circulation and value as well as the idiosyncratic exchange economy of Hoccleve's own work.[35] R. A. Shoaf also describes the metaphorical interdependence of speech and currency, stating broadly that "the analogy between language and money is ... seriously medieval," an analogy that would have been available to Chaucer and to his disciples "not only through 'experience' but also through impeccable 'authority.'"[36] Shoaf quotes Boethius to show how such an analogy might have been understood in the late Middle Ages:

> For sound is a kind of universal; names and words, on the other hand, are parts. Every part, however, is in the whole .... Thus just as a coin is copper impressed with a certain figure not only in order that it might be called a coin but also in order that it might be the price of some specific thing, so, in the same way, words and names, are not only sounds, but are imposed to a certain signification of thoughts .... And thus, in this way, a sound – that is, a significant sound – is not sound only, but is called a verb or name, just as a coin is not called copper, but is called, by its proper name, a coin, by means of what distinguishes it from other copper.[37]

Like the modern theorists cited above, Boethius understands that both spoken words and money are to some degree defined by their inclusion within a group (call that group "sounds" or "metals") but that they attain value through their specificity and distinctness within that group. It is their individuality, their circulation, and finally their metaphorical nature – the ability of the specific word to stand in for an idea within verbal discourse or

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[35] Perkins, *Counsel and Constraint*, 5-6.

[36] Shoaf, *Currency of the Word*, 8.

[37] Boethius, *De Interpretatione*, quoted and translated in Shoaf, *Currency of the Word*, 10-11.

the ability of the specific coin to stand in for a commodity of equal value within economic discourse – that unites the two things. As Shoaf concludes, "Boethius recognizes that value, linguistic and economic, depends on relativity and differentiation which are elements of exchange."[38]

From his position at the Privy Seal, where an appropriately worded petition could produce significant financial returns for both clerk and petitioner, Hoccleve would have understood these Boethian precepts. He would have been acutely aware of the fluctuating, metaphorical exchange relationship that existed between coin and commodity, and he would have seen, each time a petition produced a monetary return, the effective literalization of the value of the word. Similarly, the economy of "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" can itself be understood as literalizing the metaphorical value of the spoken word – as aggressively commodifying the monk's uttered *Ave Maria*s by forcing a fixed exchange value onto them (50 *Ave Maria*s + 5 *Pater Noster*s = 1 sleeve). Thus, I submit, it is not a stretch to see Hoccleve's monk trading in *Ave Maria*s and spending them like so many groats, nor is it a stretch to think that Hoccleve himself understood some spoken utterances, such as prayers, to operate as a medium of exchange in a manifestly economic system.

By positing a multivalent eschatological economy in which prayer is effectively bartered for salvation, "The Monk who Clad the Virgin" offers us the clearest vision among Hoccleve's devotional lyrics of how speech might function amidst the hierarchical and economic tensions created where feudally inflected exchange intersects with the

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[38] Shoaf, *Currency of the Word*, 11.

exigencies of the capitalist marketplace. Nonetheless, many of the poet's Marian poems

invoke similar economic language, and some suggest the same kinds of reciprocity that

we see in "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin." Indeed, the sheer number of Hoccleve's

poems to the Virgin suggest that Hoccleve saw in the figure of Mary – and particularly in

her traditional role as intercessor between man and God – a useful figure with which to

explore these varieties of exchange and to navigate their often conflicting currents.

Perhaps the most straightforward of these Marian lyrics is a long prayer to the Virgin

now known simply as "Ad Beatam Virginem" (Furnivall X). In this plea for salvation,

Hoccleve allows a relatively straightforward arrangement of lordship and vassalage to

predominate as he offers himself wholly to Mary and John the Apostle in return for his

spiritual preservation: "Vn-to yow I my soule commende, / Marie and Iohn, for my

sauuacioun! / Helpith me þat I may my lyf amende ... Be in myn herte now and

everemore!" (134-139).[39] The traditional precepts of homage and dependency that such

a sacral relationship suggests are borne out when Hoccleve promises to "worship &

honure" (64) the virgin "Syn [since] vp on thee / was leid the charge and cure ... to hele

our shoules of hir seek estat" (66-70). Within this traditional arrangement, spoken

prayers – both the poet's and the Blessed Virgin's – are an understood medium of

exchange. Not only does Hoccleve imply that he will perform prayers in the course of

his "worship and honure," he asks the Virgin outright to "presente ... my prayer vn-to thy

sone" (13) and makes reference to her own efficacious prayers when he notes, "To

wasshe away our cloudeful offense ... your preyre may so moche auaille" (109-12).

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[39] Citations from Furinvall and Gollancz's edition of *Hoccleve's Works: The Minor Poems* are cited parenthetically by editor and poem number, and by line.

Speech proves similarly efficacious in Hoccleve's "Ballade for Robert Chichele,"
but the poem itself registers a more multivalent economic sensibility than does "Ad Beata
Virginem." Specifically, the poem finds Hoccleve attempting to attain from God "a
purueance" ("Ballade," 24) in exchange for "[his] speeche and by [his] sawe" (21). The
word "purueance" itself – which may refer either to spiritual or to material provisions –
occupies an ambiguous position within Hoccleve's interpenetrating economic systems,
one that evokes many of the tensions evident in "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin."
Hoccleve hints at this same ambiguity in another of his Marian addresses (Furnivall VII),
a poem in which he frets that Mary, "Modir of lyf" and "cause of al our welthe" (1), will
not "accepte [his] preyeere" (21) or "purchase ... pardoun" (80) for his sins.

The mingled economies that Hoccleve presents in "Ballade for Robert Chichele"
are still more strongly evoked in his "Item de Beata Virgine" (Gollancz V):

> Syn Thow, modir of grace, haast euere in mynde
>
> Alle tho / þat vp-on thee han memorie,
>
> Thy remembrance ay oghte oure hertes bynde
>
> Thee for to honure / blisful qweene of glorie,
>
> To alle cristen folk / it is notorie
>
> Þat thow art shee / in whom þat al man-kynde
>
> May truste fully / grace and help to fynde. (1-7)

The dynamic that this passage describes, in which Mary's "remembrance... oghte oure
hertes bynde," bespeaks the vertical alignments implicit in "The Monk Who Clad the
Virgin." This point is further underscored later in the poem when Hoccleve describes
Mary's salvific intercession on behalf of her "seruantȝ" (84). But, the lady/servant

relationship that the poem proposes is frequently undercut by language suggestive of market exchange, such as Hoccleve's description of Mary's "purchase of ... foryeunesse" as a "bysynesse ... Þat vn-to man-kynde is so profitable" (118-121) or his concern that Christ "hath boght our soules at swich prys / þat derrere might no thyng han be boght" (106-107).

As the co-mingling of economic systems begins to emerge in "Item de Beata Virgine," so, too, do the economic overtones of the spoken word. The speaker asks, for example, "What wight is þat that with angwissh and wo / Tormented is if he preye vn-to thee / Him to deliuere and to putte him there-fro" (8-10), a statement that shows prayer circulating in the economy of salvation. He also marvels at how "acceptable" (79) Mary's own prayers are to Christ and even ponders the plight of individuals who cannot speak, reasoning that "thogh þat preye may [their] tonge noght, / Yit holpe [are they] thurgh cry of hertes thoght" (13-14). Such a formulation goes so far as to re-imagine the usually silent act of repentance as an act of bodily prayer, a *de facto* utterance. Salvation, it seems, needs to be purchased with some kind of spoken devotional, even if it is the unheard speech of the heart.

