Families, Fictions, and Seeing Through Things:
Re-Reading Langland, Chaucer, and the *Pearl*-Poet

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the generation of meaning in medieval texts and suggests ways in which we can *re*generate that meaning by deploying medieval hermeneutic models. Unlike previous scholarship in this particular area, much of which focuses upon how scholasticism and the classical inheritance influenced medieval reading practices, this project brings together two relatively new theoretical models in order to re-evaluate our understanding of some well-trodden ground: the work of William Langland, Geoffrey Chaucer, and the *Pearl*-Poet. These two models are genealogy and thing theory – two perspectives which seem very different but which both resonate with medieval forms of understanding. This dual theoretical paradigm complicates our assumptions about how linear models functioned in the Middle Ages and highlights how the absence of meaning can be just as significant as its presence. The "thing," both as concrete object and divine unknown, is an integral part of genealogy, in that the linear genealogical model is constantly on the edge of dissolution as its hidden histories threaten to disrupt its stability.

In each of the four "case studies" in this dissertation I apply these models to my readings of different forms of textuality: literary tradition, the physical manuscript, and literary analysis. Langland's poem *Piers Plowman* is a central component in each case study, largely because it refuses conclusions and resolutions. Its apparent transgression of genre, its unexpected turns, and its ability to be aligned with opposing ideologies make it a puzzle to the modern reader. It is, in many ways, an indefinable "thing." Much of this project looks for such moments of "thingness" in order to explore alternate models of signification, and therefore *Piers Plowman* is ideal as the common thread connecting the different parts of my argument.

 Applying thing theory and the genealogical paradigm to the various works in this dissertation facilitates an exploration of issues such as authorship, community, individuality, and alterity and the role they play in medieval textuality. Increasing our awareness of how medieval reading practices diverge from modern ones surely enhances our understanding of how literature shaped medieval English culture – a culture which, in turn, shaped our own.

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For Rich, who believes in me even

when I don't believe in myself

Chapter 1

Introduction

"Piers," quod a preest thoo, "thi pardon moste I rede;
For I shal construe ech clause and kenne it thee on Englissh."…
In two lynes it lay, and noght a lettre moore,
And was writen right thus in witnesse of truthe:
Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam.
Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum.
"Peter!" quod the preest thoo, "I kan no pardon fynde
But 'Do wel and have wel. and God shal have thi soule,'
And 'Do yvel and have yvel, and hope thow noon oother
That after thi deeth day the devel shal have thi soule!'"
And Piers for pure tene pulled it atweyne
(*Piers Plowman* B:VII:105-117)

Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It
operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on
documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.
(Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 76)

Medievalists are continually caught up in a web of documents, of texts whose origin,

genealogy and function are often unclear. The reconstruction of a culture that thrived a half

millennium or more ago requires us to be, in Michel Foucault's words, "patiently documentary"

as we sift through thousands of textual remnants, classifying them in order to make visible the

connections between them and establish an overall sense of coherence. In other words, nearly all

of our encounters with medieval records require us to unearth textual genealogies – a task that is

as daunting as Foucault's quotation above suggests. Many of these genealogies are indeed

"tangled and confused" since they rely upon texts that have been "recopied many times" but in

seemingly infinite variations. Our sense of what a logical textual genealogy looks like (shaped by modern ideas of genre and authorship) frequently does not resonate with the medieval sense. To forget the "surprising otherness" (Jauss and Bahti 182), the alterity, of medieval textual culture is to see fragmentation instead of unity, and then to feel the need to excuse or dismiss that fragmentation. To use a simple metaphor, it is as if we are attempting to assemble a jigsaw puzzle using the wrong picture as a reference; the pieces will not fit together in the way we expect.

This project is an effort to identify a better picture to use as we put together this medieval textual puzzle. How can we adjust our own paradigms in a way that enables us to read medieval texts – literary texts in particular – more effectively? I am interested in examining failures of signification in Middle English literature in order to see whether the text's sense of unity and its cultural meaning can be understood by focusing on other literary characteristics or different reader expectations. As subsequent chapters will discuss, applying our accustomed categories of genre and literary tradition to medieval texts in order to make them fit into a comfortable hermeneutic framework prevents us from seeing some of the meaning and value latent in otherwise fragmentary, confusing, or arbitrary works.

Because the late fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman* functions as a literary touchstone in each of the following chapters, one of its most baffling passages is quoted above as an example of where signification fails – both for us as readers and for the actual characters in the poem. In this chapter's epigraph, Piers Plowman, a figure of wisdom and authority even as he works as a simple plowman, has just organized the community to work together to plow a half-acre of land before they set off to follow Piers to the tower of Truth. However, this goal of a pilgrimage gradually fades and is replaced by the physical labour of the people – the plowing becomes the pilgrimage. To reward Piers and his "heirs" for their work, Truth sends a pardon.

The contents of the pardon are summarized at great length, but in the excerpt above it is discovered to be not a pardon at all but simply a statement about living well. In anger, Piers tears it apart and vows to live by prayers and penance instead of by plowing.[1] This is a key scene in the poem because it is at this point that Piers fades as a presence in the text and Will the Dreamer takes up the quest for spiritual knowledge that both Piers and the pardon espouse.

It is not my intent here to delve into my own reading of the B-Text's Plowing of the Half Acre and Pardon scenes (Passus 6 and 7), which are complex moments in the poem and still subject to critical debate. Rather, they are highlighted as an example of *Piers Plowman*'s repeated tendency to disrupt our expectations of it. Firstly, Piers' command over the community reinforces the importance of social hierarchy while simultaneously turning it on its head; why is a plowman Latinate, and how does he have authority over a knight? Secondly, Piers' decision to labour through prayers instead of through physical work is an uncomfortable echo of the excuses of both the narrator and the Passus 6 wasters regarding why they do not work with their hands. Finally, the destruction of a document originating with Truth and the failure of that document to conform to its textual category suggests the ultimate inadequacy of textuality. This suggestion has the secondary effect of subverting the validity of the poetic effort itself, thereby paradoxically undermining the truth of the poem. The angry tearing apart of a document meant to embody truth is the most explosive manifestation of a pattern that runs throughout *Piers Plowman*: meaning fails to be where we expect it, leaving us with the choice of either ascribing sloppiness to the poet or deploying different models of understanding.

Finding a different model of understanding is exactly what Piers Plowman does in the poem when he turns away from the promised stability of documents and of physical labour and towards a contemplative lifestyle. The pardon scene represents a failure of signification both for

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[1] In the C-text, the explosiveness of the pardon-tearing is avoided by having Piers and the priest lapse into an argument about the pardon rather than destroying it.

the readers and for the characters in the poem, since Piers' turn towards spiritual labour is confusing in light of his earlier reprimand against the wasters who promised to pray because they could not work. However, he has found a new model for "Dowel" – for living the Christian life – and Will and the reader are meant to follow his lead. Indeed, it becomes more than following: because Piers disappears from the poetic action at this point, Will essentially takes up Piers' quest himself. In this sense, Will becomes the true heir of Piers, just as Truth suggested when the pardon was first passed down to the community. The poem's moral paradigm shifts in order to reconcile the failure of the pardon with the ultimate truth of Truth, and the character of Piers provides cues to the readers regarding how to understand this shift. The pardon scene is therefore not ultimately a failure in signification, but an important turn to a new model of signification.

1.1   Theoretical Perspectives

Finding a new model of signification is, in part, my objective here. In order to explore alternate ways of reading Middle English literature and close the gap between medieval and modern practices, this project employs two theoretical models throughout: the genealogical paradigm and material culture/thing theory. Because Chapter Two provides an in-depth discussion of these two theoretical models and their utility, they are only briefly introduced here.

Using genealogy as a theoretical lens is appropriate when analyzing a society in which morality and bloodlines were intertwined and precedent and origin were more highly valued than individualism or innovation. Inheritance, legitimacy, and sexuality are also issues integral to genealogy, and an understanding of genealogy's importance aids our reading of any medieval text that engages with these ideas. Thing theory and material culture, on the other hand, evaluate the production of meaning, whether such production occurs through objects or through

vocabulary.[2] Thing theory focuses on those moments in which an object fails to do what we expect and thus becomes something unclassifiable – a thing – to us. Truth's pardon is an example of such thingness: as a document, it does not adhere to its own generic category nor does it function in the community as expected. In contrast to the failure of meaning that thing theory explores, material culture analysis attempts to evaluate how a clear relationship to a human subject generates meaning in an object. Such objects are much easier to classify and understand. The movement of a physical item from a thing to an object or vice versa is about more than our own perspective on that item; it also speaks to how we identify ourselves as human subjects. As Ian Woodward states in his book *Understanding Material Culture*, "people talk about objects as a way of talking about their lives, values and experiences....It is stories and narratives that hold an object together, giving it cultural meaning" (152).

The choice of genealogy and thing theory as paths into re-reading medieval texts may at first appear arbitrary – neither is a mainstream form of literary theory, and they seem to have little relation to one another. However, both appeal to our desire for concreteness and linearity and then disrupt those expectations. The stability of the genealogical line and the physical thing can always be undermined. The fluidity that made genealogical connections valuable – the ease with which genealogies could be fictionalized in order to legitimate anything from a legal claim to a romance – also made them highly unstable. In a similar way, the importance of figurative typology and symbolism in the Middle Ages meant that objects were never fully invested in one category or definition. The Host wafer was at once Christ's body and a physical wafer, the Dreamer's jewel in *Pearl* was at once a physical pearl, a lost daughter/lover, and a bride of Christ. Exploring how we as modern readers understand objects is therefore a valuable exercise

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[2] My discussions of this theoretical model(s) here and throughout sometimes conflate both aspects by referring to it as "thing theory" only. This is done purely to avoid awkwardness in phrasing, and should not be taken to mean that the material culture aspect of object analysis has been overlooked.

and may complicate our assumptions about the relative importance of form and content as we read medieval texts.

1.1.1   Identity and Origins

One of the important concepts which is informed by both the genealogical and thing-theory models is identity – individual, communal, physical, textual, and spiritual. Much of the analysis in the follow chapters asks when and how identity should be circumscribed or defined, and particularly how medieval readers understood identity, whether that identity be their own, their community's, or a literary text's. While thing-theory highlights slippages in identity, places in which a name or a category does not fit, genealogy pinpoints it, locating a person or a text within webs of kinship or constructing identity by drawing a single line back to a speculative or fictional origin. England's emergent sense of national self-identity was informed in part by this kind of fictionalized, linear genealogy. Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century chronicle *The History of the Kings of Britain* and fourteenth- and fifteenth-century popular historical poetry such as the *Destruction of Troy,* the *Laud Troy Book,* and Lydgate's *Troy Book* were premised on a genealogy that stretched back to Brutus (founder of Britain), who was the descendant of Aeneas, the founder of Troy. Indeed, the very existence of these kinds of texts is an example of a textual microcosm of genealogy: the three Troy narratives were English translations of Guido delle Colonne's very popularly thirteenth-century *Historia destructionis Troiae,* and therefore, in their own way, were a documentary version of a largely ideological genealogical line.

This kind of linear model had the power to consolidate a sense of community identity for the British people, thereby creating open and receptive audiences for texts that employed the Trojan genealogy. Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde,* for example, appealed to readers in part because it was thought to be a historically-grounded tale and therefore one that was relevant to the British people (Ingledew 134-6). Conversely, genealogy's hidden histories, those that are

effaced by the linear construction of a family line, can redefine or disrupt the stability of identity. A modern example of this is the status of manuscript fragments, which frequently do not fit clearly into the manuscript stemma and therefore do not have a place in the textual genealogy.[3] In a medieval context, the disruptive potential of a fragmented or distended genealogy is most often manifested in a literal form: illegitimate sexual unions and bastard children. Langland expresses anxiety about this issue throughout *Piers Plowman* and, in the somewhat problematic voice of Will,[4] ascribes to such genealogical illegitimacy serious social problems:

> For sholde no clerke be crouned but yf he come were
> Of frankeleynes and fre men and of folke ywedded.
> Bondemen and bastardus and beggares children,
> Thyse bylongeth to labory, and lords kyn to serue
> Ac sythe bondemen barnes haen be mad bisshopes
> And barones bastardus haen be erchedekenes
> And soutares and here sones for suluer han be knythes…
> Popes and patrones pore gentel blood refused
> And taken Symondes sones seyntwarie to kepe
> *Piers Plowman,* C:V:66-73

It is suggested here that only those born of legitimate unions ("gentel blood") should hold privileged and powerful positions such as bishops, archdeacons, and knights, and that social disorder is the result of bastards and bondsmen – the former being illegitimate and the latter being born into a lifelong legal obligation to another family[5] – taking on social identities that contradict their genealogical identities. This is one manifestation of the medieval sense of thingness, as I discuss in the following chapter – the inversion of social order, the collapse of hierarchy and the loss of classification. Genealogy was one of the most fundamental

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[3] In Chapter Four I discuss one such fragment and the difficulty of defining it.

[4] Will makes this statement in the C:V *apologia*, the passage in which he justifies his questionable way of life. His statements about who should serve in what capacity therefore appear somewhat hypocritical. Langland's view on bastardy is largely negative, but passages such as this one and the earlier dispute over Meed's parentage show that his position is more complex than Will's words here would suggest.

[5] Rasmussen defines bondsmen as having an inherited legal status that "meant that one was bound in service to the household of another lord (who might be free or servile himself)…[with] legal restrictions on, among other things, one's choice of marriage partner and one's right to sell inherited land" (186).

determinants of identity in the Middle Ages, and therefore the moments in which it shifts call to mind the confusing opacity of Things and the character of thingness itself.

Genealogy sits on the boundary between the individual and the communal, mediating between the two. One's genealogical position is individual and unique, but it can only be defined within the context of the larger genealogical line. As I discuss in Chapter Two, this is very similar to the medieval understanding of literature: a literary text was defined by its network of affiliations and influences, rather than by its innovation or uniqueness. This balance between the individual and the communal that genealogy negotiates was critical in the medieval understanding of the self. Since Jacob Burckhardt's 1860 book *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy,* the idea of individualism and selfhood has been closely tied to the Renaissance, with many critics since that time operating under the general assumption that these ideas were not truly conceptualized (in the way we now understand them) until after the Middle Ages.[6] I suggest in the following chapters (particularly Chapters Two and Five) that interest in these ideas was developing in the late medieval period in England. It is perhaps not coincidental that as English became a language to be respected towards the end of the fourteenth century and the kingdom of Britain was becoming more self-consciously a nation, the genealogical trope in literature increasingly turned readers towards the individual as opposed to the communal while emphasizing the constant tension between the two. In *Pearl,* for example, the Pearl Maiden is transposed from one genealogical position – that of a daughter – into another (the divine bride of

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[6] Although Burckhardt's theories regarding individualism have been subject to considerable debate over the past century or so, they have still coloured modern perceptions of Renaissance humanism. In an article written in 1930, Philip Furlong stated that the Renaissance "had as its driving force a philosophy, the philosophy of humanism" (318). However, even at this time such assumptions were questioned. In 1933, Norman Nelson discussed at length the fuzziness of the boundaries between medieval and Renaissance ideologies, asking why there was so much controversy over the truth of Burckhardt's assertions. According to Nelson, the contradicting critical opinions of whether 'individualism' solely belonged to the Renaissance "is due not only to the ambiguous use of the term 'individualism', but also...to the mistake of regarding the Renaissance as a homogeneous whole" (326). The issue of definitions is of critical importance. Lee Patterson much more recently argued that our continued tendency to assign modern values to the Renaissance not only shores up the stability of our own culture, but safely distances us from the alterity of the Middle Ages ("Critical Historicism" 2).

Christ). The changeability of genealogy in this context encourages readers to focus not on the instability of the Maiden, but on how her shift changes the Dreamer's own position and acts as a catalyst for his own personal and spiritual growth. In *Piers Plowman,* the Lady Meed's shifting genealogical location (ie, the dispute over whom she is to marry and over her own legitimacy) demonstrates how malleable genealogy and, by extension, individual identity can be; her marriage partner will circumscribe her moral/spiritual identity. Meed's own identity is subject to that of the community or family around her.

The medieval sense of selfhood as suggested in these texts was therefore not one that privileged the notion of an unchanging internal sense of personal identity, but one that recognized how the vacillations of communal identity automatically affect the individual. It was important not that one resist such vacillations in order to preserve a stable sense of self, but that one use these opportunities for individual spiritual growth without disrupting the appropriate social hierarchies that comprise the larger community. The individual became increasingly important towards the end of the medieval period, as is suggested by literary trends such as the self-conscious narrator, a sense of literary ownership by authors, and highly personalized works such as *Pearl*, but it was still closely aligned with the communal. In the same way, the individuality or uniqueness of a literary text was only valuable if that text also acknowledged its debt to its ancestors and its place in the current literary network.

1.2   Case Studies

This dissertation comprises four comprehensive case studies prefaced by a chapter that discusses in detail the theoretical paradigms employed. These case studies illustrate different manifestations of the genealogical paradigm and how it infuses textual and personal identity: literary tradition (the two streams of literature we have now termed the Chaucerian and the *Piers Plowman* traditions), textual relationships (the apparent randomness of manuscript

compilations), and the literary trope of genealogy (as evidenced in *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*). While the genealogical model is deployed in order to re-read these texts and their relationship to one another, each chapter also highlight moments in which the "thing" obscures our understanding of the text – for either the medieval or the modern reader. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter Two, thingness is, at its essence, characterized not by the fact that it is a physical object but by its lack of a stable identity. Thingness can therefore be a literary quality as well, which is why some of my analyses explore how medieval writers used the vocabulary of thingness and to what effect.

Chapters Three and Four are "partner" case studies, taking as their respective subjects two of the most widely recognized and prolific Middle English literary traditions: the Chaucerian tradition and the *Piers Plowman* tradition. The critical conversation surrounding these traditions indicates that neither of them is as cohesive as the term "tradition" would suggest, nor are they as different as we have perhaps assumed. As Chapter Three reiterates, the modern academic Chaucer is a hegemonic figure whose courtly affiliations and popularity resulted in his work overshadowing that of other writers. Langland, on the other hand, has often been viewed as an outsider, a subversive writer whose intent was to provide an avenue for a communal voice – the *vox populi* – to be heard. This perspective is not universally accepted nor is it often explicitly stated, but as the discussion in Chapter Four illustrates, it has retained its traction in academic discussion for many years.[7] The idea of Langland as a symbol of British identity and a herald of future democracy is, unsurprisingly, an anachronistic notion. Langland was an orthodox writer

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[7] Thomas Whitaker's 1813 edition of *Piers Plowman* was the first since Crowley's 1550 printings, and Whitaker's romanticization of Langland as an underdog likely coloured later critical treatment by such scholars as Skeat and Furnivall. In his edition, Whitaker refers to Langland as an "obscure country priest" who spoke out against the leaders of the Church, who "were as vindictive as they were corrupt" (qtd in Matthews 172). His notion of Langland as an isolated intellectual reinforces these ideas: "I can conceive him...to have been sometimes occupied in contemplative wanderings on the Malvern Hills, and dozing away a summer's noon among the bushes, while his waking thoughts were distorted into all the misshapen forms created by a dreaming fancy. Sometimes I can descry him taking his staff, and roaming far and wide in search of manners and characters....I next pursue him to his study, sedate and thoughtful, yet wildly inventive, digesting the first rude drafts of his Visions" (173).

whose work – or whose famous plowman character – was hijacked into the service of a very different cause. Chapter Three suggests that the characterization of the plowman texts as a "*Piers Plowman* tradition" lends a constructed sense of coherence to these texts in order to establish a counter-tradition to rise up against the hegemonic Chaucerian tradition. The appeal of subversion, of the underdog, is part of the appeal of having a *Piers Plowman* tradition, but these works do not express the voice of the people in the way we might expect given the entrenched idea of Langland as a non-institutional author.

In contrast to our received ideas about how these traditions were circumscribed, this chapter suggests that the Chaucerian tradition enabled a truly "public voice" or common identity among English writers, while the *Piers Plowman* "tradition" was spawned by a largely orthodox author and then appropriated into the reformist causes of minority groups. Chaucerian writers worked according to a model of filiation, treating Chaucer as a paternal origin that legitimized their own work. However, rather than simply reproducing his work, these writers used the Chaucerian "stamp" in their own writing in order to raise the status of the English writing community as a whole. This was only possible because Chaucer was not the perfect, untouchable author that we now think of him as being; other writers in this period felt comfortable finishing his texts, changing them, and using his themes or characters to different ends. I have characterized this activity as a form of what Jacques Derrida calls the supplement:

> But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; it fills, as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. (*Of Grammatology* 145)

A perceived lack in the Chaucerian corpus opened opportunities for supplementation, for the reproduction or perpetuation of the tradition. This lack, as well as the texts that filled it, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, and is contrasted to Chapter Four's model of how the *Piers* tradition rejected or transformed its own literary "Father."

Chapter Five delves more deeply into the question of how the Chaucerian and *Piers Plowman* traditions relate to one another and whether they are, as John Bowers describes them in his recent book, antagonistic traditions. These issues are explored via an analysis of the only two manuscripts in which *Piers Plowman* and a work by Chaucer are compiled together: Huntington Library, San Marino MS HM 143 and HM 114. HM 114 contains six texts – *Piers Plowman, Mandeville's Travels, Susannah,* an excerpt from *The Legend of the Three Kings, Troilus and Criseyde,* and an English translation of Peter Ceffon's *Epistola Luciferi ad Cleros* – while HM 143 contains only *Piers Plowman* prefaced by two leaves of *Troilus and Criseyde.* These manuscripts caught my interest because of the pairing of *Troilus* and *Piers* in both of them; not only are these two poems from (allegedly) vastly divergent literary traditions, but they are also very different in terms of genre, theme, and style. This spurred me to ask whether the Chaucerian and *Piers* traditions are indeed as different as we take them to be, and whether our modern criteria for evaluating literary relationships are not adequate for assessing medieval texts. We tend to assign these kinds of compilations to the realm of the thing – they are random, incoherent, unclassifiable. In the case of HM 143 in particular, the *Troilus* leaves are often dismissed as not possessing any kind of value, for either the modern scholar or the medieval reader. They are simply fragmentary things appended to the "real" text – the HM 143 *Piers*, which is an excellent copy of the C version of the poem. Chapter Five offers some alternate ways in which to understand these manuscripts and the texts they contain.

Chapters Three to Five all use the genealogical model and the implications of thing theory to assess what we might call the external forms of literature – the "traditions" texts belong in, the *compilatio* of their manuscripts, the *ordinatio* of the page. Chapter Six applies these ideas to the literature itself by comparing *Piers* to another poem with which it seems to have little in common: *Pearl*. The analysis begins by discussing how the physical survival and editorial or

scribal paratexts of *Pearl* and *Piers* have influenced the modern and medieval reception of both poems by making them appear more divergent from one another than they actually are. This chapter uses the genealogical and material models to demonstrate how *Piers* and *Pearl* are, in fact, very similar. Family relationships are, for example, one of the key tools each writer uses to convey moral messages. Furthermore, the notion of individual identity is particularly important in both poems, and they both use similar techniques to highlight identity. In order to illuminate such connections, I employ Jacques Lacan's theory of identity formation and his related idea of thingness – *das Ding.* Notions of otherness, desire, and the unclassifiable are all critical aspects of both poems while also being central tenets of Lacanian theory. In both poems the development of the Dreamer's individual identity is dependent upon his interaction with an external figure who represents difference – Piers Plowman and the Pearl Maiden.

Through these case studies, this project seeks to use medieval models of signification in order to re-evaluate our understanding of medieval literary texts and their relationship to one another. I have used *Piers Plowman* as the central text throughout because it is, in so many ways, confusing: it was owned by orthodox clerics as well as heretics; it was compiled with a wide variety of literary, political, and religious texts; it turns in on itself unexpectedly. While it is appealing to see *Piers Plowman* as subversive – the literary underdog, rising up against "the man" – I believe that this notion owes more to our modern attraction to this idea rather than to the medieval understanding of *Piers Plowman* itself.[8] Indeed, this project demonstrates that *Piers Plowman* is aligned more closely to "safe" texts such as *Pearl* and *Troilus and Criseyde* than it is to reformist literature. However, it is difficult to see these connections if we use our usual

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[8] Indeed, it is clear from the reformist appropriations of the poem that many of the reformers realized that *Piers Plowman* was not particularly radical and instead used its memorable and accessible plowman character as a kind of mouthpiece for their own views.

categories of literary classification, such as genre, formal structure, or style. The manuscript form and the deployment of genealogy as a foundational paradigm structuring the moral landscape of the text are both key interpretive tools in any encounter with Middle English literature. While these tools may not be exhaustive in their applicability, they certainly enrich our understanding of how such texts may have been read six hundred years ago.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

In the sculpture garden outside the National Gallery in Washington D.C., Claes Oldenberg's large-scale piece *Typewriter Eraser* stands, a testament to an earlier time and perplexing to those of us raised in the age of computers. Bill Brown uses the obsolete strangeness of the sculpture to illustrate how we encounter and are influenced by things:

> [T]his abandoned object attains a new stature precisely because it has no life outside the boundary of art – no life, that is, within our everyday lives. Released from the bond of being equipment, sustained outside the irreversibility of technological history, the object becomes something else…It is an object that helps to dramatize a basic disjunction, a human condition in which things inevitably seem too late – belated, in fact, because we want things to come before ideas, before theory, before the word, whereas they seem to persist in coming after: as the alternative to ideas, the limit to theory, victims of the word. (*Things* 15-16)

Brown is suggesting that we desire raw immediacy, for truth to be conveyed via the tactile, speechless nature of things, outside the boundaries of language, signification, and classification. In reality, of course, things do not speak such truth to us: in fact, the quality of "thingness" is only clear within the context of linguistic signification. The study of things is not merely "a theory about the cultural significance of objects" (Plotz 110); it is an exploration of those moments in which signification or classification fail. To analyze failures of meaning, however, also requires analysis of how and when physical objects *do* generate meaning. The choice between defining a physical item as an object that carries significance or as a "thing" which does not is under continual negotiation in the study of medieval literature, in which the manuscript, the text, and the edition call us to reconcile the physical with the textual. What we perceive as the thingness – the randomness or incoherence – of some manuscripts is, I argue, a sign that we need to approach the manuscript using different hermeneutic models; one such model may be

genealogy. When we re-read the manuscript in such a way, the thingness becomes a source of meaning and cultural significance. At the same time, however, this process may reinforce the thingness of other aspects of the manuscript or the literary text – a thingness that resonates with the medieval sense of the divine unknown.

The dual perspective of thing theory and material culture analysis forms one branch of the theoretical framework of this project. The other branch is the historico-literary trope of genealogy, from its most literal to its most widely paradigmatic. Gabrielle Spiegel, Raluca Radulescu, Lesley Coote, Edward Donald Kennedy, and Francis Ingledew are among the scholars who have demonstrated how genealogy operated as a structural and thematic device in medieval historical narratives, whether those narratives are "fact," such as chronicles, or "fiction," such as romance.[1] Indeed, notions of inheritance, true bloodlines, parent-child relationships and rebellion, and the acquiring of skill and knowledge through not just blood-letting but also family blood itself, are all crucial elements in both medieval historical romance and chronicle entries. The genealogical imperative is explicit in these kinds of texts, as these lines from the thirteenth-century *King Horn* demonstrate:

> We beoth of Suddene,
> Icome of gode kenne
> Of Cristene blode
> And kynges swthe gode
> > l.179-182

Horn's first statement to a foreign king is one that alleges the purity of his blood and his identification with a legitimate genealogical line. Horn's "gode kenne," "Cristene blode," his origin in the geographically-vague land of "Suddene" and relation to "kynges swthe gode" gives him a kind of cross-cultural legitimacy. Indeed, in many romances this principle holds true, with

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[1] The boundary between romance and history in the Middle Ages, and particularly for Middle English romances, is blurred and contested, at least for modern readers (Cooper, "Romance in Time" 10). Rosalind Field explains why such generic fluidity is problematic for us: the "factual inaccuracies [of medieval historical romances] irritate the historically minded reader, while their deviation from the norms of the genre disappoint the reader whose expectations are set by the courtly romances of France" (163).

genealogy being a determinant of truth and character. However, the analyses in the following chapters demonstrate that the power of genealogy underpins many questions of origin, inheritance, and legitimacy inherent to texts *beyond* the chronicle or romance genres that genealogically-oriented studies generally focus upon. Furthermore, the genealogical trope is not limited to the manifestations of bloodline-based plot points in literary texts; it also informs the medieval understanding of literary precedent, authorship, and textual relationships generally. In this sense, it is, as Zrinka Stahuljak puts it, bloodless (2). Genealogy possesses this power and comprehensive applicability because, in all its different manifestations, it is a central component of identity – individual, communal, and even textual. David Aers states that in the Middle Ages, "individual experience cannot be understood apart from the social relations of a specific community, its organizations of power manifest in the prevailing arrangements of class, gender, political rule, religion, armed force, and, not infrequently, race" (4). Race, as one facet of genealogy, defines a person through both internal and external criteria: internal because genetics influence one's physical and physiological characteristics, and external because one's genealogical or family position is also socially constructed. Genealogy therefore operates on the boundary between the individual and the communal in terms of its influence upon identity. Indeed, the changing sense of individual identity in the late-medieval period and its relationship to communal identity are issues very much intertwined with the notion of genealogy. Finally, the identity of manuscripts (their place in relation to the authorial text) and literary texts (the tradition to which they belong) are also premised on the genealogical paradigm. I argue that it is a wide-reaching ideological framework that influenced medieval reading practices and still informs our own.

Although these two theoretical branches seem at first glance to be unrelated, at their most basic level they are both rooted in the physical, the experiential, even the visceral – all of which

are inherent to the practice of reading, and particularly reading medieval manuscripts. The differences in the physical experience of reading a manuscript and reading a book surely influence our reception of the text at hand. Andrew Taylor, for example, argues that a manuscript's physical form encourages us to read more slowly, pay more attention, and become more emotionally involved with the text (*Textual Situations* 201). John Dagenais, after working with print for many years, encountered a completely different text when he began studying manuscripts: these texts "had rough edges, not the clean, carefully pruned lines of critical editions… edges…filled with dialogue about the text – glosses, marginal notes, pointing hands, illuminations….activities by which medieval people transformed one manuscript into another" (qtd in Sherman 7). The physical practice of early readers leaves its imprint on the experience of later readers. Like the engraved Anglo-Saxon artifacts analyzed by Daniel Tiffany, manuscripts are objects that "speak" not just as commodities but as evidence of individual production and ownership (Tiffany 73).

Current interest in the book or manuscript as a physical object corresponds with the development of the larger philosophical interest in objects and things. Objects and things are terms that are often used interchangeably, but theorists interested in our physical encounters with objects/things carefully distinguish one from the other. An object is something that is understood by and works for a human subject, while a thing defies all such expectations and is essentially useless (Brown, *Sense of Things* 4; Plotz 110). Bill Brown argues that things appeal to us because they offer "some place of origin unmediated by the sign, some stable alternative to the instabilities and uncertainties, the ambiguities and anxieties, forever fetishized by theory" ("Thing Theory" 1). Things can provide a sense of comfort, in that their undeniable physicality manifests itself to us as a kind of truth unspoiled by language and, like genealogy, appear to provide an origin and place us in what D. Vance Smith calls a cycle of loss and hope. In Smith's

discussion of genealogy in *Piers Plowman*, he states that each beginning in the poem is a

recollection of a previous loss and a hope of that loss's restoration, while John Plotz, a proponent

of thing theory, argues that an object becomes a thing when its meaning escapes us, when we are

unable to classify or name it (Smith, *Incipit* 122; Plotz 110). Contextualizing thing theory with

genealogy, we can understand a thing to be at once a site of loss and a potential source of truth

wherein that loss is restored. Before exploring the way in which these two theoretical

perspectives may be used in tandem, I will introduce each in more depth.

2.1   Genealogy

Although genealogy's power over medieval narratives suggests that medieval readers

subscribed to the myth of origin that genealogy posits, use of the word itself during the Middle

Ages indicates that there was also some awareness of its instability. For example, the *Cursor

Mundi* (c. 1300) and the York Mystery Plays (c. 1400) employ the term "genealogy" as an

indicator of truth and origin: readers are encouraged to "herken" to the genealogy of David and

Abraham in the *Cursor Mundi* and the York plays' reference to a Christological prophecy is

substantiated by emphasizing that "genolagye beres witnesse" to the prophecy's fulfillment.

However, the Wycliffite translation of 1 Timothy 1:4 encourages readers to refuse to listen to

"fablis and genologies withouten endes," thus linking genealogy with fables and fictions and

rendering problematic its ability to circumscribe identity. Genealogy was therefore a contested

term: it asked readers to accept the legitimacy of a bloodline, but such legitimacy could always

be subject to suspicion if its parameters were not clearly defined – the "genologies withouten

endes" suggest genealogies without limits and without origin, unsubstantiated bloodlines and

fictionalized family tales. Defining such boundaries was important to the medieval reader and it

remains important now, despite our cautious skepticism about the accuracy or reality of linear

models. Genealogy defined family or communal identity, but also provided textual space for individual identity.

2.1.1   Medieval and Modern: the Nature of Genealogy

Although royal genealogies flourished in the early medieval period under the Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian kings, genealogy as a more literary, rather than purely historical, genre became popular in the twelfth century, when aristocratic families began documenting their own family histories (fictionalized or not) to reinforce their ties to the land they owned.[2] This same time period saw the creation of one of the first French romances, Benoit de Saint-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, a long poem rooted in the Trojan historical accounts of Dares and Dictys which emphasized France's genealogical connection to the heroes of Troy (Benson, *History of Troy* 4).[3] The twelfth century was when Geoffrey of Monmouth produced his famous *History of the Kings of Britain,* which located England's origins in Troy and provided much material for later historical and romance texts (Cooper, *English Romance* 23-24). The expansion and amplification of genealogical lines during this period allowed the more linear form of genealogy to develop narrative pattern and momentum: "the profile of the family tree became a skeleton of aristocratic society, revealing the multiple threads which crossed and recrossed, binding regional nobilities into every more integrated congeries of family relations" (Spiegel, "Form and Function" 47). In other words, genealogies became stories that not only legitimized land ownership, but also consolidated community identity by closely associating people with the land.[4]

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[2] Gabrielle Spiegel argues that this happens in France ("Form and Function" 47) while Francis Ingledew makes the same case for England (668-669). Rosalind Field argues even more strongly that in medieval England tenuous genealogical claims were supported or even replaced by land claims: "With no solid claims to national identity possible on the grounds of birth, ancestry, or language, the claim of place became paramount" (165).

[3] Benoit's work was translated in the thirteenth century by Guido delle Colonne, whose *Historia Destructionis Troiae* later functioned as an important source for Chaucer, Lydgate, and others.

[4] Stephen Harris describes how Anglo-Saxon historians used their genealogies to a similar end, but he

Although genealogy enabled the growth of "an aristocratic textual culture" that functioned as an alternative to the monastic textual model, it also moved beyond individual aristocratic use to become the structuring principle of wider historical and national narratives, particularly those narratives that identified Troy as a prefiguration of Britain (Ingledew 669).[5] Spiegel argues that genealogy, in this wider application, "restored the linear consciousness of history" and "fashion[ed] history as a linear narrative" ("Form and Function" 51). Instead of viewing contemporary events strictly through the lens of figurative typology, in which past historical events and figures also function as symbols representing future events and figures,[6] people of the later Middle Ages were beginning to see themselves and the world around them as part of a genealogical lineage rooted in the ancient past.[7] The development of what Ingledew terms the "Book of Troy" or the historico-literary tradition of Troy myths was a manifestation of this emerging sense of historical origin; the growth of the Troy tradition offered stability, in that Troy was the archetype of aristocratic origins (Ingledew 676). Genealogy, and the Trojan genealogy in particular, provided a stabilizing framework for conceptualizing history and one's place in history.

However, the very essence of genealogy's reassuring stability – its assertion of an origin –

indicates that such community identities were formed not through the development of literary narratives based upon genealogy, but through the fusion of Christian and Germanic ethnic communities by means of tracing them back to common ancestors (Harris 489-491).

[5] "England" and "Britain" are ideologically-laden terms, and have been since the early Middle Ages. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* was, according to Alan MacColl, adopted by the English and the Welsh as their defining historical narrative, thereby encouraging a cultural investment in the term "Britain" (249). Throughout the Middle Ages, "England" became increasingly identified with "Britain", to the extent that they were often used synonymously. MacColl quotes the beginning of Henry of Huntington's *Historia Anglorum:* "This, the most celebrated of islands, first called Albion, then England, and now Britain" (249). I have chosen "Britain" here because of its association with the Brutus foundation story – its gesture to the nation's own genealogy.

[6] Auerbach, in his seminal article on medieval typology, defines it as follows: "the figurative interpretation combines two events, causally and chronologically remote from each other, by attributing to them a meaning common to both. Instead of a continuous development, the direction and ultimate result of which is unknown to us, the figurative interpreter purports to know the significance and ultimate result of human history" (5).

[7] I use the word "strictly" because I do not mean to imply that typological interpretation was replaced by genealogy. Both hermeneutic models co-existed and reinforced one another. For example, in *Piers Plowman* Liberum Arbitrium looks upon the Tree of Charity (itself a genealogical metaphor in the poem) and tells Will that "Adam was as tre and we aren as his apples /Somme of us soethfaste and some variable" (C:XVIII:68-9). Adam is construed as a genealogical "root" or foundation for humanity, while at the same time he and his family (his sons in particular) are "types" that dictate the future types of human beings ("Somme of us soethfaste and some variable").

also compromises its stability. An origin is always, to some extent, a work of fiction, a

mythology. Our expectations of an origin are never fully met, and so ultimate meaning (or

ultimate origination) is continually deferred in a process of Derridean play.[8] Michel Foucault's

theoretical perspective is one of the better known modern readings of the genealogical model,

and I believe his views can be fruitfully interpolated into the medieval paradigm. According to

Foucault, the idea of an origin corresponds with the idea of something's pure essence, rather like

Plato's forms; it is always enticing, but always unreachable. Derrida's notion of presence, which

is discussed briefly in Chapter Three, is not unlike Foucault's origin in that it is a post-

structuralist recasting of the Platonic ideal. Foucault expands on the mythologized origin:

> The origin always precedes the Fall. It comes before the body,
> before the world and time; it is associated with the gods, and its
> story is always sung as a theogony. But historical beginnings are
> lowly; not in the sense of modest or discreet like the steps of a
> dove, but derisive and ironic, capable of undoing every infatuation.
> ("Nietzsche, Genealogy" 79).

Foucault here suggests that genealogy is the site of contesting significations: one is the divine

origin and one is fallible and disappointing. Medieval genealogical records, taking Biblical

genealogies as a model,[9] tended to lean upon the former and avoid the latter. The Foucauldian

genealogy, in contrast, explores the confusion of textual relationships, rather than establishing a

continuous, unbroken historical chain. It traces accidents, deviations, and errors in events. In

sum, "it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought

unified" (81). It is characterized, in other words, by thingness.

However, Foucault's notion of fractured genealogy and the linear, stabilizing sense that

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[8] Jacques Derrida's notions of deferred meaning (*difference)* and the supplement inform part of my discussion in Chapter Three. See Chapter 10 ("Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences") of Derrida's *Writing and Difference* for his discussion of the role of play in relation to signification.

[9] Ernest Wilkins argues that Boccaccio's autograph manuscript of the *De Genealogia Deorum Gentilium,* a lengthy work which includes thirteen family trees of the gods, contains "the first non-biblical genealogical charts in which stems, branches, and leaves appear….their antecedents are the *arbor iuris* of medieval law, the circle-and-line genealogical charts found in historical and biblical manuscripts, and the Jesse-trees found in biblical manuscripts and elsewhere" (61).

informs many medieval genealogical records are not mutually exclusive; indeed, neither one can

really be sustained without the other. Using Foucault's perspective in her analysis of genealogy

and medieval history, Lesley Coote argues that historical narratives were formed and sustained

through a process of forgetting, in particular forgetting foreign or unwanted influences in royal

genealogies (33). For example, in fifteenth-century royal genealogies the underlying threat of

disintegration and the need for royal legitimacy during an era of great uncertainty forced

chroniclers to insist upon the stability of the king's bloodlines; the more clear the fractured

genealogy below the surface, the stronger the insistence upon stability (Grandsen 326). [10]

However, Foucault's reading of genealogy cannot stand on its own either: genealogy's

mythologized origin and its fractured character are only meaningful observations if we

acknowledge our own prior investment in the origin and our automatic reliance upon the stability

that genealogical path offers. The search for origin is an attempt to recover (or rewrite) truth, but

the ultimate recovery of that truth is constantly deferred: the mythologized origin "lies at a place

of inevitable loss....the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost"

(Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy" 79). Therefore, a genealogical paradigm that relies on the

ability of genealogy to provide an origin is already dependent upon its own fiction.

The common genealogical metaphor of a family tree is built around the idea of origin and

assumptions of causality and linearity – the tree begins with a single trunk and the varied

branches that grow from it can all be traced back to that one origin. All the branches belong to

that particular tree and there is no connection established with a different tree. [11] Foucault

replaces the metaphor of a tree with that of a web: instead of branches springing from a single

root, the threads of this web extend in all directions with no discernible source, exposing flaws

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[10] See also Radulescu (2003) for her discussion regarding the fictionalization of royal genealogies in the fifteenth century.
[11] In Chapter Three I discuss the implications of one Chaucerian family tree drawn for Speght's edition of Chaucer's *Works*. Note 9 above refers to Wilkins' argument that the divine genealogical trees created by Boccaccio were the first instance of the tree metaphor being used as a genealogical chart, outside of Biblical antecedents.

and fissures, and connecting with other trees. The genealogical web is "gray" and "meticulous",

and "operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been

scratched over and recopied many times" – a palimpsest, in other words ("Nietzsche,

Genealogy" 76). The metaphor of a palimpsest is particularly apt when we consider the medieval

models of genealogy. Because of the economic and material constraints surrounding the

production and preparation of parchment, palimpsests were common throughout the Middle Ages

(van Peer 42). However, palimpsests also belong to a long history of literary mutilations in which

the subversion and destruction of linguistic signs cause us to forget, to alter our perceptions, to

bow to new "facts." Willie van Peer argues that "the violence to which these [literary]

mutilations testify is inscribed deeply in culture, albeit in a largely forgotten, hidden, or

repressed way...it draws attention to the material conditions and foundations of our cultural

world" (34). As stated earlier, genealogical stability itself often relies upon hiddenness,

forgetting, and repression of one of the most basic material conditions: blood and bloodlines.[12]

Such forgetting, the rejection of material reality, can indeed draw attention to what has been

effaced. A conscious forgetting is often required, as medieval forms of genealogy make clear.

2.1.2   Medieval Manifestations of Genealogy

The previous section introduced two broad models of genealogy, paying particular

attention to how one model tends to conform to the medieval understanding and the other to the

modern and identifying how Foucault's modern reading of genealogy can help us understand the

subtext of the medieval forms. This section will explore in more detail three different ways

genealogy is manifested in medieval texts in order to explore not only how genealogy influenced

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[12] As Stahuljak points out, many of these repressed histories were those of women, particularly from the twelfth century onwards: "the representation of the line in secular genealogies departs from the actual practice of families that often resorted to manipulations of biological givens. The result is that, while medieval practice is not, medieval representation is exclusive of women" (117).

medieval reading practices, but how we as modern scholars are still significantly affected by the genealogical paradigm and even the myth of origin.

The first manifestation of the genealogical paradigm is, of course, the literal genealogy. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines genealogy as "an account of one's descent from an ancestor or ancestors, by enumeration of the intermediate persons," citing its earliest English usage in 1300, in the *Cursor Mundi.* This is the clearest and most stable form of genealogy; instead of exploring the relationships held among different people, it traces familial connections along one chosen line of "intermediate persons" between the founder and the last person, whoever that may be. In *The Siege of Thebes,* John Lydgate refers readers to Boccaccio's *De Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* (see Note 9 above) if they wish to learn the whole truth about Lycurgus, whose life he has just summarized: "But the trouth, yif ye lyst verryfie / Rede Of Goddes the Genologye / Lynealy her kynrede be degrees" (3537-3539). I would argue that it is immaterial whether Lydgate actually believed the *Genealogia* to be factual; his gesture to its veracity as a source, even if such a gesture was rhetorical, indicates the authority of a genealogical record within his literary framework.[13]

Genealogical records sometimes used the roll format to reinforce the ideas of lineage and continuity. In the thirteenth century, for example, histories of the kings of England were often produced as rolls. Their illustrated roundels and brief commentaries suggested that they were intended for a semi- or non-literate audience who would have used visual cues and material form to interpret the text. Michael Clanchy emphasizes the impact that this physical layout would have on a viewer: "when the roll is fully unfurled, the whole history of England, from its mythical foundation by the Trojans down to the reign of Edward I, is displayed as a continuous line" (142). The commissioning of genealogical rolls was particularly popular in the fifteenth century,

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[13] Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate likely used the material in the *Genealogia* for their own stories. See, for example, Dilts and Child.

which was a time characterized by political instability and questions of rightful inheritance (Kauffman 210). Wealthy aristocrats as well as less affluent patrons wanted to possess such genealogical documents in order to showcase the family's bloodlines and consolidate a sense of family identity. To reinforce the legitimacy of their family line, nobles often "had their family descent pictured alongside the genealogy of the kings of England…[or] commissioned pedigrees that depicted the royal descent and their own family line side by side" (Radulescu, "Yorkist Propaganda" 408). As I discuss in Chapter Three, Thomas Speght's printed edition of Chaucer's works includes a family tree very like those Radulescu describes: Chaucer's genealogy is aligned with that of the King, thus presenting Chaucer as symbolically as well as biologically integrated into the very fabric of Britain.

A genealogy was thus "at once historical and symbolic"; although it appeared to be purely literal, its deployment carried significant symbolic weight in terms of royal or aristocratic rights to hold land (Spiegel, "Foucault" 3). Moreover, such histories often distanced themselves from the literal by fictionalizing the lineage, tracing it back to a mythical hero-founder, which resulted in the family ignoring or rejecting its real genealogy for the valorized one.[14] This conscious fictionalization of genealogy – and the forgetting of alternate genealogical lines – allowed these histories to transition easily into a literary genre in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, thus establishing the family's consciousness of itself as a coherent group with a distinct identity (3-4).

I refer to this more literary form of genealogy as intratextual: it operates within discrete texts, as a grid upon which the narrative is patterned and through which narrative obtains

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[14] The less comfortable aspects of the fictionalized founder-hero narrative are also, in a sense, rejected. In her analysis of twenty medieval French genealogical histories, Spiegel notes that although the genealogy is traced through the male line, the founder-hero or origin of the tree is socially inferior to his female partner, "so that the social capital of the family resides, ultimately, on the maternal side." This fact is then effaced as the genealogy follows father to son so that "the family appears to be organized as a vertical structure based on agnatic consanguinity" ("Foucault" 3). The process of conscious forgetting – of ignoring the physiological aspects of genealogy – allows for the linear construction of the genealogical tree.

coherence. Included in this category is medieval romance, which is essentially the outgrowth of the literary manifestation of genealogy in that it is often predicated upon notions of legitimacy or rightful inheritance.[15] Earlier Middle English romances, such as *Guy of Warwick, Bevis of Hampton, King Horn,* etc., served to "exalt a noble house" (Cooper, "After 1400" 706) or reinforce current aristocratic rights, both of which were certainly functions of the genealogical genre. By the fifteenth century these uses expanded: David Wallace argues that "narratives purveying time-honored values within stable generic parameters might promise stabilization" to other forms of writing (Wallace 638). The tensions surrounding religious writing in this period meant that romance was a safe genre because romance narratives tended to reinforce the status quo and because they were patronized largely by the aristocracy (Diamond 66). However, intratextual genealogical structures operated far beyond romance, as I will argue in Chapter Six.

The second manifestation of genealogy is the form and pattern of textual production in the Middle Ages. This seems like another fairly obvious connection to make since, after all, a stemma is essentially a manuscript family tree and scribes show their debts to their exemplar (the textual "father") in each copy they create. However, the way we interpret the function of genealogy in textual relations may reveal a great deal about our own assumptions about origin and causality in textual production. Despite John Bowers' assertion that "we [as modern scholars] recognize that literary genealogies necessarily depend upon stable origins that are not always fixed....or even factually real" (*Antagonistic Tradition* 2), in fields such as paleography and codicology the search for stability – the desire to find the "root" of the stemma – is often the impetus for scholarship. To discover or establish the authorial text[16] is certainly one of the main goals of textual studies. While I do not suggest that such a goal is invalid or inappropriate (after

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[15] See Chapter 7 ("Restoring the Rightful Heir") in Cooper (2004) for an extended discussion of the links between romance and descent, genealogy, and inheritance.

[16] I use the term "authorial text" throughout, rather than "best text", since this chapter is not intended to be a discussion of editorial theory. The use of "best text" rather than "authorial text" (or vice versa) in modern editorial scholarship alone could serve as the subject of another paper.

all, most medieval scholars are interested in the question of authorship), I would point out that

this is another manifestation of the linear genealogical paradigm. Many scholars have, of course,

already questioned the utility of scholarship that seeks only to establish the authorial text.[17] My

intent is not to repeat the work that has already been done on examining the sustained academic

interest in the authorial text, but to highlight this interest as another example of the power that

the linear genealogical model still holds today. Thomas Prendergast's summary of David

Greetham's perspective on modern textual editing and the genealogical model emphasizes the

importance of moving away from the purely linear editorial genealogy and toward a weblike

model that more closely reflects medieval paradigms. Prendergast states that Greetham

"interrogates the very notion of textual descent, offering instead 'a hypertextual model of free-

floating links [as] a better simulacrum of medieval textuality than the fixed critical text of the

codex ever was" (Prendergast 2; Greetham 123).

Even in the wake of the "new philology" which rejected Lachmannian stemmatic analysis

and did not privilege the authorial text,[18] the concern for roots and origins is still there, only

reconfigured into attention on the individual manuscripts. Stephen Nichols argues that "it is that

manuscript culture [the focus on the text, margins, ink, etc of the individual manuscript] that the

'new' philology sets out to explore in a postmodern return to the origins of medieval studies" (7).

Nichols sees the incoherence and confusion of medieval manuscripts as an opportunity for

insight, suggesting that "the manuscript space contains gaps through which the unconscious may

be glimpsed" (8). The choice of words here is interesting: he refers to the physical "manuscript

space" as something to look *through* rather than at. This is very close to Andrew Taylor's notion

of the manuscript as fetish. A fetish is, in its most basic definition, a substitution for something,

and in the case of the manuscript Taylor characterizes the substituted item as origin, childhood,

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[17] Chapter 1 ("Authorship") in Dalrymple provides a useful overview of the changes in the critical position on medieval authorship through the past century or so of scholarship.
[18] See the "New Philology" issue of *Speculum* (65:1, 1990).

and desire for the real. By fetishizing the physical manuscript, we are "projecting into the Middle Ages for a lost childhood" and for an objective, measurable reality (*Textual Situations* 197-199). The "irreducibly material" nature of the fetish (203) invites us to perceive it as somehow more real, which Taylor argues is "intellectual naivete." He asks whether this connection of the physical with reality makes us assume that we are simply observers of manuscripts, writing down their "sites of conflict" without being affected by them ourselves (200). Taylor's comments resonate with those of Plotz, who makes a similar point about our approach to "things": he criticizes "scholarship that ardently desires things *qua* things to speak to us, in some kind of mysterious yet comprehensible outsiders' language" (110). Despite Western culture's secularization, our ostensible rejection of one God as a source of pure truth, we are still seeking the same end through a different means: materiality as origin, as the real.

The third manifestation of genealogy is intertextual. This is distinct from both the intratextual form identified in the first manifestation (literal genealogy itself as a text, a plot point in a work of literature, or a paradigm through which a text's moral concerns are filtered) and the physical manuscript relationships identified in the second. My discussion operates on the premise that intertextual genealogy is another way of conceptualizing literary tradition. "Texts" in this particular usage refers not to the individual copies of works, but to the work as a coherent whole; in this context, for example, I would refer to the *Piers Plowman* C Text rather than HM 143. Alexandra Gillespie suggests that the "author function"[19] in late medieval manuscript and book culture allows us to describe and classify groups of texts in relation to one another. She uses the "Oxford Group"[20] of Chaucerian manuscripts as an example: although these fifteenth-

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[19] Gillespie specifies the difference between the medieval author and Foucault's author function: it is "the difference between a reductive category – one that manages, controls, and answers – and a category that is also productive, that proliferates, energizes, and changes" (16). Such proliferation is particularly true for the author function associated with Chaucer, as the productive Father of English Literature and the named Father of the medieval and early modern Chaucerian tradition, as Chapter Three discusses.

[20] "Oxford Group" is in reference to the three anthologies at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, containing, among other texts, many of Chaucer's minor poems: Fairfax 16, Bodley 638, and Tanner 346.

century collections of courtly love poetry, dream visions, and misogynist tracts are not all by Chaucer, their label as "Oxford Group" allows us to conceptualize and discuss these texts as Chaucerian. In distinguishing these later compilations of "Chaucerian" texts and the treatment of these same texts by medieval readers, Gillespie argues that medieval sensibilities deferred textual or authorial stability, or did not seek it, while reformist and early modern sensibilities wanted "the most stable, centralized, humanist…meanings for language, literature, and books" (118). This desire for authorial authenticity is particularly characteristic of the Renaissance through the Victorian periods. Medieval reading paradigms, in contrast, focused not upon the authenticity of authorial attribution or the reality of history, but upon precedence.

Medieval readers' investment in genealogy often manifested itself as an interest in precedence or origin: what came before? How do we treat the thing or person or text that preceded us? Past precedent legitimized present practice, whether in the legal or literary spheres, and thus functioned as a thread connecting older texts to newer ones – or, as the fourteenth century drew to a close, connected contemporary texts to one another. C.S. Lewis argues that we do not now appreciate how important it was that textual genealogies were tight-knit and that new material was not easily interpolated into those genealogies:

> One is tempted to say that almost the typical activity of the medieval author consists in touching up something that was already there…We are inclined to wonder how men could be at once so original that they handled no predecessor without pouring new life into him, and so unoriginal that they seldom did anything completely new….If you had asked Laʒamon or Chaucer, 'Why do you not make up a brand-new story of your own?' I think they might have replied (in effect) 'Surely we are not yet reduced to that?' …The originality which we regard as a sign of wealth might have seemed to them a confession of poverty. Why make things for oneself like the lonely Robinson Crusoe when there is riches [sic] all about you to be had for the taking? (209-211)

Lewis expands the issue of medieval un-originality beyond the importance of precedence in authorizing a writer to write; he argues here that precedence authorized the literary material

itself, apart from the author(s). In the case of literal genealogies, the *idea* of textual precedence was more important than the proven existence of the actual manuscripts or rolls or charters. The statement they did indeed exist, often asserted through the "As others have said" trope, was sufficient to legitimize the current position of the family heir. Imaginary textuality usurped physical, visceral evidence, just as the imagined genealogy usurped the biological reality (Spiegel, "Foucault" 7). In the literary arena, for example, Chaucer did not need to provide evidence of the life and writings of Lollius, the fictional source for *Troilus and Criseyde*; he simply needed to state that he was following some sort of precedent, even if it was a rather self-consciously shallow gesture to such precedent.[21] Indeed, the shallowness of this gesture is evidence that the significance of *ancient* precedent was changing as the late medieval period drew to a close, but intertextual genealogies were still important. A text needed to fit into a network of other texts, demonstrating its affinities and its debts – its kin. In other words, texts needed to demonstrate how they were traditional.

The importance of such textual networking was unquestioned in the Middle Ages, but is something that we now, in an age that privileges originality, tend to dismiss or ignore. In his famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T.S. Eliot argues that this is a mistake – that we need to understand and appreciate textual genealogies in order to understand literature. He points out that when we praise a poet now, we erroneously focus

> upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone
> else....we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar
> essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's
> difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate
> predecessors. (1092)

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[21] Chapter Three discusses Chaucer's own role in setting literary precedent. As a contemporary rather than ancient *auctor,* his function as an authorial precedent for writers such as Lydgate and Hoccleve helped to usher in a new kind of writing culture – a self-referential authorial community rather than one that was constantly required to bow to ancient sources. Chaucer's stated debt to the fictional Lollius rather than his well-known contemporary writer Boccaccio may therefore be somewhat tongue in cheek; an acknowledgement of the changing literary scene. The similarity between "Lollius" and "lollar" (which, during Chaucer's lifetime, referred generally to a lazy vagabond rather than a heretic) may also be part of the joke.

Eliot emphasizes the importance of balancing textual tradition with originality, urging us not to discard the medieval model of textual genealogies. Jacques Derrida makes a similar point in his own discussion of tradition; he argues that "the writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system" (*Of Grammatology* 158). Both Eliot and Derrida understand literary tradition as a large genealogy in which total individualism or total originality – being a branch disconnected from the tree, so to speak – is essentially impossible. In our reading of modern texts we certainly may be guilty of over-privileging originality, but even in our reading of medieval texts the genealogical chain is often useful to us only as a way of reaching the original author and assessing the author's originality. In this way, the focus on origin may sometimes blind us to the information we could glean from the textual genealogy itself – the relationships between manuscripts as assessed separately from their relationship to the archetype. As David Greetham suggests, "if the grail of intention and origins is not the focus of our editorial ministrations, then ironically it may well be that the lower, better-attested, even more 'corrupt' witnesses....could become more culturally significant than the single, lone exemplar with no relatives and no descendants" (103).

This section outlined different genealogical forms that we see evident in Middle English literature. However, in order to understand the medieval manifestation of genealogy its fullest sense, it is important to take into account other Middle English words besides "genealogy" that connote ideas such as inheritance, bloodlines, origins, and succession. Kinship names such as father, son, etc, are of course always worth paying attention to, but for the purposes of this project I would like to address a less obviously related term: *kynde.*

2.1.3 Kynde

The concept of *kynde*, which is particularly important to Langland as well as other writers, is a complex subject that could merit its own book. However, because it does not form the focus of this project I will be addressing it only insofar as it contributes to an understanding of the main theoretical paradigms I am using. Defining *kynde* is a complicated undertaking in and of itself. The *Middle English Dictionary* (MED) has numerous entries for the noun *kynde*, approximately half of which focus on the idea of the natural (natural form, natural desire, essential character, moral instinct) and half of which relate to kinship and ancestry (to which the word "kin" is etymologically related). *Kyndenesse* has three entries, two of which focus on courtesy and benevolence and one of which combines the senses of *kynde* described in the noun's definition: "Natural affection due to kinship." The MED cites many diverse sources in its definition of *kynde* and *kyndenesse*, thus supporting Andrew Galloway's argument that *kynde* (and its variants) was one of the important "keywords" used by poets, preachers, and other writers in order "to think about and indeed to give structure to social and religious ties" ("Social Ethic" 365). The natural is consistently aligned with the good in Middle English usage,[22] as opposed to the Biblical notion of man's sinful nature, an association that Galloway indicates generated a significant amount of interest: "Exploring the double-entendre of both the 'natural' and the 'moral' meanings of 'kyndenesse' must rank among the favorite verbal games of Middle English religious writers" (373). Galloway's article focuses on one of the neglected meanings of *kynde*: the idea of gratitude or reciprocity, which conflates both the moral and natural aspects of the term.[23]

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[22] Mary-Clemente Davlin points out that in *Piers Plowman,* "Kynde is a conventional figure and usually called by the Latin name Natura" ("Kynde Knowyng" 3).

[23] The Middle English Dictionary cites "gratitude" as a secondary meaning of the unusual word "kindship," but the entries for "kynde" and "kyndeness" do not include it. However, Galloway indicates that *kynde* and *unkynde* are the usual Middle English translation of the Latin *gratus* and *ingratus* and provides several clear examples of how gratitude and *kynde* were aligned. These examples include John of Gaunt's complaint to Parliament of his treatment at the hands of Henry Percy during the Peasants' Revolt and Johannes de Bromyard's

An examination of *kynde* is important not only because it informs so much late medieval English discourse regarding nature, origin, and ancestry, but because it is particularly ubiquitous in *Piers Plowman,* which is the touchstone text throughout the following chapters. Will's desire for *kynde knowyng*, his encounter with Kynde Wit, and the overall emphasis on *kynde* knowledge and teaching are scholarly knots; there is no clear and definite consensus on exactly what Langland means by *kynde*. Britton Harwood briefly reviews some of the major critics' conclusions about *kynde* in *Piers Plowman*, and they all refer to interiority or immediacy in some way: *kynde* as intuition, as inner knowledge, as unmediated experiential wisdom ("Kynde Knowyng" 246).[24] Mary-Clemente Davlin and Harwood, who are among the small number of critics who have addressed Langland's sense of *kynde* in greater depth, explore additional meanings of the term that tend to complicate our understanding of it. For example, Harwood expands on Randolph Quirk's 1953 article on the subject by arguing that Langland's use of *kynde knowyng* owes a debt to medieval scholasticism in that it is linked to *vis cogitativa*, which is the ability to perceive material benefit, to see the overall good ("Kynde Wit" 332). As C:XIV:72ff indicates, [25] this kind of *kynde knowyng* can be passed on from father to son and therefore is a teachable knowledge. It is a knowledge of the natural sciences, however, and not the same sort of spiritual *kynde wit* that the poem elsewhere espouses: we are told that "No more can a kynde-witted man, but clerkes hym teche / Come for al his kynde wit thorw christendoem to be saued" (C:XIV:52-3). Davlin sees Langland's use of *kynde* together with his character of Kynde Wit to be a synthesis of the natural and divine aspects of *kynde*. She argues that before Kynde Wit appears, *kynde knowyng* is associated with nature, with intuitive understanding and wisdom: it is "the natural, the innate, experiential, practical, biological, or basically human"

Summa Praedicantium in which ingratitude is connected to the unnatural (371-376).
[24] Harwood summarizes this scholarship in a long footnote. The key critics he cites are J.A. Burrow, David Fowler, Edward Vasta, Neville Coghill, Willi Erzgraber, and Elizabeth Kirk.
[25] "Kynde-witted men han a clergie by hemsulue....And of the selcouthes that thei sye, here sones therof thei taughten / For they helden hit for an hey science here sotiltees to knowe."

("Kynde Knowyng" 4). Wisdom and experiential knowledge are key to Davlin's understanding of *kynde* in *Piers Plowman.*

Harwood's and Davlin's perspectives on *kynde* provide a much-needed balance to the broader range of critical perspectives that focus on the intuitive aspect of *kynde*. In this type of interpretation, which is essentially a branch of the *kynde*-as-nature theory, *kynde* is seen as unmediated and primal – an inner knowledge whose expression and understanding somehow bypass linguistic and social constraints. However, in focusing on this sense of *kynde* without balancing it with other aspects highlighted by Harwood and Davlin (such as experience and material benefit), we run the risk of ignoring the external factors that inform Langland's concept of *kynde*. Experience and material benefit are certainly included in those external factors, as are the ideas of gratitude and reciprocity that Galloway argues are so closely tied in with *kynde* in Middle English discourse. This connection highlights the common thread weaving among *kynde*, genealogy, and the socially constructed nature of identity formation:

> By blending nature with reciprocation, Middle English
> 'kyndenesse' shifts religious and social bonds away from hierarchy
> and toward affinity, and the exploitation of these lexical
> possibilities may easily be aligned with the many distinctive late-
> medieval forms of community or corporate identity. ("Social
> Ethic" 374)

Using this understanding, *kynde* is not just an internal intuition but a social practice that cements bonds between people, thereby solidifying a communal identity in which individual identity can be rooted.

The manifestation of *kyndenesse* that focuses on affinity rather than hierarchy is akin to weblike rather than the linear construction of genealogy. While many medieval writers and historians tended to focus on the linear form of genealogy,[26] I would argue that the social sense

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[26] By linear I mean the basic genealogical rolls and chronicles that follow the single paternal line in the manner of Biblical genealogies.

of *kynde* functions as the other side of the coin – genealogy as a web, based on affinity rather than origin. At the same time *kynde,* in its definition as blood connection, is an expression of the most material, visceral form of genealogy in a time in which the biological basis of genealogy was often effaced in favour of political and social considerations (Harris 489). *Kynde* is therefore an important medieval manifestation of the genealogical paradigm that demonstrates genealogy's non-linear and implicit formulations and infuses a wide variety of texts and genres.

2.2   Thing Theory and Material Culture[27]

In the thirteenth century, the English Franciscan Bartholomeus Anglicus wrote his famous encyclopedic work, *De Proprietatibus Rerum* ("On the Properties of Things").[28] John Trevisa translated it into Middle English in the fourteenth century, which suggests that there was a market for such a wide-ranging and miscellaneous work.[29] The title itself not only indicates the text's classificatory fluidity, but nicely captures what is appealing about the term "thing": it encompasses all we want to say but cannot express. Bartholomeus' encyclopedia purports to give meaning and definition to everything around us, yet the title itself somehow suggests that our definitions and taxonomies are never quite sufficient: we must still resort to calling them "things." My exploration of thingness in this project addresses both the signifying power of objects (what we might call material culture analysis) and the lapses in meaning when we encounter things and thingness itself, therefore expanding upon the various critical positions on

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[27] Daniel Miller defines material culture as the philosophy that is premised on the assumption that "what makes us what we are exists, not through our consciousness or body, but as an exterior environment that habituates and prompts us" (51).

[28] The idea of classifying "things" ("rerum") was obviously not an innovation of Bartholomeus; scholars such as Bede and Isidore of Seville (both in the seventh and eighth centuries) wrote about *de natura rerum* and of course philosophical questions about the nature of things have been posed since Plato and Aristotle. Bartholomeus is used as example here because of his temporal and linguistic proximity to the time period in which I am interested (although he wrote in Latin, his work was the subject of Trevisa's later English translation).

[29] Excluding fragments, there are eight extant manuscripts of Trevisa's translation – a significant number given general survival rates of Middle English manuscripts. One of these was copied by Scribe D, who copied other Middle English "best-sellers" by Chaucer, Gower, and Langland. Bartholomeus' original Latin text was, of course, very popular; over 100 manuscripts survive (Edwards, "Translation" 85, 88).

objects and things that scholars have taken over the years.

2.2.1 Critical Interest: Things, Objects, and Signification

Objects and materiality have been the subject of academic inquiry in a number of different fields – literary theory, philosophy, history and anthropology being just a few examples. Many theoretical or critical schools of thought incorporate materiality into their paradigms, with some of them, such as Marxism and post-structuralism, identifying the nature of the material world as central to their philosophies. Because the interest in objects and their relationship to the human condition is pertinent to so many fields, this section does not attempt to provide any sort of critical review of the relevant scholarship. Rather, it focuses on key criticism in material culture studies which helps to articulate the nature of thingness within the wider world of objects and materiality.

Martin Heidegger's 1935 book *What is a Thing?*, in which he explores our approach to the thing first as foundational to philosophical inquiry[30] and then in connection to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, opens with a question that he asserts cannot be answered (but which he then goes on to answer): what is a thing? On the one hand, a thing is something about which we are unsure, which does not fit easily into any particular category, and which may indeed be unclassifiable. To use the term "thing" is to acknowledge that we cannot insert it into our regular taxonomies – it stands alone. As Heidegger puts it, it is "anything else that is a something and not nothing" (6). On the other hand, a thing is concrete – tactile, physical, able to be directly experienced: "a rock, a piece of wood, a pair of pliers, a watch, an apple, and a piece of bread" (6). Heidegger explains that his question is impossible to answer because "within what boundaries we determine the meanings of the term 'thing' always remains arbitrary" (6). Two of

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[30] As Eugene Gendlin's appendix to Heidegger's book states, "[e]ven what we ask, the questions with which we begin (as well as every subsequent step and finding), is already a result of, and is formulated within, a certain context and a certain way of conceptualizing things" (249).

Heidegger's broad definitions of "thingness" are opposed to one another: one means the indefinable, and one means the concretely defined.[31] His philosophy therefore encompasses ideas of thingness as well as physical things themselves.

Post-structuralist theorists such as Jacques Lacan and, to a lesser extent, Jacques Derrida, have used the thing as a trope for the unknowable rather than the physical "bearer of properties" described by Heidegger (Heidegger 32). Lacan uses the two German words for thing – *das Ding* and *die Sache* – to describe his philosophy of thingness. He argues that the French word for thing (*la chose*) is insufficient for his purposes because of its etymological limitations: it "presents itself as the wrapping and designation of the concrete" (*Ethics* 43). *Die Sache* is similar to *la chose* in that is "a product of industry and of human action as governed by language" (45). This kind of thing is "always on the surface, always within range of an explanation" (45). *Das Ding,* however, refers to thingness in its manifestation as the unknowable but the ultimately desirable:

> The whole progress of the subject is then oriented around the *Ding*
> . . . the first outside. It is clearly a probing form of progress that
> seeks points of reference, but with relation to what? — with the
> world of desires. (…) This object, *das Ding*, [is] the absolute Other
> of the subject, that one is supposed to find again. It is to be found
> at the most as something missed. One doesn't find it, but only its
> pleasurable associations. It is in this state of wishing for it and
> waiting for it that, in the name of the pleasure principle, the
> optimum tension will be sought. (*Ethics* 52)

As Chapter Six explores in more detail, *das Ding* is the unknowable Other that is part of what constitutes identity or subjecthood. Lacan's notion of the mirror stage is predicated on the idea that the individual desires something outside him- or herself (the Other) and this desire is key to identity formation; *das Ding* is the ultimate and unattainable Other, one that is primal,

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[31] He does include a third category, in which "thing" is used to describe abstractions: "Thing in the sense in which it means whatever is named but which includes also plans, decisions, reflections, loyalties, actions, historical things" (6).

unknowable, and ungoverned by what Lacan calls the realm of the symbolic.[32] Jacques Derrida's

notion of presence or meaning deferred through the endless chain of signification (the

supplement, which is discussed in further detail in Chapter Three) bears important similarities to

Lacan's Other:

> Through this sequence of supplements a necessity is announced:
> that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary
> mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the
> mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary
> perception. Immediacy is derived. (*Of Grammatology* 157)

The deferred "thing" that Derrida describes is characterized by the immediacy, the primal nature,

that is inherent to Lacan's *das Ding.* Both Derrida and Lacan highlight an important aspect of

thingness, which is not only its unknowability, its deferment of meaning, but its desirability.

Lacan's philosophy is useful not only because of his specific interest in *das Ding* but

because his theories regarding the development of personal identity are pertinent to discourses of

thingness more generally. He is interested in how identity aligns with subjectivity – how we

become human subjects, and how that role defines us individually. However, in order to be

subjects we must determine what objects are, and what it means to objectify something or

someone. Although "thing" and "object" are terms that are often used interchangeably, there are

key differences in both their meanings and their uses. Plotz points out that in critical discourse

we are generally much more comfortable with the term "object," since "object" is defined by its

relation to a subject while the status of "thing" is unclear (111).[33] He gives the example of the

Rorschach blot test: it seems at first to be a "thing" of apparently non-human design which

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[32] Lacan (1975) identified three realms or orders that individuals experience during the formation of human identity: the Real (fulfilled desire, unmediated by language), the Imaginary (a place of imagined self completion, correlating to the mirror stage), and the Symbolic (what we would think of as the real world, governed by social law and language). These were first introduced in his seminars of 1954.

[33] I would also suggest that our discomfort with the word "thing" is its association with childishness – take, for example, juvenile jokes about genitalia (a "thingie") or the over-casual use of the word "thing", as if the speaker's vocabulary was not sufficient to describe the "thing" in question. Bill Brown discusses how children transform objects into things by infusing them with what he calls "misuse value", meaning the "misappropriation" of objects for uses for which they were not intended. In such "sensuous practice," a surplus is produced "into which the 'character of things as things' irrupts" ("Toy Story" 953).

allows a person to identify their own feelings and thoughts. Because of this, the Rorschach test is therefore an object that "speaks" because it is defined by a human subject; it is not a thing. Distinguishing between objects and things is, Plotz argues, important in any consideration of human identity:

> [I]t is crucial to historicize the seemingly immutable boundaries that are visibly drawn between thing and person. That is, deliberating what counts as an object....and what counts as human attention to that object is not a metaphysical project but a genealogical one, and the shifting boundaries turn out to reveal shifting ideas about the location of selfhood and subjectivity. (114)

The study of things and objects, both in a physical (as in the manuscript, for example) and a literary sense, can therefore shed light on how identity was understood in medieval society. This is particularly useful because individuality and subjectivity are generally not explored specifically in medieval texts; communal identity and spiritual roles were considered far more important than personal development for its own sake. However, an exploration of how texts treat the relationship between human subjects, objects, and things may reveal attitudes and assumptions about identity that the text does not verbalize explicitly.

Bill Brown championed the literary appropriation of thing theory in a special 2001 issue of the journal *Critical Inquiry*, a collection whose spirit followed Brown's 1999 article on Virginia Woolf ("The Secret Life of Things") and his 1998 article "How to Do Things with Things (A Toy Story)." Brown continued to expand his work on the thing in his 2003 book *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* and a 2004 collection of essays entitled *Things*. Brown's work acknowledges his critical debts to Marxist-leaning scholars such as Walter Benjamin and Daniel Miller, psychoanalytic critics such as Jacques Lacan and Melanie Klein, postmodernists like Jean Baudrillard, and Gaston Bachelard, whose work on epistemology is rooted in his work on physics, history, and philosophy. Heidegger's work, which informs most

of the other scholars Brown references, is also a significant influence on Brown. Brown's

perspective on things and thingness is closer to Heidegger than to Lacan, in that he is more

interested in the relationship between things and ideas (how things contribute to or inhibit our

ability to formulate more abstract concepts) than in the relationship between things and identity.

He notes that "we look *through* objects" to obtain social, scientific, or cultural information, but

we cannot do this with things; they are opaque, they are just there ("Thing Theory" 4). Things

therefore inhabit a liminal place between the nameable and the unnameable; on the one hand, a

thing is something concrete, something suddenly and "baldly encountered," but on the other it is

also "some thing not quite apprehended" (5). Brown argues that much of the appeal of things is

located in their concreteness, since they seem to offer "some place of origin unmediated by the

sign" (1) but that their apparent tangibility and clarity are ultimately found to be opacity. Unlike

objects, we cannot interpret things using our accustomed frames of reference. John Plotz, Charity

Scribner, Peter Schwenger, Peter Stallybrass, Ann Rosalind, Daniel Tiffany, and other scholars

cited throughout this dissertation align themselves with Brown on most of his major points

regarding things, objects, and ideas.

       In his articles "The Secret Life of Things," "How to Do Things with Things," and his

2003 book *A Sense of Things,* Brown applies his ideas of thingness to American consumer

culture, arguing that in America, things possess the consumer rather than the other way around

(*Sense of Things* 5). He integrates his sociocultural understanding of things into literary criticism

when he argues that certain texts

> ask why and how we use objects to make meaning, to make or re-
> make ourselves, to organize our anxieties and affections, to
> sublimate our fears and shape our fantasies. They are texts that
> describe and enact an imaginative possession of things that
> amounts to a labour of infusing manufactured objects with a
> metaphysical dimension. (4)

This "imaginative possession of things" is just that – imaginative rather than factual. Brown

suggests that we ignore the unnamable, uncontrollable, or uncomfortable characteristics of things

in order to force them into comprehensibility and usefulness; we transform them into objects.[34]

However, thingness is itself the "excess" of objects – it is something beyond those taxonomies or

frames in which objects fit nicely (Brown, "Thing Theory" 5; Scribner 334). When objects are

broken, transformed, disintegrated, turned around – these are moments in which the object

surrenders to thingness. Brown uses excerpts from nineteenth-century psychologist William

James' book *Principles of Psychology* to illustrate this turn from object to thing and how it

affects us on a basic sensory level – on the level of the thing:

> [James] tells the story of what happens when our habits are broken,
> when for instance we look at a landscape with our head upside
> down or when we turn a painting bottom upward: "the colors grow
> richer and more varied, we don't understand the meaning of the
> painting, but, to compensate for the loss, we feel more freshly the
> value of the mere tints and shadings"…[I]n James the difference
> between [the thing's]…. *objecthood,* and the experience of the
> thing…its *thinghood,* emerges in the moment (and no doubt only
> as a moment) of reobjectification that is a kind of misuse – turning
> the picture bottom up, standing on one's head. The point may be
> less that "sensation is one thing and perception another," and more
> that the experience of sensation depends on disorientation, both
> habit and its disruption. ("Secret Life" 6-7)

This excerpt was quoted at length because it perfectly encapsulates one of the core characteristics

of things: their ability to be at once knowable (the recognizable picture just turned upside-down)

and a jumble of unclassified sensory data (what Brown calls "some thing not quite

apprehended"). When the picture is turned upside-down, it is still the same picture but our

perception of it transforms it into something beyond itself; the failure of our usual taxonomies

defers meaning but also rejuvenates our senses.

One of the most recent works related to this field is Daniel Miller's 2010 book *Stuff.*

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[34] The connection between objects, signification, and identity (particularly social identity), while useful in
literary analysis, has been thoroughly explored in seminal post-structuralist works such as Roland Barthes'
Mythologies and Jean Baudrillard's *The System of Objects.* The study of things, and the difference between things
and objects, is a relatively new critical field – or at least, it is a new perspective on materialism.

Miller, an anthropologist interested in the study of material culture, argues that the objects or "stuff" we accumulate (which influence the way we think and behave) can be understood from a perspective distinct from Levi-Strauss's anthropological structuralism.[35] He urges us to look beyond the function of objects and instead note their visibility – whether and how their function is obscured. Although he does not distinguish between objects and things (a distinction which I believe is important), he does provide an interesting definition of thingness that is different from and yet not fully contradictory to Brown's:

> It is not that things are tangible stuff that we can stub our toes against. It is not that they are firm, clear foundations that are opposed to the fluffiness of the images of the mind or abstract ideas. They work by being invisible and unremarked upon, a state they usually achieve by being familiar and taken for granted. (50)

Like Brown and Plotz, Miller emphasizes that the concreteness of things does not mean they reveal unmediated truth. Miller's things are like objects in that they are in a clear relationship with human subjects that make use of them, but they are also "things" in Brown's sense because their utility is so assumed and obvious that it is never expressed or acknowledged. These kinds of "things" are never really defined; they are just experienced and used, without conscious thought or interest. Like Brown's earlier articles regarding thingness and American consumerism, much of Miller's analysis here focuses on commodity items, particularly clothing, and therefore he gives clothing as an example of these forgotten "things": "One of the problems we have in persuading people that the study of blue denim is so significant is that its ubiquity seems to make people regard it as less of interest, rather than more of interest" (51). While Miller's perspective demonstrates a Marxian influence and thus focuses on objects and functionality more than "things" *per se,* his work nevertheless helps us to further understand thingness.

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[35] Levi-Strauss emphasized the importance of both function and comparison in defining objects. Miller gives the example of a dining room table, which is defined by features that are only meaningful if one knows what a kitchen table or a coffee table are characterized by (51-52). Miller argues that "structuralism focused on the relationship between things rather than things themselves" (52).

2.2.2 Medieval Things

The current critical understanding of thingness is strongly informed by the word's day-to-day usage – things as concrete, things as vague, things as alternately frightening and rejuvenating. The medieval use of the word "thing" is often in reference to the excessive in ourselves or the world around us: the divine, the evil, the sexually taboo, the inexpressible or unknowable. The *Middle English Dictionary* has numerous and wide-ranging definitions of "thing." It is a word used to describe abstractions, activities, that which happened or which was heard, genitalia, dependent or weak people (such as women or children), powerful figures such as God, angels, or demons, and that which exists in and of itself, a concrete, inanimate object. At the same time, it is a word used "with imprecise semantic content" or "with weakened or no semantic content" ("Thing"). In linguistic as well as physical terms, the "thing" is largely devoid of clear signification. While the use of the word "thing" may strike us now as somewhat childish, unprofessional, or just awkward (see Note 33 above), in medieval usage it does not seem to carry this same connotation. This at first appears counterintuitive; Western medieval philosophical and religious paradigms were grounded in a system of hierarchies, and the notion of thingness as value derived from William James' metaphorical picture being turned upside down (see page 42 above) seems to contradict hierarchical order. However, Brown's related idea of misuse value may shed some light on how things were integrated into the medieval understanding of the world:

> Misuse frees objects from the systems to which they've been beholden. Common sense may tell us that the thing exists anterior to (the corresponding) object, that the thing is the substance out of which the subject, discourse, or the economic system constitutes an object. But we might instead imagine the thing (its very thingness, its 'substantial character,' its 'individuality,' its 'autonomy') as a kind of remainder - what's left over after a routinized objectification has taken place." ("Toy Story" 953-4)

The misuse value achieved when objects are reappropriated and manifest themselves as things (something that Brown and others suggest occurs during children's play) does not deny order and hierarchy, but instead acknowledges (and indeed, requires) that hierarchy and then reveals something extraneous to it. The misuse of objects temporarily extricates them from their accustomed order and inserts them into another, unknown order.

2.2.3 Thingness as the Alternate Order: The Carnival and the Divine

In medieval texts this unknown order often manifests itself as either the wild carnivalesque or as the divine – a complete absence of order, or an order so perfected it is unrecognizable to humanity. The term "carnivalesque" was initially coined by M. M. Bakhtin in his 1965 book *Rabelais and his World* to describe the abolition of hierarchy characteristic of many medieval folk celebrations. While Bakhtin saw the carnivalesque as a method of social resistance, some scholars of medieval history have argued that such inversions of order actually reinforced official culture, functioning more as a temporary and harmless escape than a sustained rebellion: "games and rituals of inversion played during periods of misrule were ways of defining and preserving the status quo" (French 392; see also Taylor, "Margins" 27 and McQuillan 62). In manuscripts such as the Luttrell Psalter and the Smithfield Decretals the monstrous things in the margins – strange combinations of man and beast, or living things and objects – embody the inversion of the social and divine hierarchies sanctioned in the accompanying text (this is particularly true in the case of the Luttrell Psalter, which is, of course, a book of biblical Psalms). Andrew Taylor describes the carnivalesque nature of these two manuscripts (the Psalter and the Decretals):

> It is a world of street theater, crowded with jugglers, stilt-walkers,
> musicians, and wrestlers; a world of exotic animals, elephants,
> unicorns, a camel; of deer hunts and boar hunts; of dirty jokes,
> when a monk sprinkles a lord and lady with urine instead of holy
> water or a miller catches his wife and a monk in *flagrante delicto*.
> Above all, it is a topsy-turvy world, where animals mimic human

actions and humans and animals mingle forms; a world of
metamorphosized grotesques, centaurs, mermaids and mermen,
wild men, and monsters, and of preaching foxes and hunting
rabbits. (23)

The animal-human crossovers are particularly characteristic of the Luttrell Psalter's grotesques.

However, the Psalter also includes illustrations, such as the scenes of peasant labour and the

depictions of the lord's family, which reinforce the status quo and thus contradict the strange

inversions in the grotesques. It is telling that much of the scholarship on the Psalter tends to

focus on the standard illustrations despite the plethora of other strange "things" depicted; we do

not really know what these things are or why they are in these books, and therefore we focus on

the objects that we *do* know. Michael Camille argues that the critical focus on the apparently

straight-forward illustrations (the labourers, the arming of Lord Geoffrey Luttrell, the Luttrell

family feast) has resulted in the Psalter's "transform[ation] from a family heirloom to something

of a mass commodity fetish representing 'Merry Olde England'"(12). However, the marginal

grotesques, most of which are unique (238), speak to the illustrators' interest in how things relate

to the normal social order – how disruptive they are, and how they should be defined in

relationship to that order. Camille suggests that these monsters "constantly evade being through

becoming"; they are rarely one kind of creature, but hybrids in which the space of transformation

is concealed by human clothing (245). They do not have to commit to one particular identity

because they are always becoming something else.

The elements of the carnivalesque included in Taylor's list are also characteristic of

burlesque parody or fabliaux, which we find in such English works as *The Tournament of*

Tottenham, Dame Sirith, and several of the stories in *The Canterbury Tales,* such as *The Miller's*

Tale, The Reeve's Tale, and *The Summoner's Tale*. The repulsive humour of a key moment in *The*

Miller's Tale, for example, would not have been accomplished without the vile vagueness of the

word *thyng* to describe the location of Absolom's naïve kiss: "He felte a thyng al rogh and long yherd" (3738). A similar effect is achieved in the Middle English romance *Octavian*, which describes the fearsome giant as "so foulle a thynge" (880); "thynge" here manages to infuse the reader with both the sense of the unknown and the distaste of a vaguely sexual allusion.[36] Whether such parodic inversions are actually intended to be subversive is highly questionable, however; some critics suggest that fabliau as a genre is rooted in moral exempla and that these kinds of tales were created to provide both entertainment and education (Furrow 6).

The other side of the medieval *thyng* is the Godly. Admittedly, the notion of a perfected divine order that is incomprehensible to man seems far away from thingness – from the physical things we encounter and touch and puzzle over. Indeed, such metaphysical perfection appears to be the antithesis of thingness. However, it is important to integrate some of the modern critical work on objects, thingness, and signification into our understanding of how "things" (as both a word itself and physical objects) functioned on a metaphysical or divine level in medieval texts. Caroline Walker Bynum, in her analysis of the function of wonder to medieval theorists, argues that instead of being "merely a physiological response, wonder was a recognition of the singularity and significance of the thing encountered" (39). To wonder at an incomprehensible thing was to be in awe of the divine. I noted above that Brown characterizes thingness as the "excess" of objects, "as a kind of remainder - what's left over after a routinized objectification has taken place" ("Toy Story" 953-4; "Thing Theory" 5). In other words, the thing may constantly defer ultimate signification, but its excess, its remainder, means that its *potential* for significance is much greater than the object – even if the thing and the object are the same physical item, such as the upside-down picture used in the example above. This is similar to Lacan's notion of *das Ding*, something which is ever desired, yet never understood; it is a veiled,

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[36] The introduction to the Southern version of *Octavian* uses the word *thyng* to castigate those who enjoy listening to fabliaux: "And fele of hem casteð a cry / Of thyng Þat fallyð to rybaudy" (13-14)

alluring hint at the real, at truth and pleasure, but it can never be truly reached or touched.

The thing is, as John Frow puts it, "at once full and inaccessible...that's why the vision of thingness so quickly becomes a vision of God" (348-9). Function and use alone cannot define it, as they can define objects. The host wafer, for example, was physically a piece of bread to be ingested, but also functioned as an annual religious experience for individuals, a sign of a unified community,[37] and the earthly manifestation of Christ himself. The unease felt at the host's unclear status – its thingness – is demonstrated in the fact that in regular Mass, a bell was rung during the sacring[38] and the Elevation of the Host. The bell was intended to make aurally "visible" an invisible moment: the transformation of the host from earthly object to divine presence. The sacring, the elevation, and the bell all made this transformation more tangible, more real, by signalling the moment of invisible divine presence via the "thing" that was the host. As Jennifer Garrison states, "mass is a ritual that demands that the worshipper accept God's simultaneous presence and absence, a moment in which the divine is almost tangible but impossible to grasp" (Garrison 295). The host is thus a reassuring physical presence but also a confusing thing whose true status or identity can never be completely understood. Recent work in sacramental theology and the medieval Eucharist corresponds with this paradoxical idea.[39]

As Chapter Six discusses, the thingness of the host is echoed in *Pearl* when the Dreamer asks the Maiden, who is accompanied by Christ as the Lamb of God, "Quat kyn Þyng may be Þat Lambe" (line 771). The word *kyn* here allows the reader to interpret the line as both "What kind

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[37] Most individuals would take communion only once a year, at Easter. During the regular Mass, the congregation would watch the celebrant raise the Host and take communion on their behalf (Duffy 93-6). Duffy emphasizes how important participation in communion was to each individual's sense of belonging; to be excluded was tantamount to social ostracism (94).

[38] The sacring is the recitation of the words "Hoc est enim corpus meum," a mystical moment which transformed the host from bread to Christ's body.

[39] For examples of such work, see Rubin (especially Chapters 1 and 5) and Beckwith. Beckwith highlights the contradictory nature of the Eucharist: "if Christ's body in the form of the Eucharist was where the integrity of an entire culture was most celebrated...if belief in transubstantiation could literally define your bona fide membership of that 'imaginary community,' then Christ's body as it was violated, eaten, transgressed and otherwise played with, was also the symbol which suffered from the most extreme degree of inner contestation and self-difference" (3).

of thing is that Lamb?" and "What kin-thing is that Lamb [what relationship is the Lamb to you?]?" Chapter Six therefore argues that the Lamb is the embodiment of the divine thing: it has an unclear relationship with the human subjects around it because its "kind" – its classification or status – is unknown. However, the Lamb also plainly exhibits its essential physicality – the blood that marks it: "Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse / Anende Hys hert, Þurȝ hyde torent / Of His quyte side His blod outsprent" (1135-7). The use of "thing" as a marker of the divine in medieval texts is also evident in *Troilus and Criseyde,* a poem discussed in Chapter 4. The narrator tells us that Criseyde seemed "lyk a thing immortal" (I:103). Troilus' lament about fate in Book IV:995-1078 uses the word "thyng" throughout in reference to events that are fated or foreshadowed and questions the nature and divine origin of such "thynges":

> I mene as though I laboured me in this
> To enqueren which thyng cause of which thyng be:
> As wheither that the prescience of God is
> The certeyn cause of the necessite
> Of thynges that to comen ben, parde,
> Or if necessite of thyng comynge
> Be cause certeyn of the purveyninge
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　(1008-1015)

However, *Troilus and Criseyde* also uses "thyng" to describe linguistic dissonance and the confusion that erupts when categories are not clearly circumscribed, as when Pandarus warns Troilus not to mix the vocabulary and behavior of love with anything else:

> Ne jompre ek no discordant thyng yfeere,
> As thus, to usen termes of phisik
> In loves termes; hold of thi matere
> The forme alwey, and do that it be lik;
> For if a peyntour wolde peynte a pyk
> With asses feet, and hedde it as an ape,
> It cordeth naught, so were it but a jape.
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　(II:1037-43)

Pandarus' statement here emphasizes how form should be aligned with content in order to

achieve linguistic signification ("hold of thi matere / The forme alwey, and do that it be lik") and draws attention to the chaos that erupts when the boundaries between such categories disappear. This boundary-blurring transforms both linguistic and physical objects into "discordant thyng(s)." Like the divine "thyng," these chaotic things cannot be defined.

2.2.4   The Modern Mind and the Medieval Thing

Seth Lerer, while not specifically addressing the implications of thing theory, nevertheless makes an useful statement when he argues that the literary text "exists not as some individuated and empirically recoverable 'thing' but as one element in the process between author, audience and publisher," that texts are socially collaborative and function as a nexus between author and reader to produce meaning (*Chaucer* 9). Manuscripts – alien objects to modern readers, who are used to books produced identically and *en masse* – may be considered, in some respects, to be "things" rather than objects.[40] The moment at which the thing (the manuscript in this case) reveals something unexpected or wrong is the moment at which we realize that we have not been seeking "truth" in the thing, but we have been looking to the thing to reinforce what we already believe to be true.

Plotz suggests that when exploring the "thingness" of things, instead of asking what meaning a culture intended an object to have, we should examine sites of failed or lost meaning – the discrepancy that exists between the intended meaning and the substance of the thing itself (110). Such moments of thingness, which are highlighted throughout the analyses in the following chapters, often indicate areas where modern modes of reading have taken precedence over medieval modes. In many cases, examining the presence of the genealogical paradigm in

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[40] To a medieval reader, the manuscript was certainly a familiar object but also a thing whose physical constitution seemed to vie against its metaphysical value. Books were made of stretched and treated sheepskin – the end product of shepherds and tanners and parchment-makers – and yet could contain the loftiest spiritual ideas. Like the Host, the lowly material nature of the book was opposed by its social and spiritual value. As Chapter 5 discusses, the opening of *Piers Plowman* seems to hint at these two sides of the book when his narrator, Will, "shopes" himself into "shrouds / As y a shep were." These opening lines are suggestive of the author shaping himself into the sheepskin pages of his own text.

such literary moments restores the medieval mode and allows us to reframe our question. A key question in any analysis of things is whether the thing is a sign, in the Saussurian sense: does it signify something? Does it signify nothing? Or does it signify something we were not expecting? The relationship between signifier and signified is a strained one within the parameters of thing theory, as demonstrated by Plotz's discussion of Brownell's 1857 painting "The Charter Oak" in which the object depicted is framed within oak itself (Plotz 112). A similar confusion of signification is identified in Chapter Six, in which I analyze the way in which the opening lines of *Piers Plowman* trouble the sign/signified relation, particularly when we consider the physical composition of the manuscript itself.

A consideration of the composition, production, intended function, and use of a manuscript resonates with Daniel Miller's alternate perspective on thingness, which was cited above. Miller sees thingness as manifesting itself at the moment in which an object's use or appearance is so obvious that it becomes invisible to us. When we think of *Piers Plowman*'s Will wandering in the Malvern Hills, shrouded as a sheep, we may also think of how the manuscript itself (also shrouded as a sheep, or in sheepskin) wanders. Medieval books were highly migratory, partly because they were very expensive and therefore less disposable and more likely to be shared among others or left in wills, and partly because there was no sense that a book had to be complete in order to be disseminated. For example, it was common for manuscripts to be circulated in booklet form before they were bound together in one book, and many texts, such as *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales*, were "published" in unfinished or fragmentary versions. Textual fragments often receive little or no sustained critical attention because of their incomplete nature; we desire the whole book, complete and accurate, and errors are useful only insofar as they direct us to the truth of the original text.[41] The seeds of this desire for truth,

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[41] The discussion of the HM 143 fragment of *Troilus and Criseyde* explores this issue in more depth. My observations about fragments are, of course, general in nature and do not reflect the treatment of all fragments. I

accuracy, and completion are seen in Robert Crowley's effort to confirm and circumscribe the authenticity of *Piers Plowman* and in the efforts of other editors to define the boundaries of the Chaucerian canon (see Chapters Three and Four).

Will's shrouded journey in *Piers Plowman,* which often confuses modern readers with its twists, turns, regressions, and shifts between waking and sleeping, parallels the fluidity of a manuscript's life. This is not to suggest that scribes (or Langland) made a conscious decision to compare the two, but merely that our own frustration with the seemingly chaotic pattern of Will's journey may mirror our resistance to or misunderstanding of the manuscript's form and function. Our interest in creating streamlined editions and technical manuscript descriptions, while practical for scholarly purposes, obscures some of the uncomfortable thingness inherent to a pile of parchment created five centuries ago. As Peter Schwenger says, "a description is a denegation of the thing described in the very act of translating it into words" (141). Such descriptions have the effect of circumscribing what the manuscript is or can be to the reader.

2.3   Blood, Text, and Thing: Connecting Perspectives

These two theoretical models of thing theory and genealogy were chosen because in their various manifestations they each highlight important differences between medieval and modern modes of reading. Understanding such differences allows us to understand alternate ways of classifying texts and to acknowledge the impact that material form has on our approach to

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would maintain, however, that any interest in fragments tends to be cursory, often, for example, focusing upon the characteristics of the scribe's hand. Certainly, such paleographic analysis provides important evidence for additional scholarship, but the remaining implications of the fragment itself often are ignored as a result. For example, when Doyle identified the scribe of a *Prick of Conscience* fragment as the same scribe who penned a *Piers Plowman* manuscript, his analysis focused primarily on the paleographical features of the scribe's hand rather than on the nature of the fragment ("Ushaw College" 43-50). Similarly, Simon Horobin's recent discovery of the HM 143 *Troilus* hand's identity as the *Piers* "M" manuscript scribe (and his further discovery of the M corrector as being Adam Pinkhurst) focuses largely on the paleographic connections between HM 143 and M. In saying this, I am certainly not criticizing the valuable work done by Horobin and Doyle – their use of their respective fragments served a larger purpose, and a digression into the fragments themselves would have resulted in long, unwieldy articles. I only point out that textual fragments may provide an interesting window into medieval reading habits that we have not yet opened.

meaning and truth. By using these paradigms to reframe what we perceive to be moments of randomness and incomprehensibility in medieval texts, we cease to see medieval readers and writers as simply less sophisticated than us and instead locate them within taxonomies that are closer to those in which they actually lived and wrote. As this chapter concludes I will highlight the important threads that connect these two theoretical frameworks.

Neither thing theory nor genealogy is restricted to either the modern or the medieval sphere; utility of these paradigms is partly based on the fact that both have influenced thought then and still do now, although in different forms. Although these two theories at first appear to have little relation to one another, they do share some key features, as this chapter has periodically highlighted. Both models are characterized by a kind of epistemological duality: they appeal to our desire for linearity, completion, and concreteness, but immediately deny that desire as they reveal their inherent instability and fragmentation. For example, as was discussed earlier, genealogy at its most basic physical level betrays its own fragmentary nature; it is not the tree we imagine it to be – the editor's manuscript stemma – but a tangled web in which meaning is generated primarily through affinity rather than hierarchy. As Foucault says, "the true historical sense [offered by genealogy] confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or point of reference" (89). It does not provide the stable identity that we desire. Genealogy, therefore, disintegrates (or reconfigures itself) when we take it from the philosophical to the physical, while "things" fall apart when we move away from the physical and into the philosophical and/or linguistic. When we look for simple and concrete truth in things we encounter – when we "desire things *qua* things to speak to us" in an unmediated form (Plotz 110) – we discover that the encounter itself is not sufficient. We need to draw the thing into the realm of language in order to understand it, and it is in this linguistic realm that the thing's lack of classification becomes clear. In other words, both paradigms appear to offer us some sort of

interpretative control, but we end up being forced to relinquish that control.

In his analysis of the genealogical paradigm in *Piers Plowman,* D. Vance Smith emphasizes this desire for control when he points out that "it is not the dead who construct genealogies, of course: it is those who want to stake a claim over the living" (*Incipit* 113). The deployment of genealogy in any of its manifestations is premised on the assumption of control, on genealogy's influence on the determination of origin, on what is "natural," and on land ownership and legal status (Radulescu and Kennedy 1). Genealogy, in other words, was an ordering framework that placed disparate elements in relation to one another. The "genealogical imagination [was] an important medieval model of historical understanding" (Smith, *Incipit* 116), and I would suggest literary understanding as well, since the genealogical model itself traverses the boundary between fact and fiction. However, the philosophical and historical paradigm of genealogy tended to efface its own physical roots: the chaos of blood and sex. The moments in which the ordering framework of genealogy clashes with its disorderly visceral reality destabilize the genealogical paradigm, leaving it open to contestation even as it asserts its own immovability.[42]

Like genealogy, thing theory balances on the edge of order and disorder (or an alternate order), physical and philosophical. Both are rooted in basic physical elements but instead of providing concrete certainty, these physical elements render both theoretical paradigms unstable – although often more interesting because of it. Thing theory and genealogy therefore both balance coherence and chaos, and my use of these ideas throughout the following chapters is intended to explore how our perception of chaos often parallels the medieval sense of coherence. In other words, by articulating those sites in which meaning escapes us we can reconfigure our paradigms and practices along medieval lines, thereby understanding the significance of what

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[42] One example of such a clash is the treatment of genealogical lines in *Piers Plowman:* the awkwardly allegorical family of Piers Plowman, whose roles seem to be a rather forced example of order, versus Langland's more realistic references to the disruptive influence of bastardy.

appears to us as illegibility, randomness, or incoherence. In her discussion of wonder and marvels in medieval texts, Caroline Walker Bynum emphasizes that the random or inexplicable was often a source of signification because of those very qualities: "if to theologians, chroniclers, and preachers, the wonderful was indeed often the strange, the rare, and the inexplicable, it was never the merely strange or the simply inexplicable. It was a strange that mattered, that pointed beyond itself to meaning" (71-2). The thing troubles us because it is an empty and opaque signifier – a physical remnant that is illegible to us – but its very opacity is what infused it with significance, whether divine or indescribable, to a medieval audience.

The paradigms of thingness and genealogy are both manifest in the manuscript, an object which is at once an economic commodity, a sign of social status, a "carrier bag" for the intellect (Le Guin 152-3), an animal product,[43] and part of a literary family. Plotz describes a thing as "an object that is troubling because it is perched on the boundary between sign and substance" (112), and this particular description is characteristic of manuscripts themselves, which, like Will shrouded in his sheepskin, inhabit that border between sign and substance. Andrew Taylor's notion of the fetishized manuscript corresponds to Plotz's understanding of things: Taylor defines the fetish as "a single material object that exists at the point of intersection of diverse ideologies" (205), a definition which suggests a manuscript is some "thing" upon which meaning is at once inscribed and deferred, a site of contesting ideas in which the signifier and the signified are not distinct entities.[44]

The force that this thingness has upon readers is, perhaps, one impetus behind the recent digitization projects. Manuscripts of all types – literary, legal, theological – are currently being

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[43] Holsinger, both in his 2009 article "Of Pigs and Parchment" and in his presentation "Membrane Aesthetics" at the New Chaucer Society Conference in Siena (2010), draws attention to the corporeal, bloody roots of medieval literature, reducing it to "millions of stains on animal parts" ("Pigs" 619). His article contrasts this mass slaughter with the strange concurrent movement to moralize animals themselves by putting them on trial.

[44] I would note here that fetishizing a thing denies "thingness" by imbuing the Thing with meaning and desire; the fetish is our way of coping with the unclassifiable or unknowable nature of the thing.

produced in digital facsimile so the reader can approach them in as unmediated a form as possible. Peter Robinson, who has been working on the digitization of *The Canterbury Tales* manuscripts, testifies to the appeal of manuscripts-as-things. The digital publishing program he and his colleagues are using to digitize Hengwrt is, he states, intended to "do justice to the eccentric beauty of the manuscript itself…giving an impression of Hengwrt as a physical object, stains, rat chewings and all; and give too a sense of the many discontinuities in the inscription of the text in the manuscript" (Robinson 136).[45] Robinson's comments regarding the "discontinuities" and ugliness of the manuscript participate in a similar discourse as thing theory and indicate an interest in the implications of reading the manuscript itself – implications beyond paleographical and codicological analysis. The increased popularity of manuscript digitization has highlighted even more starkly the question of whether the critical edition or the "real" manuscript should take precedence. Do we desire the shadow of the authorial text evidenced in a critical edition, or the scraped-up manuscript that reflects just one scribe's work? Which is closer to an "original" text, and which is more complete? Robert Meyer-Lee highlights the tension inherent to these questions when he refers to our conflicting desire for the Riverside Chaucer to be "at once an object of artistic excellence and an object of historical authenticity" (3). Textual genealogies that deviate from our expectations of how medieval literature should or did function leave us not with manuscripts as Texts (objects with which we are comfortable working) but manuscripts as Things: they are, in Brown's words, "objects asserting themselves as Things" ("Thing Theory" 4).

The incorporation of both thing theory and genealogy into our interpretation of medieval texts therefore offers a method of distancing ourselves from our own assumptions and reconfiguring our modes of reading. These models encourage us to develop an increased

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[45] Van Peer and Sherman are other examples of this wider interest in deformed, dirty, or otherwise abnormal texts.

awareness of what we assume literature to be, and to acknowledge the vastly different assumptions of an earlier culture. The wide range of these approaches also allows for useful connections to other theories, such as post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, and even New Criticism and New Historicism. As I hope the analyses in the following chapters will demonstrate, the models of thingness and genealogy force us to ask important questions not only about the nature of medieval literature, but about what we have constructed it to be.

Chapter 3

(Re)Reading Tradition: the Chaucerian Tradition

Christopher Cannon, in exploring the radical difference of Middle English literature in the late fourteenth century, argues that it is due to the "poverty of our categories" that we are unable to understand the literary logic of Middle English texts and compilations (*Grounds* 11). Our usual taxonomies, in other words, are often insufficient to the task of reading the medieval text. Cannon insists that we must reconfigure our own modern methods of classification in order to understand how Middle English texts generated meaning for their readers; he states that they must be read "apart from all…familiar categories" (3). In this chapter and the next, I examine the familiar categories of the Chaucerian and the *Piers Plowman* traditions and explore some alternate ways in which to understand the character of these traditions (and the texts that comprise them) and our own role in reinforcing their stability. In setting the boundaries of "tradition" around textual groupings we construct a linear genealogy that may be convenient and at times useful, but may also diminish the importance of other textual connections that do not fit within these boundaries.

In discussing medieval historiography, Gabrielle Spiegel defines genealogy as "a symbolic form which governs the very shape and significance of the past"; it is conceptual and metaphorical, providing a pattern for medieval accounts of history and a "perceptual grid" for the relationships between texts, authors, and manuscripts ("Genealogy" 48). The emergence of genealogy as a distinct genre – something beyond brief annal entries – restored to historical writing a linear narrative that had been subsumed by typological modes of interpretation which saw historical events and people as figurations (51). The narrative production of history enabled

by the genealogical form highlights the close formal connections between medieval representations of fact and fiction; medieval boundaries between romance, ballad, allegory, and non-fictional history were "highly permeable" (Cooper, *English Romance* 10). As a powerful medieval paradigm, genealogy is a rich yet largely untapped theoretical resource for understanding medieval modes of thought.[1] In this chapter and the next, my exploration of textual classification and the construction of Middle English literary tradition will focus largely upon how the idea of genealogy influenced (and influences) the formation of literary tradition. The development and awareness of literary tradition in the Middle Ages is a complex issue that has been somewhat oversimplified in modern scholarship, since our own sense of genre colours our perception of how medieval readers construed textual relationships. The intent of this discussion is not simply to pull apart our own reading paradigms, but to reconstruct as far as possible medieval reading paradigms. The practical manifestation of this theoretical foundation will be an examination first of the development and reception of the Chaucerian tradition and then, in Chapter Four, of the *Piers Plowman* tradition. The formation of these traditions in the Middle Ages and their modern reception are phenomena that testify to key cultural values characteristic of each era: the medieval understanding of authorship, which shifted in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the modern privileging of subversions of power.

The previous chapter outlined the history of the term genealogy, the contested use of the term in the Middle Ages, and the two opposing meanings it has inherited. The first meaning encompasses the linear, medieval sense of continuous growth which is less a progression and more a reinvented inheritance of what came before, and the second deploys post-structuralism in

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[1] This is not meant to imply that this is a completely untouched critical field. Building upon Spiegel's research into genealogical narratives (discussed briefly in Chapter Two) are scholars such as Zrinka Stahuljak whose recent book takes as its point of departure the essentially metaphorical nature of genealogy in medieval French literature. In pointing out the "discrepancy between the 'cultural' construct [of genealogy] and a would-be natural grounding in blood," Stahuljak "argues for a new way of reading medieval genealogy, one that is not based in blood but...[in the] condition of bloodlessness....[and] the act of linguistic alliance" (1-2). See also Ganim, Chapter 2, for his discussion regarding how the Western medieval world "orientalized" its own genealogy and the influence of this on early modern historiographic representations of medieval culture.

its understanding of genealogy as a decentered web of connections that, in Foucault's words, "operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" ("Genealogy" 76). These two models of genealogy – Spiegel's linear history and Foucault's muddle of palimpsests – are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, given the rewriting that characterizes the development of medieval genealogical histories,[2] these stories are perhaps closer to the Foucauldian palimpsests than they may first appear.[3] Both models can be of use to medievalists now.

Genealogy did indeed function as an ordering principle in and between medieval texts, but such order required the reader's acceptance of an essentially fictionalized origin. This fiction was closely tied to a powerful sense of precedence which located authority not in literary creativity but in the work's reliance upon much earlier texts. Foucault's genealogical palimpsest model is particularly apt here: just as palimpsests display a new work while still retaining traces of the words originally written on the parchment, the metaphorical literary palimpsest (constituted through literary tradition) allows us to see the older words underneath the newer poem. Medieval authors wishing to lay claim to literary authority needed to balance the two levels of this "palimpsest" but their success at doing so remained a source of deep anxiety,[4] particularly as the issue of authorship became an increasingly vexed one.

David Wallace suggests that fifteenth-century writers, many of whom were wrestling with the political implications of royal usurpation and the consequent questions of true

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[2] See, for example, Radulescu (2003) and Allan regarding the connection between political propaganda and royal genealogies in the fifteenth century.

[3] Spiegel wrestles with the divide between Foucauldian and medieval genealogical formations and questions whether the former can illuminate the latter, given the fact that Foucault's notion of genealogy relies upon disciplinary mechanisms that arose in the early modern period ("Genealogy" 10). She sees medieval genealogical formations as fundamentally opposed to the "anti-foundational and anti-identitarian" genealogy of Foucault yet nevertheless closes her article somewhat inconclusively.

[4] In *The Anxiety of Influence,* Harold Bloom identifies six ways writers manifest the anxiety of influence: *clinamen, tessera, kenosis, daemonization, akesis*, and *apophrades*. The palimpsest model is perhaps closest to the notion of *kenosis*, which Bloom identifies as a sort of Freudian uncanny in its simultaneous repetition of and discontinuity from a precursor.

inheritance, were interested in exploring the contested nature of genealogy: how was "true patrilineage" to be distinguished from "repudiated origins" (638)? Post-structuralist thought embraces such sites of contestation. Indeed, John Bowers argues that post-structuralism has influenced modern scholarship in such a way that allows us to "recognize that literary genealogies necessarily depend upon stable origins that are not always fixed, unitary, or even factually real" (*Antagonistic Tradition* 2). While Bowers' point is accurate, I would emphasize that the fictional nature of the constructed origin does not make it any less effective or important, nor does our cognizance of such a fiction ensure our immunity to it.

The construction of literary tradition as genealogy, emphasizing origin and inheritance, transposes the social power of the genealogical form into the literary sphere. The fiction of origin can be quite powerful: it certainly influenced past readers and, as a result, our reception of past texts. In the case of Chaucer, with his reputation as the Father of English Literature, "the myth of origin actually made itself true" (Cannon, "Myth" 649). Cannon argues that Chaucer's status in the English literary canon is the result of a strange tautology. In the Middle Ages he acquired his position as a literary father because of the quality of his writing, but after 1600 the quality of his writing was acceptable *because* he was "Father Chaucer" – he was perceived as inhabiting a space of linguistic origin and the very fact that he was there legitimated his position. D. Vance Smith points out that "medieval writers often used the figure of the father as an abstract principle of beginning, an image of both authority and precedence" (*Incipit* 125). In other words, the medieval construction of Chaucer in genealogical terms imbued him with paternal authority as well as legitimized other writers' participation in his authority.

However, unlike medieval readers and writers, who used the father-origin to historicize texts and set precedent, modern readers tend to cast the origin forward anachronistically. Edward Said says that "when the search for a beginning is pursued within a moral and imaginative

framework [which organizes disparate elements according to a legible pattern], the beginning implies the end" (*Beginnings* 41). Our investment in Chaucer as our literary father – indeed, our investment in a literary origin at all – reinforces the legitimacy of our own critical and literary endeavours, the modern ending forecast by the medieval beginning. A similar pattern influences our reception of Langland: by identifying Langland as the beginning of a tradition opposing Chaucer's hegemony, we see the Reformation and the triumph of the public voice as the final result. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Four, this sentiment influences on our own sense of a coherent *Piers Plowman* tradition.

This type of revisionist historiography is addressed by Sarah Stanbury in her article about *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (CHMEL), which argues that the CHMEL constructs England's literary history as a rise narrative privileging resistance and independence: "English vernacular writing emerges in resistance and opposition to forms of textual tyranny imposed through structures of political or clerical power" (96). Stanbury highlights Langland's role in this narrative, arguing that the CHMEL "present[s] Langland as something of a linguistic Robin Hood, a folk-hero appropriating Latin texts and distributing them, in English, to the general populace" (96). While Stanbury is referring mainly to the English/Latin opposition, this chapter will apply these principles to the reception of Langland and Chaucer by arguing that the modern assumptions about these two literary traditions indicate our own investment in the linear literary genealogy and the fiction of origin. This chapter's analyses will be extended and concluded at the end of Chapter Four, in which I suggest that the Chaucerian tradition and its writers were much closer than the *Piers Plowman* tradition to constituting a *vox populi* – a people's voice.

3.1   Tradition and Genealogy

The mythical Chaucerian origin of literature[5] and Bowers' "literary genealogies" move this discussion of genealogy away from the theoretical into the practical. In the previous chapter I discussed several manifestations of genealogy (literal, intertextual, intratextual, codicological) in order to explore not only how this model influenced medieval reading practices, but how we are still affected by the genealogical paradigm and the myth of origin. I am therefore interested in complicating the notion of tradition and exploring how the different manifestations of genealogy can broaden our understanding of the Chaucerian and *Piers Plowman* traditions in the late medieval period. These two traditions are particularly well-suited to this task because they are the only eponymously named Middle English literary traditions.[6] This naming sharpens one's awareness of origin and therefore manifests the genealogical paradigm particularly well.[7] Of course, because the naming was done by later critics and not medieval readers, these traditions may shed more light on our own investment in genealogy.

Before discussing the Chaucerian and Langlandian traditions, it is important to establish what the word "tradition" and the idea of literary tradition meant for medieval readers and how we understand tradition now. Certainly the idea of literary tradition was not described as "literary tradition" during the Middle Ages: what we know as the English literary tradition was conceptualized in filial (that is, genealogical), rather than literary terms. A named literary tradition automatically identifies its own point of origin, thus aligning itself with Spiegel's linear definition of genealogy. Although late medieval readers did not think of these two textual

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[5] See Cannon (1996) and Lerer (1993).