While these Marian addresses all implicitly affirm the power of spoken prayer and engage with metaphors of exchange to describe their respective redemptive economies, none rivals the complexity that we see in "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" except Hoccleve's "Complaint of the Virgin," a work written in the voice of Mary as she mourns Christ's crucifixion. A loose translation of a lyric from Guillaume deGuilleville's *Pèlerinage de l'âme*, this *planctus Mariae* takes the form of a series of apostrophes spoken by the Virgin Mary. Each of these apostrophes finds Mary lamenting her son's

death not in the broad terms of Christian redemptive theology but in the excruciatingly intimate terms of a human mother witnessing the death of her human son. Her first apostrophe, beginning "O fader God, how fers and how cruel" ("Conpleynte" 1), exemplifies the poem's general approach:

> "I had ioye entuere and also gladnesse
>
> Whan þu betook him me to clothe and wrappe
>
> In mannes flesche. I wend, in soothfastnesss,
>
> Have had for euere joye be the lappe.
>
> But hath sorwe caught me with his trappe.
>
> My ioye hath made a permutacioun
>
> With wepynge and eek lamentacioun." (8-14)[40]

After making her complaint to God, Mary addresses in succession the Holy Ghost, the angel Gabriel, Saint Elizabeth, the woman who blessed Christ (Luke 11:27), Simeon, Saint Joachim, and finally Christ Himself, implicating each in explicitly personal aspects of her loss. Eventually, she extends her lament beyond this coterie to address death, the sun, the earth, the angels, and, at last, the whole of humanity itself. With this final apostrophe, however, Mary's rhetorical stance shifts dramatically from the claustrophobically personal to the emphatically universal. The Virgin now asks the "sones of Adam" (227) to lament with her, to "bymeneth [Christ] in herte and cheere and vois" (231) and to recognize that "for [our] gilt makith he correcioun / And amendes right by his owne deeth" (236-237). No longer speaking only as the inward-looking and

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[40] The lyric is editorially titled "Conpleynte Paramont," in Ellis, *"My Compleinte" and Other Poems*, 53-63. I refer to it as "The Complaint of the Virgin" in order to avoid confusing inconsistencies with other recent criticism dealing with the poem.

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disconsolate mother of a human son, she now funnels her individual personal sorrows into the redemptive aspects of Christ's sacrifice.

Within the entropic spiral of Mary's personal loss, Jennifer Bryan recognizes a pattern wherein "the Virgin is made to represent the private relationships that must be sacrificed for the sake of public duty."[41] But the Virgin's cycle of loss is also related to a fundamental collapse of the spoken word, colossal failure of traditional frameworks of devotional speech to prevent or even to assuage Mary's suffering. The first suggestion the poem gives of this collapse comes in the fourth stanza when the Virgin asks the Holy Ghost, "Why hast thu me not in thi remembraunce / Now at this tyme right as thu had tho?" (22-23). The Holy Ghost's failure to remember Mary as she demands – to meet Mary's unfulfilled expectations – calls to mind the monk's abbreviated prayer cycle and the half-finished garment it engenders, both of which speak to the efficacy of spoken prayer.

In the following apostrophe Mary begins to make overt the breakdown of the economy of speech that her rebuke to the Holy Ghost only implied:

"O Gaubriel, whan þat thou come aplace

And madest vnto me thi salewyng

And seidest thus, 'Heil Mary, ful of grace',

Whi ne had thu gove me warnyng

Of þat grace that veyn is and faylyng,

As thu now seest, and sey it weel beforne?

Sith my ioye is me rafte, my grace is lorne." (29-35)

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[41] Bryan, "The Politics of Complaint," 1175.

In this stanza, the Holy Ghost's lapse in "remembraunce" is replaced by Gabriel's failure to speak the truth; more precisely, it becomes Gabriel's failure to speak enough of the truth, a distinction that again resonates with the monk's initial inadequate prayer regimen in "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin." But whereas the central flaw marking the monk's *Ave Maria* was the number of prayers spoken, the central flaw marking Gabriel's *Ave Maria* turns out to be the content of the Marian address itself, a problem of kind rather than a problem of degree. Indeed, Gabriel's address to the Virgin at the Annunciation is revealed in this stanza to be fundamentally insufficient, a kind of half truth that neither warns Mary of the crucifixion nor gives her any indication of the "veyn and faylyng" nature of grace. For this reason, the *Ave Maria*, which in Hoccleve's miracle of the Virgin functions both as salvific currency and as exchange commodity, only serves in the "Complaint of the Virgin" to sharpen Mary's grief.

Similar failures of the poem's economy of devotional speech follow in quick succession: Mary laments to Elizabeth that her words were not only insufficient but inaccurate ("The word[es] þat thu spak in the mowntain / Be ended al in another maner / Than thu had wened" [37-39]); she tells Simeon that his speech was *too* accurate, bearing bad news instead of omitting it ("O Simeon, thow seidest me ful sooth, / The strook that perce shal my sones herte / My soule thirle it shal, and so it dooth" [50-52]); and finally she upbraids her father Saint Joachim for his absence of utterance altogether (here imagined as minstrelsy), complaining that he has no harp "wherwith me make light / And me to conforte in my woful torment" (66-67). With startling compression, The Virgin of Hoccleve's *planctus Mariae* ascribes to the spoken utterance – starting with the *Ave Maria* itself – a litany of grievances and painful elisions, endemic failings that essentially

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undo the spiritual economy Hoccleve represents in "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" and that call into question the efficaciousness of devotional speech as a whole. Within this unstable economic framework, prayer seems unlikely to buy a petitioner's redemption; rather, the spoken word in the "Complaint of the Virgin" seems only to engender loss upon excruciating loss.

The nadir of the poem's verbal economy comes when Mary speaks to Christ himself, still suffering upon the cross. In Hoccleve's poem, as in the Gospel of John, Christ calls His mother "womman" (176) rather than "Maria" or "Mother."[42] In response, the Virgin begins aggressively to rupture her own name, changing it first from "Maria" to "Mara" (a pun on *amara* or "bitterness") and then from "Marie" to "marred" (183, 218) in token that "'I,' which is Ihesus, is fro me fall" (186).[43] For this same reason, Mary eventually renounces the name "modir" (225) altogether; its letter "i," like the letters in "Maria" and "Marie," is lost at the moment of the crucifixion. Bryan reads such "distortions and dislocations" as Mary's rejection of the self-referential "I," an act dramatizing within the Virgin "a dissolution of identity, of subjectivity itself." But because Mary performs this dissolution of subjectivity exclusively within language, those dislocations speak equally strongly to the collapse of the speech that the poem enacts.[44] In this regard, it is especially significant that each time Mary perverts her name, she does so specifically with regard to its vocative functions: "Wel may men clepe and calle me Mara / ... How sholde I lenger clept be Maria" (183-85); "Marie? Nay, but 'marred' I thee

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[42] John 19:26: "Cum vidisset ergo Iesus matrem, et discipulum stantem, quem diligebat, dicit matri suae: Mulier, ecce filius tuus [When Jesus therefore had seen his mother and the disciple standing whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman, behold thy son]."

[43] On Hoccleve's use of the Mara/Maria pun, see Ellis, *"My Compleinte" and Other Poems*, 62, n. 182ff.

[44] Bryan, "The Politics of Complaint," 1177.

calle" (218); "of modir ... / No more maist thow clept be by thy name" (225-26). Each of these linguistic disjunctures deals with the Virgin's name as it is "calle[d]" and "clept." Moreover, each implicitly but decidedly negates her connection to the invocatory words of the *Ave Maria* itself and dissociates her from the very forms of remembrance upon which Marian devotion and salvation so conspicuously depend.

A number of critics have discussed the gender and power dynamics implicit in late medieval accounts of the Virgin's suffering. Thomas Bestul describes the intensely tearful reaction of the Virgin in later medieval *planctus Mariae* as part of "a theological doctrine ... that stressed the idea of Mary's unique compassion, or co-suffering, with Christ, a doctrine that gradually created an exalted position for Mary as the co-redemptrix of the human race."[45] He locates within the Virgin's emotional meltdown a space in which Mary's agency, both as divine mediator and as woman, is simultaneously constrained and amplified. But I want to argue that within the particular economy of speech that Hoccleve proposes in his "Complaint of the Virgin," the systemic failure of the spoken word that coincides with Mary's breakdown is more monolithically threatening; indeed, it undermines the very means of salvation that Marian intercession, and particularly the *Ave Maria*, enable.

It is inevitable, therefore, that the poem recuperate the efficaciousness of speech – both as prayer and a means to invoke the Virgin – and affirm its role in an economy of salvation. Such an affirmation comes in the final three stanzas of the work when Mary "at last ... performs her ordained role, mediating between sinful humanity and crucified

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[45] Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 113.

Christ."[46] Turning to address the "sones of Adam," the Virgin suddenly refocuses her

personal lament outward, asking the reader to "see how my sone for your gilt and blame /

Hangith heer all bybled vpon the crois" (299-300). Mary also refers to herself as "a

modir" (239), a term that she had repudiated only a few lines before but which now

serves to reassure that she has resumed her traditional identity as "Goddes modir, of vertu

the flour" ("Monk" 35). Finally, the Virgin exhorts the reader to mourn Christ "in herte

and cheere and *vois*" (231), thus emphasizing the role of spoken prayer in remembrance

and inviting the poem's addressees to assume a devotional stance similar to that

displayed in "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin."