[6] There is also the Arthurian tradition, which, like the *Piers* tradition, takes its name from its central character. However, unlike the Arthurian tradition the names of the Chaucerian and *Piers* (or "Langlandian") traditions are each closely linked with one author. In the case of the *Piers* tradition, we know that while Piers Plowman was not an author of the poem, he was often mistaken for such by readers (see Note 8 below).

[7] Although I have referred to these traditions as the only eponymously named medieval literary traditions, I have come across the term "Lydgatiana." H.N. McCracken used this term in 1912, in the *Index of Middle English Verse* (qtd in Schaer 27, n41). Stephen Reimer also uses "Lydgatiana" in his introduction to the online "The Canon of Lydgate" project, but he does not define it.

streams as the "Chaucerian Tradition" or the "*Piers Plowman* Tradition," they nevertheless

associated groups of texts with a name pinpointing origin: Chaucer (often referred to in paternal

terms) and Piers Plowman.[8] By highlighting connections between texts, a literary tradition

functions as a family tree – a metanarrative linking a variety of works. According to Hayden

White, a narrative representation of events provides "the illusion of a centered consciousness

capable of looking out on the world, apprehending its structure and processes, and representing

them to itself as having all the formal coherency of narrativity itself" (*Content of the Form* 36).

Literary tradition allows us to conceive of a group of texts as forming a progression; it tells a

story. When we engage in this metatextual storyline, we automatically seek out a beginning and

we anticipate an end – or at least, we anticipate movement in a certain direction. This process of

seeking and anticipating engages readers' participation in the ideology of the text; art, literature,

or historiography does not have to explicitly present an argument to convince readers. Far more

effective is "the projection of a kind of subjectivity that its viewers or readers must take on in

order to experience it as art, as literature, or as historiography" (87). One's investment in the

narrative underlying the literary tradition establishes this subjectivity, and connects genealogy to

the concept of individual identity that is negotiated in the subject/object relationship.[9]

Like the term "genealogy," the meaning of the word "tradition" was somewhat contested

in medieval England. The *Middle English Dictionary* identifies the first use of the word in Mark

7:3 of the Wycliffite Bible: "Pharisees waisschen ofte her hondis, holdinge the tradiciouns or

statutis of eldere men." Colossians 2:8 construes tradition in a similar way, by comparing

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[8] The confusion of Piers with Will the narrator and William Langland the poet (and the erroneous assumption that Piers was a real person) was common (Hudson, "Legacy" 251-2). The name Piers is often a criterion for including a text in what critics have described as the *Piers Plowman* tradition, although Hudson points out that Piers was also a proverbial and generic labourer's name (258). The confusion of the generic plowman with Piers Plowman is demonstrated by John Leland, who, in his 1540 list of Chaucer's works, conflated the apocryphal "Plowman's Tale" with *Piers Plowman*: "But the Tale of Piers Plowman, which by common consent of the learned is attributed to Chaucer as its true author, has been suppressed in each edition, because it vigorously inveighed against the bad morals of the priest" (qtd in Bowers, "Police" 42).

[9] See Chapter Two for a more extensive discussion on how genealogy, subjectivity and identity are connected.

traditions of men to the elements of the world, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the use of

the term in 1380 by Wycliffe, who refers to people who are bound by "a tradycion þat þai han

hem sijlfe made." Bowers compares these kinds of passages, which demonstrate that the earliest

English use of the term tradition "came loaded with a sense of fictitious origins" (*Antagonistic*

Tradition 5), to Lydgate's more positive use of "tradition" in his *Troy Book.* Lydgate's assertion

that "holy doctrine and traditions" (II:5831) will help the Church defeat its opponents associates

tradition not with man-made rules but with divine origins. In both the Biblical sense and in

Lydgate's text, "tradition" is more akin to practice than to the notion of relationship or similarity

inherent to the concept of literary tradition. However, both senses of the word are linked by the

importance of origin, which surfaces in literary tradition as precedence.[10] While a traditional

practice in the usages cited above was legitimized (or condemned) by its original inception by

God or man, a tradition of literature was legitimized not by the "original" author *per se* but by

literary precedent. Moreover, texts in the same tradition would supplement one another,

providing additional information or an alternate perspective by highlighting their stylistic or

thematic commonalities.[11] Bowers argues that Chaucer "was being promoted as traditional

within two decades of his death" (*Antagonistic Tradition* 7), not because of his originality but

because he appropriated older French, Italian, and Latin precedents into the English milieu.

According to Bowers, tradition functions on a basic level by "transmitting something to

the next generation" (6), a definition which again demonstrates the debt that tradition owes to the

concept of genealogy. This notion of continuity with subsequent generations is one that can

mediate between the use of the word "tradition" in a social sense and its use in a literary – and

specifically Chaucerian – sense. A modern scholarly perspective, informed by post-structuralism,

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[10] The *OED* does give some interesting and lesser known meanings of "tradition" dating from the later Middle Ages: "The action of handing over (something material) to another; delivery, transfer (sixteenth century); A giving up, surrender; betrayal (late fifteenth century); oral delivery of information or instruction."
   [11] The analysis of HM 114 in Chapter Five gives an example of how medieval literary tradition could be reframed in this way.

would encourage us to focus not on the continuity that a literary tradition supplies, but on the places where tradition fails, where textual genealogies dissolve or contradict one another. Elizabeth Clark indicates that we should "look less to historical continuity (and hence to the nostalgia for the past that such histories often encourage) than to discontinuity, noting both breaks in the larger historical order and the gaps, absences, aporias and contradictions in texts. [This perspective] eschews 'grand narratives' that often mask ideological presuppositions" (7). Clark's perspective provides a useful framework in which to read *our own* reading of medieval literature. I am interested not only in problematizing the coherence of the Chaucerian and *Piers Plowman* traditions, but in examining how moments of fragmentation actually lead us to understanding literary tradition differently. While we are aware that our categories of genre and tradition are to some extent convenient fictions, employed for practical reasons, the ongoing use of these categories certainly affects our understanding of the texts because they circumscribe both context and definition. When we fail to acknowledge the influence of the genealogical model on medieval textuality (and on our own perception of medieval texts), we leave ourselves susceptible to discounting important commonalities among texts of different "traditions," rather than asking ourselves how these traditions were actually read and understood in the Middle Ages. The Chaucerian tradition and the *Piers Plowman* tradition are examples of how such deconstruction and reconstruction can occur.

3.2 Chaucer's Family Tree

With the enhanced sense of origin that corresponds with a named tradition such as Chaucer's[12] comes the clear deployment of the first genealogical manifestation identified above: the literal genealogy, or the family tree. A family tree is in many ways a fictional construct, but it

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[12]The fact that the *Piers Plowman* tradition is named after a character in the poem rather than the author has implications for the function of the genealogical model in this poem's reception, as discussed in Chapter Four.

provides comfort, a sense of stability and direction, and a point of origin. In his late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century editions of Geoffrey Chaucer's works, Thomas Speght capitalized on that sense of comfort and permanence by prefacing the text with a full-page illustration of "The Progenie of Geffrey Chaucer" (Figure 1). Speght's editions were the first to refer to Chaucer as "Antient" and "Learned" (Pearsall, "Thomas Speght" 75), and Speght's prefatory material and textual inclusions also constructed Chaucer as not only an *auctor* like Homer or Virgil, but as a literary courtier – a figure to be respected in Speght's time.[13] Since Chaucer, as Speght's 1598 preface to his readers states, was from "most vnlearned times and greatest ignorance" compared to the seventeenth century "wherein Learning and riper iudgement so much flourisheth" (Speght, "Preface"), there was a certain amount of anxiety regarding how his medieval origins could be reconciled with his high literary status (Machan, "Speght's 'Works'" 159). For this reason, Speght's editions of 1598 and 1602 reinforce Chaucer's courtly associations, to the extent that he presented Chaucer's family tree in such a way that aligned Chaucer's non-aristocratic lineage with the aristocracy.

Even though the title of Speght's Chaucerian genealogy indicates that we are looking at Chaucer's sons and daughters, Chaucer's own line is actually a relatively minor branch of the tree.[14] As Figure 1 shows, Chaucer's father-in-law Sir Payne Roet forms the tree's "root," and on both sides of that root, a series of heraldic crests descend down the page. Chaucer and John of Gaunt hold the same genealogical position on Sir Payne's right and left side, respectively, with John of Gaunt's line ending with the Tudor heir of the Lancastrian line, King Henry VII, and Chaucer's ending with the Yorkist Edmund de la Pole. In the centre, between the two lineages,

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[13] As this chapter will later suggest, Speght's impulse to distance Chaucer from other medieval authors was completely counter to Chaucer's actual medieval function.

[14] Martha Driver refers to the chain of crests as "all the alliances of the Chaucer family" (232), but does not discuss the discrepancy between the title of the tree ("The Progenie of Geffrey Chaucer") and how the tree itself is constituted.

Figure 1: "The Progenie of Geffrey Chaucer," from Speght's *The Workes of our Antient and Learned Poet, Geffrey Chaucer, Newly Printed*, 1598. By permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

there is a large portrait of Chaucer standing on his son's grave, thus giving the impression that the family tree pictured does indeed represent Chaucer's, and not Payne Roet's, progeny. Moreover, Chaucer's central position suggests his power to unify the Yorkists and the Lancastrians under the banner of "English"; even in Speght's time, Chaucer was representative of national solidarity. The chronological inversion indicated by Chaucer's position on his own son's grave also indicates that Chaucer is somehow outside of time, someone beyond the aristocratic genealogy.[15] This is a Chaucer who seems to surpass or, perhaps, define the limits of the family tree mapped out for him. Everyone else on the page – including the small crest labeled "Chaucer" on the tree itself – is defined in relation to the large figure of Chaucer the Author inhabiting the centre. This hierarchy is characteristic of family trees in general (certain histories – often female or illicit histories – must be ignored in order to create a coherent genealogy) and is also characteristic of other "family trees" I will be discussing: specifically, the Chaucerian literary tradition, whose members are circumscribed, built up, or reduced by their relation to Chaucer, and manuscript stemmata, which trace manuscripts back to a hypothetical lost archetype and tend to ignore fragmented representations of texts. Fragments, such as the one discussed in Chapter Five,[16] are briefly noted but not discussed in manuscript genealogies. This neglect is certainly pragmatic (and perhaps necessary) from an editorial point of view, but it also testifies to our ongoing interest in completeness, coherence, and origin – none of which are represented in isolated fragments of text.

The following sections propose a new way of understanding the Chaucerian tradition and what it meant to be a Chaucerian writer, one based on what I have termed social and supplemental forms of authorship (defined and discussed below). Chaucer may not truly have originated social authorship, but in practice he certainly popularized it. The practice of

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[15] This is a convenient representation of Chaucer, since his connection to the royal genealogy is rather peripheral and tenuous.

[16] Section 5.3.1 in Chapter Five discusses the *Troilus and Criseyde* fragment in HM 143.

supplemental authorship, which defined the medieval and early modern Chaucerian canon, used Chaucer as a kind of catalyst to solidify the position of other authors, thereby consolidating a self-referential community of vernacular writers who integrated, rather than were controlled by, classical precedent. The way in which social authorship fostered a sense of communal intimacy among writers of Middle English texts, and Chaucer's central position in that community, enabled other writers to use Chaucer as a *contemporary* precedent as they expanded and re-imagined his texts in ongoing acts of Derridean supplementation. Chaucer's role in establishing English literature as a legitimate product went far beyond his literary skill; his social position among authors, clerks, and (as Speght's title page emphasizes) the aristocracy allowed him to be used as the first contemporary literary precedent, which in turn consolidated a self-legitimizing community of Middle English authors. Rather than relying on ancient precedent in order to market their texts, they authorized themselves and their community as *auctores*.

Chaucer therefore functioned as both contemporary and as precedent for a community of writers – he was a Father requiring reproduction of heirs, and also a colleague who participated in that community. Speght's over-emphasis of Chaucer's royal connections two hundred years later draws attention to the former role rather than the latter. As Machan notes, it was imperative that Chaucer be aligned with courtly circles in order to accord with the values of Speght's time and the impetus for the edition: Speght indicates that "certaine Gentlemen…[his] neere friends, who loued Chaucer as he well deserveth" had asked Speght to restore Chaucer from the "iniurie of time, ignorance of writers, and negligence of Printers" (Speght, "Preface"; qtd in"Speght's 'Works'" 155). It was only appropriate that these literary gentlemen should love and admire another gentleman. With England's emergent sense of both national and international identity,[17]

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[17] Turville-Petre (1996) is one of the seminal studies in the field of medieval English nationalism. John Bowers' chapter ("Chaucer After Smithfield") in Cohen's *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* elaborates upon Chaucer's own literary consolidation of English national identity, a "nationalism based on claims of ancient historical origins, a distinct language, and a deep antagonism toward its more powerful neighbours" (57).

it was crucial that "Speght's Chaucer, 'our English Poet' in the editor's words, [was] above all quintessentially English" (156). Speght's edition, with its visual presentation of Chaucer as the link between England's aristocratic families, cemented Chaucer's position as England's literary father. Alexandra Gillespie suggests that in the absence of Chaucer's own assertion of authority, "we are left with the Chaucer 'effect,' the author who is a 'function' of the creation, circulation, and interpretation of his texts, paratext, and others' texts about his work" (19). The medieval Chaucerian tradition in some respects superseded the "authentic" Chaucer canon;[18] this is an important distinction to make if we are to re-evaluate what constitutes "Chaucerianness" and the nature of the Chaucerian tradition itself. Before embarking on a consideration of these concepts, however, it is necessary to review how past criticism defined the medieval Chaucerians.

3.2.1 Defining the Chaucerian Tradition

The term "Chaucerian" is often used casually, but how carefully do we consider what we mean when we use it to describe or define something? Our own understanding of Chaucerian almost certainly differs from the medieval one. In general, scholarship on the Chaucerian tradition treats Chaucer as a stable and unified central object around which other texts and writers circulate or a root from which they grow. [19] The modern handling of the Chaucerian literary tradition is therefore a manifestation of the intertextual genealogical model: it is based upon a notion of filiation, in which Chaucer is the Father – the root, or origin of the family tree – and his successors (and their works) are sons. In this genealogical impulse we are following the

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[18] The use of the term "authentic" here may raise questions and concerns, particularly since there is not a clear medieval equivalent. However, the imbalance between the medieval and modern understanding of authenticity is entirely the point: it is what *we* now use to determine the Chaucerian canon, but had no significance to a medieval readership. Although they were certainly interested in the Chaucerian canon, in grouping together works authored by Chaucer, the actual determination of "true" authorship and the exclusion of other writers were not priorities. "Chaucerian" compilations such as CUL Gg.4.27, Pepys 2006, Tanner 346, Bodley 638, and Fairfax 16 exemplify this seemingly contradictory impulse to gather together Chaucer's canon without being concerned about whether Chaucer authored all the texts.

[19] Most of these writers are not described as stable in terms of skill and career; Derek Pearsall, for example, urges readers to discern between the good and the bad in Lydgate's works, stating that while many of them are "worthless," some are quite good ("English Chaucerians" 204).

path first laid down by the Chaucerian imitators that we now tend to deprecate. However, even though these authors first cast the mold that shapes our sense of "Chaucerian," they themselves essentially broke that mold as they constructed it. Our tendency to label a text or a writer as "Chaucerian" somewhat discounts the value of the author or work by assigning it to this monolithic category. By redefining the medieval development and function of "Chaucerianness," we can give more credit for agency and innovation to these other writers.

On the face of it, Chaucerian authors present themselves as simply imitating Chaucer rather than reinventing him. Like T.S. Eliot, whose famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, Harold Bloom's influential understanding of literary precedent in *The Anxiety of Influence* should be acknowledged here. His perspective may shed light on the way in which Chaucerian writers attempted to balance imitation and competition as Chaucer's "inheritors." Bloom claims that poetic influence was described in filial terms (poets as sons of their literary fathers) for centuries before the term "influence" was used.[20] This movement from the genealogical paradigm of paternity to a more objective word like "influence" parallels what James Simpson describes as the process of Chaucerian reception in the late Middle Ages, in which Chaucer's influence moved from that of personal presence into philological absence.[21] I part ways with Bloom, however, when he contends that there is no significant sense of literary anxiety – whether described as influence or as filiation – before Shakespeare.[22] His own description of how poetic influence manifests itself in poets resonates strongly when we consider the Chaucerian tradition (and perhaps even the *Piers* tradition): he states that major poets have "the persistence to wrestle with their strong

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[20] Bloom argues that the shift from filiation to influence occurred during the Enlightenment, this filial role and need for "parental" approval was termed "influence" during the Enlightenment (26-27).

[21] Note 23 and Section 3.3.2 below discuss Simpson's views in further detail.

[22] His reason for this claim is that Shakespeare is essentially the first "great" Father-poet – there was no precursor with which he needed to wrestle. Bloom therefore considers poetic anxiety to post-date the Elizabethan age (Bloom 5, 11).

precursors, even to the death. Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves" (5). While not judging whether medieval Chaucerian writers did or did not have "capable imagination," one could argue that their works show evidence of all three poetic responses: wrestling with Chaucer, idealizing him, and appropriating him.

Although earlier scholarship – particularly that of the nineteenth and early twentieth century – tended to accept the self-deprecation of Chaucer's followers, thereby aligning itself with the linear genealogical understanding of Chaucer's influence, more recent work indicates that the medieval understanding of "Chaucerianness" was more complex than those humility topoi would lead us to believe.[23] A primary question is whether Chaucer actually functioned as the stable authorial figure we treat him as now. Kathleen Forni wrestles with this issue and with the definition of Chaucerian: "Like the Chaucerian voice, the Chaucerian canon is fundamentally diverse, ambiguous, and unstable" (*Chaucerian Apocrypha* 20). This connection between Chaucer's textual voice and the Chaucerian canon is an important one because it indicates that we are not viewing a unified, stable figure on the one side and a tangle of texts and genres on the other; the multiplicity of Chaucer's narrative voice is echoed in the diversity of his followers' works. Similarly, David Lawton argues that it is not just the spurious Chaucerian tales and imitations that are "apocryphal," but the instability of Chaucer's own narrative voice:

> This is what heteroglossia does: Chaucer's voice…has been reduced to parity with other voices, the other languages of the text… All of these voices are equally alienated from their ostensible, presumed or possible source. They are apocryphal voices. (*Chaucer's Narrators* 4)

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[23] See Lerer (1993) and Simpson for examples of some of this work. Lerer's focus on the creation of a "literary system" (4) in the fifteenth century focuses heavily on the nature of Chaucer's "paternal" relationship to his successors. Simpson proposes a presence/absence model of Chaucerian reception: his reception shifted from presence (or personal connection) in the fifteenth century to absence (the objective, empirical, academic treatment of Chaucer) in the early modern period.

Lawton cites the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definitions of apocrypha and apocryphal, noting that the majority of them refer to fiction, fable, objects or texts of spurious origin and doubtful authenticity, etc (14). These definitions are often applied to misattributed texts of the Chaucerian tradition, but Lawton sees Chaucer's own narrative voice, and not just the voices of his followers, as apocryphal: "Narrators are always concealments, bookish secrets: apocrypha" (14). The appropriation of Chaucer's voice by Chaucerian writers was not the destruction of something unified, but a continuation of the instability that Chaucer himself wrote into his texts.

The notion of Chaucer as a stable centre imitated by others is therefore an incomplete understanding of his role in the Middle English writing community. A brief survey of the critical treatment of the term "Chaucerian" by major scholars over the past several decades demonstrates how often we return to this assumption of unchanging centrality. Derek Pearsall, A.C. Spearing, Julia Boffey have all made important arguments about what "Chaucerian" means (and meant), but we can extrapolate from some of these definitions our own investment in Chaucerianness. Spearing's distinction between Chaucerian writers who truly understood Chaucer and those who did not is an example of the academic tendency both to view Chaucer as the "original" root of Middle English literary talent, and to judge Chaucerian writers on their skills of imitation. The latter, he says, "imitated only the external forms of his poems without responding to their inner spirit"; Lydgate is included in this unfortunate group (171). Spearing uses a vocabulary of interiority to articulate these differing responses to Chaucer: depth and shallowness, penetration and surface imitation, hidden qualities and external appearance. Derek Pearsall, too, characterizes Chaucer as having "penetrating awareness" while Lydgate conforms to formulas and patterns ("English Chaucerians" 217). The lesser of the Chaucerian poets follow Chaucer in surface form – Lydgate's formulas and patterns, for example – but show no comprehension of the true meanings hidden in his poetry. While it is true that more recent criticism (including

Pearsall's own) questions these assumptions, the continuing traction of the Chaucerian tradition in academic discourse testifies to our ongoing investment in Chaucer as the master (deep) and his followers as inferior (shallow). Our inheritance of the Romantic period's investment in interiority has surely reinforced the aesthetic judgments associated with "deep" and "shallow."[24]

Despite the lukewarm modern reception of Chaucerian writers, there is general critical consensus that the Chaucerian tradition was largely defined by those writers who lived during Chaucer's lifetime or just afterward, and whose use of genre and style echo Chaucer's or who make direct allusion to him and his work. Pearsall argued in 1966 that the Chaucerian tradition continued only as long as poets imitated Chaucer in their use of literary convention as opposed to intentional and personal imitation: "When poets begin to imitate Chaucer consciously, as Spenser does, because they think him a great poet and worthy of imitation, the Chaucerian tradition...has ended, and the history of Chaucer criticism begins" ("English Chaucerians" 239). Pearsall focuses on the "English Chaucerians" and how their appropriation of Chaucer's tone, style, rhetoric, and use of genre identify them as participants in a Chaucerian tradition. However, if we see literary tradition as a genealogy in which writers construct themselves as children deploying the authority of a father, then it is clear that late medieval Chaucerian writers did indeed consciously imitate Chaucer. They constructed Chaucer as a literary father and themselves as inheritors – efforts that reveal these Chaucerians to be as much pragmatic self-promoters as literary purists. Indeed, these categories were certainly not mutually exclusive. Creating imitations of and additions to Chaucer's texts was not merely an acknowledgment of Chaucer's "paternity" but a technique by which a writer established his own authorial identity and legitimacy. This was made possible not just because these writers followed a literary model that had already been proven to work, but because social and supplemental authorial practices cemented Chaucer's role as a contemporary precedent authorizing other writers.

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[24] See Duss, Klotz, and Chapter 3 of Aries and Duby.

Therefore, while I certainly agree with Pearsall that these writers often "imitated Chaucer by convention," I would question his assertion that conscious, explicit imitation of Chaucer constitutes Chaucerian criticism rather than a Chaucerian tradition. Conscious imitation seems to be at the heart of how the Chaucerian tradition developed, although it was not limited by imitation. Furthermore, imitation by convention does not necessarily exclude conscious imitation. Helen Cooper points out that even though "conventional" now tends to be a pejorative work, "etymologically it derives from the idea of coming together, agreement, a shared understanding" (*English Romance* 14). Part of this shared understanding is between the Chaucerian writer and the reader, both of whom recognize the influence of Chaucer on the text at hand, but also recognize the Chaucerian text as adding to or substituting for (supplementing) the "authentic" text as written by Chaucer. The incomplete nature of *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, "marks a determined lack" and therefore invites supplementation[25] that in turn works to define the authentic Chaucer: "there has never been anything but supplements…the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 159).[26] This brief glance at the supplement shows that while Derrida's expression of this idea is highly philosophical and less than practical in some respects,[27] it nevertheless emphasizes that these Chaucerian supplements have served to define and even make more valuable that which is "real(ly)" Chaucer – even if we have only a trace. As Pearsall says, Chaucerian writers – particularly Lydgate – "fixed the modes in which the fifteenth century was to understand and use Chaucer" ("English Chaucerians" 222).

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[25] Pearsall expresses particular surprise at Lydgate's imitation of the *Tales* in his *Siege of Thebes* because "within the then-current system of critical categories, *The Canterbury Tales* could not, for the most part, be taken seriously; and it is in terms of this adequation of critical response to the system of critical theory that the fifteenth-century attitude to Chaucer is best and most fruitfully understood" (203). Perhaps Lydgate's imitation of *The Canterbury Tales* – his use of it as a precedent – actually enhanced the authority of Chaucer's poem.

[26] This notion of the supplement is an important one in our understanding of Chaucer and his followers, and therefore will be addressed in more detail in Section 3.3 below.

[27] We cannot, for example, argue that Chaucer never "was" and there have only ever been Chaucerian supplements.

In 1986, Julia Boffey again asked the question at the heart of both Spearing's and Pearsall's discussions: what criteria do we use to deem a work "Chaucerian" ("Proverbial Chaucer" 38)? Boffey's use of the word "Chaucerian" was largely in reference to the canon of Chaucer's works rather than the writers themselves – a canon which, at different times throughout the centuries, has included numerous spurious works. However, her question points to the same issues that Pearsall raised: the determination of a Chaucerian style not only helps us to establish the authenticity of works attributed to Chaucer, but, in theory, allows us to decide which authors and texts should be included in a Chaucerian tradition. The early reception of pseudo-Chaucerian works within Chaucerian compilations suggests that "Chaucerian" as a stylistic and social category was more important than "written by Chaucer"; as Alexandra Gillespie suggests, "Chaucer is a category grand enough, and convenient enough, to accommodate the writings of other medieval authors" (135). "Chaucerian" became a kind of literary family name through which texts could circulate with legitimacy and by which textual reproduction was spurred on. A father is not a father unless he produces heirs.

3.3   Redefining the Chaucerian Tradition: A "Supplemental" Genealogy

Perhaps because of the medieval interest in the Chaucerian textual family rather than Chaucerian "authenticity," Chaucer-only miscellanies were not typical; it was more usual for his texts to be accompanied by Chaucerian poets such as Lydgate, Hoccleve, and Clanvowe (Edwards, "Author Collections" 103).[28] In the previous section Jacques Derrida's notion of supplementation was connected to what Helen Cooper describes as a shared understanding between reader and writer. I argue here that the idea of the supplement – a chain of substitutions

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[28] Indeed, Alexandra Gillespie points out that over fifty English texts now confirmed not to have been authored by Chaucer have been ascribed to him at some point, and "160 are still in the 'Lydgate Canon'" (22).

in the pursuit of the real – can enhance our understanding and definition of the genealogical nature of the Chaucerian tradition. The idea of the supplement was itself born out of a familial relationship: in Derrida's analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he notes that Rousseau's reliance upon his lover Therese is a self-admitted substitution for Rousseau's mother. However, Derrida expands this single moment of substitution outward by claiming that "Mamma herself was already the supplement of an unknown mother" (156-7). In other words, the act of supplementation, or seeking a substitute, is grounded in a desire for a genealogical origin. In Rousseau's case this was a literal genealogical origin (his mother), but the genealogical metaphor applies to social, linguistic, and literary forms of supplementation as well.

The textual phenomena we define as the Chaucerian tradition – the inclusion of early Chaucerian poets and pseudo-Chaucerian works in Chaucerian miscellanies, allusion to and imitation of Chaucer, and related practices – all supplement Chaucer the Author. Chaucer was the foundation, the lost origin whose influence was felt profoundly by writers in his circle and those writing after him. However, despite (or perhaps because of) this anxiety of influence[29] these writers clearly desired to add to his corpus of writings, to fill it up with additional poets and texts, to make him into more than he was, while also emphasizing their own inadequacy to complete that task. This paradoxical desire is illuminated by Derrida's discussion of the supplement in *Of Grammatology*, which focuses on the dual meanings of substitution and addition that are inherent in the term:

> But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It
> intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; it fills, as if one fills
> a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior
> default of a presence...Whether it adds or substitutes itself, the
> supplement is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is
> super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must
> be other than it. (145)

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[29] I discuss Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence above.

The position of the supplement here resonates with the paradoxical position of Chaucerian writers and their texts.

The supplement operates at its most basic level in the signifying structure of language itself, but Derrida also identifies it in the epistemological issues that arise in the study of philosophy and literature. This deeply rooted "logic of the supplement"[30] is a key characteristic of the Chaucerian tradition. Citation and allusion are characteristic of medieval literature, but the citing of Chaucer as a contemporary writer, rather than an ancient one, and the corresponding implicit or explicit assertion of one's right to write with (or write for) Chaucer results in a curious ambiguity: Chaucer's place of privilege over these other writers is compromised because of their very acknowledgement of his privilege. These Chaucerian writers, through allusion, citation, and direct address, claimed Chaucer as a superior and an origin, but in adding to and "completing" his corpus they were, in fact, also functioning as a substitute. Although fifteenth-century literature has been castigated for its lack of sophistication and poor imitation of Chaucerian brilliance, critics now recognize that there was aesthetically and socially valuable literature produced during the period, and that rather than simply being bad Chaucerian tribute artists, these writers were *auctores* themselves.[31] This outpouring of Chaucerian-yet-not literature is an example of Derrida's assertion that "what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence" (159). The death of Chaucer, as the "original" presence, opened meaning in the supplemental literature that followed; this is in contrast to the texts that circulated in response to the anonymous *Piers Plowman*, many of which tended to narrow, rather than expand, the interpretive possibilities of *Piers*. Because these Chaucerian

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[30] In using the "logic of the supplement" in this discussion, I do not intend to discard Chaucer's literary contributions or his skill. By using Derrida's term "logic" I am referring to the ingrained patterns of thought that lie behind the complex motivations and desires of other writers for/about Chaucer. These patterns are separate from the social reality of Chaucer's life and work.

[31] For an overview of earlier scholarly attitudes to fifteenth-century literature and an argument against those attitudes, see Lawton (1987). For an example of how this earlier negativity began to shift, see Pearsall (1966).

writers are "other than" Chaucer, they can enact the logic of the supplement by creating his

image within their texts. Within this logic, Chaucer himself, as presence, becomes the

indefinable thing towards which the supplemental chain constantly reaches:

> Through this sequence of supplements a necessity is announced:
> that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary
> mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the
> mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary
> perception. Immediacy is derived. (157)

The use of the word "thing" suggests that the object desired does not have the coherence or

clarity that we expect from it, that it represents rather than manifests an ideal. As Bill Brown

says, the word itself "functions to overcome the loss of other words" ("Thing Theory" 5).

Chaucer the Author is an apocryphal "thing" that by the fifteenth century was defined not just by

his own works but by the response of others to him. This response was indeed, as the opening of

this chapter suggested, a *vox populi*.

The influence of Chaucer's authorship and the nature of the "supplemental" authors he

fathered afterwards are issues more easily analyzed several centuries later. At the time,

authorship was a vexed and ambiguous category that included compiling, translating, borrowing,

or (rarely) original composition. In his seminal book on medieval authorship, A.J. Minnis states

that "no 'modern' writer could decently be called an *auctor* in a period in which men saw

themselves as dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants" (12). Although we now consider

Chaucer to be innovative in many ways, many critics emphasize that Chaucer's writing was very

much shaped by the character of what he was rewriting: he "chose deliberately not to emphasize

the originality or invention of his compositions. Rather than the anxiety of influence, it was the

anxiety of *originality*" (Machan, *Textual Criticism* 116, emphasis his). Similarly, A.S.G.

Edwards argues that, despite the popularity of Chaucer's poetry and his prolific following, a

distinct sense of the role and meaning of an author did not develop in late medieval England the way it had in France ("Author Collections" 102).

The common practice of compiling "Chaucerian" texts with texts actually written by Chaucer supports Edwards' position; as Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 argue, the focus of such compilations is the literary community they reflect rather than Chaucer's canon, per se. At the same time, however, Chaucer responded to this attitude: he attempted to circumscribe his canon by referring to his other works (a practice Lydgate and Hoccleve took up themselves) and to establish his own authority to write by citing authorial precedent.[32] When he introduces *The Parliament of Fowls* by telling his readers that "out of olde bokes, in good feith / Cometh al this newe science that men lere" (lines 24-25) he pays respect to the notion of precedent while also authorizing the "newe science" that he himself is producing. In these moments, and particularly in his famous Retraction, his gesture to conventionality draws more attention to his corpus of work than to his sense of humility.[33]

There are therefore two very different senses of authorship at play in the Chaucerian tradition, one being an authorship premised on precedent, and the other being what we would consider a more modern definition, wherein the value of the writer's works is based on their authenticity or their origin – their proximity to the writer. Mediating between these two poles and mitigating the tension between them is what I have argued is a distinctly "Chaucerian" sense of authorship: the authorial supplement. Within the logic of the supplement, Chaucer is not just the literary father who passes on his inheritance to others. As an ultimately unattainable origin or presence, he also functions as a catalyst whose absence (via incompletion and lack) compels

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[32] Gower was another medieval author who recognized the emerging importance of exerting increased control over one's works, whether through design or circumscribing a canon. See, for example, Echard (1997).

[33] Chaucer clearly recognized the social and political benefits of paying lip-service to ancient precedent or origin. The source he cites for *Troilus and Criseyde*, for example, is the fictional writer Lollius, but he does not acknowledge his significant debt to Giovanni Boccaccio, a writer who was Chaucer's contemporary, despite his earlier death.

supplementation and addition. The kinds of authorial posturing characteristic of this supplemental authorship consolidated a contemporary community of writers whose work was then able to be self-legitimizing. One of Chaucer's most significant contributions to English literature was therefore his largely posthumous role as a *contemporary* auctorial precedent, rather than an ancient one. Chaucer's references to others and their references to him helped to solidify the writing community, which developed not as a single, linear genealogy but as a network of connections and allusions to one another.[34]

3.3.1 Social Authorship

The supplemental authorship this chapter has presented as characteristic of the Chaucerian tradition manifests itself on a more practical level in what I refer to as social authorship and embedded authorship. While formal and stylistic literary features will always be used to determine whether a given text is Chaucerian, I would suggest that another important way to evaluate a writer's "Chaucerianness" is the writer's deployment of the kind of authorial posturing that we now associate most strongly with Chaucer, and which is used in all of his larger works as well as his smaller, more personal poems.[35] I touched upon supplemental authorship above, and here I align authorial posturing with this practice of supplementation. I am not, however, indicating the kind of rhetorical and literary posturing to which Machan refers when he discusses how Chaucer presents his own rewriting of a given work.[36] The authorial posturing discussed here is very much authorial in a social sense, rather than rhetorical. Social and embedded authorship both involve the author mediating between the derivative, linear, and

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[34] These authorial posturings are discussed in more detail in the next two sections.

[35] Chaucer's Middle English translation of *Le Roman de la Rose* is generally considered to be earlier than *The Book of the Duchess*, but I would argue that it is in the latter that we first see evidence of the unique narrator and the gestures to other writers. See Lawton (1985) for a more in-depth treatment of Chaucer's narratorial voice.

[36] Page 80 above.

genealogical sense of authorship rooted in the older scholastic tradition[37] and the sense of individual authorship that was developing in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Social authorship in my usage refers to the practice of acknowledging, and therefore solidifying and legitimatizing, one's contemporary writing community. Part of this practice was rooted in Chaucer's own courtly circle of friends who exchanged acknowledgements in the works they penned. When Paul Strohm argues that Chaucer "is neither particularly topical nor particularly historical, [but] in certain respects he is nevertheless profoundly social" ("Literary Scene" 14), he is gesturing in part to the close social circle that made up part of Chaucer's immediate readership: men such as Scogan, Clifford, Bukton, Vache, Clanvowe, Strode and Gower, all of whom read Chaucer's work and many of whom engaged in mutual poetic acknowledgments with Chaucer. These men did not present themselves as Chaucer's heirs; rather, they behaved as his colleagues. As R.T. Lenaghan states, Chaucer's own poems to Scogan and Bukton are really "joking exchanges between identifiable equals" (157). Even though their work does not show much (or any) direct influence from Chaucer, these writers are still "Chaucerian" in the sense that they participated in the system of social authorship that led to the consolidation of a writing community based upon contemporary precedent initiated by Chaucer. This is a "Chaucerian" system that uses Chaucer not really as an origin, but as an element of cohesion that connects the different parts.

Mutual recognition of one another's work allowed for the development of a writing community that valued the attachment of one writer to a text, a view of authorship that was very different from the earlier medieval model. Chaucer's famous dedication of *Troilus and Criseyde* to Ralph Strode and to "moral Gower" is a well-known example of his own practice of social

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[37] See Minnis 1-12, 73-75 for his argument connecting the later medieval sense of authorship and *auctoritee* with the older scholastic tradition.

authorship, and we also see it in his envoys to Scogan and Bukton.[38] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and

Steven Justice argue that both Chaucer and Langland had a shared readership in London civic

circles, and therefore subtle as well as explicit references to other writers would have been easily

recognized ("Reading Circles" 76). Other authors such as Hoccleve and Lydgate also practiced

this kind of social authorship, using gestures to Chaucer and occasionally to other writers in

order to solidify their own position as author.

The practice of social authorship was in some ways a variant of the modesty topos – a

writer gave credit to a contemporary rather than claiming all skill for himself. However, there

was a concurrent interest in writing oneself into one's text, which was a way of claiming a sort of

copyright without violating social convention. This embedding of the writer into the fabric of

the literature he is producing is another method of asserting authorship and textual control – he is

in the text as well as outside of it. Although Chaucer's own deployment of this practice of

embedded authorship has become the most well-known of his contemporaries,[39] and while his

fame allowed his use of this technique to legitimize others', it is not clear that it is "Chaucerian"

in the sense of being initiated by Chaucer. In the last two decades of the fourteenth century there

certainly appeared to be a wide interest in incorporating the author into the text, so as to solidify

the author's association with it; Gower does this at the end of the *Confessio Amantis*; Hoccleve

does it in *The Regiment of Princes*; Lydgate does it in the *Siege of Thebes*.[40]

Claiming authorship in any sense and legitimizing the English tradition by commending

contemporary authors were both bold statements. Instead of relying on anonymity and tracing

their literary genealogies to ancient sources, writers were establishing those literary genealogies

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[38] *Troilus and Criseyde* is also the text in which he credits the fictional "Lollius" as his source, rather than the contemporary Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio.

[39] The narrator in *The Canterbury Tales* being the most obvious example.

[40] As Finlayson indicates, in the earlier French poem *Roman de la Rose* Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun play a similar authorial game with their readers. However, the practice as a whole is rarely seen before the later decades of the fourteenth century; anonymity characterizes much medieval writing. As Graham Caie quips, "'Anon' was a very busy writer in the Middle Ages" (20).

among themselves, thus forming a network rather than a single line. In his analysis of how the

genealogical paradigm can be mapped onto manuscript studies, linguistics, and biology, David

Greetham distinguishes between the "tangle" of literary evidence that is at our fingertips and the

linear and unified "tree" that we make out of that tangle by selecting evidence to fit our own

hypotheses about textual relationships.[41] In considering social authorship as "Chaucerian" but

not necessarily originated by Chaucer, Greetham's perspective may be useful: he points out that

a linear, parental relationship assumes causality, but "convergent variation can produce the

effects of causal relations without the substance" (113).[42] In other words, these authorial postures

may be part of wider social developments that were reconfiguring the position of the writer, but

without locating "real" causality in Chaucer himself. The figure of Chaucer functions as a

catalyst, providing a sense of precedent and therefore unity.

3.3.2   The Chaucerian Canon and "Dyuers other workes"

Lydgate and Hoccleve are considered Chaucerian poets not only because they allude to

Chaucer's work or stake a claim as his successors, but because their texts are included in most

fifteenth-century "Chaucerian" anthologies, both manuscript and print. My intent here is not to

summarize the work already done on these texts but to identify the sense of Chaucerianness

underlying the anthologizing impulse in manuscript codices, as distinct from how print editions

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[41] Greetham's application of theoretical methods based in biology to the editing of medieval manuscripts is not unique; Peter Robinson and his colleagues used similar methods in their production of the digitized *Canterbury Tales*. In collaboration with specialists in molecular biology, Robinson's team subjected several sections of *The Canterbury Tales* to phylogenetic analysis (P. Robinson 128). The University of California's Museum of Paleontology defines phylogenetics as "the connections between all groups of organisms as understood by ancestor/descendant relationships" ("Introduction to Phylogeny").

[42] Editorial theory, of course, acknowledges this phenomenon, with the *Piers Plowman* editorial tangle being perhaps one of the best examples of its difficulties. As Kane and Donaldson state in their introduction to their edition of the *Piers* B Text, "even allowing for possible changes of exemplar these [variational groups among the B manuscripts] cannot all be genetic groups; some must be products of convergent variation, whether lateral transmission or coincident substitution. Our problem was to distinguish them" (19). However, the goal of recension, and certainly the goal of the Athlone editors, is to reconstruct the archetypal text and thus Kane and Donaldson state that they dismiss textual errors produced through convergent variation and focus instead on texts that demonstrate genetic relationships. To their credit, they do acknowledge the limitations of their method: "It seems right to emphasize that our procedures contain arguments which could nullify them; but the hard fact is that there is no more satisfactory alternative" (20).

define "Chaucerian." Many printed Chaucerian anthologies use earlier compilations as sources while emphasizing that their printings are "authentically Chaucerian" in a way that the manuscripts do not (Erler, "Printers' Copy" 225). For example, in Wynkyn de Worde's 1530 printing of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, Robert Copland's preface describes the poor material condition of the source manuscript (Bodley 638) and the resurrection Chaucer's poem experiences at the hands of a printer:

> Layde vpon shelfe in leues all to torne
> With letters dymme almost defaced clene
> Thy hyllynge rotte with wormes all to worne…
> Bounde with olde quayres for aege all hoore and grene
> Thy mater endormed for lacke of thy presence
> But nowe thou art losed go shewe forth thy sentence
> And where thou become so ordre thy language
> That in excuse thy printer loke thou haue
> Whiche hathe the kepte from ruynous domage
> In snowe wyte paper thy mater for to saue
> With thylke same langage that Chaucer to the gaue
> (qtd in Gillespie, *Print Culture* 123)

The contrast Copland draws between the "dymme," "defaced," and rotting manuscript and the "snowe wyte paper" of de Worde's saving edition highlights the power of material form on a text's reception. The soul of Bodley 638 is now "losed" from its shackles of dirt and grime and can "shewe forth [its] sentence" once again; it has essentially been resurrected by the printer, in that its "mater" and its true Chaucerian language have been saved by the new, clean paper it is now preserved upon. [43] Copland presents the manuscript form as limited in its range and efficacy, as hampered by its own "mortality," while his edition will be available to a wide audience and in a clear, long-lasting format. Although early modern printers looked to manuscript sources to authenticate their editions, their printings had the power to reveal the truth in the manuscript.

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[43] Mary Erler points out that in Bodley, the *Parliament of Fowls*, Lydgate's *Complaint of a Lover's Life*, *The Chance of the Dice*, and *Ragman's Roll* are all marked for printing, concluding that "it looks as though Bodley 638 was employed in printing circles for at least five years" in the sixteenth century ("Printer's Copy" 224).

Printed editions of Chaucer often used "Chaucerian" manuscript compilations as sources

to establish Chaucer's true canon. However, as Copland's preface suggests, the attitude toward

Chaucerianness in printed anthologies was very different from manuscript anthologies; while

many print editions advertise themselves as repositories of Chaucer's complete works, the

manuscripts rarely ascribe works to Chaucer (Edwards, "MS Arch. Selden" 59). The printed

editions, in general, construct themselves as a reinvigoration of the manuscript compilations of

supposedly "Chaucerian" poetry and thereby redefine those compilations *as* Chaucerian.

Manuscript anthologies containing Chaucer's works, although they sometimes are conflated with

printed editions in discussions of Chaucerian anthologies, project a very different sense of textual

identification. These anthologies include Cambridge University Library Gg.4.27 (the earliest

Chaucerian compilation, and the first to pair Chaucer with Lydgate), Digby 181, Longleat 258,

Arch. Selden B.24, Tanner 346, Bodley 638, Fairfax 16, Trinity College Cambridge R.3.19 and

even, to an extent, John Shirley's British Library Additional MS 16165.[44] The most influential

printed anthologies, many of which were produced within a century of the manuscripts, are those

published by William Caxton, Richard Pynson, William Thynne, Thomas Speght and John Stow.

Each of these editors added spurious works to the Chaucerian canon, a trend that did not cease

until Tyrwhitt's edition in 1775 (Edwards, "Manuscript to Print" 1). The printed editions'

revisionist declaration of the Chaucerian canon has, I suggest, made it easier for us to interpret

the manuscripts listed above as Chaucerian compilations – simply as precursors to the printed

editions – when in fact their use of Chaucer was quite different.

In his facsimile edition of Fairfax 16, John Norton-Smith expresses the widely-held

critical consensus that "the notion of a 'Works of Chaucer' did not arise until the advent of

printing and the antiquarian impulses of the sixteenth century" (ix). Although there is general

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[44] Defining Shirley's manuscript as Chaucerian may seem a stretch, but Pamela Robinson sees Shirley's compilations as an influential factor in the popularity of "Chaucerian" anthologies (xxiv). See Hanna (1996) for an extensive discussion of the manuscript.

agreement on this point, scholars still frequently refer to the manuscript compilations listed

above as "Chaucerian,"[45] a label that may be convenient but which also frames any interpretive

acts visited upon those texts. Despite the anthologistic impulse that we see in manuscripts like

CUL Gg 4.27 and the Oxford Group (Tanner, Bodley and Fairfax), there is no clear evidence in

these compilations of an interest in Chaucer's centrality. Moreover, despite Chaucer's own

attempts to protect his work from interference,[46] he himself was not particularly interested in

presenting his corpus as a single body of work (Hanna, "Presenting Chaucer" 19). This

phenomenon corresponds with the nature of the supplemental writing that attached itself to

Chaucer in that Chaucer here is used to solidify the cultural position of a body of Middle English

literature.

These manuscript compilations were created not so much as "Chaucerian" canons but as

Middle English canons; they are manifestations of the Chaucerian supplement, in that they are

the practical outcome of a self-legitimizing writing community. Boffey and Thompson describe

these anthologies as organized around "secular, usually amorous themes" and that they use

Chaucer's minor poems as a "nucleus" around which other popular poems were added (280).

While the content of these compilations supports such a conclusion, the general argument still

indicates that Chaucer as Author is their defining feature (a "nucleus"). I suggest that instead of

being created as Chaucerian books in the traditional sense, these manuscripts consolidated a kind

of Middle English literary canon using Chaucer as a catalyst. The works contained in the

compilations use the tools of social authorship popularized by Chaucer in order to create a self-

referential literary framework in which the English texts alluded to and complemented one

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[45] Norton-Smith's choice of words to describe the Fairfax manuscript is revealing: soon after he
acknowledges that Fairfax cannot be described as a Chaucerian anthology, he explains that "after item 24 [in
Fairfax] we have the descent into additionalness" (viii), referring to the poems in the last three booklets, most of
which are authored by Lydgate. The "descent into additionalness" suggests that the earlier "Chaucerian" sections are
the primary materials of Fairfax, and that the Lydgatiana is inconsequential or supplemental.
[46] His envoy at the end of *Troilus*, his *Retractions* and his poem to Adam Scriveyn are well-known
examples of Chaucer's sense of textual ownership.

another. While classical models of love are used in these compilations, they are appropriated in a way that highlights the English writing community's ability to absorb and take interpretive control of those models. A brief analysis of one manuscript family – the Oxford Group – will demonstrate how such "Chaucerian" manuscripts functioned.

Tanner 346 (T – 1440s), Fairfax 16 (F – 1450s) and Bodley 638 (B – 1475-1500) were famously dubbed the Oxford Group in 1908 by Eleanor Hammond, who argued that the similarities among these three manuscripts prove that they share a common ancestor ("Oxford" – see Table 1 for contents).[47] Subsequent scholarship has countered Hammond's conclusions, arguing instead for separate booklet transmission (Gradon 309; Robinson xxv).[48] Bookleting was a popular technique in the fifteenth century because it allowed for a level of affordability and flexibility in the process of anthologizing texts that was not available to the consumers of printed editions.[49] An examination of the contents, order and presentation of the Oxford Group manuscripts will therefore illuminate how medieval readers assimilated Chaucer into the larger pool of Middle English literature.

Despite their similarity in contents, the Oxford manuscripts were not produced for similar customers. Even though F and B are textually closest to one another, materially F holds closer affiliations with T. While B is composed of cheaper paper booklets that use parchment only for the outer folia (much like HM 114, discussed in the next chapter), F and T are made completely of parchment and have a more sophisticated programme of ornamentation. Jessica Brantley

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[47] See Hammond (1908) for her full discussion.

[48] Robinson does acknowledge, however, that "the close textual affiliation and the order of appearance" of *The Temple of Glass, The Legend of Good Women, The Parliament of Fowls,* and *The Book of the Duchess* in Bodley and Tanner indicate that there may have been one booklet containing these four texts and used as a common exemplar for both manuscripts (xxv). See Hanna (1996) and Mooney (2001) for their analyses of medieval bookleting practices in compilations.

[49] Fascicular compilations "may have been shaped around the works of a single author or a theme, around the personal tastes of the reader-buyer, or around a specific set of historical or topical associations" (Lerer, "Idea of the Anthology" 1253). Readerly habits did not really influence printers' choices; rather, the canonical presentation of Chaucer in printed editions was, Edwards argues, motivated largely by the printers' anticipation of profit by creating a new market niche ("Manuscript to Print" 1).

asserts that the Fairfax frontispiece is "one of the most accomplished illuminations to be associated with any of Chaucer's works" and that it, like the manuscript itself, was probably a professional commission from its owner, John Stanley (171, 174). The production of T was somewhat less organized, but the fact that its three scribes seemed to have worked on it concurrently with exemplars shared among them indicates that it was probably not produced on speculation (A. Gillespie 47, Brantley 174). Unlike T and F, B was the product of continuous copying and was clearly made on a smaller budget. The similarity in textual contents among F, T, and B compared with their differences in quality and planning suggest that these types of anthologies held interest for readers across a wide social and financial spectrum (Boffey and Thompson 282). Since a thorough analysis of the contents of all three Oxford Group manuscripts could occupy its own chapter, I will limit this discussion to some observations about the first part of the manuscripts and what they reveal about medieval "Chaucerianness."

As Table 1 below makes clear, there are two textual groupings (meaning texts adjacent to one another) common to F, B, and T: the larger group contains Chaucer's *The Complaint of Mars, The Complaint of Venus, Anelida and Arcite,* and Lydgate's *Complaint of a Lover's Life* (with Hoccleve's *The Letter of Cupid* close to this group in all three manuscripts[50]); the second contains Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Book of the Duchess.* Lydgate's *Temple of Glass,* Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and Clanvowe's *The Book of Cupid* are also found (not grouped together) in all three manuscripts, while B and F share *Ragman's Roll, The Chance at the Dice* (both anonymous gaming poems), *Complaint to Hope, Complaint D'Amours* (both anonymous), and Chaucer's *The House of Fame, The A.B.C.,* and *Fortune.* Although Chaucer's

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[50] B and F also have Clanvowe's *The Book of Cupid* in this grouping, but in T it does not appear until Booklet II.

works make up close to 50% of each manuscript individually,[51] the pool of texts that the manuscripts hold in common is more equally diversified among Chaucer, Lydgate, Clanvowe, and anonymous authors (with Chaucer's texts in a reduced majority).

Table 1: Contents of Oxford Group Manuscripts (Red = Chaucer; Blue = Lydgate; Green = Hoccleve; Pink = Clanvowe; Black = Anonymous; Yellow Highlight = beginning of a new booklet)

BODLEY 638	FAIRFAX 16	TANNER 346
Complaint of Mars	Complaint of Mars	Legend of Good Women
Complaint of Venus	Complaint of Venus	Letter of Cupid
Complaint of a Lover's Life	Complaint of a Lover's Life	Complaint of a Lover's Life
Anelida and Arcite	Anelida and Arcite	Anelida and Arcite
Book of Cupid	Book of Cupid	Complaint of Mars
Temple of Glass	Truth	Complaint of Venus
Letter of Cupid	Letter of Cupid	Complaint unto Pity
Complaint unto Pity	Ragman's Roll	As oft as syghes ben…
Legend of Good Women	La Belle Dame Sans Mercy	For lack of sight..
Parliament of Fowls	Temple of Glass	Temple of Glass
Book of the Duchess	Legend of Good Women	Book of Cupid
House of Fame	Parliament of Fowls	Envoy to Alison

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[51] In B, 42% of the poems (8 out of 19) are Chaucer's; in Tanner, 50% (7 out of 14); and in Fairfax, 50% if one does not count the two short Lydgate fragments preceding *The Mutability of Man's Nature* or the 20 short poems and ballads at the end of the manuscript (likely composed by Charles D'Orleans). If these other poems are included, Chaucer's works only make up 30% of the manuscript.

BODLEY 638	FAIRFAX 16	TANNER 346
Chance of the Dice	Book of the Duchess	Book of the Duchess
An ABC	Envoy to Alison	Parliament of Fowls
Fortune	Chance of the Dice	
Complaint Against Hope	House of Fame	
Complaint D'amours	Complaint unto Pity	
Ragman's Roll	An ABC	
Order of Folys (incomplete – possibly Lydgate?)	Fortune	
	Lenvoy to Scogan	
	Complaynt of Chaucer to his purse	
	Lenvoy to Bukton	
	Lack of Steadfastness	
	Against Women Unconstant	
	Mutability of Man's Nature (preceded by two Lydgate fragments from Fall of Princes and Four Things that Make a Man a Fool)	
	Complaint Against Hope	
	Complaint D'Amours	
	Victorious King (a begging ballad to Henry V)	

BODLEY 638	FAIRFAX 16	TANNER 346
	Doubleness of Women	
	Prayer for Royals and People	
	Reason and Sensuality	
	How a Lover Praiseth his Lady	
	Venus Mass	
	Collection of 20 short poems, mostly about love and lovers. Possibly by Charles D'Orleans.	
	England's royal genealogy	

Contemporary hands in these manuscripts generally do not ascribe texts to Chaucer,[52] nor does their *compilatio* evidence an interest in privileging Chaucer's works. If there was an interest in presenting Chaucer more prominently as the central *auctor* in these compilations, the logical choice for opening texts would be those works more widely acknowledged as Chaucer's than the *Complaints* of Mars and Venus. *The Book of the Duchess*, composed for John of Gaunt on the death of his wife, was certainly one of Chaucer's most well-known works and one to which his name may have been more clearly attached, at least in part because of Gaunt's patronage.[53] The

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[52] One exception is in Fairfax: *Truth, Mutability, Scogan, Bukton,* and the *Complaynt to his Purse* are all attributed to Chaucer in the table of contents and in the MS titles. A later hand in the margin of the table of contents also attributes the *A.B.C.* to him.

[53] *The Book of the Duchess* survives only in T, B, and F, none of which contain a contemporary attribution of the poem to Chaucer; however, the poem's use as a Chaucerian source by other writers like Lydgate, together with its association with the Duke of Lancaster's patronage of Chaucer, indicates that this poem was generally known to be Chaucer's. See Ellis for his discussion regarding the sixteenth-century debates about whether the true title of this text was *The Book of the Duchess, The Death of Blanche,* or *Chaucer's Dream.* T, B, and F are the only manuscript in which *Duchess* survives, and Ellis points out that Tanner does name the text *Chaucer's Dream*, acknowledging Robinson's assertion that it was a seventeenth-century hand that added this title (250, P. Robinson xxiii). However, he suggests that Thynne's edition, which uses the title *The dreame of Chaucer*, "has many unique readings that point to a lost manuscript source that may, presumably, have carried the title *The dreame of Chaucer*" since neither T, B, nor F contain a contemporary usage of this title (250).

Envoys to Bukton and Scogan, even though they employ rhetorical techniques intended to address a diverse readership (Horvath 176), nevertheless are based upon social relationships Chaucer cultivated with courtiers – relationships that would have been highly public.

This group of poems deploys love and antiquity as vehicles for English literary endeavours. It opens with texts by Chaucer but not those most clearly associated with him,[54] perhaps in order to highlight the ability of English writers – and the language itself – to integrate the classical heritage into English tales. F and B's opening sequence of texts (from the *Complaints* to *The Book of Cupid*) historicizes and textualizes amorous love by highlighting the connection between the contemporary personal experience of love and classical antecedents.[55] However, the final text in this series (Clanvowe's *Book of Cupid*) diverges from the classical focus; instead of narrating the experience of love using classical antecedents, the *Book of Cupid* attempts to resolve, through the debate format, the tension between amorous pleasure and pain – a tension highlighted through the other poems' references to the polemic roles of Mars and Venus in the experience of love. It is a particularly English debate poem, not only because of its indebtedness to the thirteenth-century English poem *The Owl and the Nightingale* but because it alludes to Chaucer in a clear, recognizable way (Justice, "Lollardy" 672). In other words, the most English of poems in this first group attempts to resolve the problems of love posed by the earlier ones. The ancient models are used to exhibit the sufficiency of Englishness itself to do this – not the sufficiency of Chaucer in particular, although Chaucer's skilled deployment of such models is highlighted by placement in the compilations.

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[54] *A Complaint of a Lover's Life* and *The Book of Cupid* (and *The Temple of Glass* a little further on) appropriate much more well-known works by Chaucer, such as *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, and *The House of Fame*, but those works themselves do not appear until much later in the compilation.

[55] The distantly classical and the personally contemporary are interwoven throughout these texts. Mars speaks of his longing for Venus; Venus laments the power that love holds over her (and her poem concludes with Chaucer's envoy to his readership and his acknowledgment of a contemporary source in Oton de Graunson). Lydgate's Black Knight prefaces his tale of personal heartbreak with a catalogue of ancient tormented lovers, while the narrator introduces the scene with lengthy descriptions alluding to figures of myth and antiquity. F and B's version of the classical tale of *Anelida and Arcite* opens with Anelida's emotional Complaint rather than the poet's less personal invocation to Mars.

Tanner, the earliest of the Oxford Group, also contains the grouping of *Lover's Life, Anelida and Arcite,* and the *Complaints* of Mars and Venus, but these are preceded by Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* and Hoccleve's *The Letter of Cupid.* The focus on love and classicism is similar to that seen in B and F, but the *Legend* and the *Letter*, as the first texts in the manuscript, provide a different angle on these issues that transforms Tanner into an empowering defense of women.[56] Both the *Legend* and the *Letter* are about not just past and present experiences of love, but about how women in particular are wronged in love by immoral men. The *compilatio* of T enables the *Letter* to function as a condensed version of the *Legend*, thus reinforcing their common themes. Just as Chaucer goes through a list of laudable women who lived good lives and were wronged by men, Hoccleve provides a vigorous defense of women throughout the ages whose names have been sullied.[57] The next poem, *A Complaint of a Lover's Life*, depicts a man in sorrow because of unrequited love but there is no indication that his lady's actions are wrong. In fact, the knight's inactive complaining, year after year, could be said to reflect more badly on himself than his lady. *Anelida* and the *Complaint of Mars* then follow: the former is about a good woman and a false man, and the second depicts a female figure (Venus) who holds absolute power over love and over all men she encounters. In Tanner, therefore, the placement of Chaucer's *Complaints* to Mars and Venus transforms the interpretive context of these poems, making them function differently than they do in B and F.

Finally, the placement of the second, smaller textual grouping in these manuscripts (*The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parliament of Fowls*) reinforces the idea that these compilations focus upon a self-referential literary community rather than Chaucer in particular. The

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[56] There is some sense to this when we consider that the *Legend*'s F prologue (which Tanner includes) dedicates the work to Queen Anne, wife to Richard II.

[57] Hoccleve does not focus on classical figures, as Chaucer does; the poem is a response to bookish repudiations of women, including those found in the Bible. Much of Hoccleve's poem uses Biblical stories as well as hagiographies to defend women rather than condemn them. Most surprising, perhaps, are his defense of Eve's first sin and his condemnation of Christ's male disciples in light of the loyalty of his female followers.

connections between Lydgate's *Complaint* and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess,* and between Clanvowe's *Cupid* and Chaucer's *Parliament* are particularly clear, and are made more so by the primary placement of Lydgate's and Clanvowe's poems and the pairing together of Chaucer's. The emphasis is not on the antecedent texts, but on the works that extend those texts. *The Temple of Glass, The Book of Cupid,* and *A Complaint of a Lover's Life* all allude to or imitate one or all of *Duchess,* the *Parliament,* and *The House of Fame*, but the first three precede the latter three in each manuscript. In Tanner, however, the placement of Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*, which directly references *Troilus and Criseyde,* the *Parliament, The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame,* underscores Chaucer's role in this literary community. The manuscript opens with a poem that catalogues several other poems by the same author which are then included in subsequent booklets, sprinkled among works by other writers. There was little apparent interest in actually attributing works to Chaucer or to anyone else; the focus was upon affiliating the texts with one another.

In contrast, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century printed editions of Chaucer tended to assign this mixture of texts to the monolithic category of "Chaucerian" – meaning "written by Chaucer." This marks the beginning of a transition from the medieval model of supplementation and community to the modern one of canonization. The aggregative impulse in these printed Chaucerian anthologies did not legitimize the works of the other medieval writers lumped in because their texts were simply subsumed into the larger category – a victim of Foucault's "author function."[58] They therefore did not function as the Chaucerian supplement described earlier. Instead, syntactical vagueness in the title pages of these printed anthologies encouraged readers to assume Chaucerian attributions even when such attributions were uncertain or false. This vagueness is located a phrase that is common to several different editions "diverse additions" or "diverse other works." Several examples from title pages are listed below:

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[58] See Foucault (2002) for his discussion regarding the value and use of the authorial name.

Pynson's 1526 printing of the *Book of Fame*:[59] "Here begynneth the boke of fame / made by Geffray Chaucer: with dyuers other of his workes."

Thynne's 1532 Works (also used in Stow's 1561 edition)[60]**:** "The workes of Geffray Chaucer newly printed with dyuers workes whiche were neuer in print before: As in the table more playnly dothe appere."

Speght's 1598 Works: "The Workes of our Antient and Learned English Poet, Geffrey Chaucer, newly Printed. In this Impression you shall find these Additions…" *Lists the prefatory material plus* "Two books of his, neuer before Printed."

Speght's 1602 Works: "The Workes of our Ancient and learned English Poet, Geffrey Chaucer, newly Printed. To that which was done in the former Impression, this much is now added…" *List of prefatory material, including* "The whole works by old Copies reformed" *and* "The treatise called Iacke Vpland, against friers: and Chaucers A.B.C. called La priere de nostre Dame, at this impression added."

Speght's 1602 Works (second title page, after prefatory material): "The works of Geffrey Chaucer, newly Printed, with diuers additions. With the Siege and Destruction of the Worthie Citie of Thebes, compiled by Iohn Lidgate, Monke of Burie."

1687 reissue of Speght: "The Works of our Ancient, Learned & Excellent English Poet, Jeffrey Chaucer: As they have lately been Compar'd with the best Manuscripts; and several things added, never before in Print. To which is adjoyn'd, The Story of the Siege of Thebes, by John Lidgate, Monk of Bury."

Out of these editors, Pynson is the only one who clearly claims that the additional works are by Chaucer; however, his edition includes two texts that are explicitly attributed to other writers (Christine de Pizan and Lydgate). Kathleen Forni suggests that the term "diverse" here could refer to "several" other works by Chaucer without claiming his authorship for all of them

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[59] Pynson technically printed his editions of the *Book of Fame* [sic]*, Troilus and Criseyde,* and the *Canterbury Tales* separately, but all complete surviving copies are bound together in one volume, thus suggesting that they circulated together as a kind of compendium of Chaucer's works. In this particular instance, the *Book of Fame* printing also included the *Parliament of Fowls, Truth, La Belle Dame Sans Mercy, Moral Proverbs of Christyne* [de Pizan], *Lamentation of Mary Magdalen, Letter of Dido to Aeneas,* and the *Proverbs of Lydgate* (Forni, "Pynson" 428).

[60] Stow's edition also listed Lydgate as the author of the *Siege of Thebes*, something that Speght adds to the prefatory material of his 1602 *Works*.

("Pynson" 429) – certainly a feasible explanation, since the term "diverse" holds several different meanings.[61] Pynson does correctly attribute the works that are Chaucer's own (with the exception of *La Belle Dame*) but does not claim Chaucer's authorship for the spurious works. However, even given this caveat, the phrasing used allows the reader to assume attribution. In William Thynne's edition of six years later, the language in the title page is equally vague: it is not clear whether the "dyuers workes which were never in print before" are included in the "Workes of Geffray Chaucer" or are a separate addition to them.[62]

The Speght title pages also employ syntactical vagueness and the appeal of novelty in order to attract interest in an expanded collection of Chaucer's works. The 1598 and 1602 primary title pages both boast that the texts are "newly printed" with "additions" that are actually the prefatory material rather than additional works (Chaucer's life, a glossary, etc).[63] However, both pages also specifically refer to two new texts; the 1598 edition does not name the texts it adds[64] while the 1602 edition specifies *Jack Upland* and the *A.B.C.* (the latter of which he attributes to Chaucer[65]). The secondary title page of the 1602 edition returns to the vague "diuers additions" phrasing, which could refer to non-Chaucerian works or to the newly revised versions of Chaucer's works suggested by the phrase "by old Copies reformed" on the first title page. The specific reference to the inclusion of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* gives the impression that the other works are by Chaucer himself. The 1687 reissue proudly declares that the texts therein "have lately been Compar'd with the best Manuscripts; and several things added," with no

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[61] The term "diuers"/"diverse" deserves a brief note here. In both the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, its late-medieval and early-modern usages conform to the modern meanings of "diverse" that could apply here ("Different or not alike in quality; not of the same kind; various, sundry, several"). Thus "diverse" in this context could mean other works by Chaucer or works by other authors and by Chaucer. However, the *MED* has an additional definition – used in Lydgate's fifteenth-century *Troy Book* – not found in the *OED*: "unusual, strange, wonderful." This definition resonates with the idea of the divine unknown discussed in Chapter 1.

[62] Thynne's edition adds 24 works not by Chaucer, and it was used as the basis of Stow's 1561 edition, in which he added a further 18. Speght added three more (Forni, "Chaucer's Dreame" 141).

[63] See Machan (1995) for a discussion on the influence of Speght's paratextual material.

[64] *The Isle of Ladies* and *The Flower and the Leaf*

[65] In the Fairfax table of contents, a later hand has attributed the "devoute ballade" to Chaucer by writing "The ABC of Chaucer" in the margin.

clarification of whether the added "things" are texts by other authors, paratextual material, or newly discovered or edited Chaucerian works. Lydgate's *Siege* is once more "adjoyn'd," again suggesting (without claiming) that the other works contained are Chaucer's.

James Simpson characterizes the difference between the handling of Chaucer by scribes and by printers/editors as one of presence versus absence, two models that he uses to describe Chaucerian reception in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries:

> The 'remembered presence' is a figure without precise delineation: his texts are available as materials for new poetry which builds on accretively, in almost conversational manner, to Chaucer's poetry; Chaucer's name need not be cited when borrowing…The product of this model is a new literary work. The 'buried absence', or philological model, by contrast, delineates a textual corpus in very precise ways, excising accretion, and reconstituting exactly what the poet said. The master is, ostensibly, the poet himself. (255)

Simpson's distinction here is a helpful way of understanding the cultural function of Chaucerian manuscript anthologies versus printed editions of Chaucer's works. However, in his description of this movement from a personal to an objective or scientific reception of Chaucer, Simpson acknowledges the role of Chaucer's texts in manuscript compilations but not the overall effect achieved. The activity of compilers who insert Chaucer into their particular literary genealogies (ie, the anthology) without focusing on origin or attribution is an extension of the attitude of the medieval writers themselves. Simpson indicates that the impulse of Chaucerian writers to "build onto his achievement…reveal[s] a confident readiness to enter into often competitive and productive conversation with Chaucer, freely adding to his works" (257).[66] The outcome of this productiveness is certainly new literary works, as I suggested earlier in this chapter, but it is also a network of writers who became self-referential; they absorbed into their literature not just classical antecedents, but one another's work. Compilation choices in manuscripts such as

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[66] Simpson uses several examples from Lydgate's work to demonstrate this sense of understated competition with Chaucer (258-9).

Tanner, Bodley and Fairfax highlight the consolidation of an English writing community for whom the vernacular was a vehicle able to integrate the classics, rather than be controlled by them. Instead of the linear genealogy suggested by translation of classical works (or translations of translations), this vernacular community functioned on the basis of mutual allusions and references, integrating the classical heritage into a developing English literary framework.

In concluding this chapter, I would like to reiterate that a reconsideration of how we define "Chaucerian" does not require us simply to discard the criteria of style and theme that have been commonly used over the past century of scholarship. Instead, this discussion seeks to open an alternate way of understanding the Chaucerian tradition and by doing so, to open rather than close the definition, and to encourage increased engagement with and consideration of the term "Chaucerian." I have used Derrida's notion of the supplement to characterize the "Chaucerian" moment that allowed vernacular writers, who may have referred to themselves as compilers or translators, to enact the role of *auctores* – a role that was previously restricted to ancient and institutionally sanctioned authors. In evaluating how authority was construed in the late Middle Ages, Tim Machan describes the works of *auctores* as those that

> elicited the distinctive exegetical responses of glosses, commentaries, and discussion in university lectures…the existence of such institutional responses served to confirm the auctorial status of writers. There is thus something circular in this theoretical framework: Auctores were those known and named writers whose works had *auctoritas,* and *auctoritas* was identified as the characteristic quality of the work of an auctor. Such circularity reflects the….self-validating character of medieval views on authority, which made it difficult if not impossible for a contemporary writer to acquire auctorial status. (*Textual Criticism* 97)

By consistently deploying the practices of social authorship – positioning himself among his contemporaries – Chaucer helped to create a self-referential writing community. Due to the fame Chaucer garnered through both his civic and literary successes, the community itself used

Chaucer as a *contemporary* precedent – an idea unthinkable in the older culture of authority that Machan describes. By claiming control over their own works by diversifying the narrative voice and embedding themselves in their texts in that particularly Chaucerian way, and by treating Chaucer's texts as works that not only required completion and supplementation but were *open* to such completion by contemporary vernacular writers, these Chaucerian writers were not so much lauding Chaucer as using him to consolidate a community of vernacular authorship.

Although I have characterized the medieval reception of Chaucer's *auctoritee* as supplemental and self-promoting, and his later editorial treatment as more concerned with empirical authenticity and origin, editorial activity in general retains this medieval impulse to supplement and to gloss. The desire to recreate a family line for an imaginary lost object (the archetype or the autograph manuscript) rather than presenting the naked text is in large part motivated by pragmatic and pedagogical concerns, but there is an underlying assumption that the manuscript is not enough – it is not sufficient and therefore requires addition, supplementation. For both medieval readers and modern editors, the Chaucerian text begs for interventions. This reading of the Chaucerian tradition as an extended supplement to Chaucer is intended simply to point out the discrepancy between Chaucer's entrenched position as the founder of English literature and the fluidity of his authorial status in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The remnants of this fluidity underpin editions of Chaucer, from Caxton to the Riverside. Rather than repeating the excellent work done by other scholars on Chaucer's canonicity and reception,[67] in the next chapter I will be exploring how our understanding of Chaucer and the Chaucerian tradition (his supplement) may be useful in re-evaluating and contextualizing the *Piers Plowman* tradition. Like the Chaucerian tradition, the *Piers Plowman* tradition is one that reflects back to us our own concern with origin while effacing the medieval concern with affiliation. Unlike the

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[67] Lerer (1993), Bowers (2007), and Cannon (1996) all present nuanced arguments concerning Chaucer's role as author and as the founder of English literature.

Chaucerian tradition, however, which appropriates Chaucer in order to continue or reproduce him, the *Piers* tradition texts constitute a literary kidnapping of sorts: Langland's "ownership" of his central character quickly fades as Piers Plowman is brought under the umbrella of divergent ideologies. Chapter Four explores how the *Piers Plowman* tradition, far from consolidating Langland's authorial position, essentially dissolves and diversifies the author of the poem in order to redefine the poem itself.

Chapter 4

(Re)Reading Tradition: the *Piers Plowman* Tradition

The *Piers Plowman* tradition, as the only other named literary tradition in Middle English

literature, is usually thought to comprise works influenced or inspired by the famously

anonymous poem, *Piers Plowman.*[1] Unlike the writers of Chaucerian texts, who often completed,

supplemented, or continued Chaucer's tales, the writers of the *Piers* tradition (most of whom are

also anonymous) often show little knowledge of the comprehensive content of *Piers Plowman*

and instead appropriate isolated themes or characters to further their own interests – there is no

sense of "completing" the text. Rather than using a known English author's name as precedent to

legitimize and market their own work in English, *Piers* tradition writers use a text whose origin

cannot be pinpointed and whose main character (a Christian labourer) has a hold on the popular

imagination in order to imbue their own works with that same cultural power. Unlike Chaucer's

work, much of *Piers Plowman*'s influence was due to its anonymity and its wide circulation,

factors that resulted in an origin-less text whose popular roots seemed to run deep (perhaps

because of its very lack of a specific origin), and which was therefore available for appropriation

into a wide variety of discourses.

The *Piers Plowman* tradition therefore seems to be the antithesis of the genealogically-

oriented Chaucerian tradition[2] in many ways, or at least it has been read this way since the birth

of Middle English literary criticism in the nineteenth century. It is based upon a single

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[1] The identity of *Piers Plowman*'s author was a question for many years, and even now, when scholars generally accept that William Langland penned the poem, he is still a figure about whom we know very little about. He thus remains essentially anonymous to us.

[2] Although modern scholarship has constructed the genealogy of the Chaucerian tradition along the linear model, I have suggested that it be viewed as a network instead. The overemphasis on the linearity of the Chaucerian tradition has consequently overstated the difference between it and the *Piers Plowman* tradition.

anonymous work, which was successively revised over many years, written in a shifting genre that was vaguely associated with an older form of English literature. While *Piers* itself expressed traditional anticlericalist views in a time where anticlericalism was becoming a potent and dangerous reformist cause, *Piers* tradition texts completely revised the poem's conventional anticlericalism into political and/or religious subversion. In contrast, the Chaucerian tradition included a variety of literary genres, explicit authorial attributions and appropriation of known stories, and any potential subversion in its anticlerical gestures manifested itself as light satire. The Chaucerian tradition localized itself around an identifiable origin of contemporary precedent, whereas the prophetic and social power of the *Piers* tradition was derived from its absence of an origin, its ever-changing search for the presence of Piers Plowman, the laboring Christian. Langland's poem is only vaguely and intermittently topical, and its explicit allusions are largely limited to the Bible and Cato; it is very inward-looking. Langland did not practice social authorship in the way that Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve, Lydgate, and other writers did.[3] His particular method of writing himself into his own text appears, in comparison to Chaucer, confusing and inconsistent,[4] resulting in Langland exerting even less interpretive control over his poetry than Chaucer did. This lack of control allowed the *Piers* tradition to develop in a particularly political way.

These two textual groups also treat the nature of writing and authorship quite differently. Unlike the Chaucerian tradition, in which Chaucer's literary inheritors follow Chaucer's precedent in exploring what writing and authorship mean, the texts that constitute the *Piers*

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[3] Middleton (1989) famously argued that Langland encoded his own name into his poem for the benefit of an intimate group of readers and Kerby-Fulton and Justice note that Langland "was one of the first Middle English writers to present a sophisticated authorial persona...within his poetry" ("Reading Circles" 73). They present evidence suggesting that Langland may have had a small "coterie" readership among the civil service. However, these arguments do not suggest that Langland's poetry (or his name) was well-known in the way that Chaucer's was.

[4] Will's pattern of sleeping and dreaming and the slippage of allegorical characters into waking sequences leaves the reader constantly unclear about Will's experiences. This lack of clarity is heightened by some of Langland's other decisions, such as his choice to expand the role of Recklessness in C by having the character take over some of Will's speech. The distinction between Recklessness the allegorical figure and recklessness as a quality of Will becomes very unclear.

Plowman tradition tend to be more polemic or didactic than self-reflexively literary. That is, their focus tends to be upon pressing political and social concerns rather than the nature of authorship. *Piers Plowman* itself, a poem which claims no author, reveals intense anxieties about the relationship between authorship and authority – a relationship made all the more vexed because these two words derive from the same Latin root: *auctoritas*. While Chaucerian writers such as Hoccleve and Lydgate exhibited some level of anxiety regarding their authorial position as Chaucer's sons, colleagues, and substitutes, *Piers* tradition writers show no such anxiety despite Langland's own concern about authorship.

The *Piers Plowman* tradition, although a common and convenient scholarly category, is by no means a stable one. The parameters of the Chaucerian tradition, with its fixation on authorial naming and imitation, appear easy to define by comparison, although the discussion in Chapter Three indicated ways in which the definition can be opened. Bloom's categorizing of authorial angst in *The Anxiety of Influence* may be useful here. In keeping with the analysis of the Chaucerian supplement, I would argue that authors such as Lydgate, Hoccleve, and Henryson enact Bloom's notion of *tessera* – the antithetical completion of the authorial precursor, with the implication that the author had not gone far enough. However, these poets are constantly confronted with their own fear that they themselves did not go far enough in imitating Chaucer.

The authorial anxiety manifested by the authors of Langlandian texts is more akin to Bloom's *daemonization*, in which "the later poet opens himself to what he believes to be a power in the parent-poem that does not belong to the parent proper…he does this, in his poem, by so stationing its relation to the parent-poem as to generalize away the uniqueness of the earlier work" (16). The lack of a clearly identified author for *Piers Plowman*, even in the early years of its dissemination, allowed it to speak to a wider audience – both socially and temporally. The

location of authority within literary or allegorical characters[5] rather than the author/narrator's clear integration of himself into the text encouraged later readers to read the poem as timeless and prophetic, rather than historically contingent. This apparent misreading is akin to what Bloom calls the "power in the parent-poem that does not belong to the parent proper." In other words, *Piers Plowman* became an influential text in part because its lack of an external origin shaped it into what seemed to be a universal poem.

Piers tradition poetry appropriates this power of universality in two general ways: texts publicly participated in *Piers Plowman* by appropriating or drawing directly upon it, or texts participated in the same public discourse as *Piers Plowman* without necessarily drawing directly upon the poem itself. Rather than echo or imitate *Piers Plowman* explicitly, the texts in this tradition appropriate *Piers* for their own use. They do not seem interested in giving credit to the poem itself nor do they want their text directly associated with it. Unlike Chaucerian tradition writers, who usually make their debt to Chaucer unambiguous in order to solidify their own authorial position, *Piers* tradition texts tend to use themes that will attract the *Piers Plowman* readership (which was a wide one) without referring to the poem itself explicitly. In this way, the *Piers* tradition enacts what David Harlan describes as the journey of all literary works: "every text, at the very moment of its inception, has already been cast onto the waters...no text can ever hope to rejoin its father...it is the fate of every text to take up the wanderings of a prodigal son that does not return" (qtd in Clark 142).

Given the hazy connection between *Piers* and the poems in its tradition, we must ask when the idea of a *Piers Plowman* tradition was first formulated and its function in modern scholarship. The issue that immediately arises is how we now determine the texts that belong in the tradition, and whether "tradition" is really the appropriate term for the connections among

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[5] In the "authorial" characters of Will and Piers in particular, but also in the figures of Holy Church, Reason, and Conscience.

these different works. These questions are central to my examination of the *Piers* tradition as well as the Chaucerian tradition. Even though we tend to see Chaucer as a writer of state-sanctioned (even politically-safe[6]) poetry and Langland as a writer whose following opened the way for the rising of a public literary voice, my argument here suggests the opposite. It was Chaucer who enabled the consolidation of a vernacular writing community – a public voice in a sense – while the *Piers Plowman* tradition and *Piers Plowman* itself in reality represented diverse groups (and perhaps "diuers other workes"), whether institutional or revolutionary.

4.1   Critical Consensus on the *Piers Plowman* Tradition

In a paper given at the Fourth International *Piers Plowman* Conference (2007), Fiona Somerset questioned the utility of the term "*Piers Plowman* tradition" when the boundaries governing it are neither agreed upon nor consistent. John Bowers, in a similar line of inquiry, recently suggested that it was "never really a coherent 'tradition' since its contributors worked in isolation and never even knew the name of the founding author," but that its existence was the catalyst in forming the self-conscious, author-focused Chaucerian tradition of the fifteenth century (*Antagonistic Tradition* 31).[7] Bowers' point is thought-provoking, but I would like to turn it around and examine the co-existence of the Chaucerian and Langlandian traditions from a different angle. While I agree with Bowers that the *Piers* tradition was "never really a coherent 'tradition'" in the Middle Ages, I suggest that modern scholarship on Middle English poetry has imposed a certain unity upon this group of poems, linking them together in an intertextual narrative that allows us to conceive of them as a literary tradition. This constructed sense of

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[6] Chaucer could be bitingly satirical, but he was not generally openly critical about the governing monarchy.

[7] Most of the "tradition" was produced in the very late Middle Ages or early modern period – well after Langland's lifetime, which is one of the ways it differs from the Chaucerian tradition. Kathy Cawsey, like Bowers, asks whether fifteenth- and sixteenth-century readers would have considered the plowman texts to be a unified group, and takes this question as the focal point of her article. However, her references to Langland's poem as "the original plowman work" and the other plowmen poems as all "ultimately drawing on William Langland's fourteenth-century poem" (189) suggests that she sees *Piers Plowman* as a unifying text.

coherence has two functions: first, it broadens the professional field of medieval literature by directing attention to minor literary works that would otherwise be largely ignored; and second, it sets up an independent tradition against which the hegemonic Chaucerian tradition can be read. Seeing these textual groups as distinct traditions in opposition to one another carries certain ideological imperatives; in particular, it secures our investment in the same type of resistance narrative (very appealing to readers in a Western democratic culture) that Sarah Stanbury sees in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*.[8]

I have sketched very briefly how we might define texts of the *Piers Plowman* tradition, and I would now like to touch upon how the boundaries of this category manifest themselves in scholarship. Nineteenth-century scholars of the poem did not, to my knowledge, ever refer to *Piers*-influenced works as part of a *Piers Plowman* tradition; this may be partly due to the fact that they often referred to the poem itself as "The Vision" or "The Book"[9] rather than "Piers Plowman," thus depersonalizing the poem to an extent.[10] The early twentieth-century debates regarding single versus multiple authorship, pioneered by J. M. Manly, also contributed to the lack of interest by earlier scholars in seeing the plowman poems as a unified literary body inspired (or perhaps fathered) by *Piers Plowman* (C. Brewer 184-195). Having said that, early scholars did recognize that there was some sort of connection between *Piers Plowman* and other plowman writings, or poems that shared distinct thematic concerns with *Piers*. W.W. Skeat, for example, argued that *Richard the Redeless* was so stylistically and thematically close to *Piers Plowman* that the two poems must share an author (*Piers the Ploughman* xi-xii). He was concerned, however, that the more superficial similarities between *Piers* and *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* would lead readers to reach the same conclusion regarding these two poems

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[8] See page 62 above. This point is also discussed in this chapter's conclusion.
[9] Skeat preferred the latter, criticizing those who used "Vision" because the *Visio* only constitutes part of the poem (Skeat, *Visio* xiii).
[10] As discussed in the opening of this chapter, a name provides an origin, and an origin supposedly provides continuity and coherence. By naming the poem according to its genre, the appeal to origins is removed.

– that Langland wrote both.[11] He was adamant that these two texts – one superior, the other not

– do not share an author:

> About the year 1394...some writer of unknown name and of
> narrower views wrote a short poem of 850 lines in alliterative
> verse, as a satire against the friars, to which he gave the name of
> *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, no doubt with the view of
> attracting attention. His conception of the Ploughman, however, is
> very different. (xiii)

Skeat's comment that the *Crede*'s author intended to attract attention by using the name

of Piers Plowman indicates that Skeat recognized a distinct literary movement that used

Piers Plowman to further its own objectives.[12]

J. J. Jusserand, one of Skeat's contemporaries, likewise did not refer to a *Piers* tradition

but did entitle one chapter of his book on *Piers Plowman* "Langland's Fame – His Place in

Mystic Literature." Although in the book he spends some time (pages 192-219) highlighting

commonalities between Langland and other writers, both continental and English, from the

Anglo-Saxon period to post-Reformation, he does not claim any kind of causality or unity among

these texts and writers. He does claim that many of them, especially the English authors, were

aware of Langland's poem, but in general he places *Piers Plowman* in a very wide literary

context. When Jusserand does address the reformist English texts that are now considered part of

the *Piers Plowman* tradition, he presents them simply as erroneous readings that insult

Langland's literary intentions (190). Jusserand suggests that the plainness of *Piers* manuscripts

indicates that the poem was of "serious and practical character" and "transcribed to be read, and

not looked at; scribes copied it, as it had been written, for the benefit of the simple and sincere,

for men of good will" (187). These men of good will are *not* the reformers who appropriated the

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[11] Indeed, the author of one of Skeat's boyhood lesson books (*A History of England*), Mrs. Markham, gave him an excerpt of the *Crede* to study and told him it was from *Piers Plowman* (C. Brewer 92-3).
[12] Skeat's judgment of *Richard* and *Crede* seems to be at least partly based on his beliefs regarding Langland's poetic skill; *Richard* is well-written and pointed but the *Crede* demonstrates "narrower" views, hence the former is much more likely to be written by Langland and the latter is probably a poor imitation.

name of Piers to gather popular support in the authentication of their own cause. Jusserand uses the example of John Ball's letters to transform the 1381 rebels' revolutionary activity into a metaphor characterizing the later writers of the plowman tracts:

> Sometimes Piers was entrusted with missions of which Langland would never have approved. At an early date, the meaning of the poem had been distorted by many, each being moved thereunto by the necessities of his cause. All the dissatisfied, all the protestors and reformers forcibly pulled the Plowman by his cloak, or seized it to place on their own shoulders. Nothing proves more clearly than this the renown and authority of the Visions. (189)

Jusserand's terminology casts the *Piers* tradition as a violent imposition upon the purity of Langland's original poem, but one that paradoxically proves *Piers'* "renown and authority."

The actual use of the term "*Piers Plowman* tradition" reframes the readings of these violent texts by aligning them with, rather than opposing them to, *Piers Plowman.* The first usage that I have been able to locate dates to 1944, in Helen White's book *Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century*.[13] The first chapter of White's book is entitled "The Piers Plowman Tradition," although her ultimate assertion of such a tradition is somewhat hesitant. White argues that Langland's poem "expresses in a powerful way a central tradition of social criticism...[it] was actually in the main stream of a tradition of moral and social denunciation pouring from the pulpit itself" (12). Her suggestion that *Piers* is an expression of a "central tradition" – what we might now term a central discourse of reform or anticlericalism – stops short of claiming the kind of unity and coherence that "tradition"

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[13] While I cannot claim definitively that no other work refers to a *Piers Plowman* tradition prior to White's book, a later comment by Robert Kelly may support such a statement. In his 1977 article "Hugh Latimer as Piers Plowman," Kelly argues that Latimer's 1548 Sermon of the Plow attempted to root the sixteenth-century reform movement in earlier precedent by "placing the sermon in the 'Piers Plowman tradition,' as Helen C. White has called the body of poetic and prose works in which Piers is the central figure"(14). His reference to White's usage suggests that she created the term herself; it also suggests that the boundaries of the *Piers* tradition were not at all clear by 1977, which may be why Derek Pearsall's book of that year discusses the idea in some detail. In later debates about what constitutes the tradition, scholars use the term itself freely and generally do not cite any earlier usage. One notable exception (which supports the argument for Helen White's originality) is Charlotte Brewer's *Editing Piers Plowman,* in which she cites White's book and Anne Hudson's "The Legacy of *Piers Plowman*" as the two sources that summarize and discuss plowman writings (9, note 9).

implies.[14] White's discussion also suggests that Wycliffe's teaching was the catalyst for the development of a *Piers* tradition (24), again avoiding an overly confident commitment to the idea of a tradition rooted in *Piers Plowman* itself. This may be because the idea of a *Piers* tradition was novel for the time;[15] not only did the term bypass the authorship question, but it framed Langland as an author analogous with Chaucer, whose own tradition and influence was well-established in scholarship by this point. For example, in Mary Louise Carlson's 1944 review of White's book, she refers to the support that later reformation activists "found in Langland and his successors" (61). In this light, *Piers Plowman* is no longer the passive, imposed-upon text seen by Jusserand and Skeat, but an active text that inspired other works – works that are not merely erroneous readings, but successors. Under the auspices of a *Piers* tradition Langland becomes, like Chaucer, a literary father of sorts.[16]

Derek Pearsall's 1977 book *Old English and Middle English Poetry* considers *Piers* and the poems associated with it under the larger umbrella of alliterative poetry. As suggested in Note 13 above, by 1977 the idea of the *Piers Plowman* tradition seems to have been gaining scholarly momentum and Pearsall therefore presented for consideration at this time a taxonomy of texts that took this particular tradition into account. He divided poems of the alliterative revival into two groups, one of which was the *Piers Plowman* group, "consisting of poems in the political, didactic and complaint tradition (*Piers Plowman* itself, of course, transcends such a grouping) and characterized by a pragmatic and 'unpoetic' handling of alliterative verse" (153). This group includes *Richard the Redeless, Mum and the Sothsegger, Pierce the Ploughman's Crede, The Crowned King,* and *Death and Life* (153). The second group is Pearsall's "classical

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[14] Scase's book *Piers Plowman and the New Anti-clericalism* takes a similar point of departure (that *Piers* is participating in a larger discourse) without a sustained engagement with the idea of a *Piers* tradition. She does note in the preface that "writings of the '*Piers Plowman* tradition'….suggest that anticlerical Wycliffite and Protestant reformers looked to the poem as…a viable way of writing in English about matters of church and state" (xi).

[15] As Note 13 above indicates, Robert Kelly's reference to White's 1944 usage of "*Piers Plowman* tradition" suggests that even in 1977 the term was not quite in common use, but perhaps gaining popularity.

[16] This paternal role was enhanced as scholars at this time began to move away from referring to "The Vision of Piers Plowman" or "The Vision" and instead favoured the use of Langland's name.

corpus" and is marked by a sophisticated poetic style; it includes the poems in the *Pearl* manuscript, *The Siege of Jerusalem, Morte Arthure, The Destruction of Troy,* the Alexander poems, and *The Parlement of the Thre Ages. Piers Plowman* itself does not fit satisfactorily into these groupings; Pearsall admitted that the poem does not conform easily to any one genre, and that it tends to be associative and discontinuous rather than linear. He even suggested that "by any standards but its own, it is near to artistic breakdown" (178). However, Pearsall recognized that *Piers'*s generic fluidity is what allowed it to influence such a wide variety of texts, and in his comparison of those texts with *Piers,* the latter always receives the benefit.

The idea of a *Piers* tradition is also critically addressed in David Lawton's 1981 article "Lollardy and the *Piers Plowman* Tradition." Lawton opens his article with a definition of the *Piers Plowman* tradition: "Two later Middle English alliterative poems of satire and complaint are so indebted to *Piers Plowman* as to constitute a *Piers Plowman* tradition" (780). He identifies these poems as *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* and *Mum and the Sothsegger* (both written circa 1400). Lawton clearly has a stronger sense than White of *Piers* as the root of this tradition, but he restricts the tradition drastically. Two years later, in 1983, Marie-Clare Uhart included a "select list of works of the 'Piers Plowman tradition'" in her doctoral dissertation, a list that was far broader than Lawton's (2-8).[17] In 1993, Helen Barr found a happy medium between Lawton and Uhart: her book *The Piers Plowman Tradition* adds only *Richard the Redeless* and *The Crowned King* to Lawton's short list of *Piers* texts.[18] While she does not limit the tradition to these four texts, she does argue that they "form the substantial part of what has been called the *Piers Plowman* tradition" and that "their literary indebtedness to *Piers* is shown in the recall of key

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[17] She includes *Richard the Redeless, Mum and the Sothsegger, Jack Uplande, The Plowman's Tale* (both versions), *How the Plowman lerned his Pater Noster, Pierce the Ploughman's Crede, God spede the plough, A godly dyalogue and dysputacyon betwene Pyers Plowman and a popysh preest, The praier and complaynte of the Ploweman until Christe, I playne Piers,* and *Pyers Plowmans exhortation unto the Lordes, Knightes and Burgoysses of the parlymenthouse.*

[18] Putter lists the *Crede, Mum, Crowned King,* and *Richard* as "the poems in the 'Piers Plowman Tradition'" (29). Although he does not cite Barr as his source, his study was published only three years after her 1993 book, thus indicating that he was likely informed by her work.

words and phrases and in the reminiscence of important episodes" (5-6). Significantly, Barr characterizes the *Piers* tradition as marginalized and possibly subversive: "All the poems in the *Piers* legacy bear witness to the emergent voice of those literate members of society who may have been excluded from key positions of sacred or secular authority, but who were keen in this time of flux and unrest that their voices be heard" (7). In her 1994 book, *Signes and Sothe: Language in the Piers Plowman Tradition,* Barr continues to explore the nature of the *Piers* tradition. She defines the tradition as "poetry which looks back to *Piers Plowman* as a source of inspiration" and insists that "we must regard the corpus in a different light from the self-naming and self-fashioning literary tradition authored by Chaucer"(9). Barr echoes Elizabeth Salter in identifying the nature of the tradition as "more conceptual than literary, one of pursuing truth, a tradition which accepts the help of whatever texts and authors may be available" (9).

In her concluding essay to John Alford's 1988 *A Companion to Piers Plowman,* Anne Hudson discusses what she calls the "legacy" of *Piers Plowman.* Her notion of the *Piers* tradition is quite broad and extends from the letters of John Ball to the sixteenth-century blackletter Protestant tracts. She is careful, however, in how she classifies the relationships between what we may consider *Piers* tradition texts and *Piers* itself: rather than referring to a "*Piers Plowman* tradition," she uses words like "reminiscent," "influence," or "parallel" (252-255) to describe how certain texts were related to *Piers.* Hudson indicates that many texts believed by other (or earlier) critics to be inspired by *Piers* are, rather, what we might call a literary sibling to the poem: both *Piers* and Text X draw upon the same tradition or discourse (254). Andrew Galloway likewise avoids committing to a *Piers* tradition, but does suggest that "Middle English dream-vision poetry seems to have grown up around and perhaps in part in response to *Piers Plowman,*" thus aligning *Piers* not with political and polemical literature but with the relatively widespread and safe genre of the dream vision (*Penn Commentary* 9).

In her 2003 article "Expanding the Langlandian Canon," Fiona Somerset approaches the *Piers Plowman* tradition somewhat differently; she embraces the idea of a *Piers* tradition but suggests that "Piers" references or stylistic similarities are insufficient measures to establish the boundaries of such a tradition.[19] She sees subversive qualities in Langland's use of Latin and argues that *Piers* tradition texts contain the same kind of "radical Latin designed for a mass audience" and exemplify certain Langlandian concerns and themes (77).[20] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton is another scholar who has suggested "non-traditional," Latinate texts for the *Piers* tradition. In her recent book, she argues that the pro-Wycliffite poem *Heu quanta desolacio* is "perhaps the earliest known *Piers Plowman* tradition poem extant today….it contains several previously unnoticed allusions to or borrowings from *Piers Plowman*" (*Books Under Suspicion* 163, 174). Lawrence Warner, however, questions whether there is actual evidence of influence, since both *Piers* and *Heu quanta* share one particular phrase with Odo of Cheriton's *Fables* and John Bromyard's *Summa Praedicantium.* He argues that this indicates "mutual indebtedness to the homiletic tradition c.1380 rather than one's reliance upon the other" (*Lost History* 8).

It is clear from this brief survey of scholarship that the concept of a *Piers Plowman* tradition remains somewhat contested. However, its inclusion in impermanent documents such as course syllabi indicates that the idea has ongoing and institutionalized traction in academic discourse. Admittedly, university courses dedicated to *Piers Plowman* or the *Piers* tradition are relatively few and far between,[21] partly because Arts faculties are providing fewer medieval

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[19] In this respect, her interest in expanding the *Piers* tradition corresponds to the discussion in Chapter Three regarding opening the definition of the Chaucerian tradition.

[20] Somerset focuses on three Lollard texts that form the heart of this particular manifestation of the *Piers* tradition: *The Lantern of Light,* the sermon *Omnis Plantacio*, and the treatise *De Oblacione Lugis Sacrificii*.

[21] I contacted (either through website exploration or email) what I felt to be a relatively representative sample of universities in North America and Britain regarding their syllabi: Oxford, Cambridge, Yale, Birmingham, UC Berkeley, Toronto, University of York, Washington, Victoria, Oregon, New York University, Western Ontario, Duke University, and Sam Houston State University. Out of the information I gathered, I selected two examples with which to demonstrate the current pedagogy of *Piers Plowman.*

offerings in general[22] and partly because *Piers Plowman* does not have the same public

popularity as Chaucer's works. A pedagogical presentation of the *Piers* tradition mitigates this

problem by aligning Langland with Chaucer, thus making *Piers Plowman* itself, or a course

about its tradition, more marketable to both students and university administration. A review of

transitory scholarly sources such as university class syllabi does indeed suggest that there is

some pedagogical utility in presenting a course as a study of a tradition rather than a single

poem, since this gives *Piers* a depth of context, demonstrates it to be influential, and aligns it

with Chaucer.[23] Christopher Cannon's description of his 2008 course "The *Piers Plowman*

Tradition" is an example of how the idea of the *Piers* tradition can be used to incite interest in

Piers Plowman while also acknowledging the instability inherent in tradition:

> In this course we shall read, in depth, that tradition of texts which
> clearly led to the writing of *Piers Plowman* (*The Parlement of the
> Three Ages*, *Winner and Waster, The Simonie*, medieval complaint
> literature in general) as well as those texts that *Piers Plowman* is
> sometimes said to have 'produced' (*Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*,
> *Mum and the Sothsegger* and *Richard the Redeless*,). These two
> pursuits will bracket a careful reading of *Piers Plowman* itself (in
> the B-text, but with careful attention to the C-text revisions). The
> broadest aim of our work will be to come to some agreement about
> the defining characteristics of the '*Piers Plowman* tradition',
> should, of course, we decide that such a tradition does indeed exist
> (that is, a body of work that would not exist, either at all or as a
> body, in the absence of this poem). But, since our work will also be
> guided by deep reading in the scholarship on *Piers Plowman*, we
> will also be trying to describe the extent to which knowledge of
> this surrounding material alters or fills in gaps in current
> understandings of *Piers Plowman* and the cultural work that it did
> (and/or does). (Cannon, "*Piers Plowman* Tradition" n.p.)

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[22] This trend is, however, counteracted by the increasingly close affiliation of medieval studies with emerging technology, such as the digitization of manuscripts. See Williams and Emmerson for their respective discussions about the impact that popular medievalism has had upon this declining field.

[23] Fiona Somerset's description of her proposed "*Piers Plowman* and its Tradition" course at the University of Western Ontario, for example, compares Langland (favourably) to Chaucer, as well as to Pound, Eliot, and Dickinson. Somerset indicated that she made these comparisons (the Chaucer one in particular) to attract students who had enjoyed an earlier and well-received "Chaucer and the Canon" course. The *Piers* course was cancelled due to Professor Somerset's other commitments, not because of a lack of student interest. My thanks to Professor Somerset for sharing the latter points with me by email.

Cannon's course aims to provide a carefully nuanced introduction to the *Piers* literary tradition, but does not assume the coherent presence of such a tradition ("should, of course, we decide that such a tradition does indeed exist"). Nevertheless, this abstract does impose a type of narrative pattern upon the tradition: students will first study the texts that "clearly led to the writing of *Piers Plowman*," then the texts "that *Piers Plowman* is sometimes said to have 'produced'." An assessment of these before-*Piers* and after-*Piers* works "will bracket a careful reading of *Piers Plowman* itself." The development of the tradition is presented as a storyline: The *Parlement, Winner and Waster,* and *The Simonie* are the introduction and rising action, *Piers* is the climax, and the later *Piers*-inspired texts (which nearly always suffer by comparison to *Piers*) are the falling action and denouement.

Miceal Vaughan at the University of Washington offered a course on the *Piers* tradition in 2004:

> Next to the works of Chaucer, the poems associated with the figure of Piers Plowman can claim an important and continuous place in the development of what we can call an English vernacular literary canon. The *Piers* tradition contains works that (primarily) focus on criticism and satire of contemporary secular and religious institutions and on the development of a morally reflective and personally engaged individual citizen of early modern England. We'll start with…*Piers Plowman*…We will then read and discuss works which evidence the reception and development of this idealized figure of the plowman as he appears during the subsequent two centuries. (Vaughan, n.p.)

Vaughan's course description aligns with Hudson's view of *Piers* and the *Piers*-tradition texts as all drawing upon a wide social tradition of satire or complaint. In this course, the *Piers* tradition is constituted by "the reception and development of [the] idealized figure of the plowman" in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts, rather than by imitations of the poem *Piers Plowman.* However, Vaughan's statement that "the poems associated with Piers Plowman can claim an important and continuous place in the development of what we can call an English vernacular

literary canon" gestures to one of the advantages of locating tradition, which is that we are able to establish a contextual framework in which to read texts that otherwise might be overlooked. Bowers argues that minor works that become associated with canonical authors "achieve new meaning in diachronic relationship with 'major' literary works such as *Piers Plowman*" (*Antagonistic Tradition* 26). This "new meaning" can be a fruitful area for scholarship, but its attraction may lead to the overstatement of a lesser-known work's connection to a canonic work.

The differing scholarly consensus on what constitutes the *Piers Plowman* tradition is of particular interest to me, especially in light of the Chaucerian tradition. However, before proceeding to a discussion of the *Piers Plowman* tradition itself and how the two traditions contextualize one another, I would like to expand briefly on the distinction I made earlier between the two classifications within the *Piers Plowman* tradition and conclude this section by suggesting a very broad and flexible definition which aligns more with Hudson's view than with Lawton's or Barr's. As mentioned above, the *Piers*-related corpus can be divided into two large categories: texts that publicly participated in *Piers Plowman* by appropriating upon it, and texts that participated in the same public discourse as *Piers Plowman*, without drawing directly upon the poem itself.[24] In general, the former category (texts that draw directly on *Piers Plowman*) includes *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede, Mum and the Sothsegger, Richard the Redeless,* and perhaps the letters of John Ball as recorded in Knighton and Walsingham's chronicles.[25]

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[24]These categories overlap in the sixteenth-century texts that use the name "Piers Plowman" but whose content does not reflect any knowledge of the poem other than that of the title character. As many scholars have pointed out, "Piers Plowman" was somewhat of a traditional folk name, so later writers who appropriated it were also drawing upon an older tradition of the iconic plowman as well making loose reference to the poem *Piers Plowman.*

[25]The connection between John Ball's letters and *Piers Plowman* remains contested. Steven Justice's book *Writing and Rebellion* makes a compelling case for "insurgent literacy" among the peasant rebels and how *Piers Plowman* was read as a model for revolution. The letters' references to "do well and better" as well as to Piers Plowman himself may an indication that the writer had some knowledge of the poem, in particular the B text (Green 185). Lawrence Warner questions this assumption by pointing out that Ball could also be alluding to Chapter 7, verse 38 of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "both he that giveth his virgin in marriage, doth well; and he that giveth her not, doth better" (*Lost History* 13).

The latter category is larger and more fluid, since the multivocality that characterizes *Piers Plowman* enabled its participation in a wide variety of discourses, including antifraternal satire, complaint, vernacular theology, dream vision poetry, and the alliterative tradition. Furthermore, the texts in this category often use the plowman figure (albeit a figure often named Piers) while demonstrating no knowledge of Langland's poem, thus indicating that they are, alongside *Piers Plowman*, engaging in a wide-ranging discourse that valorized the humble layman. Although *Piers Plowman* itself is not unorthodox in nature, many of the texts in this latter category have strong reformist tendencies, some unorthodox. Langland's method of writing is associative and ruminative rather than narrative, and this circular process results in a poem that asks questions about truth instead of making statements about it; this is a key distinction between *Piers* and unorthodox or Lollard plowman texts, which tend to be morally or politically polemic (Bowers, *Antagonistic Tradition* 13). The works included in this broader category of the *Piers* tradition more or less correspond with the list that Uhart provides in her doctoral thesis: *The Plowman's Tale, The Prayer and Complaint of the Plowman*, *The Crowned King, Jack Upland, Friar Daw's Reply, Upland's Rejoinder, How the Plowman Learned his Pater Noster*,[26] *The Scottish Field, Death and Life, The Lanterne of Liȝt, I playne Piers, A godly dyalogue and dysputacyon betwene Pyers plowman and a popysh preest*, and *Pyers plowmans exhortation unto the lordes, knightes and burgoysses of the parlyamenthouse*.[27]

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[26] Anne Hudson claims that this early sixteenth century tract is working with a proverbial, rather than Langlandian, plowman, but I find this assertion questionable (Hudson 158). The plowman in this text is miserly, recalcitrant, and greedy: he reluctantly promises to learn his Pater Noster if the priest gives him some grain. It is interesting that this was one of the earliest plowman writings printed (by Wynkyn de Word in 1510), but it is a far cry from the "honest laborer" that Hudson earlier describes as the proverbial plowman.

[27] To my knowledge, these latter three poems (all sixteenth century, and all brief) are not yet edited for publication. They are, however, available in scanned black-letter through the UBC Library's Early English Books Online collection.

4.2 Redefining the Plowman: The Tradition's Texts and a Traditional Piers

This failure or forestalling of any linear narrative in *Piers Plowman,* which Anne Middleton argues is accomplished through a series of interrupted episodes in which the main action is halted or redirected,[28] also opens the poem up to supplementation, but not in the sense that I identified in the Chaucerian tradition. The lack of narrative coherence and conclusion did not attract continuations or conclusions, as did Chaucer's works, but new beginnings; the character of Piers was re-started, rewritten, and completely reframed in the later plowman poems. Rather than carrying on a *Piers Plowman* tradition, most of these Langlandian texts redefined Piers as a more "traditional" character who was used a vehicle for reformist ideology. The various Piers figures that appear in some of the *Piers Plowman* tradition poems[29] are vastly different from the Piers of *Piers Plowman* whose physical presence is unstable and whose social role as a plowman is never literally enacted. Aside from one brief line suggesting he had done some plowing,[30] Piers' only non-metaphorical activity in the fields is to direct the work of others – a social role that clashes with a plowman's historical reality but which fits nicely with Piers' development into a Christ-figure.[31]

Piers' very presence as a human plowman is slowly effaced in the B text's Passus VI (Passus VII-VIII in C) as he becomes increasingly associated with Christ; like Christ, who mediates between God and humanity, Piers inhabits a liminal position between secular

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[28] See Middleton (1982).

[29] The poems using the figure of Piers Plowman or a plowman figure that seems intended to recall Piers Plowman are: *The Prayer and Complaynt of the Plowman, I playne Piers which cannot flatter, Piers the Plowman's Creed, A godly dyalogue and dysputacyon betwene Pyers plowman and a popysh preest, Pyers plowmans exhortation unto the lordes, knightes and burgoysses of the parlyamenthouse,* and *How the Plowman Learned his Paternoster.*

[30] "At heiȝ prime Piers leet þe plowȝ stonde / To ouersen hem hymself; whoso best wroȝte / Sholde be hired þerafter whan heruest tyme come" (B:VI:112-114).

[31] Howard Troyer argues that the figure of Piers draws ultimately upon Thomas Aquinas' connection between Peter and Christ, and therefore "for man at his best [Langland] set the symbol of Piers, and then as he worked he allowed Piers to become plowman and overseer, pilgrim and prophet, secular king and holy see, the race of Adam or its redeemer as he saw in the various roles the truths he meant to convey. In the plowman was one truth, in the pope was another, and Piers was made to speak them in order for one and yet all." (372)

subservience and spiritual authority. He moves gradually toward the latter throughout the poem, and B:VI is a key turning point. It is here that we are introduced to his highly (almost awkwardly) allegorical family[32] and learn that Piers is preparing for his physical departure from the earth (or earthly life) by creating his will:

> For now I am old and hoor and haue of myne owene
> To penaunce and to pilgrimage I wol passe wiþ oþere;
> Forþi I wole er I wende do write my biqueste…
> The kirke shal haue my caroyne and kepe my bones
> For of my corn and my catel he craued þe tiþe
> I paide hym priestly for peril of my soule…
> For þou3 I deye today my dettes are quyte…
> I wol worshipe þerwiþ truþe by my lyue
> And ben his pilgrim atte plow for pouere mennes sake.
> My plowpote shal be my pik and putte at þe rotes
> And helpe my cultour to kerue and close þe furwes
>
> (B:VI:83-104)

This document seems not to be a will in the usual sense; Piers vows to give away his possessions and his physical body (his bones) to the church, but this vow is followed by another vow to take up a pilgrimage of worship, thus indicating that he will not die before it is fulfilled. The tools of his material trade will be appropriated to his new spiritual walk, which is cast as a metaphoric plowing. However (in a rather circular progression), before embarking on this journey he asserts his spiritual and social authority by first trying to organize/force the community to work and then, when that is unsuccessful, by purchasing a pardon from Truth in recognition that physical labour will not save his companions just as it will not save him. After the famous tearing of the pardon, Piers returns to his original intent of departing earthly life: "'I shal cessen of my

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[32] The allegoricization of his family moves Piers further towards his spiritual role and away from his physical presence. His wife is Dame werch-whan-tyme-is, his daughter is do-ri3t-or-þi-dame-shal-þee-bete, and his son is Suffre-þi-Soueryns-to-hauen-hir-wille-deme-hem-no3t-for-if-þow-doost-þow-shalt-it-deere-abugge-lat-god-yworþe-wiþ-al-for-so-his-word-techeþ.

sowing,' quod Piers, 'and swynke noȝt so harde / Ne aboute my bilyue [belly joy] so bisy be na moore / Of preires and of penaunce my plouȝ shal ben herafter'" (B:VII:122-124). [33]

In Piers' later manifestations as Anima, the Christ-Knight, and an allegorical plowman (his oxen are the four Gospels) he fulfills his social role in only spiritual terms; he never returns to physical labour and subservience yet his primary name is still Piers Plowman, thus providing a link between St. Peter who mediates between Christ and man, and the plowman who mediates between man and earth. Piers' development throughout the poem is therefore very different from Will's, who is the "I" that the reader follows and identifies with. Will's development is rather recursive; he moves in and out of dream revelations and his learning is compromised by continual regression. Moreover, Will himself is much more closely associated with his own material presence: he covers himself in a hermit's robes, he describes his own place of residence in Cornhill, and the progress of the visions themselves is dependent upon his very human tendency to collapse into sleep.

In contrast to *Piers Plowman* itself, the eponymous *Piers* tradition poems such as *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede, I Playne Piers That Cannot Flatter, Pyers plowmans exhortation unto the lordes, knightes and burgoysses of the parlyamenthouse, The Praier and Complaynt of the Plowman* and *A godly dyalogue and dysputacyon betwene Pyers plowman and a popysh preest* tend to focus upon and exploit Piers' social role as labourer, drawing attention to his rustic and accessible physical qualities in order to present the character as a kind of public voice. By using the term "public voice" here I am not claiming that these poems actually functioned this way; rather, I suggest that the strategic use of the plowman's voice is intended to *appear* to represent widely-held public values. This is something that Langland's Piers never does, even though Piers

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[33] The pardon-tearing scene is complex and has been read in many different, sometimes revolutionary, ways (which is one reason some critics believe Langland excised it from the C text). For some of these different readings please see Lawler, Frank, Baker, and Allen.

does seem designed to represent the "everyman" nature of Christ, which of course is ultimately a vehicle through which to express a divine rather than a populist perspective (Troyer 370).

The *Crede*, one of the earliest *Piers* tradition texts,[34] is the closest to *Piers Plowman* in that it exhibits an ongoing concern with learning, literacy and Scripture, as the title itself suggests. Although it does not participate in the wider documentary discourse of "legal, diplomatic, and historiographical practices" that Langland uses to such effect (Steiner, "Langland's Documents" 95), it does follow the *Piers* Pardon scene in the way it authenticates personal and spiritual pursuits. There is some material evidence suggesting that the *Crede* was read as analogous to *Piers Plowman,* if not really a continuation of it. In one of the two extant *Crede* manuscripts, BL Royal 18 B xvii, the *Crede* immediately precedes a *Piers* text and both are copied in the same Chancery hand. In Rogers' printing of 1561, the two texts are again partnered. Considering the fact that only four full *Crede* texts survive from the medieval/early modern period, the presence of *Piers Plowman* in two of those texts is significant. The *Crede* fragment (Harley 78) also provides evidence as to the poem's audience: it was copied by the prolific Hammond scribe, whose résumé includes two copies of *The Canterbury Tales,* two copies of *The Regiment of Princes*, Fortescue's *Governance* tract (which is also found with *Piers Plowman*), the English prose *Merlin,* medical treatises, and two Lydgate/Chaucer anthologies (Boffey and Thompson 287). This list suggests that the *Crede* likely circulated among the readership of *Piers* and that it was not necessarily considered a purely didactic work: it was also entertainment.

In contrast to other plowman poems, the *Crede* appropriates the character of Piers in an unusually developed way; he "is much more than the symbol that he became in later works"

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[34] Using the reference on line 657 to the Lollard trial of Walter Brut in the 1390s, A. I. Doyle dated the *Crede*'s composition between 1393 and 1401, although its earliest surviving copies are a fifteenth-century fragment and two sixteenth-century paper manuscripts (Hudson, "Legacy" 255).