But "vois" is not the only thing rehabilitated in these final lines; along with the

affirmation of spoken piety, the final stanzas also witness the return of the reciprocal

structures that were so central to the salvific economy of Hoccleve's miracle of the

Virgin:

> If yee to him han any affeccioun
>
> Now for his wo your hertes oghten colde.
>
> Shewith your loue and your dileccioun.
>
> For your gilt makith he correccioun
>
> And amendes right by his owne deeth.
>
> That ye nat reewe on him, myn herte it sleeth. (233-38)

The spiral of loss dramatized in the first part of the poem – the very failure of prayer

itself to function in fulfillment of the Christian promise of redemption – is replaced here

by an economy in which the interdependent relationship between Christ and mankind is

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[46] Bryan, "The Politics of Complaint," 1178.

paramount, in which the faithful reciprocate the "correccioun" of His martyrdom when they "Shewith [their] loue and [their] dileccioun" (235), and in which their prayer – their "vois" – both ensures and requites "redempcioun" (245). Indeed, the Virgin herself now claims that any failure to honor and mourn her son appropriately will " [her] herte ... sleeth" (238), a statement that proposes types of exchange similar to those we see in "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin." Speaking now in her capacity as heavenly intercessor, Mary grieves not for the death of her son but for the prospect of humankind's failure to recognize and reciprocate the blood "despent in greet foysoun... for... redempcioun" (244-45). Within the positive eschatological framework of the poem's final stanzas, the reciprocal relationship of redemption is once again fulfilled by the spoken words of prayer, words that purchase salvation rather than engender loss.

Economies of Madness and Recovery in Hoccleve's *Series*

Hoccleve's Marian poetry thus develops a devotional economy predicated simultaneously on the hierarchical precepts of noble gift giving and on the more horizontal arrangements that prevailed in England's vibrant money economy, described by Lee Patterson as one "of the central elements that constitute[d] life in late medieval London."[47] I have argued that Hoccleve posits spoken prayer as a key medium of exchange within that devotional economy, a *de facto* currency whose value is predicated not only upon its circulation but also upon its ability to perform necessary salvific work. Within his Marian lyrics – and most evidently within "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" and the "Complaint of the Virgin" – Hoccleve offers his readers a soteriology that

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[47] Lee Patterson, "'What is Me?': Self and Society in the Poetry of Thomas Hoccleve," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2002): 468.

depends upon these economic and linguistic features. The real threat to our salvation, his poems demonstrate, comes when one or another of them breaks down: when spoken prayers are flawed or incomplete; when the intercessor makes herself unavailable to the supplicant; when the supplicant does not provide an adequate number of prayers to the intercessor. But if we put its overtly soteriological aspects aside, this idiosyncratic economy of speech cannot be relegated solely to Hoccleve's devotional works. Rather, the economic and linguistic dynamic that Hoccleve represents in his Marian lyrics assumes a central position in his secular poems, particularly in his final group of works, the five linked poems known as *The Series*. This unity between Hoccleve's sacred and secular writing – this link from the efficacious prayer to the efficacious petition by way of the often-empty purse – illuminates close affinities among religious, economic and even political redemption in Hoccleve's corpus, and it underscores the increasing work that the spoken word was understood to perform in the early years of the Lancastrian dynasty.

Responses to the autobiographical elements of *The Series* have varied widely. Most earlier critics understood the poem's account of Hoccleve's "wilde infirmite" (*Series* 1.40) and its aftermath to be uncritical self-description, so much so that D. C. Greetham could bemoan an overall critical response to the work that simply "took Thomas Hoccleve at his word" and ascribed neither a rhetorical nor narrative function to his autobiographical stance.[48] Greetham's lament, though, is something of an overstatement: five years earlier, John Burrow had called *The Series* a poem "preoccupied with the business of its own composition," and ten years before that,

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[48] D.C. Greetham, "Self-Referential Artifacts: Hoccleve's Persona as a Literary Device," *Modern Philology*, 86 (1989): 242.

Penelope Doob had argued that Hoccleve's presentation of his disease and recovery owed a great deal to conventional medieval understandings of madness as both punishment for and purgation of sin.[49] What these two readings have in common, as Greetham might suggest, is a general assumption of the truth value of Hoccleve's account, which is to say they both accept, either tacitly or explicitly, Hoccleve's madness and recovery as actual historical events. Nonetheless, the readings also show Hoccleve's response to his madness, whether autobiographical or not, to be mediated through specific cultural and literary filters, a point that is ultimately more significant, I would assert, than whether Hoccleve experienced exactly what he describes.

Recent critical responses to *The Series* have largely adhered to this pattern, though they have posited an increasingly diverse range of assessments: Hoccleve's work has been perceived alternately as demonstrating proto-humanist anxiety about a medieval world still uncertain about the place of the individual, as detailing a psychosomatic response to the exigencies of life in fifteenth-century London, as revealing "the workings of a consciousness for which self-knowledge and social acceptance are at once goals to be achieved and conclusions to be avoided," and finally as developing "a sophisticated meditation upon the irresolvable fragmentation of the self and the intricate connections between [Hoccleve's] poetic project and the specific cultural milieu of the Privy Seal."[50] Like these readings, my own discussion of the poem does not depend upon the

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[49] John Burrow, "Hoccleve's Series: Experience and Books," in *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays* ed. Robert F. Yeager (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1984), 260; Penelope Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), especially 208-231.

[50] Stephen Harper, *Insanity, Individuals, and Society in Late-Medieval English Literature: The Subject of Madness* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), especially 173-219; Matthew Boyd Goldie, "Psychosomatic Illness and Identity in London, 1416-1421: Hoccleve's Complaint and Dialogue with a Friend," *Exemplaria* 11 (1999): 23-52; Patterson, "What Is Me?" 444; Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse*, 163.

autobiographical verity of Hoccleve's madness and recovery. Though Hoccleve does insist upon positioning himself at the very center of his work, both referring to his "felawis of the Priue Seel" (1.296) and inscribing his own name in the friend's address in the "Dialogue" (2.3, 20), the poetic "I" that he develops within it is nonetheless a narrative persona, one whose autobiographical function should not eclipse its rhetorical one. I am interested in examining the linguistic economy that Hoccleve uses his autobiographical persona to develop, an economy that, in itself, proposes a path to salvation similar to that depicted in the Marian lyrics.

In the secular *Series* that salvation is not the spiritual redemption of the penitent but the psychological and social redemption of a man struggling to come to grips with his "þouȝtful maladie" (1.21). Hoccleve advances it most overtly in the "Complaint," the "Dialogue with a Friend," the brief continuance of the "Dialogue" at the beginning of the "Tale of Jonathas," and the envoy to Lady Westmorland – the segments of the *Series* framing the work's central three narrative exempla and those most commonly labeled autobiographical by modern readers. In the first segment, the "Complaint," Hoccleve depicts himself ruminating upon his madness in solitude, engaged only in the private actions of reading and thought. The opening lines of the poem emphasize this solitude by darkly inverting the opening lines of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a work whose very organizing conceit – tales told on a springtime pilgrimage to Canterbury – emphasizes the importance of "felaweshipe" and "compaignye":

> Aftir þat heruest inned had hise sheues,
>
> And that the broun sesoun of Mihelmesse
>
> Was come, and gan the trees robbe of her leues,

>That grene had ben and in lusty freisshenesse,
>
>And hem into colour of ȝelownesse
>
>Had died and doun throwen vndirfoote,
>
>That chaunge sanke into myn herte roote. (1.1-7)

Here, as Burrow writes, "November drives Hoccleve in upon himself in solitary meditation."[51] Whereas Chaucer "on a day... by aventure yfalle / In felawshipe" (*CT* I 19, 25-26), Hoccleve "vppon a niȝt, / Siȝynge sore ... in [his] bed lay" (1.17-18), quietly pondering his "siknesse" (1.22) and its sad consequences. In a continued inversion of Chaucer's text, Hoccleve relates how his friends undertook pilgrimages *for* him during his infirmity; they leave him in his solitude until the "greef aboute [his] herte so sore swal" (1.29) that he "nolde kepe it cloos no more" (1.32).