(Hudson, "Legacy" 255), although I will qualify this statement by suggesting that the *Crede's*

Piers served as a basic template for the Piers of later works. The *Crede's* Piers is a character

more easily identified and sympathetic than the increasingly ethereal and allegorical Piers of

Piers Plowman itself. The brutal physical experience of the *Crede's* Piers stands in contrast to

the gradual effacement of Langland's labourer:

> I seiȝ a sely man me by opon þe plow hongen
> His cote was of a cloute þat cary was y-called,
> His hod was full of holes & his heer oute,
> Wiþ his knopped schon clouted full þykke,
> His ton toteden out as he þe londe treddede,
> His hosen ouerhongen his hokschynes on eueriche a side,
> Al beslombred in fen as he þe plow folwede…
> His wijf walked him wiþ wiþ a longe gode,
> In a cutted cote cutted full heyȝe
> Wrapped in a wynwe schete to weren hire fro weders,
> Barfote on þe bare ijs þat þe blod foldwede.
> (Lines 421-434)

This passage takes place after the narrator has questioned the four fraternal orders in his

unsuccessful quest to learn the Apostle's Creed. None of the friars know or care to know the

Creed, but each offers to absolve the narrator for his lack of learning if they receive payment.

The description of the physical condition of Piers and his family[35] acts as a foil to the friars'

lavish lifestyle and clearly identifies the plowman as the "repository of endorsed 'lewed'

simplicity [that] contributes to the ironic perspective on clerical values" (Scase, *Anticlericalism*

171-2).[36] The *Crede's* Piers is more interested in pursuing a detailed dissection of Catholic

practices and fraternal flaws. His activity is not the symbolic action of Langland's Piers (the

ordering of the estates and tearing of the pardon), but the very basic work necessary for daily

living – he pushes his plow, dirty and exhausted, followed by a wife whose feet bleed from the

rough ground. He therefore exemplifies a "lewed" learning and common humanity that aligns

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[35] The next several lines elaborate on the pitiful state of Piers' children.
[36] The use of the term "sely" in the lines cited above also links Piers to the holy fools and virtuous lunatics
that represent "lewed simplicity" in Langland's poem.

itself more easily to the social, as opposed to the allegorical, nuances of Langland's poem. His

starving and bloodied family is more akin to Langland's poor widows and orphans than to the

purely allegorical family of Piers Plowman, and his tattered clothes and ragged appearance

remind us more of Will wandering hopelessly through city and country "shoped" in "shrouds"

than the Piers Plowman who perkily "putte[s] forth his hed" (B:5:537) and, rather unrealistically,

imposes a division of labour in the "feld of folk" (B:5:10). The *Crede*'s Piers is a man who calls

the narrator "brother" and offers him food, rather than a symbolic figure whose identity shifts as

he fades in and out of the narrative. He is perhaps a more accessible and functional example of

lewed simplicity than Langland's Piers, who eventually transforms (to all intents and purposes)

into Christ himself.[37]

Even if we did not have British Library MS Royal 18 B.xvii to demonstrate that at least

one scribe had intimate knowledge of both the *Crede* and *Piers Plowman* (the same Chancery

hand copied them both), there is no doubt of the latter poem's influence on the former, in terms

of content as well as title. The narrator's interaction with the friars is an expansion of Passus 8 of

the B text of *Piers Plowman*, in which Will enters into dialogue with some corrupt and unlearned

friars, and lines 744-762 of the *Crede* (Piers' treatise against friars) draw upon the *apologia* in

Passus 5 of the C text (Kerby-Fulton, "Bibliographic Ego" 133). It is also clear that the poem

was composed by a Wycliffite sympathizer: in addition to the reference to Walter Brut's trial for

Lollardy, the poem praises Wycliffe explicitly in line 528. Although Bowers dismisses the

Crede's composer as "heavy handed" ("Police" 31), there nevertheless is evidence that this early

Piers imitator revamped the figure of Piers Plowman in a distinctly reformist and socially topical

manner that established a foundation for later writings that borrowed the name of Piers Plowman

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[37] For two important critical perspectives on the complicated relationship between Piers and Christ in *Piers Plowman,* see Davlin (1972) and Troyer.

– particularly the tracts *I Playne Piers* and *A godly dyalogue and dysputacyon betwene Pyers plowman and a popysh preest*.[38]

I *Playne Piers,* a 92-page tract printed circa 1546 (Cawsey 201), presents itself as a contemporary, rather than ancient, text: Piers speaks to readers from a perspective of contemporary topicality but his message focuses upon his argument that Protestantism has its roots in antiquity and Biblical teachings, while Catholicism does not (Kelen 117). It positions itself somewhere between a religious tract and poetic story, conforming fully to neither. It appears to be written in first-person prose, but within the prose is retained a loose rhyme scheme that gives the text a lighter and more literary flavour than, for example, the *Exhortation*.[39] The introduction of its main character suggests a literary narrative, and, like the *Crede,* it characterizes Piers as a very human, accessible, hard-working labourer:

> I Piers Plowman following ploughe on felde, my beastes blowing
> for heate, my bodye requyrynge rest, gapynge for the gayne my
> labours gan me yelde, upon the plowgh beame, to syt me thought it
> best, agayne the hayle I lened, my face to heauen I cast, to that
> greate Lorde aboue (*I Playne Piers* Aii recto)

This introduction is followed by a discussion of the various problems between rich and poor, the unjust burning of Protestant heretics, the Catholic misrepresentation of the sacraments, and the need for an English mass. The personal, descriptive introduction of Piers, paired with the didactic content of the text, speak to the composer's desire to present Piers both as labouring comrade and spiritually authoritative figure. Unlike *Piers Plowman*, however, the overall flavour

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[38] Two additional tracts, *Pyers plowmans exhortation unto the lordes, knightes and burgoysses of the parlyamenthouse* and *The Praier and Complaynt of the Plowman*, exploit the figure of Piers plowman (as a common labourer) without the characterization specific to Langland or the *Crede*. Although Charlotte Brewer correctly states that all four of these neglected texts "use Piers as a spokesman for the author, the voice of reason, moral and religious enlightenment, and social concern" (*Editing* 9), I found that *Playne* and *Dyalogue* inserted themselves into a Langlandian/Creed tradition far more clearly than the other two. The Piers of the *Exhortation*, for example, is very concerned with contemporary politics, land use, and availability of labour, and does not exhibit any of the lewed spirituality or prophetic confidence of the other Piers figures.

[39] Cawsey argues that the pattern of mixed rhyme schemes in the text suggests that it was composed through a combination of several different medieval and early modern sources (202-5).

is explicitly didactic rather than literary, which is unsurprising when we consider the author's comments about the Catholic Church's lax attitude to the reading of popular literature: "you allowe they saye, legenda aurea, Roben Hoode, Beuys & Gower, & al bagage besyd, but Gods word ye may not abyde" (*I Playne Piers* Eiii verso). This statement reflects not only the author's derision for the "bagage" that constitutes popular English reading material, but his desire to legitimize an alternative body of English writings: Biblical translations and commentaries.[40] In fact, he was attempting to use Piers Plowman to authorize an entirely English devotional practice, extending as far as performing the mass in English rather than Latin:

> I [Piers] was at masse not longe ago where the prest had forgotten in his challyce to do the wyne that shulde haue bene a god, the sellye solles knocke hande and breste, theyr belefe was fullye upon the prest, they honored for God they wyst not what, so do they many a tyme....wolde God we might here what they do say, in our englyshe tonge they coulde not playe.....why shuld they feare, that I poore Peers and other shulde understande, this they kepe in hande, and it hyde in huther mother. (*I Playne Piers* Image 41, n.p.)

This is another example of how this Piers, like the *Crede*'s, more closely reflects the social realities of a plowman: he cannot understand the "huther mother" of the Latin mass. Langland's Piers, however, is Latinate and therefore remains affiliated with the established Church and able to use its authority – even against the Church's own representatives.[41] Furthermore, virtually all of Langland's direct Biblical quotations are in Latin, and he frequently gives only partial verses in the expectation that a Latinate readership will be able to fill in the gaps. Tim Machan makes a compelling argument that, in fact, English trumps Latin in *Piers Plowman*, but he does not emphasize that this would be apparent only to Latinate readers ("Language Contact" 359-385).

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[40] This Wycliffite writer was seeking more than the texts of vernacular theology: English "mysticism" (Rolle, Julian of Norwich, the Cloud of Unknowing, etc) was a consistently orthodox practice, while actual Biblical translations had been very contentious since the late fourteenth century, and more so after Arundel's Constitutions of 1409 (Watson, "Censorship" 826).

[41] After all, his ability to dispute in a Latinate manner is what enables him to outwit the priest in the B-text pardon scene.

The conclusion of *I Playne Piers* falls back into a fairly orthodox exemplum: "God graunte us all eyes to espye, eres to here & mouthes to speke, & lernynge in herte to beleue trulye…God saue the kynge & speede the ploughe. / And sende the prelates care ynoughe." Interestingly, a version of this traditional motto ("God spede the plouȝ / and send us korne I now") prefaces two *Piers Plowman* manuscripts – Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.14 and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 293 (Echard, *Printing* 1). The change from "send us korne I now" to "sende the prelates care ynoughe" gives a newly political twist to an old folk saying, redefining it just as these poems redefined the Piers Plowman figure. The notion of "lernynge in herte" likely draws upon Langland's interest in "kynde knowing" and his character of Kynde Wit, and it is also the authoritative cornerstone of the other tract I will briefly discuss here, *A godly dyalogue and dysputacyon betwene Pyers plowman and a popysh preest.*

Like the *Crede* and *I Playne Piers*, the *Dyalogue* employs a narrative framework to enclose unabashedly didactic content. The text opens with a trick of fate: "It chaunced that this symple Pyers plowman com to a certeyne house" where the locals are hosting a dinner party for several priests – suggestively evocative of B:XIII/C:XIV of *Piers Plowman*, where the doctor of divinity argues over supper. As Piers wanders by, the party erupts into a dispute about the sacraments, and one particularly proud priest is attempting to prove his superiority over the "symple people." Upon overhearing the argument, Piers "encouraged hymselfe, yea was rathere boldened and encouraged by the secret motyon of the holy goost shauvyng this sentence of Christ before hys eyes" (*Dyalogue* Aiii recto-verso). This "secret motyon of the holy goost" is Piers' source of authority as he enters into a debate with the priest; like "lewed simplicity," "lernynge in herte," and "kynde knowing" it is indicative of the gradual turn to inwardness and

private spiritual practice that began in the late fourteenth century and was flourishing by the end of the sixteenth.[42]

John King argues that while the Piers of the early fifteenth-century *Crede* is, like Langland's, doctrinally safe, the sixteenth-century plowman writings transformed him into a blatantly reformist figure (343). It is true that the *Crede* Piers is speaking within a largely orthodox discourse of antifraternal sentiment (Lawton, "Lollardy" 785), but the *Crede*'s reconstruction of the Langlandian Piers – its depiction of him in human and spiritually intuitive terms, versus his highly symbolic nature in Langland – forecasts his treatment in the later plowman texts like *Dyalogue* and *I Playne Piers.* This new Piers seems to be far more representative of the labouring classes, and his ability to claim authority through inward learning presents such authority as accessible to a wide range of humble laypeople. At first blush, he is much closer to a *vox populi* than Langland's Piers.[43] At the same time, his position as a plowman retains its claims to antiquity: he has a "doubly iconic status" in which he speaks both as a brother and as a forefather (Kelen 102). In these early modern appropriations the contemporary concern with origin was qualified by remnants of the medieval concern with affiliation.

The revisionist casting of Langland's poem as proto-democratic is, I would argue, largely due to the sixteenth century reinvention of Piers, even though that reinvention is based not so much in politics as in religious orthodoxy. The claim for the labouring classes' spiritual authority does not "foreshadow" democracy, but continually looks back to Biblical precedents, and in doing so aligns itself to medieval paradigms of religious practice. To use Kelen's words, the emphasis on **"**the plowman's antiquity served to assimilate the various reformist projects of the sixteenth-century texts in which he appears to earlier species of English anticlericalism...and thus

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[42] See Jagodzinski, particularly Chapter 1.

[43] As this chapter as a whole suggests, however, this idea of a representative voice was the intent of the reformist appropriation of Piers, not necessarily the effect. There is no clear historical evidence linking this reformist plowman figure with an actual reformist movement rooted in the English peasant population of the time (although in Germany there was a sixteenth-century "Peasants' War").

to mitigate the charge of Protestant 'newfangledness'"(104). The old versus the new is the issue at stake, and both reform and orthodox camps attempted to prove not their innovativeness or progressive thinking, but their origins in antiquity.

While the *Crede* belongs to a tradition of literature that appropriates the name and character of Piers, it also shares a discourse with other works that draw heavily on the content, rather than the name, of *Piers Plowman*; the two main works at hand are *Mum and the Sothsegger* and *Richard the Redeless*.[44] These two *Piers* traditions – one based on name, the other on discourse – are often classified as one, but their treatment of Langland's poem is quite different. While the plowman writings capitalize on an established literary figure,[45] texts such as *Mum* and *Richard* employ a mixture of phrases, figures, and themes from *Piers Plowman*. As has often been observed, the frequent result of such appropriation is the turning of orthodox statements or characters to reformist purposes. In her essay on medieval cultural appropriation, Claire Sponsler uses modern subcultures to illustrate this phenomenon: "the subculture is not forced to accept the meanings usually attached to those [mainstream] materials, but instead is free to improvise with the materials it acquires from the marketplace, giving them new meanings and uses" (22). Although this particular statement is in reference to contemporary subcultures such as goth or punk, it is a useful lens through which to view the kind of literary appropriation undertaken by reformist writers in the sixteenth century. Rather than simply using the Piers figure as a mouthpiece for the concerns of honest Englishmen (and, of course, reformist Englishmen), Langlandian texts such as *Mum* and *Richard* ignore the eponymous character and instead lift from *Piers Plowman* memorable phrases or moments of effective satire and employ

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[44] *Jack Upland* and *Friar Daw's Reply* are roughly contemporary with *Mum* and *Richard,* but their use of Langland is far less developed. They reduce the complexity of *Piers* into a standard antifraternal debate satire.
[45] Hudson points out that "none of the authors thought it worthwhile to explain their figure, or to start by establishing his authority" (259). Clearly, Piers had symbolic cachet from its early years.

them to different ends. Their authority lies not in their use of a stock figure, but in their

rhetorically safe generic form – dream vision and naïve social commentary.[46]

Within these safe forms, the authors are using the technique dubbed *bricolage* by Levi-

Strauss[47] - they are combining elements of *Piers Plowman* and wider discourses of anticlerical

sentiment in order to reinvent the Langlandian style. The composers, however, were certainly not

always skilled in their execution of *bricolage*: Lawton points to lines 108ff of *Mum* as an

example of its "uncomfortably jumbled reminiscence…of *Piers Plowman*" ("Lollardy" 788).

Indeed, these lines are a rather "jumbled" reminder of key phrases from Langland's poem: "For

alle the greet clercz that with the king lendith / Knoweth this as kindely as a clerc doeth his bokes

/ Hit is no siker seruice but for a somer saison." Sponsler, in her discussion on the effects of

bricolage in Henry IV's reign,[48] emphasizes that while this technique may have its awkward and

improvisational aspects, "as an act of appropriation [it] is not random" but rather "motivated by

the necessity of the moment....because it makes sense and is homologous with larger structures

and concerns" (25). It is this intentionality and association with "larger structures and concerns"

that we must keep in mind when reading these poems: academic criticism frequently points out

the areas of borrowing from *Piers*, but fails to examine those areas contextually. These poems

must be read not only as part of a broad antifraternal tradition, but as texts responding to and

appropriating *Piers Plowman* in a specific and intentional way during a time in which the

horizons of English vernacular literature were broadening exponentially.

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[46] The dream framework (used by *Mum*) was a popular literary genre, and the naïve social commentary (used by *Richard)* is acceptable because the author's criticisms of the King are mitigated by an introductory statement begging the reader's indulgence and seeking correction of any "fables or foly ther amonge" his text so he can "amende that ys amysse and make it more better" (lines 57-60).

[47] He introduced this concept in Chapter 1 of his 1962 book *The Savage Mind*.

[48] She refers to John Fisher's theory that the abundance of English texts after 1400 is due to Henry IV's politically-motivated efforts to gain the nation's support by promoting English as a national language (24). See Fisher's "A Language Policy for Lancastrian England."

4.3   Chaucer and Langland: Reproducing Tradition

In his poem *The Fall of Princes*, Lydgate presents the literary tradition in which he is writing (advice to princes) as a kind of genealogical narrative, in which the same story is reproduced by great writers throughout the ages:

> The Fal of Prynces gan piteously compleyne
> As Petrark did, and also Iohn Bochas
> Laureat Fraunceys, poetys both tweyne
> Toold how prynces for ther greet trespace
> Wer ovirthrowe, rehersyng al the caas
> As Chaucer dide in the Monkys tale
> (Book IX:3422-27)

The self-promotional nature of this particular narrative aside, Lydgate clearly has the sense that writing is also about rewriting and that texts are not only related to one another by the method of their "makyng" (written by great *auctores*) but by their content. A bow to precedence was more important than a claim to originality. However, the inclusion of a contemporary writer in this particular genealogy was itself a gesture of some originality for the time, as was discussed in Chapter Three. Thomas Hoccleve was another "Chaucerian" writer who made great strides toward constructing a writing community whose authority lay in contemporary authors such as Gower and Chaucer, rather than the classical fathers; indeed, Bowers suggests that Hoccleve "worked the hardest to install Geoffrey Chaucer as the Father of English Poetry and to claim his own position as direct lineal heir in this literary genealogy" ("Politics of Tradition" 352). Both Hoccleve and Lydgate use the metaphor of literary inheritance not only to supplement Chaucer's own writing, but to legitimize their own.

The notion of reproduction is pertinent here, in more ways than one. Not only is reproduction central to how genealogy – in all its manifestations – functions, but it also gestures to the medieval fertilization of both the Chaucerian and the *Piers Plowman* traditions. The literary genealogy, to a medieval reader, meant the re-production of older texts whose value had

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been proven not only by their age but by the marks made on them by other readers – these literary grandfathers were therefore claimed by generations of readers. This located such texts within a deep and "traditional" context – a context constituted not of other texts, but of readers whose marking of the work indicated centuries of acceptance.

Chaucer did not ignore this importance sense of tradition and context in his own writing. As many critics have shown, he drew upon an impressive range of Italian, and French sources in order to craft his own particular style of English poetry and prose.[49] His "originality" did not arise *ex nihilo*, and this allowed him to function as the contemporary precedent that consolidated and legitimized a late medieval English writing community through the practice of supplementation. Allusion to Chaucer allowed writers such as Hoccleve, Lygdate, Henryson, Usk and others to re-produce Chaucer's words, but also to use their own voices to express those words, and in doing so, to frame and control Chaucer within a genealogy that they themselves were attempting to supersede. In order to remain valid and powerful, a genealogy must continue; it cannot stop with the father, it must produce and reproduce heirs. The reproduction of Chaucer's voice by other writers thus solidified the authority of his voice within that genealogical paradigm and ensured his position as father while competing with it in a rather Oepidal effort to establish a distinct authorial identity. As weblike as the connections are among texts and writers in the Chaucerian tradition, the writers themselves constructed it as a more concretely linear tree in order to control Chaucer's influence and use it toward their own success.

In contrast, the *Piers Plowman* "tradition" was constituted of writers who were uninterested in providing clear and unambiguous references to *Piers Plowman* itself. They were re-producing Langland's work not the way the Chaucerians did, through echo, allusion, and supplementation, but a politically-charged way that produced (or reproduced) Piers Plowman as

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[49] Chapters 2 and 3 of Boitani and Mann provide good general discussions regarding Chaucer's continental influences.

an entirely different character – a rewritten genealogy. As Langland's identity (his authorship of *Piers*, the probable details of his life) became increasingly known and accepted throughout the twentieth century, it became easier for critics to consolidate plowman writings and texts which shared some of Langland's religious and political concerns under the umbrella of a *Piers Plowman* tradition; with an author's name more firmly attached to a famous series of texts, the notion of a tradition seemed more viable and appealing. Helen White's book of 1944 was likely the first to employ this term, in all probability because the authorship controversy had been settled, thus providing *Piers Plowman* itself with a more firmly established sense of internal coherence. Chaucer studies were well-entrenched in academia by this time, and the idea of a *Piers Plowman* tradition was an attractive contextual match for the Chaucerian tradition. John Bowers' book *Chaucer and Langland: The Antagonistic Tradition* argues that these two traditions grew out of response to one another, but I would also suggest that our own current response to these traditions is an equally important area of analysis. Chaucer's role as Father, with all the ideological implications associated with that title, begs us to find a voice from below that can contextualize and perhaps challenge his dominance.

It is important to acknowledge our own inclination to resist hegemony when we are reading texts written within a completely different cultural framework. Sarah Stanbury highlights this issue in her analysis of *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, which she argues is a rise and fall narrative of "the heroics of English. English vernacular writing emerges in resistance and opposition to forms of textual tyranny imposed through structures of political or clerical power" (96). According to Stanbury, the collective force of the essays in the CHMEL is to "romance English as a democratizing and rebellious *vox populi*" (97). While Stanbury is referring to our modern ideological construction of Middle English, similar ideas apply to *Piers Plowman,* whose association with a "tradition" presents the poem as an alternate voice to the

Chaucerian hegemony. Indeed, David Aers' article "*Vox Populi* and the Literature of 1381" in the CHMEL seems to equate marginalized voices with revolutionary voices, while also associating *Piers Plowman* with these newly public, rebellious voices (439) and Chaucer with the hegemonic, institutional voices that muffled them (444).[50] In a similar vein, David Lawton characterizes *Piers Plowman* as a "maverick masterpiece" which "spawned…diverse yet essentially unrepresentative offspring, all of which fail to transmit the transcendental concerns of their model" ("Alliterative Poetry" 10). Being conscious of our use of the term "tradition" may help us discern how much we are attempting to reconstruct a medieval reading and how much we are reading our own desires into a text.

Although we are now intensely interested in evidence of a medieval *vox populi* rather than the hegemonic institutional voices, the public voice of the Plowman was, in essence, largely silenced by Langland as well as by Chaucer. Chaucer's Plowman is an opaque, silent and safe figure whose Tale was never given to him. Langland's Plowman, although he represents Christ-like leadership and wisdom, nevertheless does not truly perform a "public" voice: with the exception of the pardon-tearing (a scene removed from the C text), Piers Plowman speaks on behalf of the Church and institutional authority and is increasingly distant from the realities of public life.

The texts of the *Piers* tradition frequently employ a "public voice" that, in reality, speaks only on behalf of what was a minority of revolutionary reformists. If there is any "public voice" in *Piers Plowman* itself, it belongs to the Dreamer, whose uncertainty, failings, and never-ending questions most closely parallel the perspective of a layperson. Chaucer's "public voice", however, was carried on by the authors who supplemented him, who cemented him as a paternal,

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[50] In her essay "Piers Plowman" in the CHMEL, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton is more careful about associating *Piers* with revolution when she emphasizes that "the extent to which such clerks [Langland's reading circles] formed a *socially* radical proletariat is dubious" (537). Other scholarship has demonstrated the essential orthodoxy of *Piers Plowman* itself; see, for example, Turville-Petre (2000) 37, Hudson (1988), and Cawsey 189.

institutionalized figure and yet who also consolidated what we would now consider a grass-roots community of writers. In their literary and social performances, then, these two traditions are not controlled by one father or one voice, public or not: in our reading we traverse a weblike "feld full of folk" rather than the single trunk of a family tree.

Chapter 5

Traditions Intersect: Confusing Compilations

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the classification of texts into distinct literary traditions brings a sense of stability to our interpretation of those texts, essentially functioning as a hermeneutic framework that makes comprehensible to us the strangeness of the medieval voice. However, literary genealogies were understood and treated very differently six hundred years ago, which is why the stability of medieval literary categories is immediately fragmented by the very evidence that supports the construction of those categories: the texts they include. For modern scholars, manuscript compilations (or anthologies, commonplace books, miscellanies, etc[1]) are often the locus of such fragmentation and instability because the apparent randomness of some of their inclusions complicates our notion of genre or literary tradition. How does one text derive from, supplement, or relate to another, very different, text? Are we now seeking out a textual relationship simply because they are bound together as a random result of the material conditions of manuscript production? The question of legibility is central to my discussion: how are we to understand compilation manuscripts when the most commonly used tools of theoretical organization – literary tradition and authorship – diverge from medieval reading practices?

It is clear from the manuscript evidence that not all (perhaps not even most) compilations can be explained by unorganized collecting habits and "binding accidents" (Hanna, "Booklets" 102). In many cases, there appears to have been some sense of design even within the

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[1] Boffey and Thompson discuss several manuscripts in each of these different categories and both Shailor (153) and Revard (1) touch upon the descriptive inadequacy of the term "miscellany."

constraints of exemplar availability and finances.[2] Perhaps we can develop a different sense of literary tradition by examining the physical, and not just literary, cues that indicate relationship or association, and in turn those physical cues may reveal literary connections that we did not see. Our reliance upon categories based on literary tradition simplifies and organizes the texts that we study, but those categories also often cloud our understanding of manuscript compilations.

To look at this issue more closely, using some of the ideas discussed in the previous chapters, I will be examining the Chaucerian and *Piers Plowman* traditions as manifested in two manuscripts from the Huntington Library, San Marino: HM 114 and HM 143. These manuscripts are the only two known instances of Chaucer and Langland's poetry, and even poetry from their respective wider traditions, being compiled together.[3] As was discussed in the previous chapters, the Chaucerian and *Piers Plowman* traditions have been read as very distinct from one another, in terms of content as well as readership – although this latter point may be worthy of reconsideration. The evidence of late medieval miscellanies suggests that early readers of Chaucer were generally interested in the new literary style[4] and courtly aesthetics rather than older poetic discourses such as alliterative poetry, tail-rhyme romances, and *Piers Plowman*

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[2] Within the past ten years there has been increasing interest in how medieval miscellanies were created and how we should approach them. For example, see Moss, Boffey and Thompson, Nichols and Wenzel, Taylor (2002, 2003), Hanna (1986), and Edwards (1990, 1996).

[3] To my knowledge, with one exception there are no extant manuscripts containing both a Chaucerian text and a text of the *Piers Plowman* tradition. One possible exception is Hoccleve's version of the *Plowman's Tale*, which was copied in the mid fifteenth century onto the blank leaves at the end of the Squire's Tale in Christ Church Oxford MS 152. Hoccleve's *Plowman's Tale* was not originally written to be included with the *Canterbury Tales*, but was a Miracle of the Virgin tale actually entitled "Item de Beata Virgine" and then supplemented by a Chaucerian prologue by the scribe of Christ Church 152. Although Hoccleve's poem has no relation to the *Piers* tradition discourse of the plowman-as-reformist, its scribal title lends itself to comparisons with both Langland and Chaucer. To further complicate things, there is another *Plowman's Tale* that is a more clearly reformist, *Piers* tradition poem which, like Hoccleve's poem, was supplemented by a prologue that fit it into the pilgrimage framework. Both versions of the *Plowman's Tale* were included in printed editions of the *Canterbury Tales*. See Bowers (1992) for further background information:

[4] As touched upon in Chapter Three's discussion of the Chaucerian tradition, the new literary style of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries is sometimes defined as the style of Chaucer himself, rather than a broader trend in which he was participating. Such a style is generally defined in formal or aesthetic terms (ie, the use of rhyming couplets or rime royal rather than the alliterative long line or tail rhyme) but it is also characterized by a self-conscious "literariness" – an awareness, expressed in the texts themselves, of the complicated nature of authorship, translation, and narration.

(Partridge 17). Hanna suggests that this new Chaucerian courtly discourse replaced not only the traditional popular literature such as the tail rhyme romances, but also older discourses of counsel and complaint – the discourses most clearly evident in poems such as *Piers Plowman* (*London Literature* 312). In an alternate perspective on this old-new dichotomy, John Bowers argues that the Chaucerian and Langlandian traditions vied against one another without explicitly responding to one another: the former representing a new form of popular expression, a combination of *sentence* and *solas*, and the latter expressing an intense search for truth and righteousness, often at the cost of coherent poetic narrative. He identifies this contest as a kind of "double tradition," each tradition being dependent on the other for its continuation (*Antagonistic Tradition* 3). This chapter differs from Bowers' study in that it does not focus on the wider idea of tradition (a category that was problematized in Chapters Three and Four) but instead evaluates how two specific works by Chaucer and Langland respond to one another within the constraints of discrete manuscript contexts.

5.1   Traditions Intersect: HM 114 and HM 143

Given the different reading circles for these two traditions, it is perhaps unsurprising that *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer's works tend not to be compiled together. What may be more surprising, however, is that in both HM 114 and HM 143, the Chaucerian text paired with *Piers* is *Troilus and Criseyde.* The pairing of these two particular poems is a topic that has received little scholarly attention[5] despite recent criticism suggesting that *Troilus* would be the least likely Chaucerian text to be included with *Piers Plowman.* Bowers, in developing his argument that Chaucer wrote in negative response to Langland, argues that during the 1380s and 1390s, an author wishing "to write literature that did *not* look Langlandian" would eschew the dream-

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[5] As will be indicated in the literature review sections of this chapter, the work done on these manuscripts tends to focus on each manuscript individually, and often each text in the manuscript individually. In general, critical comparisons of manuscripts are undertaken when they have a scribe and/or a wide range of texts in common.

vision frame in favour of a more linear narrative, avoid the alliterative style, and use third-person narration; "in short, he would write *Troilus and Criseyde, The Love of Palamon and Arcite,* and finally *The Canterbury Tales*" (*Antagonistic Tradition* 30). Bowers also argues that scribal decoration of manuscripts suggests that scribes placed "divergent values" on Chaucer and Langland ("Professional Readers" 114). In a similar line of discussion, Ralph Hanna suggests that Chaucer continually attempted to differentiate himself from Langland, to the extent that his own investment in his authorial image resulted in Langland being forced underground. He defines Langland somewhat dramatically as "the great repressed voice" in comparison to Chaucer, and suggests that "any putative dialogue between Chaucer and Langland....is at best a monologue" (*London Literature* xvii, 248). Both Bowers and Hanna here focus upon Chaucer's writing – a strong textual presence – as a response to the powerful absence of Langland.[6] D. Vance Smith acknowledges this "absence" in the surprise he expresses at the fact that Chaucer never references Langland, even though Chaucer was "clearly influenced in some, probably deep, way by Langland" ("English Writer" 91).

Given some of these critical assumptions about the polarity of Chaucer and Langland, it may be surprising to us that the only Chaucerian work compiled with *Piers* is a poem that, accurately or not, is now seen as designed to avoid association with *Piers* – one of Chaucer's most lauded poems, the historical romance *Troilus and Criseyde.* The evidence of HM 114 and HM 143, however, suggests that the gap between *Piers* and *Troilus* is not as wide as we think. Anne Middleton's comments regarding the readership of *Piers* counter, or at least qualify, the conclusions of Hanna, Robinson, and Bowers: "*Piers* occurs regularly among long works which, in 'storial' form, unfold the bases of possession, and the derivation of custom and authority" ("Audience and Public" 110). These works include *Mandeville's Travels*, which is compiled with

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[6] This perspective of Chaucer as reacting against Langland was voiced much earlier, in Ian Robinson's 1972 book *Chaucer and the English Tradition* which presents Langland and Chaucer as mutual foils and suggests that Chaucer's Plowman "was a retort to Langland" (203).

Piers five times, *Susannah*[7] (three times), *The Siege of Jerusalem,* the *Alexander* stories, *Ypotis,*

and *Troilus* (two times each).[8] *Piers* also occurs twice with "alliterative works clearly influenced

by it [*Richard the Redeless* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*], and both clearly reforming, if not

Lollard, in tenor" and, interestingly, twice with short texts that are anti-Lollard (107). In this

range of literature we can see the variety of discourses into which *Piers Plowman,* a poem whose

genre and dominant ideology are flexible and ambivalent, was appropriated. The narrator himself

provides little stabilizing influence, but even delineating the poem's overarching themes leaves

us with no sense of completion or full coherence. D. Vance Smith suggests that tracing out

thematic elements "shows us where *at particular points* the poem locates itself in the social or

psychic world...but not where, or even in what discourse, the total poem locates itself"

("Negative Langland" 35, emphasis his), hence the poem's varied textual companions. *Piers*

Plowman is a long work that could easily stand on its own without requiring the protection of a

larger compilation, so the texts with which it *is* compiled are important resources for *Piers*

scholars. Compilation choices may indicate how certain scribes saw *Piers Plowman*'s political or

religious inclinations.

This chapter analyzes not only the textual contents of two *Piers* manuscript compilations

but the physical aspects as well, such as their page layout, materials of production, rubrication

and collation. In discussing HM 114, John Thorne makes what appears at first to be an obvious

statement, that "there can be no straightforward relationship between economy-class book-

making materials or production formats and specific textual qualities" (90). While this is

technically accurate, the physical quality of the manuscript can provide information regarding

the social and financial context in which it was produced, as well as influence a reader's

interpretation of it. The mutual influence of form (meaning material structure as well as literary

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[7] *Susannah* is also known as *The Pistil of Susan* and *The Pistil of Swete Susan.* For the sake of consistency and convenience, I have used *Susannah* throughout.
[8] The HM 114 *Piers* is compiled with three of these works: *Mandeville, Susannah,* and *Troilus.*

structure) and content has been an issue of philosophical and aesthetic interest since the classical

period, but it has been the subject of particular critical interrogation over the past half a century

by scholars such as D.F. McKenzie, Marshall McLuhan, and Hayden White, among others.

McLuhan's 1967 book *The Medium is the Massage*[9] is probably the most widely-recognized

manifesto on the importance of form in communication. Hayden White's *The Content of the

Form* (1987) addresses the form/content issue in literary terms: he argues that narrative form in

historical writing profoundly influences our understanding of history. Chapter Three's discussion

of the Chaucerian tradition touched upon the issue of content over form (or interior over exterior)

by pointing out how critical treatment of Chaucer often characterizes Chaucer's followers as

shallow copyists of Chaucer's deep meaning. For example, A.C. Spearing's 1976 definition of

the Chaucerian tradition demoted those writers (like Lydgate) who imitated Chaucer's poetic

form without understanding his inner meaning. Acknowledging how form can influence our

understanding of content will help us be more self-conscious of our own assumptions about texts

and can also reveal clues about how a manuscript may have been read by contemporary readers.

As this chapter continually emphasizes, the modern sense of literary connectedness or coherence

does not always (or even often) correspond to the medieval sense.

The coherence of a manuscript is often more a matter of perspective than of objective

truth. Chapter Two introduced Martin Heidegger, whose works explore the way objects inhabit

the intersection between humanity and technology. His book *What is a Thing?* focuses on the

idea of the "thing" in both its concrete and unknowable manifestations, and positions itself as an

explication or continuation of Immanuel Kant's notion of "the thing-in-itself" (*das Ding an

sich*).[10] Heidegger says, "it turns out that the everyday things show still another face" even when

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[9] Sic: "massage" was initially a typo, but McLuhan decided to retain it because of the pun on massage/mass-age.

[10] Put very simply, Kant's "thing in itself" is an object removed from the constraints of time, space, and usage that define it (Rescher 290).

we can describe only the tiniest minutiae of those things (12). He gives the simple example of the sun by contrasting the sun's scientific, "factual" properties with its properties as understood by a shepherd who structures his life around what he believes is the sun's rising and setting. In conclusion, he asks:

> Now which of these is the true sun?...Or is the question wrongly put, and if so, why? How should this be decided? For that, obviously, it is necessary to know what a thing is, what it means to-be-a-thing, and how the truth of a thing is determined. On these questions neither the shepherd nor the astrophysicist informs us. Neither can *or needs* to pose these questions in order to be immediately who they are. (13, emphasis mine)

If we do not see coherence from our own frame of reference, it is easier for us to reduce a manuscript to random components, to break it apart and analyze its pieces in isolation as if they did not mean anything to one another (Taylor, *Textual Situations* 208). The manuscript as a whole is not really a whole from this point of view: it is some "thing" that needs to be reconciled with itself.

In moments such as this, removing ourselves from our own sphere of familiarity is beneficial. If we wish not only to understand a medieval text but to understand the experience of reading (and the impulse behind writing) a text in the fifteenth century, we need not to define as fact what that particular manuscript is, but instead how it functioned for those medieval readers and writers. This chapter attempts to reframe our understanding of two *Piers Plowman* compilation manuscripts whose creation has often been relegated to randomness. There has been little to no critical interest in the significance of these two *Troilus/Piers* pairings,[11] for possible reasons that will be discussed in the following sections. Within the varied range of texts that we find compiled with *Piers,* there are some important commonalities that allow us to begin seeing

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[11] A brief survey of some relatively recent work in the field of medieval anthologies by scholars interested in Middle English authors (and often Langland or Chaucer in particular) shows virtually no mention of these manuscripts: Boffey and Thompson, Edwards (1989, 1996, 2000), Boffey (1996, 2000), Hanna (1996).

coherence instead of chaos. The first is noted by Middleton in the excerpt quoted above: *Piers* occurs with works that articulate the derivation of authority, customs, and possession.[12] The second is the focus on otherness, foreignness, and the East shared by almost all of the texts with which *Piers* appears. HM 114 and HM 143 provide a useful lens through which to evaluate these kinds of shared features. Although I initially anticipated that the notion of origins (and the anxiety associated with pagan origins) would be the primary thread connecting these various ideas in HM 143 and 114, the evidence of HM 114 in particular suggests that the position and power of women is an unanswered question informing this manuscript's six texts.

We should not, however, dismiss the importance of origins when reading these texts, since anxiety regarding women in the medieval period is in many respects an anxiety about origins. Eve, the first woman, was the downfall of man ("man" meaning her partner as well as mankind) but at the same time she was essential in order for mankind to reproduce. The Biblical narrative of human origin therefore presents women as secondary, as different, but also as powerful and influential. As the texts in these compilations indicate, the Eastern "otherness" of ancient civilizations – Troy, Babylon, Egypt – becomes entangled with the otherness of women. The texts acknowledge the discomfort, ambivalence, and instability of female roles and female power (particularly over men) by presenting women in a setting that conveys some sense of liminality or strangeness, such as a visionary dream, an exotic city, or a garden. An analysis of HM 114 may also illumine our understanding of why these two poems were also compiled together in the much shorter HM 143. I must preface this discussion, however, by emphasizing

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[12] The relationship of *Mandeville, Susannah,* the *Three Kings* excerpt and the *Epistola* (four of the six texts in HM 114) to these concepts and therefore to *Piers Plowman* is more or less clear. *Troilus and Criseyde*'s connection is less clear; it is certainly a poem in, as Middleton puts it, "storial form," but does not appear to address issues of authority, customs or possession directly. However, it is worth noting that by 1400 *Troilus and Criseyde* was being included in devotional compilations, thus indicating that for medieval readers this poem may have been linked to *Piers* by way of spiritual interest (Edwards, "Manuscripts" 258). Both poems explore, to some degree, how morality is enacted on an individual basis – how we make moral, Godly choices, and what our choices say about our character. While these notions do not question spiritual authority in any explicit sense, they do explore how (and if) the individual makes moral decisions on their own, without clerical mediation.

that the following analyses do not presuppose that the scribe (or compiler) was consciously

presenting foreignness as gendered or femininity as Other. Rather, the analyses are intended to

illustrate how scribal choices may have been influenced by deeply ingrained cultural paradigms

of origin: womanhood and England's roots in the Othered East.

5.2   Huntington Library MS HM 114[13]

HM 114 is a compilation manuscript containing, in order, *Piers Plowman, Mandeville's*

Travels, Susannah, an excerpt from *The Legend of Three Kings, Troilus and Criseyde,* and an

English translation of Peter Ceffons' *Epistola Luciferi Ad Cleros,* all written by one scribe in an

Anglicana script.[14] These texts are in booklet form,[15] with smaller paper-and-parchment quires

forming three larger booklets[16] which were then bound together to form the manuscript (Thorne

69). It was copied in the first half of the fifteenth century by the same scribe (hereafter referred

to as Scribe 114[17]) who copied Lambeth Palace MS 491[18] and British Library MS Harley 3943.[19]

The latter contains the same unusual recension of *Troilus* as HM 114[20] and the former contains a

complete version of *The Legend of Three Kings* (Benson and Blanchfield 103; Thorne 68-69),

thus indicating that Scribe 114 may have had some of his own exemplars (or at least was

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[13] Patricia Bart's edition of the HM 114 *Piers Plowman* is forthcoming, and therefore all discussion of HM 114 here is, at this point, without the benefit of her work.

[14] UC Berkeley's online *Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts at the Huntington Library* provides a full description of the manuscript: http://sunsite3.berkeley.edu/hehweb/HM114.html.

[15] Hanna describes a booklet as "a group of leaves forming at least one quire, but more likely several, and presenting a self-contained group of texts. Booklets thus form units intermediate in extent between the quire and the full codex" ("Booklets" 101).

[16] The three large booklets are divided as follows: fols 1-130v (containing *Piers Plowman*); fols 131-192v (containing *Mandeville, Susannah,* and the excerpt from *Three Kings*); fols 193-325v (containing *Troilus* and the *Epistola* translation).

[17] At the 2010 New Chaucer Society conference in Siena, Linne Mooney and Estelle Stubbs presented research indicating that a man named John Osborne was the scribe of HM 114, Lambeth Palace 491, and Harley 3943. Their publication on Osborne and other scribes is forthcoming.

[18] See Schaer 13-16 for a brief introduction to Lambeth 491's connection to HM 114. Hanna follows Schaer in arguing that Lambeth was produced earlier than HM 114 (Hanna, "Scribe" 122).

[19] See Hanna (1989), 127-128 for information regarding Harley's relationship to HM 114.

[20] Although Hanna acknowledges that this *Troilus* is the only complete version of the poem that we have extant ("Manuscripts and Transmission" 174), he concurs with Russell and Nathan in his belief that the unique readings in this recension are not authorial, suggesting instead that Scribe 114 had possession of a poor archetype and "scrupulously...tried to reproduce it" in both manuscripts (Hanna, "Scribe" 127-128; Russell and Nathan 119).

connected enough to source them more than once) and therefore was likely a professional-level copyist whose skills were sufficient to support him financially. Dialectal features of the three texts copied by Scribe 114 suggest that he was trained in the east Midlands, probably Essex, and moved to London to work (Thorne 69; Meale 216). Like many other scribes, Scribe 114 likely began his copying career in the civil service and gradually began taking literary commissions as they became sufficiently lucrative to enable his continued copying of them (Thorne 89).

In the Athlone edition of the *Piers Plowman* B text, the editors dismiss HM 114'*s Piers* as a highly corrupt B text and therefore do not include it in the B stemma. Hanna sees the HM 114 *Piers* not as a corrupt version of B but as a conflation of all three texts (Hanna, "Scribe" 124), while Thorne agrees with Russell and Nathan's characterization of the HM 114 *Piers* as a B text, with borrowings from A and C (including the C *apologia* or "autobiography" in Passus V). In addition to these borrowings, the text contains 51 additional lines, most of which are unique (Thorne 70; Russell and Nathan 119,126). Scribe 114's conflation of the three versions of *Piers* went beyond a simple composite edition of the poem, however; he used the various material selectively and "subjected it to a range of interventions that....altered its meanings and emphases" (Thorne 90). Thorne provides a thorough analysis of Passus III to demonstrate how Scribe 114's version of *Piers* intentionally altered the language and syntax at key junctures in order to emphasize judiciousness and wisdom in monarchs while downplaying any criticism of the King or of local administration (72-81).

Thorne's discussion of the HM 114 *Piers* is in many respects a response to Bowers, who compares the HM 114 scribe somewhat unfavourably to Scribe D.[21] Even though Scribe 114's knowledge of various texts suggests a level of familiarity with medieval English reading communities and the emerging book trade, Bowers argues that he lacked the business sense

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[21] In their 2010 NCS paper, Stubbs and Mooney identified Scribe D as John Marchant, a man who worked in the chamberlain's office from the 1370s-1415 and died in 1421.

shown by Scribe D and was out of touch with current reading trends ("Professional Readers"

121). According to Bowers and Hanna, Scribe 114 did not know what would sell – he was

copying not by commission or knowledge of popular interest, but on speculation, using what sold

in the past as a guide and therefore producing a random compilation of old-fashioned texts (121;

Hanna, "Scribe" 124). The following sections suggest that Scribe 114 produced this manuscript

with a very different sense from ours about textual relationships.

5.2.1   Production, Collation, and Compilation

Bowers and Hanna do not pursue Scribe 114's choices beyond the possible reasons he

chose to copy the works he did. Neither explores the question of why the works in HM 114 were

compiled together, even though Bowers in particular clearly characterizes this collection of texts

as an intentional compilation, not as an accidental textual grouping. His general assessment of

this scribe is expressed as follows:

> [He] compiled anonymous vernacular texts without discriminating
> much between poetry and prose, between old-fashioned alliterative
> verse and more courtly rhyme-royal compositions. His enterprises
> represent a transitional phase toward the more broadly based book-
> buying public that would become William Caxton's commercial
> clientele. ("Professional Readers" 114)

HM 114 is characterized here as a rather misguided hodge-podge compilation rather than, on the

one hand, a thoughtful and thematic grouping, or on the other, a pile of separate texts that were

never meant to be bound together in the first place. Bowers goes on to argue that Scribe 114's

work catered to a broader, downmarket audience rather than an elite circle of patrons and thus

did not receive the commercial success of Scribe D's professionally-executed manuscripts.

Thorne, in countering Bowers' argument, paraphrases Bowers' negative perspective on the

physical and literary inferiority of HM 114: "its mixture of texts is passe; its presentation

retrogressive" (70). Doyle, Samuels (qtd in Doyle), Hanna, Thorne, and Frank Schaer, however,

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all attribute some level of professionalism and literary knowledge to Scribe 114 (Doyle, "The Manuscripts" 94; Hanna, "Pursuing History" 205; Thorne 71; Schaer 29).

It is true that the physical quality of HM 114 would not be described as professional or high quality. The impression one receives upon handling and reading this manuscript is that of economy: as much information as possible fitted into a small space. Unlike some other professionally produced London manuscripts, HM 114 has no expansive margins or professionally-executed initials or illustrations, nor is it made of high-quality parchment.[22] It is a relatively small, very fat manuscript in which all available space is used to its greatest advantage. Rather than using expensive parchment throughout, Scribe 114 used a single vellum sheet (folded into a quarto) for the outer and inner bifolium of each quire, with paper used for the remaining leaves – a method that he also employed in the Lambeth manuscript. This paper/parchment combination contributes to Hanna's assessment of it as "cheaply made," since paper manuscripts at this time were generally designed for a less affluent readership (Lyall 13).[23] The inner paper/outer parchment booklet construction was designed to protect the inner pages while allowing the booklet to circulate independently and be loaned out as an exemplar.

HM 114's use of paper renders its copies of *Troilus* and *Piers* somewhat unique. Paper is rare in the manuscript record of both poems, perhaps because patrons who could pay for a full copy of *Troilus* or *Piers* likely would not need to scrimp by commissioning the project on paper rather than parchment.[24] The outer vellum leaves of the quires may have been used not just to

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[22] In his survey of *Piers Plowman* manuscripts, Ralph Hanna identifies several features as characteristic of London productions. These include extra spaces to mark a shift in speakers – an expensive and unusual decision in the *Piers* manuscript tradition, and one which occurs almost exclusively in London copies of the poem (*London Literature* 245). Famous contemporary manuscripts produced in London, such as the Ellesmere Chaucer, also show evidence of an interest in marking speakers and a lavish use of parchment space.

[23] Christopher de Hamel argues that the upper classes were not always averse to purchasing paper manuscripts, and cites the Duke of Burgundy's library inventory, which in 1467 contained paper as well as parchment volumes and even lists two paper/parchment manuscripts (16).

[24] Out of the sixteen extant *Troilus* manuscripts, 4 are paper and 2 (including HM 114) are parchment and paper (Edwards, "The Manuscripts" 258). Regarding *Piers Plowman* manuscripts, 7 out of the 18 A texts are written on paper, but paper in the B and C traditions is almost non-existent, thus making HM 114 a unique

protect the inner paper leaves but to give the impression of higher quality – an impression that would have been important if Scribe 114 was loaning out the quires for copying at some point. Thorne insists that HM 114's *Piers Plowman* is "textually sophisticated" and that its literary content bears no relation to its low-quality physical presentation (90). As indicated above, the mutual influence of form and content in a manuscript is an issue with which this chapter is concerned, since one of the larger questions of this study focuses on how the manuscript-as-object influences the interpretation of its content.

HM 114 is a site upon which the form/content interplay is enacted. Upon reading the manuscript itself the modern reader experiences a physical sense of disjointedness as the texture and shape of the page changes every few leaves between paper and parchment. We are accustomed to judging (almost unconsciously) a book's contents and organization by the mere feel of the paper on our fingertips; we quickly rush through the thinner flyleaves until we feel the thicker "real" pages, or we jump to the small collection of glossy photos in the centre of the book before reading the first page. In a limited sense, texture acts as a kind of literary map. We assume that the pages of our books will fall into these categories (flyleaves, photo pages, cover page, etc) and that we will never be surprised by an unexpected texture. However, does our own experience of reading a manuscript like HM 114 indicate anything about the medieval experience of doing so? We are accustomed to the consistency of mass-produced books and judge the book's legitimacy (in part) by that standard. Possibly HM 114's miscellaneous format reinforces, accurately or not, our own perspective of it as a random, rather than intentional, compilation.

An analysis of HM 114's physical form must take account of its booklet format, since this provides important information about the purpose and nature of this manuscript. The three large booklets that make up the codex are constituted as follows: Booklet 1 is *Piers Plowman*

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specimen. Lyall suggests that the relatively high proportion of paper manuscripts in A texts as compared to B or C may be "indicative of the respective audiences of the various recensions of the poem" (14).

(quires 1-8), Booklet 2 is *Mandeville's Travels, Susannah,* and the *Three Kings* excerpt (quires 9-12) and Booklet 3 is *Troilus* and the English translation of the *Epistola* (quires 13-20). Within these larger gatherings are the smaller paper/vellum booklets of which the entire codex is composed, and which would theoretically be loaned out for copying. The theory that bookleting indicates an unplanned manuscript composed of "loaner" texts does not, however, fully account for the inclusion of *Susannah,* the *Three Kings* excerpt*,* and the *Epistola.* These texts were appended to the end of two of the larger booklets: *Susannah* and the *Legend* follow *Mandeville* and could not be circulated separately,[25] and the *Epistola* occurs at the end of the large booklet containing *Troilus* and not in its own smaller paper/parchment quire (although, unlike the other two shorter works, it does begin on a recto rather than a verso). In other words, these shorter texts could not be circulated separately from the longer works.

Whether Scribe 114 initially copied the longer works with the ultimate intent of compiling them together is a question that cannot be decisively answered, but we can put forward some reasonable suppositions based upon the characteristics of the manuscript and of the texts themselves.[26] It appears, for example, that the extra leaves at the end of *Mandeville* were used to append texts that actually supplemented the content of *Mandeville,* even if the empty leaves were not originally intended to be there.[27] In other words, the shorter texts were not, I argue, chosen randomly as space-fillers. The fact that Scribe 114 added shorter texts to both *Mandeville* and *Troilus* indicates either that he expected to add supplementary texts or that he overestimated how many leaves he would require (unsurprising when one considers that his pages vary from 26-36 lines per page) and therefore supplemented the longer works with this

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[25] *Susannah* begins on the verso of *Mandeville*'s last page, and the *Legend* begins on the verso of *Susannah*'s last page, which means that the three poems could not be circulated individually – they all share pages between them.
    [26] One may suggest that the scribe and the compiler were different people. While this is possible, this chapter argues that the manuscript's *mise en page* and its *compilatio* indicate that Scribe 114 was also the compiler. As Hanna argues, the quire counting suggests this as well ("Scribe" 129).
    [27] See Section 5.2.2 for a more extensive discussion on this point.

additional material in order to fill up the last quire. This suggests that he had pre-prepared the

paper/parchment quires for his own use, rather than assembling them as he went along.[28]

Hanna analyzes the scribe's quire counting to show that he "clearly produced the text in

three [large] sections to be joined" ("Scribe" 129). He does not, however, articulate why Scribe

114 would have chosen these three booklets for compilation together, particularly since the three

longer works are certainly of adequate size to have been bound individually.[29] Indeed, Hanna

seems to contradict himself somewhat when he suggests elsewhere that the content of HM 114 is

"perhaps a fortuitous conjunction" ("Radically Chic" 191). Hanna and other critics are vague on

whether HM 114 is random miscellany or a more unified anthology, and therefore the following

section addresses this issue specifically by examining how the manuscript constructs its own

literary genealogy in order to narrate – and thereby control – the Otherness or the "thing"ness

that these texts have in common.

5.2.2   Textual Contents and *Mise en Page*: Booklets or a Book?

Whether Scribe 114 intended to leave extra leaves at the end of *Mandeville* and *Troilus* or

if he simply worked from his pre-set booklets and did not cast off rigorously*,* I argue that his

decision to complete those quires with *Susannah*, the *Three Kings* excerpt and the *Epistola* was

made with the entire book in mind. This section will first examine the inclusion of the three

short works, and then the compilation of the three longer ones.

I argue that these three shorter texts, which could not have circulated separately from the

final quires of *Mandeville* and *Troilus*, were chosen for the purpose of supplementing the three

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[28] Christopher de Hamel indicates that scribal acquisition of pre-prepared gatherings from stationers was common in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, suggesting that "for many scribes [in the later Middle Ages], the task of writing a manuscript must have begun with neat stacks of paper or parchment gatherings, ready folded and ruled"(26). If Scribe 114 had been preparing the quires as he wrote the poems would have been easy to include one or two fewer bifolia in the final booklet of the larger poem, but if he was working from a prepared stock of his own blank booklets, each of which had the same distinct paper/parchment combination (and hadn't planned the lines-per-page very rigorously), he may have found it easier to leave extra space rather than disrupting the foliation. A professional scribe would be more likely to have a stock of prepared booklets.

[29] Short texts are obviously more likely to be joined with others before being bound.

larger texts and creating a cohesive book. It may have been that *Piers, Mandeville*, and *Troilus* were in fact commissioned and that Scribe 114 used the leftover pages to highlight some of the commonalities among the three texts. For example, one of the main reasons for the inclusion of the *Three Kings* was very likely its description of gardens and balms in Egypt, because most manuscripts of the Middle English version of *Mandeville* lack the description of Egypt included in the Anglo-Norman text (Hanna, "Scribe" 122).[30] Scribe 114 was not copying mindlessly; he was aware of the missing sections in his English version and in the absence of a correct exemplar he provided the missing information (or something similar to it) by drawing upon his knowledge of *The Legend of Three Kings*[31] which he had already copied in Lambeth. In Frank Schaer's introduction to his edition of *Three Kings*, he suggests that Scribe 114 may have had his own exemplar for this text, partly because the inclusion of *Three Kings* in Lambeth was an unusual choice (possibly a special commission), and partly because the HM 114 text follows Lambeth quite closely until the end where extraneous sentences are introduced. Schaer states that "these different responses show that the scribe was capable of copying the same text quite differently on different occasions" (29). This also shows that he was very likely copying from the same exemplar.

Although several critics have identified the "Egypt gap" as the reason for the *Three Kings* excerpt being included in HM 114, relatively little attention has been paid to *Susannah,* even though it directly follows *Mandeville.* With the *Three Kings* providing supplementary Egyptian information, one would assume the scribe would copy it directly after *Mandeville* rather than introducing another poem in between them. *Susannah* is a vernacular version of Chapter 13 of the Vulgate's Book of Daniel, which tells the story of how lecherous and elderly judges try to seduce the "sotil and sage" (l.14) Susannah, who is married to Joachim, a "Jeuw jentil" who was

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[30] See Seymour (2002, 1966) and Higgins 104-106 for further information regarding the transmission of *Mandeville* and the "Egypt-gap."

[31] This text was a translation of John of Hildesheim's *Historia Trium Regum,* dated between 1350-1375.

"lele in his lawe" (l.2-3). The righteousness of Susannah and Joachim save them in the end, without Susannah having to dispute the laws that allegedly condemn her. *Susannah* was a well-known story in the Middle Ages and a copy of it is included in both the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts, two of the largest extant Middle English compilations. Edwards argues that Simeon's *compilatio,* and in particular its rearrangement of the texts surrounding *Susannah,* highlights thematic affinities among sections of the manuscript by emphasizing "female devotional figures who provide models of Christian conduct, and who, by their submission to Divine Will, enable the triumph of that Will" ("Vernon Romances" 167). The *compilatio* of HM 114 performs a similar function, but to a different end. Instead of compiling texts in order to showcase female spiritual exempla, Scribe 114 made choices that were practical (texts provided information that supplement other texts), but which also manifested the disconcerting and unavoidable Otherness of women – the attraction of the strange and exotic. Women may be the passive objects of a male gaze, but their very passivity functions as power when that gaze disrupts the stability of the men holding it, whether those men are literary characters or the reader himself. Is Susannah an example of a woman who is suitably submissive, or seductively disruptive? Is she, in other words, an object or a thing? *Susannah's* inclusion in this manuscript draws attention to the underlying theme of woman-as-Other in HM 114's other works.