Phrases like these propose Hoccleve's isolation to be a physical ailment, tantamount in some ways to the poet's "bodily sikenesse" (1.38) itself. But as the poem continues, the terms of that isolation shift. Rather than continuing to develop the stifling, bodily solitude presented in the opening stanzas, the poem increasingly insists upon a decidedly linguistic isolation, one in which Hoccleve is alone even "among the prees" (1.73) by virtue of his exclusion from spoken discourse. Initially, such linguistic isolation seems only to be an extension of the physical isolation of the prologue; Hoccleve complains, for example, that "hem þat weren wonte me for to calle ... Her heed they caste awry, / Whanne I hem mette, as they not me sy" (1.75-77), a description of his enforced solitude that highlights his physical dissociation from his former acquaintances and, as Knapp suggests, serves to "emphasize a sense of simultaneous isolation and

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[51] Burrow, "Experience and Books," 261.

claustrophobia."[52] Soon, however, Hoccleve's isolation begins to manifest itself in the

same terms of remembrance (or lack of remembrance) that we witnessed in the Marian

lyrics: "Forȝeten I was al oute of mynde awey, / As he þat deed was from hertis cherte"

(1.80-81). Eventually Hoccleve's solitude is predicated almost entirely upon an inability

to engage meaningfully in conversation. The poet's friends speak around Hoccleve but

not to him: "Thus spake manie oone and seide by me" (1.85); Hoccleve overhears

conversations about him but is in no position to respond: "Tho wordis, hem vnwwar, cam

to myn eere" (1.91). Bereft of speech, Hoccleve is regarded as an animal by his former

intimates, one of whom "seiden [he] loked as a wilde steer" (1.120) while "anothir seide

... 'Full bukkissh is his brayn'" (1.122-23). Hoccleve listens to the words of others, but

these only propel him into his own thoughts rather than into speech ("I leide an eere ay to

as I by wente, / And herde al, and þus in myn herte I caste: / 'Of longe abidinge here I

may me repente" [1.134-35]). Exiled from the spoken commerce of his former friends,

Hoccleve finally allows himself to descend entirely into silence: "Forwhy, as I had lost

my tunges keie, / Kepte I me cloos, and trussid me my weie" (1.144-45). Despite the

slanderous "suffring wronge" (1.179) that has been done to him, Hoccleve has "not

answerid aȝen, but kepte scilence / Leste þat men of me deme wolde" (1.180-81). At the

very best, these passages propose a Thomas Hoccleve who is on the thin peripheries of

spoken discourse; at the worst, they reveal a Hoccleve who is utterly silent, even in the

face of proffered speech.

David Mills argues that by "[approaching] him through a diagnostic vocabulary"

the people who speak about Hoccleve "imprison him – and themselves – in their

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[52] Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse*, 169.

discourse."[53] If that is indeed the case, however, those same speakers also seal Hoccleve off *from* their discourse, hermetically enclosing him in a third-person silence within and precluding him from participating in their verbal economy and their community. Significantly, Hoccleve sums up his linguistic isolation in explicitly economic terms:

> My wele [wealth], adieu, farwel, my good fortune.
>
> Oute of ȝoure tables me planed han ȝe.
>
> Sithen welny eny wiȝt for to commvne
>
> With me loth is, farwel prosperite.
>
> I am no lenger of ȝoure liuere.
>
> Ȝe haue me putte oute of ȝoure retenaunce
>
> Adieu, my good auenture and good chaunce. (1.267-73)

In a sentiment that immediately recalls Foucault's observation that "when goods can circulate ... they multiply, and wealth increases," Hoccleve draws a direct equation between his failure to function within a money economy and his inability to "commvne" with his friends. Speech and specie here are two sides of the same coin; a person who "may but smal seie" (1.264) will find himself unable to produce wealth, either linguistic or fiscal, within an economy of speech. If in the Marian lyrics, particularly in the "Complaint of the Virgin," we see how a breakdown in the economy of speech threatens spiritual redemption, here we see how a similar economic breakdown imperils Hoccleve's ability to attain psychological redemption.

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[53] David Mills, "The Voices of Thomas Hoccleve," *Essays on Thomas Hoccleve*, ed. Catherine Batt (Turnhout, BE: Brepolis Press, 1996), 96.

Appropriately, the first respite Hoccleve finds from his sorrows comes in the form

of a dialogue – a borrowed volume of Isidore of Seville's *Synonyma*, in which "a man

lamenting his miseries ... is interrupted and admonished by reason, who advises him to

consider the sufferings of others, and to realize that his sorrows are justly ordained by

God."[54] Reading this Boethian consolation does not necessarily constitute a triumphant

re-entry into the economies of speech from which Hoccleve has been excluded; however,

he does describe the *Synonyma* as a book that feeds him well "with the speche of

Resoun" (1.315), a formulation that suggests that he engages with the text as he would

with actual spoken discourse. As Roger Ellis notes, "For Hoccleve ... books are an item

of mental as well as commercial currency, and their circulation joins readers and writers

literally no less than metaphorically."[55] Moreover, the pseudo-speech that Hoccleve

enacts by reading Isadore seems to allow him at least some degree of redemption; in any

event, he castes his sorrow "to the cok" (1.386) and bids it farewell. Isadore's dialogue

encourages Hoccleve to understand his madness as a malady "wich cam of Goddis

visitacioun" (1.382) and over which Hoccleve has little control.

Hoccleve's reassertion of a relationship with the divine is of fundamental

importance to the "Complaint"; indeed, I want to suggest that the outlines of such a

relationship are strongly reminiscent of the relationship the monk develops with the

Virgin Mary in "The Monk who Clad the Virgin." This resemblance becomes clear near

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[54] Both A.G. Rigg and J. A. Burrow have identified the book Hoccleve refers to as the *Synonyma*, a work
widely known in the Middle Ages. See A. G. Rigg, "Hoccleve's *Complaint* and Isidore of Seville,"
Speculum 45 (1970): 564-74 (quotation from 566); J. A. Burrow "Hoccleve's *Complaint* and Isidore of
Seville Again," *Speculum* 73 (1998): 424-28.

[55] Roger Ellis, "Introduction," "*My Compleinte" and Other Poems*, 33.

the close of Hoccleve's poem when the Privy Seal clerk relates how God first afflicted

and then healed him of his madness:

Thoruȝ Goddis iust doom and his iugement

And for my best, nowe I take and deeme,

Ȝaf þat good lord me my punischement.

In welthe I took of him noon hede or ȝeme,

Him for to plese and him honoure and queme,

And he me ȝaf a boon on for to gnawe,

Me to correcte and of him to have awe.

He ȝaf me wit and he tooke it away

Whanne that he sy that I it mis dispente,

And ȝaf aȝein whan it was to his pay.

He grauntide me my giltis to repente,

And hensforwarde to sette myn entente

Vnto his deitee to do plesaunce,

And to amende my sinful gouernaunce. (1.393-406)

As in his Marian lyric, Hoccleve establishes in these stanzas a supplicant/intercessor

relationship constructed along the lines of a vertical hierarchy. And while that verticality

is less dramatically undercut by the overt references to interdependence that we see in

Hoccleve's "Monk Who Clad the Virgin," this feudally inflected relationship still offers a

certain degree of reciprocity, for example, when Hoccleve excoriates himself for his

failure to "please and ... honor and queme" God, or when he promises "Vnto his deitee to do plesaunce." The language of charity and philanthropic giving, so prevalent in the Marian lyrics, are also important to the redemptive economy of the "Complaint." Hoccleve offers God thanks for "thin infinit goodnesse / and thi ȝiftis and benefices alle" (1.411-12), an emphasis that recalls both the gifts "youen" by both monk and Mary in Hoccleve's miracle of the Virgin and the benefices sporadically offered to Hoccleve himself at the Privy Seal.[56] The same economy that allowed spiritual redemption in the devotional lyrics now enables psychological redemption in the secular "Complaint."

The next parts of the series – particularly the "Dialogue" – develop in a social setting the same redemptive linguistic economy that the "Complaint" develops in a solitary one, thus rendering *The Series* as a kind of poetic diptych and according the poem an overall typological structure in which the "Dialogue" fulfills the promise of redemptive discourse only suggested in the "Complaint." To this end, the "Dialogue" itself stands in for the Boethian exchange presented by Isadore's *Synonyma*. To be sure, such a parallel is not exact; both Knapp and Patterson point out the discrepancies between the highly stylized language of the formal Boethian consolation and the "entirely different discursive universe" that marks the more colloquial "Dialogue."[57] Despite these differences, however, both Isadore's work and the "Dialogue with a Friend" offer a dynamic of spoken exchange geared toward enabling Hoccleve's social rehabilitation, a dynamic that gives Hoccleve access to an economy of speech from which he has been exiled. Indeed,

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[56] See Knapp, "Bureaucratic Identity," 365.

[57] Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse*, 175; Patterson, "What is Me?" especially pp. 444-448.

it is the spoken aspect of the "Dialogue" (as opposed to the textual aspect of the "Complaint") that the *Series* most prominently emphasizes. James Simpson shows how Hoccleve uses an array of stylistic and rhetorical devices in the work "to efface any sense of barrier between the reader and the scene he or she witnesses," a strategy that both imparts to the "Dialogue" the appearance of reality and suggests that for Hoccleve, "the actual means to sanity ... lies in dialogue."[58] In its ostensible spoken-ness, then, the "Dialogue" seems to offer Hoccleve a degree of social redemption to go with the psychological and spiritual redemption he describes at the end of the "Complaint."

The emphasis that the "Dialogue" places on spoken exchange as a means of redemption also reveals an important thematic connection between *The Series* and Marian lyrics such as "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" and the "Complaint of the Virgin," a connection further reinforced by the commercial and economic metaphors that Hoccleve employs throughout the "Dilogue" and, more broadly, throughout the *Series*. Nowhere are these metaphors more explicit than in Hoccleve's lengthy and seemingly arbitrary screed against coin-clippers and counterfeiters, an invective that readers have attempted to integrate into the poem's concerns about madness and social reintegration in a wide variety of ways. Paul Strohm, for example, has argued that Hoccleve's diatribe implicitly supports the dynastic aims of the early Lancastrian kings, while Karen Smyth has read the passage as a rhetorical move whereby Hoccleve emphasizes the temporal and political immediacy of the "Dialogue." Other readers have simply declared the passage an aesthetic and thematic mistake, citing it as the "the main blemish" on an

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[58] James Simpson, "Madness and Texts: Hoccleve's *Series*," *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (Exeter: Short Run Press, 1991), 20, 24. Simpson is not alone in proposing a "talking cure" for Hoccleve: Burrow has raised the idea in "Autobiographical Poetry," especially 402-05, and it has reappeared more recently in Sarah Tolmie, "The Prive Scilence of Thomas Hoccleve," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000): 281-309.

otherwise unified poetic whole.[59] But the "cursid vice" (2.164) of coin-clipping that

Hoccleve discusses brings issues of value and circulation to the fore. Given the strong

economic language that marks descriptions of spoken exchange in the "Complaint," we

belittle it at our own peril.

Rather than dismissing Hoccleve's account of coin-clipping as an aesthetic

anomaly, we can more fruitfully examine it through the lens of spoken exchange. As

Hoccleve describes them to his friend, the economic implications of coin-clipping are

closely analogous to the social implications stemming from Hoccleve's "þouȝtful

maladie":

> "Howe shal þe pore do in his holde
>
> No more moneie he ne haue at al
>
> Par cas but a noble or halpenie of golde,
>
> And it so thynne is and so narowe and smal
>
> That men the eschaunge eschewen oueral?
>
> Not wil it goo but miche he theronne leese.
>
> He moot do so, he may noon other chese." (2.120-26)

This account of how coin clipping affects the poor strongly foregrounds issues of

exchange. Indeed, the very heart of the problem that Hoccleve describes is not the

physical act of clipping (the practice of shaving small amounts of gold off coins and thus

making them "narowe") but the potential for clipped coins to be refused by merchants

and kept out of circulation – for their "eschaunge [to be] eschewen." What makes coins

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[59] Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, especially pp. 142-146; Karen Smyth, "Reading Misreadings in Thomas Hoccleve's *Series*," *English Studies* 87 (2006): 16-17; Burrow, "Experience and Books," 263. Burrow writes, "The main blemish – and it is a serious one – is the passage in which the poet harangues his friend on the evils of tampering with the coin of realm."

worthless is not that they have been clipped *per se* but that they are unable to circulate, that they can no longer function effectively in an economy of exchange.

Coin-clipping was perceived as a genuine threat in the early fifteenth century; Hoccleve refers in the "Dialogue" (lines 2.136-40) to a series of statutes introduced by Parliament in 1421 standardizing the weight of English coinage and increasing punishments for counterfeiters and coin-clippers.[60] But Hoccleve's deeply personal indignation at the practice of clipping coins – his insistence that coin-clipping "hath hurt me sore" (2.101) and that it is the equal of murder, theft, extortion and heresy – does not simply reflect a keen eye for current events or a desire to ingratiate himself to potential Lancastrian patrons. Rather, it reflects the struggle that Hoccleve describes so poignantly in the "Complaint": his struggle to reaffirm his social and psychological solvency among his colleagues and friends by circulating his own speech among them; his struggle to spend the coin rendered suspect by his "wilde infirmite" in the marketplace of socially redemptive verbal exchange. Hoccleve reinforces this connection through a series of careful linguistic echoes: his concern that he "may but smal seie but if men deme I rave" (1.264) finds a numismatic counterpart in his "narowe and smal" (2.123) coins; his fear that the words of his fellow privy seal clerks are of so little value that "thei miȝten as wel haue holden her pees" (1.301) is repeated in the "Dialogue" when he wonders how a coin "may ... holde his peis whanne it is wasshe [clipped]" (2.106); his "feble wit" (1.277) becomes the coin-clipper's "feble moneie" (2.102). Hoccleve even associates coin clipping with his madness itself: the former he calls "[t]hat venym [which] ouere wide and brood spredith" (2.170); the latter he refers to as "the greuous venim / That has

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[60] See also Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, 143-144.

enfected and wildid my brain" (1.234-35). Significantly, the solution to both problems is shown to be identical: just as Hoccleve's "means to sanity ... lies in dialogue," so too does the remedy for the problem of clipped coins lie in economic circulation, a process of exchange through which, Hoccleve insists, "Vnwaisshen [uncorrupted] gold shal waisshe awey þat vice" (2.182).[61]

Dismissed or marginalized by many critics, Hoccleve's discussion of coin-clipping should, therefore, more accurately be understood as the central conceit of the "Dialogue." It is the metaphorical framework for the poem's socially redemptive economy, an economy whose respective failures and successes alternately prevent and propel the poet's fraught recovery. In this respect, the "Dialogue" fundamentally reproduces the networks of linguistic and economic exchange developed in Hoccleve's Marian lyrics. The coin itself – be it clipped or unclipped – becomes a literal embodiment of the linguistic currency idealized in "The Monk who Clad the Virgin"; the destabilization and proposed redemption of that coin echoes the analogous destabilization and redemption of speech in "The Complaint of the Virgin." Moreover, insofar as they ask us to recall the metaphorical links between the spoken word and the minted coin – the "relativity and differentiation" that Boethius sees connecting the two as well as the signifying function that each holds within analogous systems of exchange[62] – Hoccleve's coins, both clipped and whole, become a concrete manifestation of the metaphorical value the poet ascribes to the spoken word. They are emblematic of the properties of circulation that make the spoken word so valuable a commodity, and they further remind

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[61] Simpson, "Madness and Texts," 24

[62] See Shoaf, *Currency of the Word*, 11; Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 203.

us of the corruption and subsequent devaluation to which speech, like coinage, is necessarily vulnerable.

If Hoccleve's screed against coin clipping responds to his inability to circulate his own damaged coin within a linguistic economy, then the "Dialogue" fits into the patterns of redemption through verbal exchange developed by the *Series* as a whole. First, the "Dialogue" extends the recuperative work hinted at in the "Complaint" by replacing the implicit and solitary discourse of Isadore's *Synonyma* with the explicit, social discourse of Hoccleve's conversation. More important, however, the "Dialogue" works to position the economy of speech developed in the *Series* into the same idiosyncratic and reciprocal economy developed in "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin," an economy that suggests, paradoxically, the simultaneous operation of a seigneurial, vertically aligned hierarchy and a mercantile, horizontally inflected arrangement. Hoccleve alludes to the vertical structures of this economy when he invokes the Lancastrian "patronage nexus" into which he hopes to enter his work; indeed, we would be hard pressed to think of Hoccleve seeking patronage from "My lord of Gloucestre" (2.534), a man second only to "our lord lige, our king victorious" (2.554), without considering the strict vertical strategies of exchange implicit in such a relationship.[63]

Hoccleve's friend in the "Dialogue" suggests a similar hierarchy when he urges Hoccleve to atone for the misogyny of his translation of Christine de Pizan's *L'epistre de Cupide*. By writing "sumwhat now ... in honour and preysynge of [women]" (2.673-74), the friend insists, Hoccleve will be able to redeem himself from the anger of his female readers and once again gain their favor. The friend offers Hoccleve the following advice:

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[63] The phrase "patronage nexus" is from Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, 181

"Be heuy of thy gilt, and the confesse,

And satisfaccioun do thow for it.

Thow woost wel, on wommen greet wyt and lak

Ofte haast thow put. Bewaar lest thow be qwyt.