   Susannah opens with a stanza introducing the orchard/garden Joachim owns, which is clearly presented as a symbol of Joachim's wealth and success.[32] This is followed by an extensive description (lines 66-117) of the plants and birds in the garden, in which Susan wanders and then bathes (thus becoming the object of the judges' lecherous gazes):

> In the seson of somere, with Sibell and Jone,
> Heo greithed hire til hire gardin, that growed so grene…

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[32] Lines 27-30 introduce the garden: "He hedde an orchard newe that neighed wel nere / That Jewes with Joachim priveliche gon playe;/ For he [was] real and riche of rentes ever rere,/Honest and avenaunt and honorablest ay."

The fyge and the filbert were fodemed so fayre,
The chirie and the chestein that chosen is of hewe,
Apples and almaundes that honest are of ayre,
Grapes and garnettes gayliche thei grewe…
Fele floures and fruit, frelich of flayre,
With wardons winlich and walshenotes newe,
    Thei waled.
  Over heor hedes gon hyng
  The wince and the wederlyng,
  Spyces speden to spryng
    In erbers enhaled. (66-67, 92-104)

The fecundity of the garden (the description of its birds, trees, fruits, and spices) aligns

Joachim's wealth with Susannah's sexuality and fertility. In the excerpt above the garden is

depicted as flourishing and "grene," with its fertility emphasized in the mouthwatering

description of its many fruits. The last two lines suggest that this fertility is almost uncontrolled:

the spices "speden to spryng" (hasten to grow) in such a fragrant place. The garden's sexual

associations are further suggested in the following stanza, in which Susannah disrobes after

verifying that she and her ladies are alone in the arbour: "Als this schaply thing yede in hire

yarde / That was hir hosbondes and hire…Forthi the wyf werp of hir wedes unwerde" (118-

119,124). As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the common medieval deployments of "thing"

vocabulary is with reference to female sexuality.[33] In the lines cited, Susannah is a "schaply

thing" wandering in a garden that is jointly owned by her and her husband, thus the garden

becomes associated with her body and her sexuality. As she dismisses her attendants and

unguardedly ("unwerde") disrobes, the reader's gaze coincides with the gaze of the lecherous

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[33] The use of the word "thing" in this line seems intentional, since alliterative practice dictates that "thing" here should be replaced with a word beginning with "y". The notes to the TEAMS edition of the poem state that F.J.Amours' edition emends "thing" to "ying" (meaning "young person") in order to correct the alliteration (Peck, note 118). One of the extant manuscripts (Cotton Caligula Aii) reads "Als this yonge yepply yede in hir yerde" – apparently the Cotton scribe was interested in correcting the alliteration as well. However, the use of "thing" as a noun paired with an adjective is much more common than the use of "ying." The *MED* only attests to the usage of "ying" as an adjective, with no examples of the noun being implied. However, the *MED*'s definition of the word "thing" in the corresponds much more closely to the ambivalent figure of Susannah. Under definition four we read: "(c) used with adj. modifier as a term of affection, tenderness, pity, etc. for an innocent or a socially dependent person, esp. a maiden, child, or virtuous wife; also used of an angel with childlike form; swete (tender, yong, etc.) ~; (d) used with pejorative adj. or phrase, as a term of disparagement for a person, devil, personified animal, etc."

judges watching her, rather than with Susannah's own perspective. In such moments, Susannah becomes a titillating figure rather than a spiritual model.

The garden description in *Susannah* finds an echo in the description of the Egyptian gardens in the *Three Kings* excerpt which follows it, but in the *Three Kings* the sexual implications are absent and Christianity is introduced:

> And in þe same place wher our Lady dwelled with her child is now the gardyn of bawme…And in that same gardyn bene .vij. wellis of noble water of which our Lady was wont whan she dwellid þere to take and to wesshe her child and her clothes and also bathe hym. And bycause of tho wellis þat gardyn is opyn, vnwallyd and vnclosyd. And in that gardyn growyn busshys in manere as busshes of rosers, of the which busshis growyn the bawme…and euery busshe haþ a keper in speciall, a Cristynman which be of þe sowdans prisoners, and euery man kepith his busshe as his owne body…And þer may no man kepe tho forseyd busshes of bawme but Cristynmen, for if eny oþir men þan Cristynmen kept hem anon they shold shrynke and dryen vp and dye.[34]

Rather than Susannah bathing in the garden, it is now Mary bathing the infant Jesus, and instead of an enclosed area that recalls the privacy of Susannah's sexuality, this garden is unwalled and open because both Mary and Jesus represent sexual purity (or even asexuality). Righteous Jews own and maintain the garden in *Susannah*, but here it is the Sultan's Christian prisoners who have a green thumb and the garden will dry up if someone other than a Christian cares for the plants. The issue of righteous heathen, which is present but not emphasized in *Susannah*, is one of the central problems in *Piers Plowman,* the first text in the manuscript.[35] The *Three Kings* segment following *Susannah* avoids the issue by emphasizing the role of Christians in caring for the garden (even though, realistically, there would have been no "Christians" when Christ was an infant). These contrasts between the treatment of the garden in *Susannah* and the *Three Kings*

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[34] Passage taken from Shaer's edition of Lambeth (p.81, lines 9-18), with HM 114's minor variants silently incorporated.

[35] Indeed, it seems likely that the A text of *Piers* was halted because Langland did not know how to handle the issue of the righteous heathen.

present the latter text as an answer or a corrective to the implications of the righteous heathen –

the paradox of the Christian "Other" – in *Susannah*.

One may therefore ask why *Susannah* was included at all, if its tenets are tempered or

qualified by the *Three Kings,* particularly if the *Three Kings* alone provides the needed

information to supplement the defective *Mandeville*. One possible answer may certainly be that

Susannah is, like the *Three Kings,* a Biblical adaptation and, moreover, a popular exemplum.

However, another argument is that Scribe 114 understood *Susannah* to be set in Egypt as well

and therefore felt that *Susannah*'s garden and orchard descriptions would be just as useful in this

manuscript as the *Three Kings'* description of Egyptian balms. To accept this idea, we must first

deal with the fact that *Susannah* announces itself as set in Babylon, not Egypt. This is, of course,

very likely why no critics (to my knowledge) have noted its possible connection to the "Egypt-

gap" *Mandeville*. The key to resolving this problem is to recognize that Mandeville refers to two

different Babylons in his narrative: one was the Babylon now known as Iraq, which he refers to

as Babylon the Great and which was part of the Persian Empire; the second was Babylon the

Less, which was the early medieval name of a district in Old Cairo (P. Hammond 132; Pearsall,

Piers Plowman 148). *Mandeville*'s references to the Cairo-Babylon clearly indicate that it is part

of Egypt, since it is identified as the place to which the holy family fled. In the *Three Kings*

excerpt, the author clarifies that "the place wher they [the holy family] dwellyd [in Egypt] was

ny þe citee of Babyloyne and Alchaye" (80-81, lines 20-21), a confusing statement if one is

thinking of Babylon the Great but which makes sense in reference to Babylon the Less.

This "doubling" of Babylon in the medieval world is, I would argue, one reason for

Susannah's inclusion in HM 114, and particularly its place directly after *Mandeville's Travels*;

Scribe 114 noted that *Susannah* is set in Babylon and associated that with the Cairo-Babylon that

Mandeville describes. We are already aware that he knew enough of *Mandeville*'s contents to

recognize that his exemplar was missing information, and therefore it is reasonable to assume that he would be familiar with the two Babylons. In any case, he understood both *Susannah* and the *Three Kings* excerpt to contain information about Egyptian plants and herbs – information missing from *Mandeville* – and therefore appended them to *Mandeville*. Scribe 114 is therefore presenting to the reader evidence that not only improves the reading experience, but also showcases his own knowledge. Because he was aware of the gap in the *Mandeville* he copied, he added two additional stories set in the same region as the missing material and containing comparable information. The extra leaves in *Mandeville* were not used as scrap vellum/paper upon which the scribe copied whatever shorter texts he happened upon at the time; they were used to complete or extend his version of *Mandeville*. Just as Chaucerian writers exerted control over Chaucer the Author by supplementing/substituting his canon, Scribe 114 controls his "original" text by adding to it and filling in the gaps. By doing so, he essentially reinterprets or rewrites specific aspects of *Mandeville.*

Susannah's connection to other texts in HM 114 is not limited to *Mandeville* and the *Three Kings*. In some of its key themes it also echoes *Troilus and Criseyde,* which makes up most of the final large fascicle in the manuscript. As the following paragraphs will suggest, *Susannah*'s thematic connections to both *Troilus* and the *Three Kings* draw attention to the ambivalent status of women, thereby connecting the Otherness of exotic lands like Babylon, Troy, and Egypt to the Otherness or the thingness of women themselves. The thematic connections between *Susannah* and *Troilus* are the clearest. Both poems concern a woman, loved by a good man, who becomes the object of seduction by someone else. Both women are presented as "righteous" in some sense, although both stories are set in pre-Christian times and thus the reader must negotiate, like Langland's Dreamer, the problematic issue of righteous heathen. Their righteousness, however, is tested by attempted seduction; in simplified terms,

Susannah passes the test and Criseyde does not. The narrative of seduction is far more complex in *Troilus* than it is in *Susannah*, but in both texts the issue of culpability and the moral implications of each woman's actions cause the reader to question the criteria by which we judge female sexual agency and whether such agency is morally acceptable. When we learn that Troilus has been cast down from the top of Fortune's wheel to be replaced by Diomede (4.8-14), is Criseyde still held accountable for her choice? Does Susannah's decision to send her attendants away and bathe alone in her garden stain her virtuous character because it elicits the lust of the judges watching her? Although she bathes "in hire yarde / That was hir hosbonde's and hire" and believes that "folk be faren from us" (118-120), the scene is strikingly reminiscent of the David and Bathsheba story, in which King David sees a beautiful married woman bathing on a rooftop and has her brought to his rooms.

David's lustful gaze upon Bathsheba was a common subject in medieval illustrations and functioned both as a moral exemplum and as titillating attraction for readers (Veldman 215). Given the wide recognition of the story, and this scene in particular, I would argue that the figure of Bathsheba, as the exotic, unattainable, "Other" (in all senses) woman, haunts the texts of HM 114. The questions underlying the David and Bathsheba story – questions of the character of femininity, culpability for sin, and the influence of a woman on man's behavior – form one thread connecting *Susannah, Troilus and Criseyde,* and the *Three Kings.* Certainly there is some ambivalence even in Bathsheba's medieval construction. Monica Ann Walker Vadillo suggests that such ambivalence is present in some medieval iconography, arguing that Bathsheba's portrayal in French illuminated manuscripts of the Penitential Psalms "could have a multilayered reading ranging from the prefiguration of the Church or the innocent object of David's lust to the seductress that made King David sin and even be a warning against vanity" (Walker Vadillo n.p.). Did readers ask a similar question about Susannah? The *Ancrene Wisse* construes

Bathesheba solely as a seductress, condemning her as representative of women who reveal

themselves in men's sight, thereby causing holy men to fall into the sins of lust and adultery:

> Likewise Bathsheba, because she uncovered herself in David's
> sight, she made him sin with her, as holy a king as he was and
> God's prophet. (2.81-82)
> For all the three sins which I spoke of last, and all the evil of Dinah
> that I spoke of above, all [of it] came not because the women
> looked foolishly on men, but because they uncovered themselves
> in man's eye-sight and did whereby they might fall into sin. This is
> a terrifying word to women that reveal themselves to the eyes of
> men.
> (*Ancrene Wisse* 2.95-101)

The threat represented by Bathsheba (and by extension, women in general) is not that of stupidity

or foolishness, but of passivity – one of qualities usually desired in a woman. Women who allow

themselves to be objectified by men are held responsible for such objectification. Although the

Biblical story presents Bathsheba as a passive subject to David's lust, the medieval

understanding of her as evident in the *Ancrene Wisse* equates this kind of unguarded passivity

(bathing in the open) with an intentionally titillating striptease.

The interpretive vacillation between Bathsheba as innocent and passive or as powerful

and seductive resonates with the ethical uncertainty inherent in the choices of Criseyde and even

Susannah. Criseyde's sexual union with Troilus was largely the result of Troilus' manipulation,

but her subsequent shift in allegiance to Diomede in what she felt were extenuating

circumstances renders her, to some readers, as guilty of disloyalty as if she had actively seduced

Troilus and then discarded him. Her passivity in the face of Troilus and Diomedes' sexual

initiative and the question of whether Fortune fated her choice to be are issues that make her

actions questionable but certainly not guiltless (after all, the inevitability of Judas' choice to

betray Christ did not mitigate his culpability).[36] Although the Biblical *Susannah* would not

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[36] The traitorous actions of Criseyde's father are perhaps included in the poem in order to predispose the reader to interpret Criseyde's own actions as another kind of treachery.

normally be subject to scrutiny, its compilation with *Troilus* and the *Three Kings* (a fallen woman in the former, and the Madonna in the latter) places it in a framework of moral uncertainty and ambivalence about femininity.

These texts therefore form their own small-scale intertextual genealogy – they are part of one textual family or literary tradition. The general themes they share are primarily the association between the garden setting and sexual purity, a conventional association yet one that is complicated by the compilation of these texts together. Underlying these conventional ideas is the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of the overly sexualized "Eastern" woman and the difficulty of assigning women in general to one kind of category. Woman-as-Other becomes Woman-as-Thing in HM 114's texts – thing as an essentially physical sexual object, and thing as an unclassifiable and ambivalent entity. Indeed, both Criseyde and Susannah are characterized as exceeding description – as things. Criseyde's "natyf beautee" was so "aungellyk" that "lyk a thing immortal semed she" (1.101-102) and Susannah is described as a "schaply thing" (118).

Part of the thingness of a woman is the issue of whether her passivity renders her appropriately subservient or whether it actually increases her control over the male gaze that supposedly controls her. One of the questions implicitly posed by HM 114's *compilatio* is that of who is passive (the object) and who is active (the subject) and how this translates into power relations. Susannah's passive role at first appears the least complicated. She disrobes when she believes she is alone, unintentionally exposing herself to the gaze of the lecherous judges. In her subsequent trial, she becomes even more passive in the face of male authority, to the extent that she does not defend herself and thus leaves her actions open to question.[37] Criseyde is very much

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[37] I would note here that the character of Meed in *Piers Plowman* also shares with Criseyde, Susannah, and Bathsheba a passivity that renders her moral nature questionable. Meed's marriage is negotiated and changed by everyone surrounding her, while she herself stays mostly silent. Her moral character is disputed by Holy Church and Theology, the former of which condemns her as an unprincipled bastard while the latter argues that she is legitimate and not responsible for the actions taken on her behalf. While Meed's position as an allegorical figure makes her a different example from Criseyde and Susannah, her passivity, her influence over the men around her, and her questionable morality are all elements that link her with these other characters. Meed is certainly one of the more

a passive object to both Troilus and Diomede, appearing to make choices simply in response to the actions of both men.[38] However, both Criseyde and Susannah ultimately manifest their passivity as control. Troilus, Diomede, and the lecherous judges attempt to define these women by framing them within a masculine gaze, but instead they are compromised by the sexual desire that their own gaze elicits. In disrobing in her garden, Susannah has a far greater influence upon the judges than they have upon her when she is brought to trial for adultery. Her refusal to speak in her own defense or to argue against the word of the judges results in her freedom. Her passivity therefore is her way of exerting control over the situation and maintaining her integrity.

Holly Crocker's discussion of feminine passivity in the *Merchant's Tale* resonates with the duality inherent in the behavior of both Criseyde and Susannah:

> May's conduct does not shift from passive to active; instead, her
> behavior demonstrates that feminine passivity always requires
> agency...May uses agency to maintain the appearance of passivity.
> When she shows that the difference between passivity and agency
> is only a matter of display, May takes away the ability for men to
> differentiate themselves from one another, or from women.
> (Crocker 179)

Passivity, for women, is therefore a path to greater influence and control over their own lives. One of the best examples of this is the Virgin Mary, whose passivity in the face of God's command (agreeing to become divinely impregnated) resulted in her becoming one of the most revered female figures in history. This is not to suggest that Mary intentionally set such a goal for herself, or that a medieval audience would assume such a thing. Rather, I argue that Mary's passivity led to a change in status that occurred because of how *others* saw her, regardless of any intent on her part. Objectification, which is usually construed as control, functioned to imbue her (or her literary representations) with power; Mary as a passive object therefore becomes aligned

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well-known figures from *Piers Plowman,* in part because she was modeled after Edward III's mistress, Alice Perrers.
    [38] The issue of Troilus' passivity in the face of Pandarus' agency further complicates these ideas.

with the divine unknown. In the *Three Kings* excerpt, for example, Mary is submissively led by Joseph into Egypt, but the passage only briefly glances at Joseph, focusing instead on Mary, Jesus, and the garden, with Mary as the central figure.[39] Female passivity has traditionally been a desirable quality in what we would now define (somewhat anachronistically) as misogynistic societies, but the combination of texts in HM 114 presents the desirable quality of female passivity as something that can also compromise men. Women are never fully subordinate to one category and never fully subject to masculine narratives and the masculine gaze.

HM 114 concludes with a forbidding and ostentatiously powerful masculine narrative: a letter from the devil. The *Epistola Luciferi Ad Cleros* has not received much attention thus far in this discussion. It is the final text of HM 114, included in the last quire of *Troilus and Criseyde*, and has been largely ignored in Middle English scholarship.[40] Such disregard is almost understandable. This Middle English translation of Peter Ceffon's original Latin text is unattested anywhere else, seems to have nothing to do with the other works in the manuscript, and is quite short. It is a satirical, anticlerical piece that seems rather out of place in this compilation, particularly since the English is so poor and convoluted. Robert Raymo, who produced the only edition of this version, laments that its "occasional felicities of word and phrase are lost amidst the wild profusion of sprawling and structureless sentences" (235). The evidence of *Piers* and *Troilus* indicates that Scribe 114 has some skill in expression, and therefore we must ask why this awkwardly worded text was not "edited" as the others were. Since it is included at the end of the last quire of *Troilus* the *Epistola* translation must have been copied after Scribe 114 copied *Troilus*, thus disallowing the possibility that this text was one of

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[39] It is an interesting re-creation of humanity's origins: a male and a female in a perfect, almost supernatural, garden. However, the sinful Eve is not removed or corrected. Instead, Adam is replaced by the perfected Jesus and Mary takes the role of Eve. This new Eve is not the active woman who urges Adam to taste the fruit; instead, she is the ultimate model of female passivity as she accepts divine impregnation and follows her husband to foreign lands.

[40] With the notable exception of Raymo's edition (1969).

the scribe's earlier, less polished efforts. I would suggest three different reasons for the *Epistola*'s inclusion here and its tedious style: the style itself contributes to the satire that the author is making upon the pomposity of clerics and perhaps the emptiness of legal jargon; Scribe 114 was copying this text in haste and did not have the time for the significant revision required; or the person who translated Ceffons' text into Middle English was Scribe 114 himself, who then included his own humble work at the end of a manuscript containing much more well-known texts. These are, of course, speculative suggestions based upon what HM 114 tells us of Scribe 114's skills, as discussed above. Whatever the case, we know that the *Epistola* is treated somewhat differently from the other texts. In contrast to the scribe's unique treatment of *Piers Plowman,* the *Epistola*'s awkward and tedious style is not amended (or perhaps is simply the outcome of a rough and unfaithful translation of the Latin[41]), there are no running headers,[42] and its genre (a letter in the form of a charter) is unique in the manuscript.

The fact that the *Epistola* appears so distinct (and perhaps out of place) from the rest of HM 114 may encourage us to reframe our perspective on this text and the whole manuscript: what connects it to the rest of the HM 114 "family"? What generic (or genealogical) ties does it have to its companion texts? I argue that it connects the end of the manuscript to its beginning in *Piers Plowman*, thus reinforcing the manuscript's unity.[43] *Piers Plowman* is not only the first text in the manuscript, it is also the only text that is codicologically independent; on its own it forms one of the three larger booklets and ends on a verso. Thematically, however, it has commonalities with the five other works in HM 114, including the *Epistola.* Out of all the texts, *Piers* is the one that bears the clearest relationship to the *Epistola* in that they are both highly

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[41] This option is possible, but strikes me as unlikely. Patricia Bart describes the scribe as having "a level of Latinity high enough to interpolate Latin quotations into his text which are found in no other surviving manuscript" (Bart n.p.).

[42] See pages 168-171 below for a discussion of the manuscript's *mise en page.*

[43] Three of the four poems in Cotton Nero A.x (*Pearl, Patience,* and *Sir Gawain*) use a similar technique internally; they use common phrases to tie the poem's end to its beginning.

allegorical and both play with legal vocabulary for satiric or moral effect. More specifically, both

texts filter allegory through the lens of documentary legal practices and land ownership.[44] The

Epistola presents itself as a letter from Lucifer to the earthly clerics under his authority, and

somewhat models itself after the Pauline Epistles:

> Lucifer lord & prince of þe depe donioun of derkenes, Rewlour of þe
> regne of þe infernall empire, kyng of þe cuntre of cumb bryd caytifs
> Justise & Juge of all Geheniall subiectes, duke of þe dale of dyssese
> heer of þe erytage of hell, to all our dere leef & worthi to be lovyd
> felawes breþerin and childryn of pryde vniuersall & singuler wi þe
> froyte of all fals nes fulfillyd of is dayes cherche.   (lines 1-6)[45]

Lucifer's ownership of a variety of allegorical lands and the effort made to incorporate

alliteration into the recitation corresponds generally to what Andrew Galloway calls a "literary

tradition of allegorical territories" (*Penn Commentary* 259) and specifically to Meed's marriage

charter on folio 9r of the manuscript (B:II:84ff), wherein her lands are listed: "With the erldom

of envye and wrath to gidre / With the forcelet of flityng and jangling out of reson / With the

countre of couetise and al the coost aboute." The transformation of spiritual condition into

earthly ownership is central the *Epistola* and is also a touchstone throughout *Piers Plowman,*

from the opening scene of the field of folk, to Piers' description of the allegorical journey to

Truth, to the Christ-Knight's journey into hell.[46] Allegorical landscapes thus provide a

connecting bridge between the first and last texts in the manuscript.

It is not just the tradition of allegorical territories that connects *Piers* and the *Epistola.*

The two texts also present such allegorical land ownership through a legal lens. Emily Steiner's

work has demonstrated how legal and documentary practices became embedded in literature of

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[44] Emily Steiner has published extensively on *Piers Plowman'*s use of legal and documentary practices (see Steiner 2000, 2002, 2003).

[45] Quotations taken from Robert Raymo's edition of the text.

[46] It is interesting to note that in between these allegorical paths, Will the dreamer just wanders – an activity that is implicitly and explicitly condemned in the poem, and yet which allows him to learn the Christian life of "Dowel". The efficacy of these carefully set out allegorical pathways is therefore continually subjugated to the wandering, directionless travel that Will insists upon maintaining.

the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and how *Piers Plowman* in particular is grounded in a narrative whose signposts are documentary devices – Truth's Pardon, Meed's Charter, Moses's *maundement*, Peace's Patent, and Hawkyn's acquittance. The section in *Piers Plowman* that parallels the land-recitation in the *Epistola* is actually part of Meed's marriage charter, which lists the lands that will pass from her ownership to her new husband's. Scribe 114 draws particular attention to Meed's charter by adding a paraph to the left of the first line ("Wyteth & Wytnesseth that woneth on this erthe") and the word "Chartre" in the right margin.[47] This suggests that he anticipated an interest in how legal or administrative language of possession and ownership could frame spiritual concerns – an interest also reflected in the rather inflated, bureaucratic wording of the *Epistola*. Bryan Davis highlights the satiric use of "documentary" language in Lucifer's letter: "The resemblance between Lucifer's self-designation and such formulaic titles as 'Dei gratia Rex Anglié et Francié et Dominus Hibernié' is unlikely to have been accidental, and the remainder of his salutation echoes formulas of both civil and ecclesiastical letters" (33).

In his edition of the *Epistola,* Robert Raymo posits another possible connection between *Piers* and the *Epistola* aside from their inclusion in one manuscript and their interest in literary and legal fictions. He argues that *Friar Daw's Reply*, a response poem to *Jack Upland*, makes reference to the *Epistola*, calling it "Sathanas pistile."[48] Both of these anticlerical satires have been considered, at one time or another, part of the wider *Piers Plowman* tradition; these types of bluntly politicized anticlerical works are often seen as a mutation of *Piers Plowman*'s much more carefully orthodox yet impassioned call for spiritual reform (Scase, *Anticlericalism* xi).[49]

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[47] My thanks to Dr. Patricia Bart for confirming that the marginalia on this folio and in the manuscript generally does appear to be in Scribe 114's hand.

[48] The lines he cites are: "But good Jak, your grace, where be ye foundid? / Not in Goddis gospel but in Sathanas pistile" (qtd in Raymo, 234)

[49] While distinguishing them from *Piers Plowman* itself, Scase (2007) never demonizes these texts; she discusses in the detail the documentary and legal mechanisms with which these kinds of antifraternal satires aligned themselves.

While the idea of an additional connection between *Piers* and the *Epistola* is attractive and certainly feasible, I am not fully convinced that *Daw's* reference to Satan's "pistile" is actually a nod to the *Epistola* translation. Emily Steiner has shown that the notion of the devil's record and Christ's charter was widespread in English medieval culture in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and argues that Meed's charter in *Piers Plowman* functions as an analogue to the devil's record ("Langland's Documents" 97-99). The relationship between Meed's charter and the devil's record and the close parallels between Meed's charter and the *Epistola* all suggest that the documentary category (charter, letter, record, etc) is less important than the vocabulary within that document. It is therefore possible that "Sathanas pistile" could be in reference to the notion of the devil's record more generally, rather than Lucifer's *Epistola* specifically.

Of all the texts in HM 114, the *Epistola* is the most difficult to read, with its rambling, run-on sentences and convoluted vocabulary, but it is also arguably the most condemning of foreignness and of women – issues that the other texts treat with some ambivalence, as I have discussed above. Babylon, in which *Susannah* is set, is mentioned in the *Epistola* but in the Satanic context suggested by the Book of Revelation. The call to "our worthily bylovid citezeins of our bylovid Babyloyne" on fol. 322r is prefaced several lines earlier, on fol. 321v, by a reference to the Biblical whore of Babylon: "the comen strumpet whiche dyde fornycacion with the kynges and princes of the erthe, turnyd from a modir to a stepmodir, from Cristes spouse to a strayed strumpet, from chaste to a comyn hore, thin olde clennnesse and virginite thow hast broke and destroyed." The text therefore presents Babylon as the ultimate Other: it is opposed to God, to western Christendom, and to any acceptable performance of femininity. There is no veil of passivity here: the power of this "strumpet" lies in her sexual agency. While this agency is metaphorical, the use of sexuality to illustrate evil is illuminating. Unlike *Piers Plowman*'s Lady Meed, whose latent seductiveness is mitigated by her apparent passivity, or Susannah, whose

submissiveness allows her to exert power, the association of women with sexuality and evil is very clear here and is reinforced later (fol. 324v) when Lucifer discusses at length his "bylovyd doghtris" – Simony, Pride, Covetousness, Ire, Envy, Lechery, Fraud, Deceit, and other varied sins. Unlike Langland, who usually depicts sinful allegorical figures such as Fals, Favel, Liar, and the deadly sins as male, the writer of the *Epistola* presents them as not just female, but as daughters of Satan. The threat of reproduction – of the core of genealogy itself – is manifest in these daughters, who are the spawn of the devil, and in the whore of Babylon, whose overwhelming sexuality not only destroys the spiritual state of the men she seduces but who theoretically can give birth to more of her own kind. The daughters' names and the words "strumpets," "hores," and "harlotes" earlier are included in the few rubricated words that are not sentence-headers, a choice that suggests their importance.

The *Epistola*, in its awkward and unapologetic anticlericalism, brings characteristics common to the other HM 114 texts to their extremes: the deft legal allusions in *Piers Plowman* become the worst of convoluted legal language in the *Epistola; Susannah, Piers Plowman,* and *Troilus* obliquely question feminine morality while the *Epistola* uses femininity to represent evil; while the anticlericalism in *Piers* is more or less diplomatic, it is explicit in the very title of the *Epistola.* Its blunt, awkward style and rambling prose become even more pronounced in contrast to the texts preceding it, nearly all of which are presented in a way that highlights their formal structure. This brief work therefore functions as a rather punchy conclusion to the manuscript, and one that tends to close off the interpretive possibilities of the other texts while allowing them to retain their titillating attraction.

Thus far I have discussed how the three shorter works in HM 114 lend coherence and unity to the codex as a whole by highlighting key connections to and among the long works – *Piers Plowman, Mandeville's Travels,* and *Troilus and Criseyde.* I have suggested that these

three larger texts form the foundation of the manuscript while the shorter works supplement that foundation, filling in the physical and literary gaps of HM 114. However, the question of why the three long texts were chosen in the first place has not been addressed. One of the most obvious reasons is that these works were popular and very widely disseminated, and therefore Scribe 114 could expect both a general interest in them and relatively easy access to exemplars – indeed, in the case of *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Piers Plowman*, the scribe very likely had access to more than one copy of the poem.[50] In his article on *Troilus'* manuscript transmission, Hanna argues that the nature of *Troilus* as one continuous poem (as opposed to a divisible work such as the *Canterbury Tales*) meant that scribes who began copying it must have anticipated having access to all parts of the text. Given this consideration, Hanna posits a kind of "lending library" of *Troilus* booklets, a "commercial supplier who provided the poem in sections to individual scribes" (183). This system would rely upon a consistent demand for *Troilus* and the scribes' interest in obtaining the remaining booklets in order to complete their commission. The wide dissemination of *Troilus* surely indicates that not only was the text popular, but its popularity was assured enough to support the booklet "library" system that Hanna proposes. Certainly the wide dissemination of both *Mandeville* and *Piers* indicates a similar level of popularity as *Troilus,* though perhaps not always a similar audience. The popularity of these three texts continued throughout much of the fifteenth century,[51] thus rendering questionable the assumption that HM 114 was an old-fashioned, out of date compilation.

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[50] As has already been discussed, the HM 114 *Piers* is a unique conflation of the poem's three versions. HM's version of *Troilus* is the only "full" text of the poem, and Hanna indicates that the scribe obtained the full version "by devious (but mechanical and easily explainable) means" ("Manuscripts and Transmission" 174).

[51] The sheer number of early to mid-fifteenth century manuscripts of these three works speaks to their ongoing popularity. The popularity of *Troilus*, for example, is evident in the fact that it was one of the earliest Middle English works to be printed, and it was frequently printed on its own until the mid-sixteenth century (Edwards, "Manuscript to Print" n.p.). The popularity of *Mandeville* in England actually increased after 1400; "fresh recastings of it (in prose and verse) show that its vogue was great both as a work of 'lust' and as one of 'lore'" (Moseley 182).

I argue that, beyond reasons of popularity, the choice to copy and compile these three texts indicates an impulse to seek the origins of spiritual authority and the genealogy of morality. The three works form a tripartite literary structure within the manuscript: *Piers* focuses on how to live the Christian life by asking whose spiritual teachings are valid, what kind of spiritual and earthly labour should one perform, etc; *Mandeville* provides accounts of a Christian's encounter with supposedly primitive heathen cultures whose practices exist outside the physical and moral boundaries of Christianity; and *Troilus* is set in what medieval Christians considered the birthplace of their own civilization and deals with pre-Christian morality. Each of the three texts examines moral accountability and spiritual identity and whether these can exist without adequate institutional guidance. The order of the three larger works creates a reverse cultural genealogy in which *Piers* represents contemporary Christian life, *Mandeville* describes contemporary primitive cultures outside of Christendom, and *Troilus* represents pre-Christian time. The questions of correct moral action, moral authority, and the causation behind both sin and success that are raised in *Piers, Mandeville,* and *Troilus* are also key elements in the *Three Kings, Susannah,* and the *Epistola.* Just as the Chaucerian tradition functioned as a Derridean supplement to Chaucer's own works, the shorter texts in HM 114 supplement the canonical works they accompany not simply by adding to them but by suggesting alternate readings and bringing implied questions to the surface.

The textual contents of HM 114 are therefore not as disparate as they first appear. The *mise en page* of the manuscript itself indicates that it was indeed created to be a unified codex. The running headers are the most immediately noticeable feature and these are written with remarkable consistency in the top margin of each page.[52] Using red ink, the scribe has summarized each work's title in his own way. With the exception of the rubricated header/title of "Piers Ploghman" on the first page of the poem, *Piers Plowman* is not titled in the headers but

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[52] With the exception of the last several leaves of the manuscript, which contain the *Epistola*.

has "passus" in the verso top margins and the passus number (in Roman numerals or written out in Latin) in the right; *Mandeville's Travels* has "mawn" in the verso top margins and "devyle" on the right rectos; *Susannah* has "Susanne" in both top margins; the excerpt from the *Three Kings* has "Joseph"; and *Troilus and Criseyde* is headed by "Troylus" on the verso sides and the book number on the rectos. Scribe 114's choices with respect to these headers are important indicators of his assumptions about his readership, his approach to each text, and the value he places on consistency.

The first important point to note regarding the headers is that the titles of all works except *Piers* (and the *Epistola,* which does not have headers and may have been the last text added) have been abbreviated into proper names: Mawndevyle, Susanne, Joseph, and Troylus. *Mandeville*'s headers, as noted above, are split between the verso and recto sides of the facing leaves ("mawn" and "devyle") in such a way that emphasizes the continuity between the pages but also draws attention to the "Other" origins with which *Mandeville* is preoccupied – not just the strange alterity of the people he encounters, but the Eastern association with Satan, the ultimate Other.[53] There is no other name-splitting of this sort in the manuscript; the scribe does not even do it for the texts in which it would make sense to spread the names across the facing leaves, such as *Troilus and Criseyde* or *Susannah* (which the scribe refers to as "the storye of Susane & Danyell" in his explicit, a somewhat confusing acknowledgement of *Susannah*'s Biblical source in the Book of Daniel). Scribe 114 simply focuses on one central figure in each

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[53] The splitting of "Mandeville" into "mawn" and "devyle" (rather than the "Maundevyle" spelling used at the beginning of the text) also draws attention to the possibility of identifying two separate words in his name: "mawn" is strikingly close to "maw" (the Middle English word for mouth or gut) and "devyle" is self-explanatory. This word-splitting therefore allows one to see the devil's maw in the running headers of the text. It seems obvious that the scribe intended us to read "Mandeville" and not the devil's mouth, but the ambiguity inherent in splitting the word is still present. The notion of the devil's mouth calls to mind the grotesques one finds in the margins of manuscripts such as the Luttrell Psalter and the Smithfield Decretals. These images are an implied threat to bodily unity or integrity, and could be understood as a reaction to the bodily purity that genealogy implies. Nurith Kenaan-Kedar states that a grotesque image "ignores the closed, smooth and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depth" (15).

text and either repeats that name on both sides of the header or (where necessary) provides the book or passus number of the poem to aid the reader in navigating the text. He does not draw attention to the genre of these works. For example, in the headers he refers to "the storye of Susane & Danyell" as "Susanne" rather than the "pistil" (i.e. epistle) of Susan, and the *Three Kings* is not presented as an excerpt but as a text on its own, entitled "Joseph." The *Three Kings* was a popular work in the later Middle Ages, which may be somewhat surprising to us given its current obscurity, and therefore Scribe 114 may have either expected his readers to identify the larger source of "Joseph" or he was not concerned that the original be taken into account since the excerpt served his primary purpose.

The use of "Joseph" in the running headers is a bit confusing, since it bears no relation to the source text's overall topic (the three kings of Cologne) and does not reflect the content of the excerpt, which focuses on Mary's life in the Egyptian garden. Schaer suggests that "Joseph" is the running header simply because it is in the first line of the excerpt (28). While this is certainly feasible, I am not fully convinced by this explanation. Scribe 114 knew the entire text of the *Three Kings* because he had already copied it in the Lambeth manuscript, and he knew enough about it to select a portion that would correspond with the missing section of *Mandeville's Travels*. It therefore seems unlikely that he would title the excerpt based only upon the name he saw in the first line; such a choice suggests a copyist who was unaware of textual contents and simply copying by rote, which we know was not the case with this scribe.[54] I propose an alternate possibility that was inspired by my own experience with this manuscript which, while anecdotal, may nevertheless indicate a common literary association. When I was going through the codex and moving between the different texts, I found myself constantly making the same internal correction: each time I saw "Joseph" I associated it with the Middle English version of

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[54] His unique versions of *Piers* and *Mandeville* demonstrate that Scribe 114 did not care overmuch about following his exemplar, and "his two versions [of the *Three Kings*] hardly give the *prima facie* impression of being slavishly faithful copies" (Schaer 30).

the Arthurian tale *Joseph of Arimathea.* The famous Vernon anthology includes *Piers Plowman,*

Susannah, and *Joseph of Arimathea.* Although neither *Joseph of Arimathea* nor *Susannah* are

titled in the Vernon index, *Joseph* does follow *Piers Plowman* directly.[55] *Piers* therefore has

manuscript associations with both *Susannah*[56] and *Joseph of Arimathea* and one of the most

famous manuscript anthologies contains all three, with two of them in succession. It is not

unreasonable to suggest that Scribe 114's running header choice was capitalizing on the currency

of *Joseph of Arimathea,* which had become very popular with printers by the end of the fifteenth

century (Cooper, "Romance After 1400" 697) and which was already connected to *Piers* and

Susannah.

   Scribe 114's choice to include only "Passus" and passus numbers in the headers for *Piers*

Plowman rather than the name of the main character may first appear surprising, given the names

he uses in the other headers and the currency of Piers' name. As discussed in Chapter Four, the

name of Piers Plowman had accrued significant cultural potency in the late fourteenth century

and particularly in the fifteenth, during which many of the *Piers* imitations sprang up. Indeed, in

HM 143, the other manuscript containing both *Piers* and *Troilus,* a fifteenth-century corrector

has erased all occurrences of *Piers* and *Plowman*, likely because the name itself had become

widely known and associated with subversive or heretical ideologies. The circulation that the

name had achieved in the fifteenth century may be one reason why Scribe 114 chose not to

repeat it in the manuscript's headers and focused instead on the organizational aids of passus

numbers. Benson and Blanchfield's survey of *Piers* B-text manuscripts shows that Scribe 114's

choice was not unusual: only one other manuscript aside from HM 114 that uses running

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[55] Serjeantson for a complete transcript of Vernon's index. In his doctoral thesis, Robert Duncan points out that Vernon's binding is medieval so the order of the texts is probably as the compiler intended (12).
    [56] The three manuscript containing both *Susannah* and *Piers* are Vernon (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet.a.1), HM 114, and Pierpont Morgan Library M818.

headers. CUL MS Dd.i.17, although somewhat inconsistent in this practice, has "Piers" in the top margins of versos and "Plowman" on the rectos, boxed in red.[57]

The work done by Russell and Nathan, Hanna, Bowers, Thorne, and Patricia Bart (whose edition of the manuscript is forthcoming) constitutes the majority of scholarship on HM 114. Most of this scholarship focuses on the scribe's treatment of individual texts, rather than the compilation as whole. As earlier noted, unlike famed compilations such as Auchinleck or the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts, HM 114 has not drawn much sustained attention from those scholars whose interest lies with miscellanies and anthologies. Perhaps more surprisingly, it has also not been of much interest to scholars of Chaucer and Langland, whose traditions are viewed as so divergent from one another. The implications of manuscripts such as HM 114 and 143 are perhaps easier to dismiss because these views of Chaucer and Langland are, as the previous chapters suggested, deeply entrenched. Before examining what this intersection of tradition and compilation tells us about how such texts were read, I will discuss the second Langland/Chaucer manuscript, HM 143.

5.3   Huntington Library MS HM 143

As the agreed-upon base manuscript for the *Piers Plowman* C text,[58] HM 143 has played a central role in the editing of *Piers*. However, like HM 114, its pairing of *Piers* and *Troilus* has attracted very little attention. This is an early *Piers* manuscript (dated to around 1400), written in a southwestern Worcestershire dialect very similar to Langland's.[59] The *Troilus* fragment that

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[57] I have not surveyed the running headers (or lack therof) in A texts or C texts.

[58] Pearsall used HM 143 as the copy-text for his 1978 and 2008 editions of the C-text, Russell and Kane used it in their 1997 Athlone edition of C, and Schmidt used it in his 1995 parallel-text edition. Chambers first identified HM 143 as the best copy-text in 1935, although his first encounter with it in 1924 left him with the impression that it was "wretched" (C. Brewer 254).

[59] Bowers suggests that the similarity in dialects and "the closeness of dating between composition and copying, would help to account for the high quality of the text" ("HM 143" 146). It is unclear whether Bowers is

precedes *Piers* is leaves two and seven (ie, the second bifolium) of the first quire of *Troilus and Criseyde.* This fragment is written in one fifteenth-century Anglicana script while the main text of *Piers* is primarily the product of two other scribes (one being a corrector), with a third scribe responsible for erasures. While HM 114 is very simply and inexpensively ornamented, HM 143 was an expensive production with an "ambitious program of decoration [that] suggests a conscientious first edition" (Bowers, *Antagonistic Tradition* 77). The work of three scribes can be identified: Hand 1 was the primary copyist, Hand 2 made improvements, corrections, and commentary, and Hand 3 erased all occurrences of "pers" and "ploughman."[60] In his newly revised edition of the C text, Pearsall describes the Hand 2 corrector/annotator as "erasing and inserting without consulting another exemplar, sometimes making happy guesses, sometimes not" (17). There is some sense of consistency in these interventions, however, since many of them highlight the text's reformist themes without actually asserting any heretical doctrines. Bowers points out that Hand 2 was walking a fine line between heresy and orthodox reform and suggests that this scribe commissioned HM 143 himself and made the corrections and annotations for his own use ("HM 143" 139). Bowers follows other scholars in surmising that Hand 3 (the eraser) may be a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century owner responding to the text's reformist leanings during a time in which reformist thought was much more closely linked to heresy (150-153). Michael Calabrese, however, highlights evidence suggesting that the touch-ups of Hand 3's erasures (re-dabbing bits of ink that had been inadvertently scraped off) were contemporary with the manuscript's production ("Corrections" 196-198).

Unlike HM 114, HM 143 is not considered a compilation manuscript because the only full text it contains is *Piers Plowman*. The copy itself is very good but the erasures, corrections

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referring to the quality of the poem (that is, how closely it is related to the C archetype) or the physical quality of the manuscript itself, although logically it would appear that the former is Bowers' intended meaning.

[60] For more in-depth discussions of HM 143 and its scribes, see Bowers (2005), Grindley (1992), and Calabrese (2005).

and annotations have attracted a great deal of interest by scholars such as John Bowers, Michael Calabrese, and Carl Grindley, cited above, for their value as witnesses to the fifteenth-century reception of *Piers Plowman.* The fragment of *Troilus and Criseyde* was originally pages two and seven of a gathering of eight leaves from another manuscript, a gathering that would have been the first quire of *Troilus.* These pages have been bound at the front as flyleaves, thereby having no apparent relationship to the main collation of HM 143. The treatment of this fragment by scholars provides insight into the gap between medieval and modern reading paradigms and how we as academics are so often defeated by the objects in which we try to see meaning. Perhaps it is the attempt to "see through" things that hinders us when we read texts; in trying to see beyond the thing upon which the text is written, we fail to acknowledge the interpretive context that was ever-present for a medieval reader who had no access to a clean, collated edition. Bill Brown suggests that "we look *through* objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture – above all, what they disclose about *us*) but we only catch a glimpse of things" ("Things" 4). In our efforts to look "through" the manuscript as a whole, to see it as a transparent window into the Text, we avoid encountering its confusing thingness. However, by missing opportunities to acknowledge and investigate those moments in which the object is void of signification – is a Thing – we are also missing signs that indicate the gap between medieval and modern models of reading. As this section will argue, I believe that the *Troilus* flyleaves are a manifestation of that gap, and that the critical dismissal of them may obscure our understanding of how the HM 143 was expected to be read.

There is certainly scholarly interest in the *Piers* portion of HM 143 and what it says about how *Piers Plowman* was produced and read in the Middle Ages. One reason HM 143 is an object of such interest to Langland scholars is that its alterations and erasures "invite us to peer into the processes of the early production of *Piers Plowman*, revealing many of the ways in which the

poem was, and is, always being edited" (Calabrese 172). There has already been excellent work done on HM 143's interventions and therefore this chapter will not address them in any depth. As Bowers, Calabrese and others have shown, the erasures alone certainly invite investigation and Hand 2's 150 alterations and corrections, many of which appear "common-sense" rather than dependent upon an exemplar (Calabrese, "Corrections" 175), offer insight into the assumptions and priorities of this particular scribe. HM 114 attracts interest for similar reasons: the scribe had access to different versions of Langland's poem, and his particular choices – not only in *Piers Plowman* but in the other texts he copied in this manuscript – attest to his assumptions about audience and the literary marketplace. I was initially surprised to find so little critical commentary on the inclusion of the *Troilus* pages in HM 143, but upon further consideration it seems likely that the disinterest in the *Piers/Troilus* pairing is due mainly to two factors: the HM 143 *Troilus* is a fragment, and that fragment is in an anonymous hand unattested elsewhere.[61] This is in contrast to HM 114, in which both *Piers* and *Troilus* are complete and copied by one scribe. To receive these two manuscripts as evidence of a hitherto unrecognized literary stream may seem to be equating apples and oranges. Nevertheless, I would like to explore the implications of the *Piers* and *Troilus* pairing in these particular manuscripts, and to evaluate the role of the HM 143 *Troilus* apart from its current status as a useless, marginalized, broken text.

While the HM 114 *Piers* and *Troilus* are editorially relocated into their separate traditions, where they have taken their places in their manuscript family tree (or are tossed from the tree, as in the case of *Piers*), the HM 143 *Piers* and *Troilus* are treated very differently. The HM 143 *Piers* has significant critical value[62] but its fragment of *Troilus* is generally disregarded. George Russell and George Kane, editors of the Athlone C-Text, identify the fragment briefly in a footnote, indicating somewhat vaguely that it "did not originally belong with the *Piers*

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[61] This hand was unattested, that is, until Simon Horobin's recent identification of it, which I discuss below.
[62] This is in contrast to the value placed on the HM 114 *Piers* which, while an object of interest, has been discarded from the *Piers* manuscript stemma to a great extent.

Plowman manuscript"[63] and the editors of *The Riverside Chaucer* do not even name the

manuscript in their textual notes on *Troilus*.[64] John Bowers describes the fragment as follows:

> HM 143 currently begins as a physical artifact with two leaves of
> Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. These two parchment pages of a
> bifolium, which were 2 and 7 of a gathering of eight leaves from a
> lost manuscript, are bound as fly-leaves and have no relationship to
> the principal collation of the manuscript. ("HM 143" 144)

Carl Grindley, in his excellent study of HM 143's marginalia, does not consider the fragment

particularly relevant to the study of HM 143, although his use of the word "implications" does

acknowledge that the presence of the fragment may be a question that requires further

exploration:

> This fragmentary *Troilus* is not in the same hand or ink as the
> manuscript's *Piers Plowman* C-text, but, judging from the
> appearance of John Russell's signature on both folio i verso and
> 107v, it was an early addition to HM 143, and was incorporated
> into the manuscript no later than the early seventeenth century.
> Since the *Troilus* fragment was obviously not an original feature of
> HM 143, it will not be discussed or commented on in any detail,
> and the implications of its presence will not be discussed in this
> thesis. (5)

Grindley's comments here rest upon some assumptions which may be incorrect, and which are

addressed below. Ralph Hanna, however, is even more adamant than these other scholars about

the uselessness of the *Troilus* fragment in providing evidence for medieval reading

communities. In his 1999 review of Kerby-Fulton and Despres' *Iconography and the*

Professional Reader, he refutes suggestions by both the authors and Anne Middleton that the

inclusion of the fragment of HM 143 is meaningful: "[i]n Huntington Library MS HM 143 (X of

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[63] "At front one paper flyleaf, one early vellum leaf, one early vellum bifolium; at end one early vellum leaf, one modern paper flyleaf. The two single vellum leaves were originally pastedowns. The bifolium containing the Chaucer text did not originally belong with the *Piers Plowman* manuscript" (Russell and Kane, 15).

[64] In their introduction to the manuscript witnesses, the Riverside editors explain that they do not include fragmentary texts in their list of witnesses because they are not of editorial value (1161). They do, however, direct readers to Windeatt's edition of *Troilus*.

C), a bifolium from a *Troilus* manuscript, the first and eighth leaves of its first quire was used *as waste*, for flyleaves in an earlier binding" ("Radically Chic" 191, emphasis his).

Bowers, Grindley, and Russell/Kane all state that the *Troilus* fragment was not originally part of HM 143 and provide little more information on the subject. This statement, however, raises more questions than it answers. How do we judge whether one manuscript in a codex "originally" belonged with another? If it was not an original inclusion, when was it added? Does a text added into a compilation five or ten years after the original text(s) count as original to the compilation, or no? What is the evidence that the *Troilus* fragment was not an original inclusion, and if originality becomes a standard by which to judge a manuscript, how do we then evaluate compilations in general? Since the critics I have cited are focusing upon the *Piers* text, their turn away from the *Troilus* fragment is understandable, but I would now like to reconsider some of the assumptions that are underlying the consensus on these pages.

One example of such underlying assumptions is Bowers' statement (cited above) that the manuscript "currently begins as a physical artifact with two leaves of Chaucer's *Troilus*," a statement that locates the *Troilus* fragment at the material root of the manuscript, a root limited by its physicality and carrying no additional signification. His phrasing suggests that the fragment has no share in the literary value of the text that should naturally transcend the material casing and indicates that he does not see the manuscript's physical form as a source of literary evidence. Within this framework, the "real" beginning of the Book or the Text (as opposed to the physical artifact) is the first page of *Piers Plowman* and the *Troilus* is a false start. Bowers' words, however casually they may have been used, nevertheless indicate larger assumptions held by many scholars of the manuscript: the *Troilus* fragment does not signify the beginning of a book, but merely the first discontinous page of a collection of gatherings. When Bowers dismisses the HM 143 *Troilus* as merely physical or when Hanna refers to it as waste, I

would suggest we are seeing a moment in which scholars encounter the thingness of this manuscript – the site at which the object ceases to reinforce our expectations of it. The following section elaborates upon why we may wish to reconsider the status of the *Troilus* fragment and its relationship to the HM 143 *Piers Plowman*.

5.3.1 A Book in Progress: the *Troilus* Fragment

Some of the same physical features which "thingify" HM 143, which confuse our notions of textual coherence and stability, can also turn us toward a new interpretive model. The inclusion of the *Troilus* fragment is one of those features. For HM 143 and for medieval literature in general, a careful and considered look at the material existence of the manuscript reveals how modern literary criticism alone is often inadequate for understanding medieval texts. Andrew Taylor argues that "textual materialism…call[s] into question the self-contained, self-referential, and stable literary artifact" and cautions against our tendency to automatically subordinate form to content (*Textual Situations* 11). There are several pieces of evidence that converge to support my contention that the *Troilus* pages were not initially intended to function as flyleaves: *Troilus'* contemporary popularity, the identity of the scribe who wrote the HM 143 fragment, Hanna's argument for *Troilus'* booklet circulation, the material evidence of binding and compilation, and examples of other flyleaves. All of these points will be addressed below.

Because *Troilus* is a poem that was frequently produced as a whole rather than excerpted, it is easy to dismiss its manifestation in fragmentary form as random chance. However, Seth Lerer reminds us that *Troilus* was subject to the same anthologizing impulse that characterizes the bulk of medieval literature: "long poems that we consider single entitles were often read as anthologies of a sort, capable of being broken up and rearranged for individual readers' expectations" ("Anthology" 1254). He cites both the *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus* as examples of such poems, but also identifies many obviously anthologistic manuscripts, such as

Vernon and Auchinleck. Many of these anthology-based manuscripts were produced in booklet

format by several copyists, rather than in one long process by one scribe. Cambridge, Trinity

College R.3.21 is an example: several different scribes "collaborated in producing a series of

booklets, individually foliated, which were eventually bound together" (Boffey and Thompson,

288).[65] Book purchasers who wanted to create their own particular anthology did not have to

restrict themselves to working with one scribe; they could, directly or through a stationer or

scribe, source copies of their various desired texts through different copyists and then compile

them together. The booklet format made this relatively easy to do. As the various booklets and

quires were gathered together and before the actual binding occurred, they could be held

together in an "informal" compilation, often stitched into paper wrappings (de Hamel 65). As

was the case with Trinity College R.3.21, it could be some time before all the booklets were

finally brought together and bound.

   We know that several scribes were responsible for HM 143: the main hand of *Piers*

Plowman, the corrector of *Piers* (and the person responsible for the erasures, who may or may

not have been one of the other hands)*,* and the copyist of the *Troilus* fragment. However, we

now know that the *Troilus* copyist was probably well-connected in the scribal community and

was working on a professional level. Simon Horobin recently identified the HM 143 *Troilus*

hand as the scribe of British Library, Additional MS 35287, a *Piers Plowman* B text referred to

by the siglum "M."[66] Furthermore, Horobin argues that the corrector's hand in M is that of

Adam Pinkhurst, whom Linne Mooney famously identified as Doyle and Parkes' Scribe B of the

Trinity Gower and the copyist of both the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts of the

Canterbury Tales.[67] Pinkhurst may have been correcting M to prepare it for use as an exemplar

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[65] Linne Mooney argues that these booklets were purchased and circulated before their compilation together ("Scribes and Booklets" 247)
[66] For his complete argument, please see Horobin (2009).
[67] For the full argument regarding Pinkhurst's identification, please see Mooney (2006).

to be circulated among other copyists, and he may or may not have worked with the M scribe as he corrected the manuscript. Whether or not Pinkhurst and the M scribe worked directly together on M, it is very likely that they knew one another.[68] Horobin's work therefore integrates the *Troilus* fragment into the known networks of late medieval English scribes and manuscripts, a shift that may result in the fragment receiving increased critical interest in the future. These networks function for us much as the literary canon does: they offer a foundation or framework – admittedly a somewhat limited and contrived framework – in which to understand texts that may not fit. Our knowledge of the medieval English scribal community may be limited, but viewing it through these networks provides a starting place from which we can broaden our understanding of a literary marketplace that was vastly different from our own.

Like the other Middle English scribes whose work we have identified, such as Pinkhurst, Scribe D, Hoccleve, the HM 114 scribe, and others, the M scribe appears to have copied works that sold well: *Piers Plowman* and *Troilus and Criseyde.* Even though it was written in the final years of the fourteenth century, *Troilus* was popular well into the fifteenth century and beyond. Twelve out of the sixteen extant *Troilus* manuscripts present *Troilus* alone and it was printed on its own by Caxton in 1483 and Wynkyn de Worde in 1517 – sure signs that the poem was a marketable commodity (Windeatt, *Oxford Guides* 12). Moreover, its circulation was not limited to a courtly audience: by 1400 it had been excerpted and cited in at least one devotional compilation, the *Disce Mori*.[69] Alexandra Gillespie discusses how various late medieval and early modern writers compared Troilus' bad luck in love with Aristotle and Virgil, thus incorporating *Troilus and Criseyde* into the omnipresent classical tradition through both the

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[68] The evidence we have gleaned thus far from Middle English literary manuscripts indicates that the scribes who produced these texts belonged to a relatively small, close-knit community. The sharing of exemplars and other resources would have been common because, as Taylor points out, "stationers and scriveners in London or Oxford were squeezed into a few streets, often cheek-by-jowl with parchment makers and illuminators" ("Manual to Miscellany" 2). M is certainly a London production, and is likely one of the manuscripts closest to the archetype (Hanna, *London Literature* 243-47).

[69] See Patterson (1979) for his discussion regarding the inclusion of *Troilus* in this female-oriented spiritual treatise.

content and the historical theme (113-114). *Troilus* was a poem whose appeal and popularity was wide-ranging from the first years of its circulation until well after the advent of print.