Thy wordes fille wolde a quarter sak

Which thow in whyt depeynted haast with blak." (2.665-70)

*   *   *   *   *

"By buxum herte and by submissioun

To hir graces, yildinge thee coupable,

Thow pardon maist haue and remissioun,

And do vnto hem plesance greable." (2.687-90)

The posture that the friend advises is one of abject submission, a posture drawn at once from the devotional stance that the monk assumes in "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" and from the exaggerated positions of fealty and devotion that informed the discourse (if not necessarily the practice) of gender relations within the court. Indeed, Hoccleve's friend advises the Privy Seal clerk to capitulate entirely to his female readers, to "humble [his] goost" (2.692) and "[ask] hir graces with greet repentance" (2.716), to "yilde" himself (2.698) to the will of women and "take on thee swich rule and gouernance / as thee rede wolde" (2.718-19). Hoccleve, the friend suggests, will escape from a courtly hell of his own making by "prolle [prowling] aftir wommennes beneuolence" (2.744). In the face of the supplicatory posture Hoccleve assumes in the poem, we also see evidence of the self-interested philanthropy of the upper classes. This is particularly true when the friend instructs Hoccleve to "do vnto hem [women] plesance greable" (2.690) in order

that he might gain "pardon ... and remissioun" (2.689). The *quid pro quo* nature of such

an arrangement underscores the self-interest of Hoccleve's outward humility. More

tellingly, after Hoccleve assumes the posture of subservience that his friend recommends,

he writes "I lowly me submitte / To your bontees" (2.813-14), a phrase that both

reinforces the seigneurial hierarchy that Hoccleve proposes and reminds us of the

"bontee" that he hopes to receive for such submission. The phrase also pointedly recalls

Hoccleve's description of Mary in "Item de Beata Virgine" as "Modir of pitee, / Of al

bountee thow verray cofre and cheste" (Gollancz V 127-29). It invites us to see Hoccleve

in the *Series* as the same persona who repeatedly commends his soul to the Virgin in

paroxysms of guilty, sinful abjection.

But as with the Marian lyrics, the nature of the economy suggested by the poem is

not entirely that of a feudally inflected hierarchy of exchange. Indeed, within the

strictures of the vertical hierarchy he advises, Hoccleve's friend also suggests that the

poet "purchase" (2.678) with his "greet craft and art" (2.682) the love of the women he

has angered, and he warns Hoccleve that without such purchase he will be "qwyt" (2.668)

for his perceived misogyny. Both of these sentiments resonate strongly with the precepts

and the vocabulary of market exchange. Moreover, Hoccleve's friend explicitly invokes

Chaucer's Wife of Bath as an "auctrice" (2.694), a rhetorical move that draws attention to

one of the *Canterbury Tales*'s most hierarchy-violating (not to mention most

mercantilistic) pilgrims, even as it reverses traditional assumptions of authority by

declaring a figure so known for her reliance on "experience" to be an "auctrice." Such

passages thus undercut the strict hierarchy of intercessor and supplicant and suggest the

simultaneous existence of a horizontally aligned system of exchange based on mercantile

rather than feudal exchange strategies. Here again, as in the Marian lyrics, Hoccleve

develops an economy of exchange in which a palpable tension exists between coexisting

models of noble giving and of the marketplace.

Despite their manifest similarities, the redemptive economies shared by the

Marian Lyrics and the "Dialogue" differently construe the specific nature of the linguistic

currency upon which each economy relies. The primary medium of exchange in

Hoccleve's Marian lyrics is the spoken prayer. In "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin,"

Hoccleve's monk gives the Virgin her garment by uttering a prescribed cycle of *Ave*

*Maria*s, the same prayers with which he later ensures himself a place at the head of his

abbey, with which he is able engender the salvific multiplication of the final stanzas, and

for which the Virgin "souffissantly qwythth" (123) him. Prayers perform a similar

function in the darker "Complaint of the Virgin," where Mary's verbal self-effacement

threatens to deny access to the salvific economy of "herte and cheere and vois"

("Complaint" 231) and to the redemption offered by Christ's sacrifice. The "Dialogue,"

however, posits a system of exchange which, while functionally the same as that of the

Marian lyrics, seems driven more by the written word than by the spoken, a system

whose currency is the poetic text itself. This is not to say that speech is unimportant in

the poem; the "Dialogue," after all, purports to be the transcript of a conversation

between friends, a poem that strives to create the illusion of dialogic immediacy. This

very dialogic aspect of the poem, after all, grants Hoccleve entree into the economies of

exchange that catalyze his social and psychological recovery. But when Hoccleve's

friend encourages Hoccleve to assume a devotional stance in order to "purchace" (2.668)

back the love of women, he explicitly encourages the poet to "wryte in honour and

preysynge," rather than to speak. And when Hoccleve finally does "submitte / to [the] bountees" (2.813-14) of his female readers, he offers not to verbalize their praises but to "translate ... a tale ... late sy [seen], in honour and plesance / of yow, my ladyes" (2.820-22). Within the socially and psychologically redemptive economy of the *Series*, the poem itself, like the spoken utterance, becomes a medium of economic exchange. The poet's written statement joins the spoken devotional utterance as a currency that moves up the seigneurial hierarchy of philanthropic giving and across the helter-skelter, horizontal plane of the marketplace.

What the "Complaint" performs for Hoccleve psychologically and the "Dialogue" performs socially, the *Series*'s envoy to Lady Westmoreland performs extra-textually. Signed "Humble seruant to your gracious noblesse / T. Hoccleve" (*Series* 5.741-2) and included immediately after the "Tale of Jonathas," the envoy establishes a recuperative economy beyond the hermetic confines of the poem itself, one whose effect seems focused not on Hoccleve's narrative persona but on Hoccleve himself:[64]

> Go, smal book, to the noble excellence
>
> Of my lady of Westmerland, and seye
>
> Hir humble seruant with all reuerence
>
> Him recommandith vnto hir nobleye
>
> And byseeche hir on my behalue and preye
>
> Thee to receyue for hir owne right,
>
> And looke thow in al manere weye

---

[64] Lee Patterson discusses what he considers Hoccleve's dubious decision to dedicate the *Tale of Jonathas*, a profoundly anti-feminist, even misogynistic tale, to Joan Beaufort, Lady Westmorland: "How could Hoccleve possibly have thought it appropriate to dedicate this particular tale, which describes a woman persuading a young man to part with his inheritance and then being savagely punished, to this particular woman?" See Patterson, "What is Me?": 450.

To plese hir wommanhede do thy might. (5.733-40)

Except for its nod to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* ("Go, litel bok, go litel myn

tragedye" [*TC* 5.1786]), this conventional envoy would under most circumstances be of

only passing interest. In the specific context of *The Series*, however, the envoy seems to

hold for Hoccleve the genuine prospect of redemption from his madness. Indeed, if the

autobiographical frame elements of the poem are, as many readers have suggested,

reflective of Hoccleve's own struggle for social redemption after a period of mental

illness, the Envoy may be seen as a final step in the poet's rehabilitation, a short verse

that denotes the establishment of a redemptive relationship of exchange outside of the

confines of the text. And whereas written poetry replaces spoken prayer and spoken

petition as a medium of exchange within *The Series*, *The Series* itself subsequently

becomes the medium of exchange within its own envoy. Like the prayers in the Marian

lyrics, *The Series* functions to "byseeche [Lady Westmorland] on [Hoccleve's] behalue"

and "to plese hir wommanhede." It recapitulates the feudally inflected hierarchy of

philanthropic giving by recommending the "humble" Hoccleve "vnto hir nobleye" and by

showing Hoccleve's "reuerence" in the face of Lady Westmoreland's "noble excellence."

Within the system of patronage and reciprocity that Hoccleve invokes here, he himself

assumes the position of the monk in his miracle of the Virgin, offering both his fealty and

his labor, expecting in recompense the fruits of the lady's "gracious noblesse" (5.741).