With the evidence for *Troilus'* popularity and the knowledge that the *Troilus* fragment was copied by a contemporary and well-connected scribe, it is harder to accept that these pages were paired with the HM 143 *Piers* just to be used as flyleaves – as waste, essentially. Although the blank John Russell leaf and the two *Troilus* leaves are all called flyleaves, the Russell page is a paper leaf that is separate from the parchment bifolium that contains *Troilus*. Indeed, when one goes through the manuscript pages it is the Russell page that appears to function as a flyleaf, not the *Troilus*.[70] The fact that this blank paper leaf was bound together with the *Troilus* fragment and *Piers* suggests that the *Troilus* pages were not intended to function as flyleaves at all. If a blank sheet was available, why use a clean segment of a poem, much less a poem that was still popular? Flyleaves were usually scrap bits of outdated manuscripts (such as older scholastic works or musical scores) used to protect the first pages of a bound book (Ross 76; Szirmai, *Archaeology* 178; Ker viii-xiii). One frequently finds the flyleaf material to be older and cheaper (musical manuscripts are quite common), and it is not unusual to find pen trials, owner signatures, practice lines, and other paraphernalia scrawled over these leaves.[71] Moreover, it was common for late-medieval English binders to attach pastedowns to flyleaves (Ker vii-viii), a fact which increases the probability that the *Troilus* fragment was not a scrap stitched in by the later binder, but a text chosen by the compiler. Given the clean and unmarked appearance of *Troilus*, the contemporary currency of the scribe who penned it, and the popularity of the text itself, it seems unlikely that these pages were planned as flyleaves. I argue

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[70] My thanks to Simon Horobin who confirmed in conversation my perspective on these differences between the John Russell leaf and the *Troilus* fragment.

[71] In HM 114, for example, the back flyleaves are created from an antiphonal leaf containing the offices *De Judith* and *De Esther*, dating to the twelfth or thirteen century, and in HM 143 the back flyleaves contain the first few lines of *Piers* in a medieval hand, another hand wrote "Ihesu ihesu ihesu for thyn holy name to be me ihesus" and a "dan John Redbery" signed his name. John Russell signed his name on both the front paper flyleaf and the back flyleaf. While these are anecdotal examples, anyone who has worked directly with manuscripts can testify to how common it is to find these kinds of readerly markings.

that *Troilus* – the whole poem, not just the second bifolio in the first quire – was initially intended to precede *Piers Plowman*. Like the scribe of HM 114, the commissioner or compiler of HM 143 saw something shared in these poems that we, perhaps, do not.[72]

The reason why the full *Troilus* was not bound together with *Piers* is due, I believe, to the logistics of gathering and binding together manuscripts. The process of creating a bound book – an object that physically presents itself as having some sort of internal coherence – was constituted of several stages, some of which could be lengthy. As noted on page 179 above, books were often purchased and/or produced in piecemeal form, with the purchaser obtaining each item as it became available or as he/she had scribes to copy it, and in the interim the quires would have been kept together loosely using only leather or paper wrappings. The process could take months or even years before the book was complete, whether or not the book was planned from the beginning. I argue that the current form of HM 143 is the result of an interruption of this process; it is a "snapshot" taken at the point of interruption, just as texts like *Beowulf* or *The Odyssey* are metaphorical snapshots of one moment in these orally-transmitted poems.

How would such an interruption occur? While it is impossible to answer this question definitively, the evidence of this manuscript and manuscript production generally allows us to put forward educated guesses. First of all, the process of obtaining the whole of *Troilus* was likely lengthy. Ralph Hanna argues that the transmission of *Troilus* was characterized by booklet circulation ("Manuscripts and Transmission" 176-184). Scribes would gain access to one booklet at a time from a stationer, and then return it before obtaining the next. Hanna argues that such booklet exemplars of *Troilus* "were generated, *at the latest*, during the second decade

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[72] One may argue that a stationer commissioned both manuscripts for his own business – to loan them out as exemplars. In this kind of situation, there would likely be no intent to compile them together. However, I believe a private purchaser is a more likely possibility, mainly because a stationer would probably not dismantle a *Troilus* manuscript. Even if the stationer could not afford to commission the entire *Troilus* at once, it is highly unlikely that he would destroy the part that he *did* obtain in order to use part of it as flyleaf material. It is much more probable that he would have kept the *Troilus* quire(s) in anticipation of acquiring a full copy in future.

of the fifteenth century" (184, emphasis mine). In other words, the inception of this kind of circulation for *Troilus* occurs close to the time of HM 143's production.

Commercial scribes charged per gathering (de Hamel 39), whether those charges were levied piecemeal (as gatherings were completed) or after a commission was finished. The financial situation of both the purchaser and the scribe would have dictated how and when payments were made for services rendered. If the HM 143 *Troilus* was copied from the booklet exemplars that Hanna posits, it would have been copied (and perhaps paid for) one section at a time. I suggest that the individual who purchased the HM 143 *Piers Plowman* also intended to purchase a full copy of *Troilus* to accompany it but an external event of some sort interrupted the process. This resulted in a partially-completed *Troilus* left loosely compiled with *Piers,* perhaps enclosed or stitched together in paper wrappings which were an inexpensive interim substitute for binding. A change in the purchaser's financial situation is the most likely reason for such an interruption; he or she planned to commission *Troilus* in its entirety but in the end only had the funds for the first booklet (the HM 143 bifolium is from the first quire of *Troilus*). The expense of binding would therefore probably not have been carried out by this owner. It may have been that a later owner found the complete *Piers* stitched together with a quire from *Troilus* – an interim binding intended to keep the manuscripts together until the full *Troilus* was obtained – and decided to bind the *Piers* and simply use one bifolium from the *Troilus* fragment as a flyleaf. This also may have been the person who made reformist corrections and commentary. Bowers suggests that this individual was also the commissioner of the manuscript and made these corrections for his own use ("HM 143" 139-140). An owner who politicized the poem in such a way may not have cared for the thematic focus of *Troilus* and therefore would not have found it worthwhile to preserve the one quire in the hope of obtaining the rest. The theory of an earlier owner/commissioner who initially planned to bind both poems together

more adequately explains why part of a clean bifolium from *Troilus* would have been later bound as flyleaves in front of *Piers.*

I suggested above that two reasons for the critical dismissal of this fragment were its anonymity and its incomplete nature. Despite the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism on modern thought, we still remain a culture concerned with textual unity and stability. Not only is the HM 143 *Troilus* a fragment, but the poem itself does not seem to correspond with *Piers Plowman* in any meaningful way. However, Alexandra Gillespie argues that medieval sensibilities deferred or did not seek textual and authorial stability, while early modern readers – whose perspectives we have inherited, to a large extent – wanted "the most stable, centralized, humanist…meanings for language, literature and books" (118). The inclusion of *Troilus* in a *Piers* manuscript certainly destabilizes our sense of two distinct and coherent literary traditions, but its fragmentary nature in HM 143 allows us to discount it. If we allow ourselves to accept *Troilus* as a text rather than a fragment and to open up the possibility that its proximity to *Piers* was an act rather than an accident, we may see how this manuscript enacts its own kind of coherence. While we see *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Piers Plowman* as opposed in style, theme, and content, clearly some medieval readers felt differently.

5.4   Conclusions: Rereading Tradition

Perhaps HM 143 and HM 114 are not simply examples of two literary traditions intersecting, but evidence for a different sense of tradition altogether. The Chaucerian and *Piers* "traditions" contain much of the known corpus of Middle English literature but they rarely intersect. The moments of intersection I have examined in these manuscripts blur the demarcations between these traditions and demonstrate how medieval literary genealogies operate not as linear relationships but as supplemental and associative ones. *Troilus* appears to be one of the least likely of Chaucer's works to be anthologized with *Piers*; a rambling, associative

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dream vision and a meticulously structured historical romance seem to meet very different reader expectations. However, such a pairing may not have seemed as unusual to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century readers, perhaps because *Troilus and Criseyde* in many ways exceeds the generic boundaries of romance, and because the boundaries between romance and allegory are "highly permeable" (Cooper, *Romance in Time* 10, 21). *Piers Plowman* itself is also notorious for its generic fluidity, its refusal to settle into one literary form.

Despite the evidence of HM 143 and 114, there has been very little critical commentary on the correspondence between *Piers Plowman* and *Troilus and Criseyde.* Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Steven Justice argue that Thomas Usk associated *Piers* with *Troilus* because both poems address issues of free will ("Reading Circles" 67). While this is true, I believe that the issue of free will is just one facet of a cluster of deeply-rooted contemporary concerns with which both poems engage. The topical connections in HM 114 shed light on what such concerns were and how readers understood the relationship of *Piers* and *Troilus* to those concerns. We can conflate these common issues into the question of moral culpability: this includes the notion of free will, passivity and agency, and how the social and physical power of sexuality should be harnessed (and who holds that power). Although the latter point seems most relevant to *Troilus and Criseyde,* I would reiterate my earlier discussion of how Lady Meed functions in *Piers Plowman.* It is not a coincidence that the marginalia in most *Piers* manuscripts is concentrated in the first seven passus or so; it is in this portion of the poem that issues of moral, social and sexual power are negotiated in highly interactive narrative form (Meed's marriage, the confession of the Sins, the plowing of the half-acre, the tearing of the pardon, etc). More significantly, it is in this part of the poem that the Dreamer metaphorically removes his "shroudes" and reveals to the reader something of his life and occupation. This *apologia* is also the Dreamer's attempt to justify to the

character of Reason his life of social and moral passivity.[73] Although the Dreamer does not fully convince us of the legitimacy of his lifestyle, neither are we able to fully condemn him. Just as *Troilus and Criseyde* implies a judgment of Criseyde but in reality leaves the reader to decide, the Dreamer's *apologia* in *Piers Plowman* neither condemns nor convinces. It is telling that the copies of *Piers* found compiled with *Troilus* both include the *apologia,* especially given the *apologia*'s focus on moral culpability and how it shares with *Troilus* the passing of judgment to the reader rather than establishing its own moral position.[74]

Exploring the nature of moral culpability is, of course, a wide topic that many other medieval texts address on some level. However, *Troilus* and *Piers* both treat it in a relatively unique way: they refuse to claim one moral position as unequivocally right, and they temporally and socially displace these issues, thereby decontextualizing them. With respect to the first point, the moral liminality is itself a form of the passivity that both poems question. To refuse judgment is a strangely self-reflexive gesture in both texts and suggests a failing on the narrator's part. The second point identifies a similarly double-sided issue. *Troilus* and *Piers* each shift these complex moral questions into a space that is distanced from the realities of their readers' lives: an ancient civilization and an allegorical dreamscape, respectively. Although this first appears to distance readers from the moral discomfort implied by these poems, such discomfort is still realized because these apparently distant literary spaces represent public social origins (Troy) and private individual origins (one's own inner vision). The reader's own connection to these public and private genealogical traces effaces the safety and comfort suggested by the poems' displacement of these moral questions.

I have argued that, given the low survival rate of medieval manuscripts, finding two that compile two apparently distant texts is worthy of examination. Kerby-Fulton and Justice point

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[73] See Kerby-Fulton and Justice's collection (1997) for a variety of perspectives on the *apologia.*
[74] The *apologia* is from the C-text but is included in HM 114.

out that evidence of readers interested in both Chaucer and Langland survives in library records as well as manuscripts.[75] Of course, the compilation of texts together in one manuscript has somewhat different implications in terms of medieval reading practices than does the inclusion of texts in one library or collection. Just as the physical nature of a genealogical roll suggests a hermeneutic framework of continuity and linearity through which to read the genealogy itself, the physical form of a book circumscribes its contents. The containment of different texts within one binding "would have united the two [or more] disparate works...so that ways of sounding and reading applied to one might be applied to the other" (Taylor, *Textual Situations* 204).[76] Taylor's comments highlight an important distinction: compilations can suggest medieval reading practices while not always revealing medieval reading communities. The two are often concurrent,[77] but I would argue that examining reading practices is foundational to reconstructing reading communities; the former provides necessary evidence for the latter. It is natural to focus directly upon the idea of audience when evaluating a compilation, rather than the actual practice of reading that is suggested by the manuscript. Given these factors, I would like to explore briefly the reading practices suggested by HM 114 and HM 143 and their implications for the coherence and stability of the Chaucerian and *Piers* traditions.

Since we ourselves use genre and authorship as our primary modes of literary organization, we might assume that medieval readers operated in a similar manner. The apparently miscellaneous nature of medieval (especially Middle English) compilations surprises

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[75] Kerby-Fulton and Justice identify several other men active in the civil service who read Langland in conjunction with Chaucer: Thomas Jakes, Thomas Stotevyle, and Sir Thomas Charleton. The former two were members of Lincoln's Inn while Charleton was a Speaker of the House of Commons. The inventory of Charleton's books upon his death in 1465 included *Piers,* the *Canterbury Tales,* and *Troilus and Criseyde* ("Reading Circles" 67).

[76] "When the [genealogical] roll is fully unfurled, the whole history of England, from its mythical foundation by the Trojans down to the reign of Edward I, is displayed as a continuous line" (Clanchy 142).

[77] Kerby-Fulton and Justice have demonstrated that specific groups of readers, such as those of the civil service, do reveal their own reading practices (the priorities, interests, and political views that inform their interest in the text at hand and the way in which they approach it) in their annotations, the compilations they commission, and the books they own or copy.

us[78] and therefore we attempt to repattern medieval literature according to our paradigms, in the process ignoring evidence for how earlier readers understood these texts. Taylor suggests that our modern reading practices and concern with disciplinary boundaries can be destructive, in that they "create English literature by extracting only texts in English and French literature by extracting only texts in French....it secularizes vernacular literature, purifies pastoralia, and turns Latin into a sub-specialty by isolating each from the other" (*Textual Situations* 208). Boffey and Thompson, in their discussion of John Shirley's compilations, point out that in many of these collections Shirley disregarded distinctions of authorship, form and genre, and simply collected texts – an anthologizing impulse that gained traction among other book publishers largely because of the paucity of exemplars in the latter half of the fifteenth century (286, 280).

Although Hanna's view of HM 143 does not fully correspond to my own, his scholarship in the field of manuscript production has been used throughout my discussion and his insights are worthy of additional attention here. Like Boffey and Thompson, Hanna emphasizes the importance of exemplar availability in his discussion of the nature of medieval miscellanies.[79] He argues that miscellaneity is characteristic of Middle English literature, not just because of the poor supply of exemplars but because the principle of organization was not genre or author, but "mechanical thematic devices" ("Miscellaneity" 49). These devices could be lectionary readings or calendars, as was the case with *The South English Legendary*'s saints' lives or the *Northern Homily Cycle*'s exempla, or a contrived narrative framework (such as a pilgrimage or dream) and common thematic concerns, as in *The Canterbury Tales.* Hanna suggests that this "mechanical" type of organization is unappreciated by modern students who are still bound by modern generic categories (49-50), and the question of categories, as the opening to this chapter indicated, is

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[78] Jauss and Bahti identify "surprising otherness" as one of three valuable aspects in the study of medieval literature, the other two being "aesthetic pleasure" and "model character" (182).

[79] Hanna suggests that the relative lack of exemplars meant that scribes copied and compiled texts as they obtained them, rather than waiting until they had enough exemplars to create a unified compilation.

crucial to my project. Hanna's notion of alternate categories corresponds to some degree to the paradigm of genealogy, in that he suggests we look for "textual nodes, clumps of items known largely or exclusively in a common circulation," since these "might be particularly useful in joining English reading communities" ("Middle English Books" 167). These are relationships of affinity rather than hierarchy.

These textual clumps are particularly evident in the circulation of Chaucerian material. As Boffey and Thompson point out, many Chaucerian anthologies contain the same collection of poems, which indicates that these collections originated in individual booklets or gatherings (280). Hanna's 1992 review of Derek Pearsall's *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript* was an earlier expression of this idea of common textual groupings. In this review he also suggests that our own reading practices need to be adjusted in order to render the purpose and function of Vernon comprehensible to us, asking "what kind of literary constellation Vernon [and other Middle English texts] inhabited. How and why do Vernon texts appeal? What does the nature of that appeal require us to adjust to make these texts legible again?" (1028). These questions suggest that when we encounter the thingness of a manuscript we should shift our own paradigms to establish a context in which the thing becomes comprehensible.

Hanna's review of Pearsall's *Vernon* volume pertains to my analysis of HM 114 and 143. He acknowledges that most, if not all, scholars will agree that Vernon is important, "but it is equally…..in some very real sense 'illegible,' unopen to us in the current state of knowledge. It stands, for most writers here, as a kind of Jaussian utter alterity not now penetrable – and is, I sense, more than modestly embarrassing in that regard" (1028). The word "embarrassing" here refers to the semi-apologetic tone Hanna witnesses in some of the volume's contributors. He suggests that their expectations of Vernon's content and organization have been disappointed. Although it is perhaps too strong a word to use in describing the scholarly response to the pairing

of *Piers* and *Troilus* in the Huntington manuscripts, the suggestion of embarrassment is implied by the silent disinterest in this topic; much of the critical work in this field appears to view these points of confluence between Chaucer and Langland as devoid of signification, despite the keen interest in the maintenance of their respective traditions, and, indeed, the sense that they each had a coherent tradition that followed them.

However, as I hope I have shown in my analyses of the Huntington manuscripts, a different sense of literary tradition operates in at least some medieval reading circles and our dissection and segregation of the texts in these manuscripts obscures our understanding of this alternate sense of textual coherence and relationship. It may be convenient (and correct in some instances) to relegate a compilation to, in Hanna's words, a binding accident, but we should be cautious about dismissing the fact of binding too quickly. In John Ahern's discussion of bookbinding metaphors in Dante and his classical predecessors, he connects the unity of binding with the unity of knowledge required for a reader to obtain what medieval scholastics termed *sententia* or wisdom:

> For the reader of the *Comedy,* then, the passage from *sensus* [the surface or "obvious" reading] to *sententia* [meaning rooted in divine wisdom] coincides with the moment when the consecutive pages of the text are bound into a single volume. The reader who has not read the last canto is like the Pilgrim, who cannot arrive at the *sententia* of his experience, because that experience is not yet complete. (803)

The process of binding starts when gatherings are kept together, wrapped in papers or loosely stitched. Should the compiler or owner unexpectedly stop the preparation of a codex, whether through death, impoverishment or another reason, such preservation of the gatherings signals the intent of binding and makes it more likely that binding will eventually occur. If we look at HM 114 and HM 143 as books rather than miscellanies we can see how Ahern's analysis of Dante's readership may also apply to the fifteenth-century English readers of these manuscripts.

The scribes/compilers of the Huntington manuscripts anticipate that their readers will consider the whole book and not merely its parts. Scribe 114, for example, would likely have expected readers to read *Susannah* and the *Three Kings* along with *Mandeville's Travels*, to see the way the *Epistola* corresponded with the documentary nature of *Piers Plowman* and to be able to read in all the texts the common thread of spiritual, secular, and cultural origins. The very Otherness or foreignness of some of the HM 114 texts is mitigated by the framing of that otherness by the wider theme of divine roots.

What I have referred to as the "thingness" of the Huntington manuscripts is based not upon the essential incomprehensibility of these codices but on our own inability to comprehend them. The appearance, the texture, the overall material form of the manuscript is strange to us; in some respects it seems like a modern book, but then it quickly confounds our expectations of the book. This chapter's glances toward thing theory are not intended merely to identify losses of meaning and claim the Thing as the black hole of signification. Rather, the intent is to articulate why certain objects become, in Ralph Hanna's words, illegible to us, and to reconfigure our own perspective to make those things (and Things) legible.

Plotz criticizes scholars who use thing theory to ascertain "what the culture *meant* objects to mean, rather than to reflect on failures of meaning or the slippages that occur between the intended meaning and the actual embodied substance" (110). It strikes me, however, that reflection upon failed meaning invites us to ask why signification failed and how it can be achieved. The literary text, as Seth Lerer reminds us, "exists not as some individuated and empirically recoverable 'thing' but as one element in the process between author, audience and publisher" (9). When our expectations of the manuscript are denied and that "thingness" materializes in all its confusion, the gap between medieval and modern becomes increasingly visible. However, the visibility of this gap enables us to bridge it by reconstructing the

meaningless Thing into an object whose significance is viable only when we reconsider our assumptions about what constitutes textual unity and coherence. We know the object only through "its modes of representation – or rather of *our* modes of representation, the ways in which we set forth the object to the understanding" (Schwenger 137). When faced with the illegibility of the textual object, we must consider whether our modes of representation are adequate tools with which to read.

Chapter 6

Long-Lost Family: Identity and Origin
in *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*

Chapter Five concluded by questioning whether our ways of representing and classifying medieval texts actually help us read them. This question remains central in this chapter, which undertakes a comparative analysis of *Piers Plowman* and the work of the *Pearl*-poet. *Piers Plowman* aligns itself with a wide variety of genres, to the extent that generic classification is not particularly useful in understanding the poem. I suggest that we look beyond genre and instead use an interpretive paradigm based upon genealogy and thingness or unknowability to frame William Langland's work. When we do so, it becomes clear that Langland actually shares much of his value system and literary strategies with the *Pearl*-poet – a writer whose work has always seemed vastly different not only from *Piers Plowman,* but from much of the Middle English corpus generally.

The poetry of the *Pearl* poet, which survives uniquely in British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x, is at once part of the alliterative and visionary traditions and also somehow beyond them. Like *Piers Plowman,* the work of this poet seems to transcend or resist literary classification. The epistemological tension that characterizes the intersection of material and spiritual in these poems creates and recreates moments in which signification is resisted – a resistance usually manifested in genealogical, social, or physical terms that highlight the instability of our human ways of establishing identity for ourselves and others. Each poem's repeated turns to its own beginning(s) simply shows how the origin we seek is ultimately an illusion and that we must self-identify in other ways. This chapter's analysis of these shared discursive practices will begin

with a brief discussion of how the different critical streams that constitute the poems' respective editorial and scribal paratexts – the modern and medieval conversations about, or presentations of, the poems – tends to reinforce the gap between the work of these two poets. It will then proceed to explore how within the poems themselves, complete spiritual revelation and stable social classification are denied in moments of "thingness" in which materiality, the vehicle for meaning, becomes an impediment. This "thingness" keeps the reader wandering like the Dreamers and like the sheep that Will imitates, searching for more. While the previous chapters engaged with thing theory and the genealogical paradigm on intertextual and codicological levels, this chapter brings these models to bear within the literary text itself by demonstrating how they can reconfigure our interpretations of *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl.*

As this chapter will argue, the basic epistemological assumptions that Langland and the *Pearl*-poet share are grounded in the crucial importance of the physical world to generate personal spiritual growth while at the same time they highlight the role of an ultimately unattainable Other as a catalyst for that growth.[1] Section 6.1 below explains why I have selected *Pearl* out of the Cotton Nero poems as the primary object of comparative analysis with *Piers Plowman*. This chapter endeavours to highlight the similarities between *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman* in order to further explore *Piers'* discursive flexibility and to provide a wider literary context for the often-isolated *Pearl.* The techniques used by both poets suggests that despite the organizational chaos of *Piers* and the apparent isolation of and public lack of interest in *Pearl,* both may have shared similar types of reading circles – or perhaps the same circles. They were, in other words, literary siblings.

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[1] "Other" is capitalized throughout to indicate its usage as a theoretical construct.

Despite these similarities, there has been surprisingly little scholarly interest in undertaking a sustained comparison of both poets,[2] a fact that I believe indicates more about how the Cotton Nero poems and *Piers Plowman* have been transmitted to us than it signifies anything about the work of the poets themselves. While *Piers* has always been viewed as historically contingent and therefore has lent itself more readily to New Historicist readings, in Cotton Nero the utter anonymity of the author, the lack of explicitly topical references, and the meticulously crafted structure of the poems led many earlier critics to read it within a contextual vacuum, seeing the poems as artistic works whose meaning and value transcend their material and social surroundings. Much of the scholarship on Cotton Nero therefore has strong resonances with New Criticism and its focus on the text to the exclusion of all other factors. New Critical readings of other medieval texts, including *Piers,* frequently require the scholar to subordinate historical context,[3] but the Cotton Nero poems do not require such critical adjustment, thus presenting a New Critical reading, or perhaps a New Formalist reading, as a natural option.[4] John Bowers, in discussing late twentieth-century New Critical work on *Pearl*, asks why this poem "became invested with a body of commentary that has not routinely considered issues of patronage, coterie audience, material context, and production of social history" (*Politics* 3). It is perhaps because of this apparent detachment from contemporary influences that there has been relatively little sustained comparison of the Cotton Nero poems with other texts.

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[2] Most comparisons between Langland and the *Pearl* poet are brief and incidental. Sustained critical comparisons of the two, such as Baker's study of dialectal form, are unusual.

[3] In Chaucer studies, for example, the tension between the literary and the material is much more fraught than it is in studies of *Pearl*. Robert Meyer-Lee highlights the Riverside Chaucer as a locus of this tension, as scholars must reconcile their dual desires for the Riverside: it must be "at once an object of artistic excellence and an object of historical authenticity" (3). In the defense of New Criticism, however, Levinson points out that "New Criticism was more historical and more activist in its notions of form than current practice suggests" (262).

[4] The current growth of new formalism in literary studies offers (ideally) some place of mediation between new historicism and New Criticism in that it is a movement that often links the aesthetic and social value of the literary text with the cultural and material conditions of its production. Levinson identifies two general branches of new formalism, one identifying somewhat with new historicism and one with New Criticism, but emphasizes the difficulties of providing a single definition for the movement.

In my analysis of the common threads in *Piers* and *Pearl,* it became apparent that the

notion of individual identity was a concern informing the development of both poems. Medieval

authors were interested in communal identity (a body of people) or social identity (one's role in

society), rather than individual development. Despite our current caution about accepting

unreservedly Jacob Burckhardt's theory of selfhood in the Middle Ages versus the Renaissance,[5]

there is nevertheless general consensus that medieval individuals lacked "interiorized self-

recognition, and their sense of identity was communal…a person was the sum of his or her

positions in society, legal rights and obligations, kinship bonds and other external forces"

(Sluhovsky 176). Moshe Sluhovsky indicates that the Reformation was one of the first

movements in England that supported the formation of selfhood as we now understand it: "the

Protestant sense of self-reflection and self-scrutiny [led] to Protestant self-improvement" (177).[6]

The shared interest of Langland and the *Pearl* poet in individual identity was part of a new

cultural movement that turned attention to individualism and the private self, and their poems

obliquely explore ideas of interiority that would slowly develop over the next several hundred

years. David Aers suggests that this exploration was, at least in the case of *Piers Plowman*, not

acceptable, since the poet's individualism left him outside social taxonomies:

> But where is the fraternal community into which he can transcend
> this individualism? By the poem's own account, as we have found,
> nowhere. The emerging world rejects the poet's categories and
> they turn out to be ones he himself cannot inhabit. (71)

As I hope to show in this chapter, Langland's interest in individual identity was not quite as

unique as Aers' remarks suggest, although *Piers Plowman* does continually emphasize the

symbiotic relationship between individuality and the larger community.

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[5] See page 8 (Chapter One) above.
[6] The popularity of Augustine and his *Confessions* in the neo-classical period was a significant factor in the increased interest in interiority.

6.1   Choice of Texts

Any comparison of the work of Langland and the *Pearl* poet must begin with the choice of whether to include all of the Cotton Nero poems in the discussion.[7] The inclusion of all four poems then raises the question of whether to include *St Erkenwald* or even (if one is daring) *William of Palerne.*[8] The inclusion of the *Pearl* poet's entire corpus also relies on the assumption that the same author did indeed pen *Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and perhaps *St Erkenwald.* Although common authorship of the four poems in Cotton Nero is now widely accepted (Vantuono xv; Finch 2), many critics are cautious of proposing theories that encompass all four because such theories would dissolve upon the discovery of multiple authorship (Pearsall and Cooper 366-7). Robert Blanch and Julian Wasserman argue that this sense of caution undermines interpretations of the Cotton Nero poems because all four are mutually influential and intended to be read together. They suggest that despite the widely accepted theory of common authorship, many scholars still read the poems in isolation, as if in response to long-held assumptions about the nature of the poems rather than the actual weight of the evidence.[9] I would argue that the compilation of these four poems in a single manuscript by one scribe and the scholarly consensus on common authorship both lend credence to Blanch and Wasserman's assertion that the poems should be read conjointly. Furthermore, the anthologizing of these four very similar poems together and their common programme of illustrations allows us

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[7] The four poems in the Article 3 of Cotton Nero A.x are, in order, *Pearl, Cleanness, Patience,* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Pearl* is prefaced by a bifolium of full-page illustrations, with 12 miniatures decorating the remaining three poems. This question of inclusion begs the further question of how to acknowledge the multiple versions of *Piers Plowman.* How does one compare these two famously anonymous poets without constraining their texts to a unity or a linearity that may not in fact exist in their work? For practical purposes I have focused my analyses of *Piers* on the C-text, which is generally thought to be the latest of the versions, although Warner (2010) recently proposed that we reconsider this idea.

[8] Lawrence Warner (2006) argues that *William of Palerne* was an early work by Langland.

[9] Blanch and Wasserman state that "there are deeply ingrained habits of mind that are equally evident in both the content and structure of *Gawain*-poet scholarship. Books that treat themes in the whole manuscript invariably have four chapters, each devoted primarily to a single work in the manuscript. Occasionally, such a study is even preceded by an introduction that speaks eloquently of the need to take the poems out of isolation" (*Forme* 2).

to bypass the question of authorship in favour of an argument for readership: they were clearly meant to be read together and within the same hermeneutic framework.

I therefore concur with critics who suggest that the Cotton Nero poems were meant to be read in relation to one another. However, the length of this chapter is not adequate for an analysis of all four poems in relation to *Piers Plowman.* For the sake of focus and clarity, I have decided to use *Pearl* as the lens through which to view points of comparison with *Piers*. While selecting one of the four poems must always be somewhat random, *Pearl* is most appropriate for the purposes of this chapter. Firstly, its primary position in the manuscript is an important marker of the manuscript's literary form and presentation;[10] secondly, its focus on the intersection of physical or economic value, spiritual growth, and family relationships shows how genealogy and thing theory are useful hermeneutic tools with which to approach these texts; and thirdly, the central characters of Piers Plowman and the Pearl Maiden are both unique guiding figures who fulfill similar functions in the poems.

6.2   Professional Readers and Paratexts

Critics have noted how medieval scribes, annotators and illustrators essentially "edited" manuscripts for readers, and how these interventions – in the form of textual editing, glossing, illustration – have affected how modern editors approach the texts.[11] The lack of interest in a sustained comparison of Langland and the *Pearl* poet has been influenced, I argue, less by the poems themselves and more by the vast differences in such scribal interventions, the poems'

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[10] Blanch and Wasserman suggest that the four poems in Cotton Nero "delineate a temporal continuum that spans the entire course of history, reaching from the beginning of time in Creation to the end of time in the Apocalypse and its transcendence in the Heavenly Jerusalem" (*Forme* 4). The circularity of this continuum is highlighted because the poem that should come last (*Pearl*, with the Heavenly Jerusalem) is first in the sequence, thus creating a temporal loop. I would further suggest that *Pearl* could also be read as a post-lapsarian vision - a fall, a separation – and thus could paradoxically represent both the beginning and the end of time.

[11] See, for example, Windeatt (1998) who describes scribes as Chaucer's "early critics" (27) or Kerby-Fulton (2001) who uses the term "professional reader" to define medieval scribes. In her view, a professional reader is "someone whose job it is to prepare a text for the reading public, someone whose job description…allows him to filter the text for presentation to the patron or reading community" (8).

respective manuscript traditions, and the differences in editing practices, both medieval and modern. The manuscript traditions alone demonstrate the difficulty of comparing the poems: there is one copy of the Cotton Nero poems and at least 54 of *Piers Plowman,* and while *Piers* is only very rarely illustrated, the Cotton Nero poems contain twelve detailed illustrations, several of which are full-page. Such basic differences in presentation, production and survival tend to encourage the critical separation of *Piers* and *Pearl* in modern scholarship, but it is much less clear whether the poems' current physical characteristics testify in the same way to their medieval reception. This section briefly discusses how medieval and modern interventions into the manuscript genealogies and into individual manuscripts themselves shape our perception of each author and widen the apparent gap between the two poems.

I suggest that the manuscript evidence of Langland and the *Pearl*-poet has heavily influenced how we now judge each author's poetic skill and control over their respective texts, and therefore has guided their critical treatment. With regard to Langland, the question of authorial intent is complex. The sheer number of and variation in manuscripts provides much material with which critics, philologists, and paleographers can work (and debate). While single authorship of *Piers Plowman* is nearly universally accepted, the order of the texts, the A, B, and C archetypes, and the degree to which Langland controlled and finalized the production and dissemination of the versions of his poem are all hotly debated issues.[12] Scholarship over the past two decades has tended to defer the question of authorial intent, partially in the interest of practicality; the evidence is too difficult to weigh and conclusions too speculative. However, *Piers Plowman* is left tantalizingly incomplete in a number of ways,[13] and this sense of lack

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[12] The editors of the editions of *Piers Plowman* most widely used in current scholarship – Kane, Russell, Donaldson, Pearsall, and Schmidt – are obligated to defend the most minute of their editorial choices, and are often still criticized for it (as reviews of the Athlone editions, for example, demonstrate). The controversy over the Z-text erupted after Rigg and Brewer's publication of MS Bodley 851 in 1994 (See Brewer 1994), and the order of the A,B, and C texts (often taken for granted now) has been recently contested by Warner (2010).

[13] A few examples of this incompleteness are the uncertain breaking-off of the A text and the preservation in Ht (Huntington Library HM 114) and J (the Ilchester MS, University of London MS V.88) of what appears to be

invites continued investigation of authorial intent even in the face of uncertainty and a post-structuralist disavowal of the author's authority.

Charlotte Brewer highlights the complexity of *Piers'* manuscript genealogies in her 1996 book *Editing Piers Plowman*, in which she explores how editorial practices are influenced by cultural assumptions and how those same practices, in turn, influence the reception of the poem. She characterizes textual criticism on *Piers* as "peculiarly fascinating" because of its

> frequent employment of a vocabulary and diction which mimics that of the empirical sciences….[yet] despite the type of mind it tends to attract (ruthlessly logical), is quintessentially an art, in the exercise of which human judgment at every stage supervenes…. [Editorial activity] is an act of literary criticism, even literary creation, based on a succession of undemonstrable hypotheses, whose result (the edited text) can never be tested (3).

Brewer's comments allude to the ever-present question of authorship that philosophers and literary critics repeatedly encounter,[14] but they also highlight how the plethora of physical evidence for Langland's work invites editors to participate in that work, to take on the role of author or creator while speaking as an objective observer. Any editor of *Piers Plowman* is called upon constantly to judge the material evidence, and by doing so, to judge the skill of the author or scribe, to decide what constitutes literary completion, and to assess authorial intentionality in passages of dubious merit. George Kane defines these activities as conjectural emendation, and while he acknowledges the problem of "excessive subjectivity" (156) he insists that the correct practice of conjectural emendation using sound judgment is necessary, particularly when it is clear that the archetype manuscript established through recension is corrupt. Indeed, he follows earlier textual critics in arguing that it would be irresponsible *not* to employ conjectural

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early drafts of C, released early. Kerby-Fulton (2001), building upon Pearsall's and Scase's studies of the same HtJ material, argues that the HtJ material did indeed escape Langland's desk before its time and that the changes made to J by Scribe D were in fact the scribe's own improvements.

[14] Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" are two of the most widely read and cited discussions on the nature of authorship, and both remain critically relevant today.

emendation in such a case.[15] There is a constant reaching back through the textual genealogy for the origin – the autograph manuscript – but the very act of trying to follow the genealogy to its source entails the construction of that genealogy. The proposed relationships between the various manuscripts are based, to some extent, upon the editor's judgment of what constitutes poetic skill and what the author intended. An editor is therefore "inextricably combined with the text he or she produces" (C. Brewer 3), much as a medieval scribe was.

A key difference between the modern editor and medieval scribe, however, is their respective interests in intertextual genealogies. Many scribes of *Piers Plowman* were aware of other versions of the poem, and some (such as the scribe of HM 114) tried consciously to assimilate the different versions into one text, but they were interested in the immediate effect of such assimilation – the reception by readers and the general message conveyed by the poem as a whole. The poem was a present object to a medieval scribe, an object whose value was dependent upon its appeal to a reading audience. It was not until Crowley's printing of *Piers Plowman* in 1550 that there arose a consciousness of how the poetic value and legitimacy of any given *Piers* manuscript was predicated upon that manuscript's connection to the author's original.[16] Modern editors and readers follow Crowley in that the quality of one's immediate interaction with a medieval manuscript is not usually considered to be the primary indicator of

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[15] In response to those that criticize conjectural emendation because it has the potential essentially to make up the poet's work with what the editor thinks sounds good, Kane insists that the risk of "improving the poet's work by brilliant conjecture" is low, for various reasons based upon the poet's skill and the scribe's lack of interest in accuracy (163). He admits the assumption of the poet's excellence is a judgment in and of itself, but defends such an assumption: "The editor of a major poet must begin with a presumption of the excellence of his author; he is also governed by an axiom that texts, including archetypal texts, are corrupt. The excellence of his author is a matter of consensus of critical judgment; the axiom is a matter of manifest fact. Further, that excellence has survived notwithstanding the axiomatic deterioration of his texts, and must thus once have been even greater than the received texts now represent it to be" (167).

[16] From Crowley's preface to his printed edition of *Piers Plowman*: "Beynge desyerous to knowe the name of the Autoure of this most worthy worke (gentle reader) and the tyme of the writynge of the same: I did not onely gather togyther suche aunciente coppies as I could come by, but also consult such men as I knew to be more exercised in the study of antiquities, than I my selfe haue ben. And by some of them I haue learned that the Autour was named Roberte langelande, a Shropshere man borne in Cleybirie, about viii myles from Maluerne hills" (quoted in C. Brewer, *Editing* 11).

that manuscript's value; rather, the experience is subordinate to the manuscript's genealogical proximity to the authorial archetype.[17]

Our reception of *Pearl*, on the other hand, is rarely complicated by questions about authorial proximity or scribal corruption. The one surviving copy (which is indeed a good one) can function as its own origin in a sense – there is nothing with which to compare it. In contrast to the revived interest in the manuscripts of *Piers Plowman,* the materiality of the Cotton Nero poems has received relatively little ongoing attention because they survive uniquely. Morton Bloomfield suggests that there would be very little to learn from a physical examination of the manuscript now, because of the amount of work already done (8). While he may be somewhat correct when it comes to the purely codicological study of Cotton Nero, changing theoretical approaches to textuality and materiality in the Middle Ages offer broader perspectives through which to view Cotton Nero and assess the medieval reading experience. The significance of materiality in medieval studies has expanded well beyond the codicological, as recent work in the field has demonstrated.[18] The interdisciplinary nature of these new perspectives on materiality can perhaps best be summarized in D.F. McKenzie's notion of bibliography, which he defines as "the discipline that studies texts as recorded forms, and the processes of their transmission, including their production and reception…the study of the sociology of texts" (12-13). The confluence of form and meaning is integral to McKenzie's definition of bibliography, and therefore bibliography as a "sociology of texts" is a useful paradigm for the study of the manuscript form and literary culture. According to McKenzie, bibliography

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[17] Although this is, of course, the general position taken by scholars – empirical study over emotional connection – I would nevertheless point out that the desire to reach the authorial text is, in its own way, an emotionally-driven objective. Furthermore, as Echard suggests, the effort to protect manuscripts from modern readerly interventions has the effect of consecrating the manuscript itself, momentarily effacing its editorial value: "no one would let me rest a coffee cup on Morgan M690, nor would anyone allow me to do what one earlier owner of the book did – take out a pencil and draw large, full-folio portrait heads on the flyleafs. One worships at the altar of the manuscript; one does not doodle on it" ("House Arrest" 189).

[18] For just a few examples of scholarship that focuses on material significance beyond codicology, see Nichols and Wenzel (1996)*;* Taylor (2002); Edwards, Gillespie,and Hanna (2000); Griffiths and Pearsall (1989); Fleischman (1990); Patterson (1987).

allows us to describe not only the technical but the social processes
of their transmission…it accounts for non-book texts, their
physical forms, textual versions, technical transmission,
institutional control, their perceived meanings, and social effects.
It accounts for a history of the book, and, indeed, of all printed
forms including all textual ephemera as a record of cultural change
whether in mass civilization or minority culture. (13)

Examining the "sociology" of Cotton Nero and the *Piers Plowman* manuscripts may, I suggest, provide insight into how form (both literary and material) has influenced reception, both then and now.

The existence of just a single copy of the Cotton Nero poems is not unusual in the corpus of Middle English literature. Derek Pearsall points out that "nearly all unrhymed alliterative poems occur in unique manuscripts,"[19] suggesting that their circulation was regionally restricted because that style of poetry was not marketable in London ("Alliterative Revival" 39-40). *Piers Plowman* and *The Siege of Jerusalem* are the major exceptions to this general statement, and they prompted John Bowers to ask why some poems written in regional dialects enjoyed wide circulation while others (specifically *Pearl)* fell into relative oblivion. Bowers argues that it was not dialectal differences or small regional audiences that led to *Pearl*'s neglect, but rather the lack of official patronage: the *Pearl* poet was not patronized by a Lancastrian and therefore there were no funds and no royal support available to prompt the production and circulation of these poems.[20] Other authors, such as Gower, Hoccleve, and Lydgate, received royal sponsorship and the result of such sponsorship was a stable textual tradition and high quality production –

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[19] Of the Cotton Nero poems, *Pearl* has a consistent rhyme scheme throughout and *Gawain* uses the bob-and-wheel format at the end of each stanza. *Patience*, *Cleanness,* and *Gawain* all use the alliterative long line; *Pearl* is alliterative, but does not employ the long-line style.
[20] Bowers convincingly argues that Richard II cultivated support in the Cheshire region which was then withdrawn when Henry Bolingbroke was crowned in 1399 (*Politics* 69-76). Henry IV's occupation of the area was resisted, and he did not renew annuities for most of Richard's Cheshire supporters (188-189). Bowers' argument proposes that the Cotton Nero poems were likely "copied from a deluxe manuscript produced during the period of Cheshire privilege at court," and the quality of the current manuscript suggests that it was created for a manorial court of reduced means, whose ties to Henry IV were loose (191).

particularly when we consider the *Regiment of Princes,* the *Confessio Amantis,* and the *Troy Book* (*Politics* 187).

The variety of annotations in *Piers* manuscripts, the different kinds of compilations in which *Piers Plowman* is preserved, the quality and variety of paper or parchment, and of course the *mise-en-page* of the individual manuscripts all contribute to a wealth of information regarding the relationship between physical form, audience, and interpretation in *Piers Plowman* studies. *Pearl* scholarship suffers by comparison because that kind of contextual information simply does not exist. Its paratextual material is comprised of a bifolium of full-page illustrations that preface *Pearl*, with 12 miniatures decorating the remaining three poems in the manuscript. Furthermore, *Pearl* was not the target of "incorrect," subversive decontextualization, as we see with *Piers Plowman* appropriations, in part because there is no clearly identifiable ideological framework that would be easily shifted and used to different ends. Medieval appropriations of *Pearl* would be invaluable, but the first clear evidence of the poem's readership comes from a seventeenth-century catalogue. Blanch and Wasserman somewhat resignedly admit that "as interpreters of the Cotton Nero poems, we are ultimately left not with the manuscript illuminations or the marginalia, but with the poet's words" (*Forme* 121).

This reduction of meaning to literary content alone, however, dismisses the influence of form and image on the reader's interpretative experience. There is one aspect of this manuscript that could be considered paratextual evidence but which is not often used to ascertain either reading practices or the poem's intended meaning: its illustrations. Whether they were created contemporary with the poems or later in the fifteenth century,[21] the images that preface *Pearl* constitute a specific kind of hermeneutic intervention. Unfortunately, however, the *Pearl* illustrations have received very little critical interest, perhaps because of the notion that they are

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[21] Maidie Hilmo surmises that the illustrations were produced very shortly after the manuscript itself (5, 139), as does A.I. Doyle, who remarks that "the forked bears in Nero A.x make one thinkin of the reign of Henry IV" ("Manuscripts" 92)

crude and infantile.[22] Such an assumption is, of course, ultimately based on the fallacy that

aesthetic value is universal and unconstrained by social or cultural contexts. The view of the

illustrations as crudely done does not correspond with the critical consensus on *Pearl* as a work

of literary genius, and therefore their hermeneutic utility has been understated.

Maidie Hilmo suggests that even though medieval illustrations "are the sort of thing the

modern reader tends to skim over somewhat uncomfortably in the search for the real substance

of a work, [they were] the transcendental framework within which medieval creative activity and

audience response operated" (3), a comment that highlights the problem with Blanch and

Wasserman's assertion that interpreters of Cotton Nero are left with words and not images. She

identifies Gregory the Great's famous dictum about pictures being books for the illiterate as one

important influence on the modern disparagement of medieval illustrations and our dismissal of

what she calls the "transcendental framework" of pictures (13). We may look at the simplicity of

*Pearl'*s illustrations and find them difficult to reconcile with "transcendental," but their very

simplicity and focus on the dreamer to the exclusion of the bloodied Lamb, the Maiden's

luxurious dress, or Christ glorified (all of which could be sourced from conventional models and

would have been unsurprising to see) points not to the illustrator's lack of knowledge or skill but

to his interest in its ultimate message. One of the central themes of *Pearl* is that comprehension

of divine truth cannot be fully achieved during our earthly existence, and therefore the illustrator

does not attempt to depict the ethereal and divinely superlative qualities of the *Pearl* landscape;

rather, he creates illustrations that reflect the perspective of the dreamer himself and emphasize

the dream-like state he is in.

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[22] The nineteenth-century British Library catalogue entry for the *Pearl*-poet's manuscript describes *Pearl* as "A poem in old English on religious and moral subjects; with some paintings rudely executed."

Figure 2:

Dreamer gazing at
Pearl Maiden ©
The British
Library Board, BL
MS Cotton Nero
A.X, fol 42. By
permission of the
British Library.

Figure 3:

Dreamer gazing at
Maiden in celestial
city © The British
Library Board, BL
MS Cotton Nero
A.X, fol 41. By
permission of the
British Library.

Figure 4: Dreamer sleeping by the river © The British Library Board,
BL MS Cotton Nero A.X, fol 37. By permission of the British Library.

The focus of *Pearl* is not so much on how or why the pearl transforms into the divine

Pearl Maiden, but the very "Otherness" of the dreamer's experience and his journey of spiritual

self-discovery as he tries to understand the shift from earthly to heavenly. Instead of viewing

iconographic images of Christ in glory, we as readers are placed beside the dreamer, joining him

as he enters the strange landscape and finally sees the Maiden across the river. The illustrations

also emphasize the confusion inherent to a dream experience; the dreamer's attire, for example,

changes slightly in the series of pictures, "suggesting the time lapses and the unexplained shifts

characteristic of dreams" (Hilmo 150). The wavy quality of the lines, the ghostliness of the fish

in the river, the foreign shape of the trees, and the strange sense of proximity that characterizes

the spatial relationship between the Maiden and the dreamer all serve to enhance the dream-like

quality of the picture. Since the illustrator does not attempt to imitate closely the landscape

described in the poem, the features of the *Pearl* illustrations are in rather striking contrast to

those described by the poet. Spearing describes how in *Pearl* the traditional garden setting of a

dream vision "has been transformed into something less languidly autumnal, something sharper,

harder, brighter, even painfully bright"– features which are in contrast to the *Pearl* illustrator's

landscape (*Dream Poetry* 114). The illustrator's renderings of the scene traverse that boundary

between the familiarity of a conventional object (the pastoral landscape) and the Otherness of a

thing (the sharp artifice of the poem's dreamscape, the sense of a false Nature). The landscape is,

like the Dreamer's first sight of the Pearl Maiden, familiar yet strange.

Some of these features of the *Pearl* illustrations parallel *Piers Plowman*'s dream-vision

frame. Like Will, the Pearl Dreamer's clothes shift and obscure his social status and since our

focus is on the dreamer in both poems we are uncertain of our own position. The strange time

shifts signaled by the Pearl Dreamer's changing clothes and location correspond with the

confusion of Will's waking and dreaming episodes; Will experiences dreams-within-dreams and

sometimes wakes up in a different location than that in which he fell asleep. Both dreamers, as

discussed 6.3.1 below, are absorbed by the physical landscape into a semi-divine dream world,[23]

and the Pearl Dreamer's absorption is suggested by the way the lines of the dreamer's body

follow the lines of the landscape in which he is set (Hilmo 148).

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[23] This in contrast to other dream-vision poems, such as *The Book of the Duchess, The Legend of Good Women*, and *The Testament of Cresseid* in which the dreamer falls asleep at home in bed. In *Duchess* and *Cresseid,* the dreamer falls into sleep while reading a book, and in the *Legend* the dreamer actively resists falling asleep in a meadow and rushes home to sleep instead.

It is clear by not only their existence but their prominent placement at the beginning of the manuscript that these illustrations were intended to supplement the reading of *Pearl*. Rather than using the more conventional Marian or Christ-focused iconographic images,[24] the illustrator chose to depict the Otherness of the dream experience, which is what the strange descriptions in the poem were likely intended to do. The placement of the illustrations before the poem itself prepares the reader to understand the decadent descriptions as evidence not of earthly wealth but of the unknowability of divine truth – the great separation (as shown by the placement of the river) between our world and the next. The relative lack of paratextual material for *Pearl* is a loss for scholars of the poem, but the limited paratextual information we can gain through the illustrations reinforces one of *Pearl*'s central ideas: there is much that we do not understand and will never know. We learn this same lesson, somewhat ironically, from the plethora of scholarship surrounding the *Piers* manuscripts and Langland's "original" poem.

6.3   *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl:* Literary Siblings

The notion of thingness as unknowability was introduced in Chapter Two, and certainly *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman* are notoriously evasive poems. Both tend to resist firm classification, and while one cannot convincingly argue that the *Pearl*-poet participates in the *Piers* tradition (or vice versa), it is evident that both writers drew upon similar literary tropes and discourses. These discourses focus largely upon genealogy (in its different manifestations) and the instability of individual identity, both of which are connected by the notion of *kynde*, which is a key term in *Piers Plowman* and is used by the *Pearl* poet as well.[25] *Kynde* is a concept that delineates the intersection of spiritual and earthly identities, and the connections and gaps between these two planes are at the heart of the discourses shared by *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*.

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[24] Standard Marian iconography would have fit well with *Pearl*. In the late medieval period, Mary was traditionally depicted with fruits and flowers (Osenga 79-80).

[25] See Section 2.1.3 in Chapter Two for an introduction of *kynde*.

The very titles – and the characters to which they refer – of *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl* are insistently tactile and earthly: a plowman and a gemstone. In both figures the instability of the material (its shift into the metaphysical and back again) is juxtaposed with necessity of such instability in the revelation of spiritual meaning and personal growth. The material is at once necessary and inadequate; the reader and the Dreamer have their controllable objects replaced with the strangeness of things, as this next section will discuss – the pearl, the armor of Piers/Christ, Will's cloak, the Maiden's city, Truth's Tower. When we think we have, in Ian Woodward's terms, "semiotic command" of such objects (144), they shift into thingness and, like the Dreamer, we struggle to classify and understand them.

Indeed, the Dreamers in both poems struggle to classify and understand themselves as well as the figures who guide them. An analysis of individual identity in a medieval text may at first seem anachronistic; medieval philosophy and theology did not acknowledge, understand or value individualism in the way we do currently. The interest both poems evince in individual identity is an early – and relatively unusual – glimmer of the early modern period, during which the notion of the private self, in all its varied definitions, began to inform nearly all aspects of life, from architecture to literature.[26] Although personal identity was not a foreign concept to a medieval reader, it did not hold the same value as it did in later centuries and therefore it was not as commonly explored in literature. The authorial persona and the rare autobiographical impulse (as we see in Passus V of the *Piers* C text or in some of Chaucer's and Hoccleve's poetry) were medieval manifestations of the individual self, but more often the self and its meaning or experiences was configured solely along the lines of the community (Aers 4).

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[26] Jacob Burckhardt's hard division between medieval communality and renaissance individuality is now considered problematic since such a dichotomy does not take into account early modern communal identities or instances of medieval individualism (Burke 17). See Greenblatt (1980) and the essays in Porter (1997) for further information on the manifestations of selfhood in the early modern period.

Identity, even in its most individual manifestations, was thus considered to be formed externally rather than internally. The medieval tradition of moral exempla is an example of how identity formation was imagined on a practical level; an external model was required in order to sustain a sense of individual identity. In the poems themselves, this model is exemplified in the figures of Piers and the Pearl Maiden. Because of the importance of the external model, this chapter deploys Jacques Lacan's theories on Otherness and identity in its readings of *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*.[27] Lacan's understanding of where and when signification fails and how this influences the process of identity formation provides an angle from which to approach thingness that, paradoxically, transcends things themselves.

One of the key external factors in understanding identity in these poems is, of course, genealogy. Genealogy functions as an origin and source of identity, but it is continually compromised by its unstable nature. Meed and the Pearl Maiden are examples of where the strength and instability of genealogy coincide in order to propel both the reader and the Dreamer forward in the search for spiritual knowledge and a Godly identity. Genealogy is also the site upon which the physical and the textual converge, and thus is part of the poems' overall paradigm of materiality. In both poems the physical world reveals elements of the divine – the allegorical landscape in *Piers*, for example, or the garden in *Pearl* that seems to transform a jewel into a maiden. At the same time, however, the physical world impedes the individual development of the poems' central characters, as when Piers decides that plowing, which used to symbolize the Christian life, is useless and he needs to pray rather than work, or when the same landscape that produced the Pearl Maiden prevents the Dreamer from joining her. The physical world becomes a paradox of signification, producing but also resisting meaning. In a strange way, this paradigm of materiality parallels the genealogies of the manuscripts themselves. These

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[27] The integration of Lacanian theory into the reading of medieval literature is not wholly unexpected, since Lacan himself (1986) sees his ideas of desire and Otherness at play in the medieval tradition of courtly love. See O'Donoghue for his Lacanian reading of the courtly love genre.

codices preserve and transmit the poems yet the conditions of their production – the way we have inherited them – hinders us from seeing the interests they share.

6.3.1 "Sellies and Selkouthe Thynges": Object, Subject, and Identity

Earlier in this dissertation, I employed the principles of thing theory and material culture studies in my analysis of medieval manuscripts, physical artifacts whose role within medieval literary studies is foundational yet also marginal. Manuscripts are therefore an ideal medium through which to explore not only the intersection of materiality and meaning, but its antithesis – thingness, in which anticipated meaning is deferred. It may appear counterintuitive, however, to apply this same theoretical framework to events and characters within the texts themselves. After all, aside from their existence on parchment, literary events and characters are devoid of physical presence and thus seem not to correspond with the intensely physical focus of thing theory. Most material or thing-theory analyses focus upon physical objects, modern or ancient. However, I would argue that representations of physical objects – and furthermore, representations of objectification and of "thingness" – provide equal opportunity for critical engagement. In other words, thing theory is not constrained to physical objects within the "real" world; it is also useful in analyzing how the material is represented in literature and how the physical world can articulate where slippages in signification occur. W.J.T. Mitchell warns against accepting the illusion that the turn to the physical is a turn to objective truth and argues that "the physical is a thoroughly metaphysical concept....Objects only make sense in relation to thinking, speaking subjects, and things are evanescent, multistable appearances" (187). Under the definitions proposed by Mitchell, Brown and Plotz, objects have a stable relationship with subjects (in that they are defined by that relationship) and things do not.

Unstable subjects are, of course, a matter of critical interest in both *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*. Although the primary subjects in these poems are their respective Dreamers (Will and the Pearl Dreamer/Jeweller), there are additional subjects whose relationship with their physical accoutrements and the landscape around them frequently moves them into incomprehensible thingness. While figures such as Piers Plowman, Meed, and the Pearl Maiden are highly allegorical and therefore metaphysical, their ever-shifting roles and character are delineated by the material world that the text has created around them; in a similar way, the responses and actions of poems' respective dreamers are very much controlled by the landscapes they are placed into. This objectification of the dreamer figure by the material world of the poem and by material objects is an important feature of both *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*. In each poem the insistence of tactile, visceral materiality in the ultimate revelation of meaning pursues the dreamer throughout his quest.

In both poems the identity of the Dreamer is configured in response to a figure or figures representing alterity or Otherness. Because of their very unknowability, these figures represent the ultimate desire of the respective Dreamers. The relationship between subject and Other in these texts corresponds with Jacques Lacan's notion of identity formation and the mirror stage, in which the subject, at a very young age, first recognizes his or her image in a mirror as a complete and controlled "ideal-I" – as a figure that is at once the subject's own self and other-than the self (Lacan, "Mirror Stage" 2). The mirror-gazing toddler does not see his or her own uncontrolled limbs and lack of coordination; instead, in desiring wholeness the subject sees only their own imaginary completion. Lacan identifies this stage as essential to the subject's later integration into what he calls the symbolic order, [28] but he also emphasizes that the desire to see

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[28] The symbolic order is the social world, governed by the constraints of language, authority, hierarchy, and law; Lacan characterizes this kind of governance as the "Name-of-the-Father." For further information on the mirror stage and on the symbolic order, see Lacan's *Freud's Papers on Technique: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan,*

one's own completion in the image of another stays with us into adulthood. This desire is also connected to Lacan's notion of *das Ding* – the thing, the unknown part of desire, something outside of the symbolic order and outside of language.[29] Through one's desire for the unclassifiable, the stability of one's own identity is compromised.