Clothing the Virgin and Clothing the Emperor

Hoccleve's Marian lyrics and the *Series* develop an economy of speech that also

figures in the poet's remaining autobiographical works, *La Male Regle* and *The Regement*

of Princes. Written as a penitential lyric and completed between 1405 and 1406, *La Male*

Regle is a ostensibly a first-person account of Hoccleve's misspent youth, a "confession

in the form of a prayer to the god of health."[65] As such, the poem immediately puts itself

into a devotional framework familiar from the Marian lyrics, a vertically oriented

hierarchy that is necessarily predicated upon the offering of the spoken word – here the

words of confession – to effect redemption. Into this devotional framework, Hoccleve

quickly interjects the economic and linguistic metaphors that we have seen in his other

poems, referring to the god of health as the "grounde and roote of prosperitee" (*Male* 2),

lamenting that "the venym of faueles tonge / Hath mortified ... prosperitee" (211-12), and

even drawing an implicit link between the words of confession and the coin of the realm:

"By coyn, I gete may swich medecyne / As may myn hurtes all, þat me greeue, / Exyle

cleene, and voide me of pyne" (446-48).[66] In this way, Hoccleve effectively conflates

coin and auricular confession; the spoken word itself becomes the currency that finally

voids the poet of his pain.

    La Male Regle's development of a devotional linguistic economy akin to that of

the Marian lyrics comes across most strikingly in the poem's final few stanzas.

Beginning conspicuously with the words "I preye" (417), Hoccleve sublimates his

confession to "Helthe" into a pecuniary petition to "my noble lord þat now is a tresoreer"

(418), Lord Furnivall. Hoccleve asks Furnivall for his annuity (419-422), and then, under

the auspices of apologizing for his bluntness, he writes,

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[65] Thornley, "The Middle English Penitential Lyric," 297. For the dating of the poem see Ellis's notes to *La Male Regle de T. Hocleve*, in *My Compleinte and Other Poems*, 77; and Furnivall, introduction to *Hoccleve's Works: The Minor Poems*, xii.

[66] Knapp states that in these lines, Hoccleve reverses "the causal sequence between coin and confession, between poverty and penance." See "Bureaucratic Identity," 372.

> The prouerbe is, the doumb man no lond getith.
>
> Whoso nat spekith and with neede is bete,
>
> And thurgh arghnesse [cowardice] his owne self forgetith,
>
> No wondir, thogh anothir him forgete. (433-436)

Hoccleve not only establishes the hierarchical relationship of the devotional lyrics and *The Series*, he also invokes the same system of reflexivity and exchange that he developed in "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" and the "Item de Beata Virgine," a system in which the intercessor (here an earthly rather than a spiritual one) and the supplicant are locked in a mutually dependent relationship predicated upon memory. More to the point, the intimate relationship between money and language, a relationship in which speech promises to alleviate need while silence promises to exacerbate it, is explicitly tethered to that reflexivity in *La Male Regle*. Here, the "doumb man no lond getith" and the "shamelees crauour" (429) will be rewarded with "estaat real" (430).

Like *La Male Regle*, Hoccleve's *speculum principum*, the *Regement of Princes*, develops an economy of speech similar to that of the Marian lyrics and *The Series*, an economy in which, as Nicholas Perkins writes, "Hoccleve must negotiate an exchange between his words and [a] hoped-for reward from Prince Henry."[67] Here, the terms of Hoccleve's linguistic economy are primarily pecuniary rather than socially or spiritual redemptive, but both the exchange of word for coin and the concomitant hierarchical flexibility are closely analogous. The terms of the *Regement*'s specific economy become clear when we consider a passage near the conclusion of the poem in which Hoccleve laments that he is rapidly running out of poetic ideas.

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[67] Perkins, *Counsel and Constraint*, 39

More othir þing, wolde I fayne speke & touche

Heere in þis booke; but such is my dulnesse –

ffor þat al voyde and empty is my pouche, –

Þat al my lust is queynt with heuynesse,

And heuy spirit comaundith stilnesse.

And haue I spoke of pees, I schal be stille;

God sende vs pees, if þat it be his wille. (5013-5019)[68]

Antony Hassler notes that that Hoccleve here presents himself as a poet "whose words are coins, proffered in hope of some return"; the conflation of the monetary and the poetic is cemented by Hoccleve's "voyde and empty ... pouche," a conceit that evokes "the silence encroaching on a weary body and a flagging tongue, a poet who has nothing more to say, nothing more to invest."[69] But this passage engages strikingly with the rest of Hoccleve's work. Within the work's petitionary mode, the empty pouch is not only emblematic of poetic and pecuniary exhaustion; it also becomes an image for the self-reflexivity and the dependence upon circulation that we have observed in so much of Hoccleve's work, both secular and religious. Just as the Monk is granted heavenly and earthly reward for his speech to the Virgin Mary and just as Hoccleve himself is granted relief from his "þouȝtful maladie" through dialogue and social intercourse, so the poet who offers linguistic currency from his pouch will be rewarded with fiscal currency to put back into that pouch. It is the inter-circulation of coin and word here that gives both

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[68] Hoccleve, *The Regement of Princes*, 181

[69] Antony Hassler, "Hoccleve's Unregimented Body," *Paragraph*, 13 (1990): 178-79. See also Tolmie, "The Prive Scilence of Thomas Hoccleve," especially pp. 300-306.

things their value, the ability of poetic language to provide the money needed by the poet and the ability of money to provide the poetic language needed by the prince.

Insofar as they are predicated upon the value that the word accrues as it circulates, the economies of speech in *La Male Regle* and *The Regement of Princes* are reflective of a wide cultural understanding that words can do work, that speech – whether vocalized or poetic – can act effectively upon the world around it. In "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin," spoken prayers clothe the Virgin and engender the young ecclesiast's salvation; in the "Complaint of the Virgin," the failure of speech brings sorrow to Mary while the recuperation of speech holds the promise of Christian redemption. Among the secular poems, Hoccleve's *Series* shows verbal and poetic speech to be the means by which the poet recovers not only his sanity but his social position; both *La Male Regle* and *The Regement of Princes* develop economies in which words bring health and wealth to the poet. The efficacy of the spoken word in Hoccleve's Marian lyrics is crucial to the poems' devotional contexts; as my analysis of *Saint Erkenwald* demonstrates, the performative potential of speech has important ramifications in late medieval religious culture. By developing similar models for the spoken word in his autobiographical and political works, Hoccleve indicates that ideals of performative speech are equally applicable to secular arenas, that words have the ability to perform work not only for the church but for the crown. For no one is that fact more important than for the early kings of the Lancastrian dynasty.

The struggle of the nascent Lancastrian dynasty to legitimate itself in the wake of Richard II's deposition and subsequent murder is well known. Strohm provides a particularly evocative account of how both Henry IV and Henry V manipulated

chronicle-writing, written prophesy, legal writing, public spectacle, and even gossip to strengthen their tenuous claim to the throne and to "dominate their subjects' political imagination." The Lancastrians even stoked English fears of the encroachment of Lollardy in order to cement their reputation as paragons of orthodox Christianity and the rightful heirs of the throne "vacated" by Richard II. As Strohm explains, the first Lancastrian kings frequently enlisted poetic texts in their efforts to stabilize rule and dramatize their late transformation from nobles into kings: "Fully implicated in the Lancastrian task of legitimating self-transformation was the Lancastrian poet. Long recognized as practitioners and exemplars of poetry as 'symbolic legitimation,' Lancastrian poets like Lydgate and Hoccleve moved well beyond the frontiers of simple integration and into a zone of complex complicity."[70]

The question of Hoccleve's "complicity" in the Lancastrian project is still a matter of debate; Strohm's suggestion that Hoccleve was "a royalist stooge" has lately met with increasing resistance by those who see both trenchant criticism and genuine advice simmering beneath his apparent support of the Lancastrian cause.[71] I contend, however, that the very question of Hoccleve's complicity, with all of the moral and ethical implications that it drags behind it, is the wrong one to be asking. Whether Hoccleve was actively complicit, merely self-interested, or even subtly critical of

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[70] Strohm, *England's Empty Throne*, 2, 141. Like Strohm, Derek Pearsall finds Hoccleve to be complicit in Lancastrian designs of dynastic legitimation and reads the *Regement of Princes* as "part of a larger program of kingly self-representation." See Derek Pearsall, "Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes*: The Poetics of Royal Self-Representation," *Speculum* 69 (1994): 386; also Larry Scanlon, "The King's Two Voices: Narrative and Power in Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes*," *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, ed. Lee Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 216-247.

[71] The label is Tolmie's, in "Prive Scilence," 282. Like Tolmie, both Knapp and Judith Ferster object to the view that Hoccleve unambiguously supported the Lancastrian dynastic cause. See Knapp, "Bureaucratic Identity"; Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), especially 137-159. Underlying both of these essays is David Lawton's seminal reappraisal of fifteenth-century poetry, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century," *English Literary History*, 54 (1987): 761-799.

Lancastrian dynastic ambitions, what was really important to the Lancastrians and their

supporters was the work that words could do in helping to secure their throne, the ability

of the spoken word, prayer, prophesy, or poem to make legitimate their royal claim.

Whether Hoccleve's poetry actually did perform this dubious service for the house of

Lancaster is a question that remains to be debated, but there can be no doubt that it

provided a model for how such work could be transacted and demonstrated. In their

idiosyncratically economic terms, Hoccleve's poems demonstrate the performative

potential of the word. But despite the persistence of economic and financial metaphors in

Hoccleve's poetry, in the final analysis we can see it moving towards a poetics that seeks

even to transcend economics, a poetics in which words themselves function to change the

world around them, a poetics in which, as Lois Ebin writes, "the poet's words become a

form of service to the state, a potent source of political illusion making, rewarded and ...

feared by monarchs." As such, we might even imagine Hoccleve pointing toward a

poetics where "the poet's language now acquires creative force" and "the poet's words,

like the creative Word of God have the power to form a 'second nature.'"[72] In this sense,

Hoccleve's verse occupies a space where poetic speech not only clothes the Virgin, it

crowns the King.

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[72] Lois A. Ebin, *Illuminator, Makar, Vates: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 195-196.

EPILOGUE

"Wyth hym there was a Plowman, was his brother":

The Two Plowmen and the Power of Speech

"The Story of the Monk Who Clad the Virgin by Singing Ave Maria" has been all but ignored by contemporary critics anxious to dub Hoccleve England's first autobiographical poet on the basis of the *Series*, the *Regement of Princes* and *La Male Regle*. The poem, it seems, was noticed little more in its own time; it exists only in three manuscripts, a slim number when we consider the eleven surviving witnesses of Hoccleve's "Complaint of the Virgin," the ten copies of the poet's translation of Christine de Pizan's "L'Epistre de Cupide," or the seven known manuscripts of the *Series*.[1] Nonetheless, "The Monk Who Clad the Virgin" found a dubious second life in one mid-fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales* when it was recited by Chaucer's most famously silent pilgrim, the Plowman.[2] Introduced by a spurious link in which Harry Bailly invites "Ploughman Tylyer" to "telle hys tale, as lot comyth aboute," Hoccleve's short paean to the Virgin rests uneasily between the tales of the Squire and the Second Nun, a straightforward exemplum of Marian devotion in the midst of Chaucer's sometimes conflicting, often heterodox, always beguiling collection of tales.[3]

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[1] See Boyd, "Hoccleve's Miracle of the Virgin"; Ellis's introduction to Hoccleve, *"My Compleinte" and Other Poems*, vii-ix.

[2] That manuscript is now known as Christ Church Oxford MS 152. See Bowers, Introduction to "The Ploughman's Tale," in *Continuations and Additions*, 24

[3] Bowers, *Continuations and Additions*, 26 (ll. 5-6).

The compilers of the Christ Church manuscript might have had several reasons for including Hoccleve's poem in Chaucer's book. The simplest is that when they were faced with both a mute pilgrim and a few blank pages after the *Squire's Tale*, they opted to fill both textual voids with a single poetic gesture. John Bowers, however, suggests that the assignment of the Tale to the Plowman rather than another silent pilgrim (one of the five guildsmen or the yeoman, for example) is itself significant:

> The plowman-figure had become the focus of considerable controversy beginning in the fourteenth century, accused by some preachers of opportunism during the labor shortage in the wake of the Black Death, praised by Wycliffite writers as the image of the ideal Christian .... By the mid-fifteenth century, the agents responsible for organizing the Christ Church manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales* apparently felt that even a mute Plowman was not altogether desirable .... Provided with a makeshift prologue fitting the work into the pilgrimage narrative, [Hoccleve's] rhyme-royal Miracle of the Virgin ... was placed in the mouth of the Plowman as a story of unimpeachable orthodoxy.[4]

In light of the approximate dates of the manuscript in question (c. 1460-1470), the notion that Hoccleve's "Monk Who Clad the Virgin" was added to Chaucer's work as a preemptive defense against Wycliffism seems unlikely; while it lingered into the 1430s, the Lollard movement was effectively crushed by the suppression of the Oldcastle rebellion of 1414, surviving only as a fringe movement at best.[5] Moreover, by the time

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[4] Bowers, *Continuations and Additions*, 23-24.

[5] See Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), especially pages 35-48.

the Christ Church manuscript was compiled, the house of Lancaster was no longer an emergent dynasty using the fear of Wycliffism and the stringent enforcement of religious orthodoxy to solidify their position on the throne. Rather it was a dynasty struggling to *re*claim its position at the head of the English state – by 1461, Henry VI had himself been deposed by Edward IV, thus effectively ending Lancastrian rule and ushering in the even shorter-lived rule of the House of York.

What Bowers calls "the subversive potential of the plowman as a spokesman for radical change" nonetheless loomed large in the fraught political and civic environment of the 1460s, and the insertion of Hoccleve's overly orthodox miracle of the Virgin into a manuscript of the Canterbury Tales can be understood as an attempt on the part of the compliers to eliminate any taint of heterodoxy that clung the Plowman in particular and to Chaucer's text more generally. Indeed, such a move would not have been unwarranted: a manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales* (as well as a manuscript of the *Prick of Conscience*) was produced as evidence in a 1464 heresy trial. Possibly, the owners of the Christ Church manuscript had good reason to inure themselves against similar accusations, thus the addition of the Hoccleve's overtly orthodox poem.

But the "Monk Who Clad the Virgin" was not the Plowman's final word. In the 1535-36 Thomas Godfray edition of the *Canterbury Tales* and again in the 1542 edition of William Thynne, Harry Bailly once more invites the Plowman to join in the tale-telling contest, asking him to "Come nere, and tell us some holy thynge."[6] This time, rather than responding with Hoccleve's poem, the Plowman offers the *compaignye* a debate between

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[6] "The Plowman's Tale" (l. 46) in *Six Ecclesiastical Satires*, ed. James Dean (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992). Dean's introduction to the tale provides a good overview of the its addition to Chaucer's work and its continued inclusion in the Canterbury Tales into the eighteenth century. Available at <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/plwtlint.htm>.

a pelican and a griffin that advances a clear and unequivocal anti-Papist agenda. Suddenly, the sixteenth-century Plowman becomes the very ecclesiastical reformer that was so feared in the fifteenth century. In ways analogous to the addition of Hoccleve's Marian poem, the addition of a "Lollard" *Plowman's Tale* to Reformation-era editions of the Canterbury Tales makes abundant sense: following Henry VIII's official break with Rome in 1534, it became politically expedient for the "Father of English Poesy" to be seen as "an upright Wycliffian forbear" of Tudor Protestantism.[7] This impulse toward a proto-Protestant Chaucer is particularly clear in Thynne's edition of 1542. Dedicated to Henry VIII himself, Thynne's *Canterbury Tales* actually places the anti-Catholic *Plowman's Tale* immediately after the *Parson's Tale*, thus giving the Wycliffite Plowman the last word in the Canterbury pilgrimage.[8] By appending the spurious *Plowman's Tale* to Chaucer's complex work, both Godfray and Thynne, in effect, turn Chaucer into a good Tudor Protestant.

In this dissertation, I have examined representations of speech in Middle English literature, focusing particularly on the work that the spoken word performs within that literature and how such work both reflects and acts upon its cultural environment. What I have located on a literary level, the *Plowman's Tale* enacts on a textual level. Indeed, in the midst of the Wars of the Roses, when the houses of Lancaster and York were vying for control of the English throne, the addition of a tale of unimpeachable orthodoxy to a single manuscript effectively recontoured the outline of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole, literally creating a new text that comported with the religious and political sensibilities of the mid-fifteenth century. Less than a century later, during a period when, as Margaret

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[7] Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 210.

[8] See Dean, *Six Ecclesiastical Satires*, introduction; Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 229.

Aston notes "religious persecution was going on under the Act of Six Articles," the addition of the Wycliffite *Plowman's Tale* made appropriately Anglican the potentially too-Catholic collection of tales.[9] Insofar as our understanding of the historical Chaucer is necessarily mediated through his texts, we can even see the early compilers of the *Canterbury Tales* – Catholic and Protestant alike – as altering the figure of Chaucer himself, as making a new author by giving voice to his mute pilgrim. Thus, while we usually imagine Chaucer creating and managing the often clamorous voices of the Canterbury pilgrims, the Plowman's two tales show us that, in important ways, the voices of Chaucer's pilgrims – the ventriloquized speech of 30 imaginary travelers – ultimately do the work of creating their author. Here, filtered through the gauzy haze of history, we can see the literary spoken word creating the world around it.

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[9] Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 229

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