The primary manifestation of compromised subjectivity in both poems is the figure of the searching, stubborn, and often obtuse dreamer whose quest opens the narrative. Both poems begin in an outdoor setting – one on the Malvern Hills in May, the other in a garden in August – and both Dreamers unintentionally fall asleep in the greenery. While an examination of these opening passages may seem a rather rudimentary exercise, they nevertheless contain important details that frame our reading of these poems. Below is excerpted Prologue: 1- 8 of the *Piers Plowman* C Text:[30]

> In a somur sesoun whan softe was the sonne
> Y shope me into shroudes as Y a shep were;
> In abite as an heremite vnholy of werkes
> Wente forth in the world wondres to here,
> And say many sellies and selkouthe thynges.
> Me biful for to slepe, for werynesse of-wandred;
> And in a launde as Y lay, lened Y and slepte,
> And merueylousliche me mette, as Y may ʒow telle.

The contrivance of a narrator wandering in an outdoor landscape, falling asleep, and experiencing a prophetic or divinely-inspired dream is, of course, a common trope in medieval literature. The anxiety associated with determining the veracity of a dream experience often

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Book 1, pp 220-236 and "The Mirror Stage As Formative of the Function of the I As Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience."

[29] Lacan's discussion of *das Ding* is included in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII,* pp 43ff.

[30] The C text is used throughout (with references to A and B where necessary) because it is generally thought to represent the final version of Langland's poem. Although there is no critical consensus on whether the C text is artistically superior, C's narrator, while still fallible and problematic, does seem to be more experienced and more assertive (Galloway, *Penn Commentary* 35). This is evident even in the first few lines: for example, while in the B text the narrator claims his dream came "of fairye" (6), in the C text the fairy reference is omitted and a line asserting the truth of his experience is added ("witterliche Y sigh hit," line 10). In general, C "avoids or parodies" all references to magic or fairies (36).

manifests itself in the poet's treatment of the Dreamer's self-portrayal – how he legitimizes his experience to the reader (Spearing, *Dream Poetry* 5-6). This treatment occurs in one of two forms: the Dreamer either emphasizes his authority and his piety, or his actions demonstrate a lack of wisdom and an unwillingness to learn, thus creating a structural irony that teaches the reader through opposition. In these first few lines and throughout the entire poem, the integrity and trustworthiness of Langland's Dreamer, Will, is called into question. However, the Dreamer in each of the three versions of *Piers* remains a questionable figure, not just because of his own misunderstandings or lack of *kynde knowyng*, but because of the contested signification of the objects and environment around him.

The first three lines immediately present the reader with unfulfilled expectations: line 1 recalls the French-based *reverdie* genre of pastoral romance, in which a lovesick narrator would find himself dreaming in a beautiful landscape, but it is followed by two lines which suggest disguise and possibly deceit. Much critical speculation has been made regarding the meaning of these lines, and my intent is neither to echo previous comments nor to argue for definitive answers.[31] The very ambiguity of this opening, which resists interpretive finality, is key to the narrator's own representation and to the reader's understanding of it. Galloway suggests that these lines "imply self-concealment as well as self-presentation" (*Penn Commentary* 26); Will refuses to invest fully in a vocation or identity and instead uses shrouds, robes, and social/environmental isolation to avoid scrutiny. By doing so, of course, the poet *invites* the reader's scrutiny and thereby constructs the reader's relationship to the literary/material hybridity of the poem as analogous to Will's shifting relationship to the landscape around him.

Will's resistance to classification is enacted through the clothing he wears and the

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[31] See Galloway (2006), pp 26-31 for a review of the criticism surrounding this passage.

landscape through which he moves.[32] As Will "shapes" himself into shrouds as if he were a sheep,[33] almost morphing into a creature of the hills he is walking, the poet William essentially inscribes himself into (or onto) the sheepskin on which his text is recorded. It is a strange moment of textual dissonance, in which the literary and the material – the text and its literal, physical context – slide into one another. Chapter Two identified Brownell's 1857 oak-framed painting "The Charter Oak" as a manifestation of a similar kind of dissonance, in which representation and reality collide: "Are we looking at image or essence – at a sign for the thing, or the thing itself?" (Plotz 112). In these lines is Langland "shope"ing himself into the "shrouds" or the skin of a sheep – writing himself into the parchment of his own poem? The movement of the narrator into the poem and the connection of that movement with the physical material upon which the poem is written draws the reader's attention back to the manuscript - not only what the manuscript represents, but what it is: the skin of a sheep, a who wanders freely yet follows unthinkingly. These characteristics, of course, are present in Will himself. The three "figures" of Will, the sheep, and the poem's parchment are thus intertwined, resisting the reader's effort to distinguish them. Through his close association with the materials surrounding him – materials which do not clarify his own identity in any clear way – Will becomes an unclassifiable thing hovering between the historical author whom he echoes and the animal whose life was given to make the poem.

However, in the next line the sheep shrouds are depicted as analogous to the guise of a hermit, "unholy of werkes." Rather than being cast as a leader or a follower (a sheep or a shepherd), Will is now characterized by his wandering and his social isolation. Medieval hermits

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[32] A similar conflation of clothing, environment, and shifting identity occurs when Piers Plowman's plowing of the half-acre becomes the actual pilgrimage to Truth (as opposed to a necessary delay, which is how he initially presents it). See 117 above and Note 47 below.

[33] The question of whether "shep" refers to sheep or shepherd remains unanswered. "Sheep" seems to be the most commonly attributed meaning. The *Middle English Dictionary* has a separate entry for this particular use of "shep" and *Piers Plowman* is the only quotation provided: "?A shepherd; ?a sheep, used *fig.*: one who wanders or goes astray." This particular definition is perhaps questionable because it is not found attested in other texts.

were at best sources of divine wisdom and charismatic preachers, and at worst were wild, uncivilized men whose wandering needed to be controlled. They were a source of some social anxiety because they were not bound by religious vows or pledges of patronage or fealty, but at the same time some were considered to hold valuable spiritual wisdom.[34] Will's hermit guise, however, recalls the problems associated with hermits rather than their wisdom. His wandering at this point is motivated not by piety or charity; he is "unholy of werkes"[35] and rather than focusing on God he desires to hear wonders and see "many sellies and selkouthe thynges."

In contrast to the Old Testament prophets, whose eremitic lives provided signs and wonders to the people of Israel, and to the medieval hermits who integrated themselves into society through their wisdom or preaching (Howe 108-111), Will-as-hermit selfishly seems to wish only for spectacles – wonders and marvels. More importantly, the wonders he seeks to experience (and perhaps has already experienced) are described as "thynges": his wandering is aimless because he does not care about the source or nature of the marvels he will see. The "selkouthe thynges" he seeks are therefore initially understandable only as empty signifiers, as spectacles whose relation to the Christian life is unclear: they are "things" in the most elemental sense. This notion of thingness as morally questionable resonates with Lacan's *das Ding*, the unknowable and forbidden part of desire which results in the subject's exile from the world of the symbolic. Will's "selkouthe thynges" are therefore not only empty signifiers, but they lead to the end of his personal development rather than aid in it. Although Will's aimless wandering eventually becomes a journey in search of the best spiritual path, it does not begin in this way.

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[34] Howe suggests that we view medieval hermits, with their mixed vocation as an isolated aesthete and lay preacher, as a symbol of the sacred; a person who is at once integrated into the social fabric but also distinct from it. See Godden for his discussion regarding Langland's ambivalence about hermits and how he struggles with it throughout *Piers Plowman.*

[35] Galloway discusses how this line troubles the conventional "strategies of [narratorial] reassurance" it accompanies (*Penn Commentary* 22). He emphasizes how the syntax of the previous clause ("abite as an heremite") is ambivalent; he is either dressed as a hermit because that is what he is (or is like), or he is covering himself *as if* he were a hermit, with the suggestion that he is a wolf in sheep's clothing, so to speak (29). The phrase "unholy of werkes" contains the same kind of ambivalence: is the narrator simply not doing good works, or is he unsanctified and doing unholy works? (30)

Will's wandering causes him to become so fatigued that he falls asleep "in a launde"[36] and his inadvertent nap is what leads to his multiple visions, thereby enabling him to seek the spiritual life of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. When he states that "merueylousliche me mette" a vision that showed him the true and the false, he presents a new kind of marvel; the wonders that he is about to see (Holy Church, the Field of Folk, and the other figures he encounters) are spiritually substantial. Their divine purpose is clear, since they are not the "selkouthe thynges" that teach him to look and marvel without absorbing and learning. However, Will's initial resistance to classifying experiences and figures properly – and his resistance to his own classification or stable self-presentation – remains problematic throughout the poem. Despite C's many clarifications of the poem's theological material, Will retains the "thingness" that troubles his identity in these first few lines.

Through the ambiguous depiction of Will's relationship with material objects, Langland constructs a character that resists signification. Will's inadvertent lapse into sleep in the midst of his wandering suggests that the very environment by which he is surrounded claims control over him – the opposite of what man's relationship to land should be. Such a reversal of humanity's governance over the landscape troubles and destabilizes the individual identity projected by the Dreamer as well as the Dreamer's own spiritual state. The Dreamer in *Pearl* also participates in this discourse of thingness by objectifying the pearl he thinks he owns – an illusion of control that is destroyed when the predictable object (the pearl) is revealed to be something completely different and beyond the Dreamer's realm of understanding. Indeed, the nature of the pearl as something that lies beyond the categories of owned/owner, or human/inanimate aligns with Bill Brown's definition of thingness: he describes it as "what is excessive in objects...what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects - their force as a sensuous presence....the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols and totems" (*Thing Theory*

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[36] In A and B he is lulled to sleep by a nearby river.

5). This "excessiveness" in the pearl is what renders it out of the Dreamer's control, despite his initial illusion of ownership:

> Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye
> To clanly clos in golde so clere:
> Oute of oryent, I hardyly saye,
> Ne proued I neuer her precios pere.
> So rounde, so reken in vche araye,
> So small, so smoþe her sydez were;
> Queresoeuer I jugged gemmez gaye
> I sette hyr sengeley in synglure.
> Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;
> Þurȝ gresse to grounde hit fro me yot.
> I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere
> Of þat pryuy perle withouten spot. (1-12)

In these first lines of *Pearl,* the poet draws the reader's attention not to the position or status of the Dreamer but to his most valued object: his pearl. The pearl here is characterized as utterly unique among gems but also as the most purely pearl, an essentialist perspective that calls to mind Plato's theory of forms.[37] The Dreamer judges the pearl's economic and social value by describing it as fit for a prince, surpassing even those exotic gems that come "oute of oryent"; its beauty and proportions (lines 6-7) are ideal. The Dreamer claims objectivity in his assessment, for he states that "Queresoeuer I jugged gemmez gaye / I sette hyr sengeley in synglure." In other words, he is able to judge jewels accurately and has set aside this pearl as unique.

Several characteristics in this first stanza complicate the Dreamer's identity, his role with respect to the pearl, and the identity or nature of the pearl itself. We know very little about the Dreamer or his location from the opening lines – the focus is on the pearl as an object he owns,

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[37] Platonic essentialism and its later manifestation in realism ultimately do not replace the usefulness of thing theory in interpreting *Pearl* because these philosophies locate ultimate meaning elsewhere than in the physical object, asserting that objects are copies of a universal truth. However, the countering argument of medieval nominalism, which would, for example, state that true "pearlness" is found in individual pearls and is not a universal concept independent of its physical manifestations, is also inadequate. The main feature of the pearl in this poem is its shifting meaning: ultimate "pearlness" is first found in the jewel held by the dreamer, then in its fecundity when it is dropped in the grass, then in the dress of the maiden, and in the very body of the maiden. The perfect "pearlness" of the pearl remains constant, but its definition and its physical manifestations do not.

and it is not until line 9 that we even learn he is in a garden. The Dreamer's assertion that he has

"jugged gemmez" clearly suggests that he is a jeweler, as is later confirmed. However, it is the

rhetoric of courtly love in tandem with this controlling role that poses uneasy questions about the

Dreamer's identity and his relationship to the pearl. The use of the feminine pronoun in reference

to the pearl and the courtly feminine descriptors applied to it ("So small, so smoþe her sydez

were") indicate that we are meant to understand the pearl as embodying femininity (Gross 82)

and foreshadow the pearl's later manifestation as the Pearl Maiden.[38] In line 9 we discover that

he is wandering in a garden and it is there that the pearl falls from his grasp and is lost, leaving

him sick with love-longing ("I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere"). The courtly rhetoric and the

locus amoenus of a garden setting are conventions of medieval romance, and therefore they

establish literary expectations that the poem never fulfills. This resistance to classification is also

evident in the portrayal of the Dreamer and the pearl, as well as their use of language. Such

courtly conventions therefore have an additional role in the poem that corresponds to similar

moments of dissonance elsewhere.

The language of courtly love employed here and throughout the poem seems strangely

inappropriate. Charlotte Gross argues that the poet uses courtly language for two purposes: when

spoken by the Dreamer, courtly rhetoric highlights the Dreamer's inability to let go of earthly

values and the material world, and when spoken by the Maiden, it draws upon the religious

tradition of courtly rhetoric to reflect her perfected spiritual state. For the Maiden, courtly

language is "the most nearly adequate vehicle for the expression of ineffable" (80). However,

Gross's article never fully addresses the implications of incest in the Dreamer's description of

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[38] Besides the conventionally female description of the pearl, there is additional evidence in Middle English
literature for the use of the pearl as a metaphor for a beautiful woman (Beal 12-13). Much of this evidence uses
Marian theology or the Song of Songs as a model. In MS Bodleian 12653, for example, the poet praises his lover as
"both prudent and pure, like a perle of prise / Also fair of figure and oreant of bewtye" (quoted in Beal 13). The
Biblical pearl of price is used here as an analogy for a woman, and like the Dreamer's pearl, this pearl too is
characterized by an "Other" or oriental beauty. The conflation of spiritual and courtly love language reached new
heights in the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century writings of mystics. For a discussion of this phenomenon,
see Newman (2002).

and speech to the pearl/Pearl Maiden. His language suggests a romantic interest in the pearl – a suggestion that is strange not only because the pearl has not yet transformed, but because the text later suggests that she was the Dreamer's young daughter. Jane Beal deals with this disturbing implication by arguing that the Maiden and the Dreamer were lovers rather than father and daughter. She highlights ambiguities in the text of the poem to make this argument, and also argues that the illustrations do not support the father-daughter reading (3-8). However, the strangeness of the courtly interaction in *Pearl* would not be surprising to Lacan, who interprets the practice of courtly love as extreme sublimation and a way to avoid sexual congress: "Courtly love is for man…the only way to elegantly pull off the absence of the sexual relationship" (qtd in Restuccia).[39] The unattainable lady functions as a legitimate (and therefore pseudo) *das Ding* for the courtly lover.

The uncomfortable relationship between the Dreamer and the Maiden has been the focus of much debate, particularly among those critics interested in its autobiographical implications. I would argue, however, that this debate downplays or even ignores the most important point about the interaction between these two figures: namely, that the Dreamer's desire to recover the Maiden/Pearl transforms into a desire to be like her, and that this desire is unachievable. Gregory Roper sees this kind of identity formation as a kind of penance based on the subject's ability to follow a guiding model: the dreamer "must confront the weak self he has become and find a way to reshape that self on a new model, the one which the Pearl-maiden provides…he comes to a task which is not merely recovery of his pearl, but a recover of his own proper 'I'" (165). The Dreamer's desire to have or be like the Maiden is part of what constitutes his own personal identity. However, locating that desire in another person also alienates him from a stable identity, just as the child's desire for the image in the mirror is always his or her *ideal* image rather than the reality. Lacan emphasizes the importance of the "moment when the infant in jubilation

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[39] See also O'Donoghue for a more thorough engagement with Lacan's notion of courtly love.

assumes a mastery which he has not yet attained, through the mediation of the other" (*Papers* 169), and we see this mistaken assumption of mastery on the Dreamer's part throughout his interaction with the Maiden. Understanding the distance between the Dreamer and the Maiden is more important than parsing out the details of their relationship.[40]

Indeed, using Lacan's perspective we may even see the Maiden as the ultimate spiritual identity that the Dreamer longs to achieve, but is unable to until after his own death – in other words, the Maiden represents the Dreamer's own divided identity even as she functions as the Other, his object of desire. Certain uncanny[41] moments in the poem support the notion of the Dreamer and the Maiden being two different phases of one individual's spiritual and personal development. The concatenating terms in Section III are "more and more," a phrase that builds up the dual sense of desire and haunted anticipation of something unknown. When the Dreamer first sees the Maiden in the last two stanzas of this section, he recognizes her immediately but then slowly realizes that he recognizes something else about her as well: "I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere…On lenghe I loked to hyr Þere / Þe lenger, I knew hyr more and more / The more I frayste hyr fayre face / Her fugure fun quen I had fonte…Bot baysment gef myn hert a brunt / I seȝ hyr in so strange a place" (167-175). The Dreamer's sense of strangeness and unfamiliar desire increases in the next stanza:

> More Þen me lyste my drede aros
> I stod ful style and dorste not calle
> Wyth yȝen open and mouth ful clos
> I stod as hende as hawk in halle
> I hoped Þat gostly watz Þat porpose
> I dred oneende quat shulde byfalle
> Lest ho me eschaped Þat I Þer chos
> Er I at steuen hir moȝt stalle. (181-188)

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[40] The courtly language used between the Maiden and the Lamb (the Lamb, for example, refers to her as his "lemman swete" in line 763) should caution readers against using such language as a measure of earthly relationships.

[41] Uncanny in Freud's usage (*unheimlich*) refers to something that is at once "homey" and "not homey" – something recognized yet unfamiliar. Freud connects the uncanny to the illegitimate desires of the death drive.

Here desire ("lyste") and "dred" compete with one another as the dreamer struggles to understand what he is seeing. He becomes animal-like in his hesitation, standing as still as a hawk in hall, watching the scene carefully and uncertainly. This is not the reaction one would expect of a father seeing his daughter again. The Dreamer's hesitation is due to the uncertain identity of the Maiden – is she a lover? the Virgin Mary? his daughter? himself? Because he cannot know the Maiden, he also cannot know himself.

Lacan argues that in the dream state our ideal identity is often symbolized by "a fortress, or a stadium - its inner arena and enclosure, surrounded by marshes and rubbish-tips, dividing it into two opposed fields of contest where the subject flounders in quest for the lofty, remote inner castle whose form...symbolizes the id in a quite startling way" ("Mirror Stage" 5). In *Pearl*'s illustrations, the Maiden stands near a church-like building and a crenellated fortress wall while the Dreamer looks up at her from the green landscape below (see Figure 3). In the text itself, the Maiden's location is somewhat unclear at first; she is across the river from the Dreamer, but sits beneath a crystal cliff and not a castle wall. It is not until Section XVI that the Dreamer realizes the Maiden has left her castle or city to meet with him, and in Section XVII she leads him along the riverbank until he sees her city, the New Jerusalem, on top of a hill. The Maiden's association with this city and the Dreamer's inability to reach it resonate with Lacan's notion of identity formation as symbolized in the dream-state by a fortress or castle – something desirable yet distant and protected. The lengthy apocalyptic description of the celestial city grows in intensity until the Dreamer cannot restrain himself and attempts to cross the river to join the Maiden behind the gates. His hubristic act takes him out of the dream and into wakefulness, but he is now aware of his ultimate spiritual destiny even if he is currently alienated from it.

The identity of the pearl is itself unstable and imbued with "a wide range of metaphorical suggestions and connotations" (Finch 32). Purity is certainly one of the dominant ideals

embodied by the pearl, and is also central in *Cleanness* and even *Patience.* Furthermore, it is key

to the pearl's function within the poem because the pearl's value to human subjects is dependent

on its untainted status. The pearl's cleanliness and its symmetrical, natural perfection is what

make it both economically and spiritually valuable. It becomes a model for the ideal spiritual

condition of humanity, but the model fails to work if it actually comes into contact with

earthliness or the material world. In other words, the Maiden can only teach the Dreamer when

she is separate from him; he could not grasp her identity when he held her in his hands, and even

when she explains her nature to him from across the river he is still perplexed (Sections VIII-IX

and XIII-XIV, for example). Only in his alienation from her can he learn to what kind of spiritual

identity he is aspiring. In this sense, *Pearl* uses thingness as, strangely, a vehicle for meaning.

The concatenating terms "spot" and "withouten spot" in Section I of the poem further

emphasize the Dreamer's concern with his pearl's purity and cleanness, but, like all the

concatenating terms, their meaning shifts. Ad Putter suggests that "withouten spot" draws upon

the physical as well as the spatial sense of "spot"; it may refer not only to the pearl's lack of

blemish, but to its lack of a home or a dwelling place once it falls from the Dreamer into the

grass (148). Before the Dreamer's rediscovery of the pearl-as-Pearl-Maiden living across the

river, the pearl does indeed seem to be in a liminal place, much as the Dreamer himself is.

However, "spot" also speaks to the geography of the pearl and of the Dreamer: what "spot" are

they in, and why does the pearl move from one spot to another? In line 9 we are told of the

"spot" in which the Dreamer is wandering with his pearl (the "erbere"), and in lines 10 and 13

the poet describes the pearl's movement from that spot:

> Þurȝ gresse to grounde hit fro me yot (10)

> Syþen in þat spote hit fro me sprange (13)

The meaning of "yot" is unclear, but Andrew and Waldron suggest that it is the past tense of "yette" ("pour") and means "ran" or "fell" in this context (54, n10). The phrase "fro me," however, frames the pearl's movement as active and perhaps intentional; the pearl did not simply slip from the Dreamer's hand by accident. This implication is reinforced in line 13, where the pearl is described as springing from the Dreamer; it seems to have agency of its own. However, even though it has sprung away it seems to remain "in þat spote."

Although the Dreamer and the pearl are separated from one another in a spiritual or metaphysical way, they still remain in the same physical location together to the extent that in lines 55-60 the Dreamer describes falling asleep on the ground under which the pearl is buried:

> Þaȝ kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned,
> My wreched wylle in wo ay wraȝte.
> I felle vpon þat floury flaȝt
> Such odour to my hernez schot;
> I slode vpon a slepyng-slaȝte
> On þat precios perle withouten spot

Like the "Will" of *Piers Plowman,* whose ability to acquire "kynde wit" is a long and arduous process, the "wylle" of the *Pearl* Dreamer is hardened to the "kynde" teachings of Christ – and the consolation of Christ.[42] His unnatural refusal to be "kenned" by the "kynde of Kryst"[43] forces a physical and emotional exhaustion that leads to his collapse into sleep. However, it is not just his emotional shock that effects this collapse; it is the lost pearl's own fecund, sensual, overwhelmingly physical power that infiltrates his body and pulls it down to the earth. Lines 25-36 describe the pearl as a seed that fertilizes and flowers the soil with herbs, spices, and flowers. The plain earth or "moul" castigated by the Dreamer becomes an aromatic "floury flaȝt" upon which the Dreamer falls, and the scents of the herbs and flowers go straight to his head ("Such

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[42] *Pearl,* of course, participates in the literary tradition of the *consolatio,* the medieval English form of which was largely informed by Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and its translations (such as Chaucer's *Boece).*

[43] *Kynde,* as discussed in Chapter Two and in Section 6.3.3 here, can refer to actions and natural processes directed by God, and thus the Dreamer's refusal to participate in *kynde* is unnatural.

odour to my hernez schot"). It is the physical world around him, as shaped by the introduction of the pearl, that leads him into the spiritual world of his dream vision. Much of the poem explores such "connections between physical space and spiritual conditions" (Putter 149) thereby opening itself for questions about the significance of things and objects within the text.

Not only has the pearl's sensual productiveness physically overwhelmed the Dreamer, but its fecundity produces or re-produces him, just as it does the flowers and spices. As he lies asleep on top of the newly-sprouted foliage, he inhabits the same "spote" as the pearl itself, which lies hidden in the grass below. Like Will in his sheepskin garb, the pearl and the Dreamer are paradoxically separated yet also inextricably intertwined as their roles as maker and the made, as subject and object, become reversed and unclear. The Dreamer is initially presented as creator: he is a jeweler and a judge of gems and therefore "owns" the pearl because he judges its value. The Dreamer's sense of ownership over the pearl is problematic whether the pearl is read as a person or as a jewel; if the latter, he wrongly "show[s] excessive…grief at the loss of a precious stone," and if the former, he is "treating a person as if she were a thing" (Spearing 121). In both cases the pearl is objectified: it is put to the Dreamer's own use and assumes categories of signification that are meaningful to the Dreamer, while the Dreamer adopts the role of the controlling subject.

Chapter Two introduced Bill Brown's argument that objects become things when they cease working for us or when they fail to operate as expected. This is what Brown calls "objects asserting themselves as things…the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation" ("Thing Theory" 4). Within this paradigm, the Dreamer treats the pearl as an object when he controls it and as a thing when the pearl's nature and position begin to change. As the pearl becomes the fertile creator rather than the created and the Dreamer becomes the passive product of the pearl's fertility we see the pearl as a thing – as something beyond its own

objectification by the Dreamer. Brown sees this kind of thingness as the "excess" of objects; it is something "baldly encountered" but is also "something not quite apprehended" (Brown 5).[44] The Dreamer continues to encounter this paradoxical thingness of the pearl when he meets the Pearl Maiden, whose geographical position, spiritual nature, and celestial hierarchy all defy human classification.[45] Like Piers Plowman, the Maiden embodies Otherness in the poem and in doing so, controls the learning and development of the Dreamer.

6.3.2   Desiring An Other: the Pearl Maiden and Piers Plowman

The Pearl Maiden presents an interesting parallel to the figure of Piers Plowman in that both are figures whose ambivalent status defines not only them, but Will and the Pearl Dreamer, respectively. They are, as mentioned above, the ultimate Other to the Dreamers. The Maiden moves from a passive jewel to a fertile seed, from a young "faunt" to a queen of heaven, and perhaps from an obedient daughter to a courtly lady. The pearl she wears in the centre of her chest is what Kevin Marti calls a "microcosm" of the Maiden herself; it contains all that the Maiden is, while she herself physically encompasses it (6-12).[46] Any stability in her identity is associated not with her relationship to the Dreamer but with her Otherness, her distance from the Dreamer – spatially, linguistically, and spiritually. Whether she is his daughter or his alternate identity, she must remain the unattainable Other to the dreamer in order to enable him to see his own desire in her and to thereby reshape his identity to conform with the divine symbolic order he wishes to penetrate. The Pearl/Maiden's identity is "non-cognitive and unrepresentable" to the Dreamer in his current state (J.A. Mitchell 92).

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[44] Brown 5. Refer to page 219 above where I discuss how "excessiveness" of objects applies to the pearl.
[45] Sections VIII-IX and XIII -XIV are good examples of the Dreamer's confusion.
[46] Marti defines the medieval doctrine of microcosm, which he traces back to Plato, as a form of metonymy in which a part acquires the signification of the whole. The Incarnation is the centre of medieval microcosmic doctrine, "whereby God, who in himself contains all things, allows himself in turn to be contained by his entire creation" (11). The pearl, among other objects, is a medieval symbol of the "microcosmic body" (6).

In a similar process of ambivalent identity formation, Piers Plowman moves from being

one face among a crowd of pilgrims, to an unlikely leader (a plowman instructing a knight), to a

literate laymen whose abilities challenge a priest, to a sudden disappearance and an absent

recollection, and finally to a Christ-Knight figure and an allegory of Saint Peter. Piers' first

appearance is sudden: he "potte[s] forth his heued" from the crowd and asserts that he knows

Truth "as kyndely as clerk doth his bokes" and that he can lead the pilgrims to Truth's Castle

(C:VII:182-184). In these first lines, Piers' claim to authority is through "kynde" knowledge, and

he maintains that authority until he disappears after arguing with the priest about Truth's pardon.

His status as a plowman is confused by his role as a community leader and as a pilgrim, whose

clothes he wears in place of labourer's gear. Much like Will, whose hermit guise renders his

identity unclear and liminal, Piers' accoutrements place him between social categories.[47] Even in

the triumphant Christ-like manifestations towards the end of the poem, Piers' identity is still

shifting and uneasy. When Will asks Faith "Is Peres in this place?" Faith winks and tells Will

that "Iesus of his gentrice [human nature] shal iouste in Pers armes" (C:XX:19-21). Faith's wink

and the reference to the wearing of arms both indicate that it is Christ disguised in Piers'

clothing, thus taking up the theme of clothing and hiddenness that runs throughout the poem. In

Passus XXI, Will falls asleep in Mass and has yet another confusing vision of the Piers-Christ

figure. Langland highlights Piers' ambivalent status throughout the poem, but does so

emphatically in this passage:

> Y ful eftesones aslepe and sodynliche me mette
> That Peres the ploughman was peynted al blody
> And cam in with a cros before the comune peple
> And riht lyke in alle lymes to oure lord Iesu.

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[47] After the plowing of the half-acre progresses, Piers clothes himself "in pilgrimes wyse" and "caste on hym his clothes of alle kyn craftes, / His cokeres and his coffes, as Kynde Wit hym tauhte, / And heng his hopur on his hals in stede of a scryppe" (C:VIII:56-60). Although he describes his clothing as "pilgrimes wyse", the clothes he actually uses are the garments of labourers and his pilgrimage accessories are not for use in a pilgrimage. Instead, Piers wears clothes "alle kyn craftes" and hangs a seedbasket around his neck rather than a pilgrim's satchel.

> And thenne calde Y Conscience to kenne me the sothe:
> "Is this Iesus the ioustare," quod Y, "that Iewes dede to dethe?
> Or hit is Peres the ploughman? Who paynted hym so rede?"
> Quod Conciense and knelede tho, "This aren Peres armes,
> His colours and his cote armure, ac he that cometh so blody
> Is Crist with his croes, conquerour of cristene."
>
> (C:XXI:6-14)

The distinction between Piers and Christ is blurred, and Langland clearly intends it to be so. In the previous passage, Will saw Christ dressed as Piers; in this passage, he appears to see Piers dressed as Christ. The confusion in identity would have been believable to medieval readers, who were accustomed to stories of knights whose arms and armor concealed their true identities; this was a common narrative device in romance. The reader's attention is directed not to the body within the armor, but to the significance of the armor itself – of the surface. Piers and Christ are represented by the same set of signifiers: the same heraldic symbols, colours, and armor. Furthermore, that armor is "paynted" with blood. The term "paint" is used twice in reference to Christ's bloody appearance, and it gives a sense of artifice to the scene. Just as the Pearl is at once a Maiden whose identity is far beyond the intellectual grasp of the Dreamer and an object that was created, owned and judged by the Dreamer,[48] the Piers-Christ figure is beyond Will's understanding and yet is "painted" by the humanity that surrounds him, and painted with blood that shows him to be physiologically close to Will even as he spiritually distant.[49] The insistence of surface materiality in the production of meaning is clear.

The final reference to Piers Plowman is in the last few lines, and brings the poem back to its beginnings in many ways:

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[48] The Dreamer does not, of course, literally "create" the pearl, but as a jeweler he has ownership over it and metaphorically "creates" it in that it is his judgment that determines the pearl's value in human terms. The question of the pearl's *inherent* value apart from the jeweler's assessment is, I think, a key issue addressed by the poem as a whole.

[49] Certainly the conflation of Piers and Christ illustrates the paradoxical wonder of the Incarnation, in which God was at once fully human and fully divine. However, it also paves the way for the transformation of Piers Plowman into pure allegory in Passus XXI, in which Grace makes Piers "my procuratour and my reue" (258). Representing Saint Peter, as head of the Church and "mediator of the law of the Holy Spirit" (Pearsall 2008, 354), Piers drives a team of oxen that are made up of the Gospel writers, is given "graynes" to sow that are the cardinal virtues, etc. He is also given power to consecrate the Eucharist bread.

> "By Crist," quod Consience tho, "Y wol bicome a pilgrim
> And wenden as wyde as the world rennet
> To seke Peres the ploughman…
> …Now Kynde me avenge,
> And sende me hap and hele til Y haue Peres ploughman."
> And sethe he grade afture Grace tyl Y gan awake.
>
> (C:XXII:380-386)

We are thus returned to the beginning of the poem, in which Will clothes himself as a wanderer and goes out to see marvels. However, Will is replaced here with Conscience, whose journey is not in search of entertainment, but of the truth embodied by Piers Plowman. While this suggests the endless nature of the quest for truth, it also optimistically indicates the potential for spiritual development.[50] Because of the knowledge attained in Will's original search, Conscience's new quest starts on a higher ground. Piers Plowman, instead of one face in a crowd of pilgrims, is now commensurate with Truth itself and just as unattainable.[51] The circularity of this conclusion and the deepened characterization of Piers Plowman as an absent object of desire is similar to *Pearl*, whose structural perfection brings the reader back to its own beginnings and whose central figure is indeed an untouchable object of desire for the Dreamer.

In *Pearl,* the Maiden is distant from the Dreamer in both a spatial and a linguistic sense and this distance is necessary for communication to occur between them. She is neither a subject who is clearly and permanently superior to the Dreamer, nor is she an object controlled by him. Part of her Otherness is her liminality – she, as both pearl and maiden, does not fall completely into either category. Scholars have noted how weaknesses in the courtly speech community and ambivalent signification create social confusion and distance in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Plummer 198-9; Blanch and Wasserman, *Forme* 15-25)*,* and the poet uses a similar

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[50] One of the troubling or frustrating aspects of *Piers Plowman* is that it appears never to aspire to completion. Traugott Lawler characterizes the poem as recursive rather than developmental, arguing that there is "a constant return to a few key ideas rather than any clear development of Will or Piers or even of the author's thinking" (118).

[51] The initial pilgrimage to Truth was never actually begun, and therefore Truth is never reached.

technique of linguistic dissonance to illustrate the Maiden's difference from the Dreamer. Just as Will does not understand the growing and shifting identity of Piers Plowman, the Dreamer cannot comprehend the Maiden's development from "faunt" to queen, from an inexperienced girl who does not know the Creed to the spiritually wise bride of the Lamb.

The Maiden's new identity also means a new genealogy, which suggests that genealogy can be a spiritual construct capable of being altered. After the Maiden explains that the Lamb has called her to Him, washed her clothes in his blood, crowned her, and adorned her with pearls, the Dreamer asks incredulously, "Quat kyn Þyng may be Þat Lambe / Þat Þe wolde wedde vnto Hys vyf?" (771-772). The Maiden corrects the Dreamer's conflation of "makelez" and "maskellez" and then answers his question in a way that highlights the instability of linguistic signification:

> If Þou wyl knaw what kyn He be –
> My Lombe, my Lorde, my dere Juelle,
> My Joy, my Blyss, my Lemman fre…
> As a schep to Þe slaȝt Þer lad watz He
> And, as lombe Þat clypper in hande nem,
> So closed He Hys mouth fro vch query
> Quen Juez Hym jugged in Jerusalem.
> (794-804)

The Dreamer asks what "kyn Þyng" is the Lamb, but the Maiden's response ignores the latter word and takes up only the former: "kyn." The most common medieval usage of "kyn" is with respect to familial relationships – one's kin. By disregarding the disruptive potential of the word "Þyng" and focusing on the idea of kinship and relation, the Maiden linguistically enacts the distance between herself and the Dreamer. He does not control the vocabulary used in their conversation; she does. Her relationship to the Lamb is what is significant now, he Dreamer's earthly kinship with her has no importance in the realm of the Heavenly Jerusalem.[52] The Lamb and the Maiden are now intertwined in a new genealogy, and Dreamer's perplexity over what kind of "thing" the Lamb is signals again the uncertainty inherent in his desire for the Maiden:

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[52] "Jerusalem" is the concatenating word of this section.

there is something unknown in her identity (the Lamb) and the Dreamer treats this unknown

element with the desire and fear characteristic of our deepest reactions to the Lacanian *Ding*. His

initial reaction to the Maiden in Section IV was one of misrecognition, which, Lacan insists, is

not ignorance: "Misrecognition represents a certain organisation of affirmations and negations, to

which the subject is attached…There must surely be, behind his misrecognition, a kind of

knowledge of what there is to misrecognise" (*Papers* 167). In this section, the Lamb is not

misrecognized but is completely Other, and this makes his unbreakable connection with the

Maiden disturbing to the Dreamer.

The Maiden's use of jewel vocabulary emphasizes the fact that the Lamb has taken the

place of important men in her earthly life – whether those be lovers or fathers. The Lamb is her

"lemman," her joy and her bliss, and her "dere Juelle."[53] In another strange subject-object

reversal, the Maiden who was once the jewel to the Dreamer's jeweler is now the position to call

someone else "my dear Jewel." Moreover, the Maiden's Jewel is, in fact, her creator – a

reiteration of the creator/created reversal indicated in the opening of the poem. The various roles

of God as defined by the Maiden (Lover, Lamb, Lord, Bliss, Joy, etc) parallel the shifting

identity of the Maiden herself. The Maiden's move across the river has therefore aligned her

with God where she was previously aligned with the Dreamer; the former is her true *kyn* now

and the latter cannot recognize this. He can only see the confusion of God's status, as is

suggested when he asks what kind of *Þyng* is the Lamb. Finally, there is one more moment of

linguistic slippage in the Maiden's last line of the passage: "Quen Juez Hym jugged in

Jerusalem." The aural and visual similarity between "Juez" and "Juelle" is highlighted in this

passage by their close proximity to one another. Upon my first reading of this line I read "Juez"

as "Juellez," partly because I had just read "Juelle" several lines previous. In such a misreading,

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[53] The love language the Maiden uses to describe her relationship with the Lamb, who (as representative of God or Christ) would normally be called "Father," parallels the courtly language used to describe the relationship between the Dreamer and the pearl/Maiden.

one understands the Lamb to be a judge of jewels, whereas the Dreamer claimed that role in the beginning of the poem.

The misreading and shifting signification in the language used by the Maiden and the Dreamer in this passage may be usefully informed by the Lacanian notion of desire. In her analysis of kinship in *Piers Plowman*, Louise Fradenburg deploys Lacanian notions of identity formation when she argues that the subject comes into being "through its attempts to identify with certain signifiers of the symbolic order – names, kinship terms, and so on"(52). Desire is always defined as desire of and for the Other, a desire that I have already identified as something unstable. The desire for the Other is for *das Ding*, "the fundamental dimension of the unknown in desire, of something that doesn't resemble me" (Fradenburg 52). Here we again approach thingness – the excessive, the unclassifiable. Fradenburg sees this unstable desire for the Other in Will's first introduction to the allegorical landscape of his first vision: he has "the sense of awakening into an Other scene, into an indecipherable symbolic order whose relation to the desire of the dreamer is oblique" (50). Will's desire to integrate into this order parallels the desire of the *Pearl* Dreamer to rediscover his pearl in the new landscape he encounters. The Otherness of the *Pearl* landscape is even more striking: crystal cliffs, indigo-blue trees with silver leaves, pearl-covered ground, and a jeweled riverbed. Furthermore, in both poetic landscapes there is a fortress or castle that the dreamer longs to reach (Truth's tower and the Maiden's castle/city), and these fortresses are associated with the Other sought by the dreamer – Piers Plowman, who knows the way to Truth's Tower, and the Maiden, who lives in the celestial city. These connections again suggest the relevance of the fortress-identity connection Lacan sees in dream activity.

As this discussion has demonstrated, both Piers and the Maiden are indeed the Other, the object of desire to the dreamers. In his conflicting roles as labourer and leader, Piers Plowman

remains the unattainable Other and ultimate spiritual model to Will, who wanders with little direction and refuses to engage in physical labour (C:V:1-65). The Pearl Maiden, both as a pearl and as a queen of heaven, is the ultimate Other for him – the object of desire and thus the model upon which he attempts to form his identity.[54] There is something unknown in both figures – where did they come from, how did they arrive, where do they go? This desire for the unknown can only be articulated within the symbolic order, simply because it is the antithesis of the symbolic. In this line of thought, Nicolette Zeeman connects Saint Paul's notion of sin as something defined by the law (that is, the symbolic), with the Lacanian *Ding*: "Where Paul locates sin, Lacan locates the Thing, 'the-beyond-of-the-signified,' that traumatic, prohibited, and impossible object of desire within the Real.....illicit desire can underpin, be screened by, turn into, the sublime" (32). The key here is the idea of the sublime: Zeeman's association of the Thing with sin ignores one medieval view of thingness and the unknown, which is that it represents divinity.[55] Indeed, the practice of the Eucharist manifests the confluence of the divine and the unknown, presence and absence, particularly well: it is "a ritual that demands that the worshipper accept God's simultaneous presence and absence, a moment in which the divine is almost tangible but impossible to grasp" (Garrison 295). As the celebrant ingests the bread and wine, he literally shares the blood of Christ, and in so doing, temporarily takes on Christ's identity. The celebrant thus becomes physically invested with Christ's blood and its power, manifesting in front of the congregation the physical *and* spiritual bloodline that encompasses all humanity.

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[54] Jennifer Garrison reads the dreamer's tendency to identify with the Other as negative: "the dreamer identifies with people and things that are radically unlike him instead of recognizing his own limitations and failures" (310). However, I would argue that the trajectory of the poem as a whole supports a Lacanian-oriented reading, in which the dreamer's identification with the Other is ultimately necessary for his own individual growth.

[55] See Chapter Two, Section 2.2.3.

6.3.3   Beginning Again: Genealogy and *Kynde*

Earlier I discussed the strange subject/object reversal that develops in the Dreamer's relationship with the pearl/Pearl Maiden. Entwined in this reversal is both the question of the pearl's origin and the issue of creation versus artifice, and what is truly natural or *kynde.* These questions about origin and nature point to the importance of genealogy in how identity is constructed in these poems. While Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is helpful in understanding the way in which Langland and the *Pearl* poet use the narrator/guide framework and how this framework is integral to identity formation, the genealogical paradigm would have been more consciously understood and deployed by both readers and writers in the medieval period. Desire and Otherness are pressures influencing the subject's personal development in these poems, but genealogy is material, visceral evidence – a bloodline – that defines one's identity in a social and physiological way. Genealogy quite literally defines one's *kynde*, meaning one's family and/or nature. However, as Chapter Two suggested, the notion of *kynde* is much more complex than it first appears, and its integration into both *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl* ultimately construes relationships in the poems as webs of affinity rather than lines of hierarchy. The origin (and the literal genealogy) is effaced as it becomes clear that there is no singular origin – there is a multitude of them.[56] In a similar way, genealogy can move away from the literal and into the textual. In its documentary nature genealogy is subject to linguistic slippage, as the "kyn"/"kynd" discussion above illustrated. In its confluence of the physical and the textual or literary, genealogy exemplifies the tension between material and metaphysical that I have argued characterizes *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl* and echoes the sense of *kynde* discussed by Davlin: *kynde* as a conflation of physical experience and spiritual wisdom.

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[56] The shift of the *Pearl* Dreamer from origin to lost and wandering, or Piers Plowman from present leader to completely absent are just two examples of the multiplicity and therefore the effacement of origins in the poems.

Both poems first establish the literal sense of genealogy as a family line mapping origin, then explore the ultimate inadequacy of that model and turn instead to genealogy as *kynde.* They treat genealogy not as a source of truth and a demonstration of nobility, but as an ever-asked question of spiritual and social legitimacy that rarely references concerns of land ownership or aristocratic rights. Issues such as bastardy and fatherhood haunt the periphery of *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl,* repeatedly re-entering the narrative as complex moral illustrations. Legitimate birth does take precedence over bastardy in the poems, but not because of the importance of noble lineage; rather, the linearity of noble succession is largely ignored in favour of *kynde* genealogies (those that represent the legitimate and the natural/Godly). Although *Pearl* focuses on a much narrower social milieu than *Piers Plowman* – indeed, it is not a "social" poem in the same way at all – they nevertheless share an interest in genealogical connections that manifest themselves through and beyond biology. For both poems, biology and moral behavior are mutually influential in the construction of genealogy as a historical reality and a literary trope. In this kind of "metaphysical" genealogy *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl* depart from the more conventional literary uses of genealogy and instead explore its inherent instability, its tendency to diverge endlessly into different discourses (both literary and historical). Just as the material accoutrements that should mark and stabilize identity actually do the opposite in both *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*, genealogical lines that are valued because of their ability to delineate origin and prove identity ultimately fail.

Genealogy as a marker of identity and a stabilizer of social relationships is a premise that both poems highlight and then subvert in order to demonstrate that the divine genealogy – made manifest through the Eucharist – is the only unbreakable genealogical chain. The Eucharistic ritual, in which the sons actually become one being with the Father – the ultimate Origin – through the ingestion of the Host, temporarily erases the genealogical chain, with all its potential

for weakness, and allows all of the Father's heirs to share time, space, and position with the

Father. Sarah Beckwith emphasizes the Eucharist's power to symbolize social unity (2-3), but I

would suggest that it also symbolizes genealogical unity: spiritual and physical origin (in Christ

and God) as momentarily present and real within one object and one body (the celebrant's). The

"sacramental sign" of the raised and ingested Host "is both insufficient and totally necessary"

(Rubin 36) because it marks a moment which can never be sustained or described. Like Lacan's

notion of the "Real" – an unreachable, non-linguistic place of fulfilled desire – the raising,

breaking, and eating of the Host (transubstantiation) offers a brief sacramental presence that

consolidates the community by removing the distance between the community and its spiritual

origin – there is no more chain.

In *Piers Plowman,* the potential of linear genealogy to collapse and subvert is at first

unclear. For example, Piers' righteous allegorical family and Langland's concern for the

disruptive potential of bastard children and promiscuous women all indicate an investment in

genealogical legitimacy.[57] Although this interest is hinted at throughout the poem, it is made

explicit in Passus X of the C text (Passus IX in A and B) when Will begins the search for Dowel.

Passus X concludes by connecting *kynde* to legitimacy but opens with a clear echo of the

beginning of the poem,[58] creating a circular narrative pattern that directs the reader's attention to

the fact that a new journey is about to commence. Some of the differences between the Passus X

opening and the beginning of the poem are changes that indicate development or at least change

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[57] Aside from evidence for these concerns in other works of the time (sermons, etc), the scribal
interventions in some of the *Piers* manuscripts suggests that some of the scribes copying Langland's poem shared
his wariness of illegitimate reproduction. For example, in my study of the rubrication patterns in Oxford Corpus
Christi College MS 201 (a *Piers* B-text) I discovered that "bastard," "widow," "whore," "common woman," and
"harlot" were among the very few words not rubricated by the scribe. Michael Calabrese has argued that the C-text
revisions excised much content that was sympathetic to prostitutes, thus taking a harder line on illegitimate
sexuality. See Calabrese (2006).

[58] "Thus yrobed in russet Y romede aboute / Alle a somur seson for to seke Dowel / And fraynede ful ofte
of folke that Y mette / Yf eny with wiste where Dowel was at ynne / And what man a myhte be of mony men Y
askede" (C:X:1-5). By line 61, after Will has asked two friars and a clerk where he can find Dowel, he wanders into
a "wide wildernesse and by a wode-syde" where he eventually falls asleep under a tree (line 66), listening to
birdsong.

on Will's part – change that does seem to have been effected by Piers' actions, as I suggested in the discussion of Piers' influence on Will's identity. Unlike the beginning of the poem in which Will wanders not for spiritual betterment but for personal entertainment, his quest now is to find Dowel, or how to live the Christian life. He is still wearing hermit's garb,[59] but in his waking encounters with the friars in Passus X he seems more learned or at least more proactive than he was in the beginning. Indeed, in the Prologue Will falls asleep before doing anything at all, and when he enters his first vision his role is largely that of a passive onlooker. In contrast, the Will of Passus X actively debates the friar's statement about Dowel in a rather clerkly manner: "'Contra!' quod Y as a clerk, and comsed to despute" (C:X:20). He goes on to counter the friar's assertion with his own, somewhat questionable arguments.[60]

The similarities between the opening of Passus X and the opening of the poem highlight the differences and development in the Dreamer's attitude, thus providing an example of the hopefulness that D. Vance Smith sees in *Piers Plowman*'s constant return to its own inception: "New beginnings create a temporal disjunction that confirms the loss of what has come before...but new beginnings also offer hope that that very loss will be restored…Each new beginning that the poem makes reinforces a loss; it must inevitably come after an ending" (*Incipit* 122). This new beginning – a new period of wandering for Will, quickly followed by a new dream vision – is preceded by the "loss" of the pardon sent from Truth.[61] Will, "fol pencyf in herte" as he thinks of Piers Plowman after he awakes from the pardon argument, laments that the "pardoun Peres hadde the peple to glade / ….the prest impugned hit thorw two propre words" (C:IX:301-302). The priest's disparagement of Piers and of the pardon, and the disappointing

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[59] Pearsall's note on this line states that russet was "commonly associated with hermits, but by the late fourteenth century [had] some particular association with the itinerant preachers of Wyclif's persuasion" (187).

[60] Pearsall points out the problems with Will's argument, and suggests that even though Will is using a clerkly vocabulary, his argument "is of course specious" (188).

[61] The hope that the pardon would contain a magic formula for salvation was destroyed when the only words it contained were, in paraphrase, "Do good and you'll go to heaven; do evil and you'll go to hell" (C:IX:287-8). This idea is generally correct, theologically speaking, but it is not a pardon, which was the prize the whole community had been toiling for – incorrectly, as Langland suggests in this scene.

non-resolution of the dream itself, all convey the sense of loss that Smith indicates is compensated for when Will's search begins again in Passus X.

Will's discussions with Thought and Wit in Passus X focus on the nature of Dowel and its connection to Kynde as the ultimate origin of all things – the unbreakable genealogy. Wit tells Will that Dowel and his family live "in a castel that Kynde made of foure kyne thynges / Of erthe and ayer is hit maed, ymedled togyderes / With wynd and with water wittyly enjoyned" (C:X:129-131). Kynde is therefore associated with the productiveness of nature, but his skill is a source of mystery. He combines the undefinable "thynges" of water, earth, wind, and air, "craftily withalle" (132). This notion of Kynde as a fecund source of life is reinforced when Will asks Wit to define Kynde for him:[62]

> "What kynne thyng is Kynde?" quod Y; "canst thow me telle?"
> "Kynde is Creatour," quod Wit, "of alle kyne thynges,
> Fader and formour of al that forth growth
> The which is god grettest, bygynnynge hadde he neuere"
> (C:X:151-154)

Just as the physical elements controlled and produced by Kynde are characterized as "thynges," a word which conjures up not only something that is unknowable but something that is limitless in scope, so is Kynde itself. Will is perplexed by "what kynne thyng" Wit is talking about, a searching inquiry that calls to mind the Pearl Dreamer's question to the Maiden about "what kyn thyng" is the Lamb. By defining Kynde as "creatour," "fader," and "formour" of "alle kyne thynges" Wit conflates Kynde with God, the ultimate creator. By associating Kynde closely with God and emphasizing that God has no beginning (line 154), Wit draws attention to the importance of natural or *kynde* origins and indicates that God's origin does not exist because God as a divine being exists in a state of perfect *kynde*-ness.

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[62] Will's insistence on a literal, descriptive classification of Kynde is somewhat reminiscent of the disciples' literal-minded interpretations of Christ's parables.

Kynde is also etymologically related to the term "kin" and therefore linked with the notion of genealogical legitimacy – *kynde kyn*. The biological imperative behind Kynde (via Dowel) is made clear throughout Wit's discussion, particularly in the following passage:

> Ho-so lyueth in lawe and in loue doth wel,
> As this wedded men that this world susteyneth
> For of here kynde they come, bothe confessours and martres,
> Prophetus and patriarkes, popes and maydenes.
> For god saith hymsulue, "Shal neuere goed appel
> Thorw no sotil science on sour stok growe";
> And is no more to mene but men that ben bygeten
> Out of matrimonye, nat moyloure, mowen nat haue the grace
> That lele legityme by the lawe may claymen.
> (C:X:204-12)

Within the context of Wit's speech, it is clear that the influence of Kynde is what enables people to do well; the Godly source of Kynde[63] means that truly natural inclinations will be directed toward the good (living "in lawe and in loue"). Wit, however, makes an additional connection when he links the life of Dowel with "wedded men" and the legitimate children born to them.[64] Of their *kynde* (that is, out of legitimate genealogies) come the people whose good work keeps the spiritual state of society intact: confessors, martyrs, prophets, Church fathers, etc. The agricultural metaphors of the bad apple and the sour stalk refer to this insistence that good people are born from legitimate unions, and bad people are born from illegitimate unions. It is a dichotomy that echoes the message of the pardon, but with a physical, genealogical imperative.[65] Langland's moral paradigm becomes insistently material, even visceral – bloodlines and sexuality become the standards by which to judge what is *kynde*, and therefore what is Godly. One's spiritual identity is therefore partly defined by genealogical legitimacy, although, as we

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[63] In C:X:157-158, as part of his response to Will's question about what Kynde is, Wit says that "Man is hym [ie, God] most lyk of members and of face / And semblable in soule to god but if synne hit make". Our natural or "kynde" spiritual "appearance" is like that of God, and is only marred when sin interferes in our lives.

[64] The B-text conveys the same idea, but is more explicit about the concerns of legitimacy and bastardy: "Dowel in this world is trewe wedded libbynge folk….the wif was maad the wye for to helpe werche / And thus was wedlock ywroȝt with a mene persone….And thus was wedlock ywroȝt and God hymself it made" (B:IX:115ff).

[65] This message is carried home in the next 50 lines or so, as Wit expands upon how Cain's sinful conception led to the sin of all humanity.

see in *Pearl,* genealogy is pliable and can transform to reflect a transformed spirituality. It becomes, in Stahuljak's words, bloodless (2).

If the life of Dowel provides a highly spiritual model of genealogical legitimacy that manifests itself through the base materiality of bloodlines, the Lady Meed is an example of how the poem subverts the power of genealogy even as it asserts it. Genealogical legitimacy can be highly ambivalent and unstable in practical life. In his revised edition of the *Piers Plowman* C-text, Derek Pearsall notes on line 24 of Passus II that "Langland frequently uses patterns of family relationships as allegorical signals of moral status" (69), a touch of realism that invites the reader to examine their own moral standing and family situation. The Lady Meed (introduced in Passus II) is the first instance of this kind of allegorization. Langland uses the trope of genealogy to show Meed's resistance to easy classification, her moral ambiguity and her flexible loyalties. However, even as the poem highlights her moral fluidity, she is characterized as a "mayde" (C:II:19), thus bypassing what would have been an easy allusion to the biblical Whore of Babylon.[66] Instead, the text focuses on the dispute over Meed's parentage, who her kin are, and who she is to marry – all are, of course, concerns based upon the power and influence of genealogy on a practical level.

After Will first sees Meed, arrayed in her decadent garb (the luxury of which "raueschede [his] herte"[67]), Holy Church explains to him Meed's lineage:

> In the popes palays [s]he is pryue as mysulue,
> Ac sothnesse wolde nat so for she is a bastard.
> Oon Fauel was here fader that hath a fykel tongue
> And selde soth sayth bote yf he souche gyle,
> And Mede is manered aftur hym, as men of kynde carpeth:
> *Talis pater, talis filia*

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[66] Pearsall's note on Meed's description in his revised edition of the C text points out that the removal of several details about her description also serves to downplay any allusion to the Whore of Babylon (69).

[67] C:II:16. Will's reaction to Meed here parallels to some extent the Pearl Dreamer's response to seeing the Maiden for the first time: "Þat stonge myn hert ful stray astount" (179).

> For shal neuer breer bere berye as a vine
> Ne on a croked kene thorn kynde fyge wexe
>
> (C:II:23-29)

Holy Church's objection to Meed's intimacy with the pope is based only secondarily on her propensity to falsehood, inherited from Favel her father; her primary concern is Meed's bastardy. Presenting Meed as simply the daughter of Favel would have sufficiently emphasized her deceitful nature, but Langland chose to highlight her bastard status. Indeed, throughout the poem Langland depicts bastards as sources of deceit and disruption, suitable for labour but nothing more.[68] Holy Church's assertion here that thorns cannot bear fruit will be echoed in C:X:208-9 (briefly discussed above) when Wit states that "Shal neuere goed appel / Thorw no sotil science on sour stok growe." Drawing on the Biblical analogy of the vine and the branches,[69] Langland's agricultural metaphors for parentage and genealogy draw attention to this intersection of spiritual morality and physical composition.

After Holy Church departs and Will is left alone to watch the bridal gathering, he notes the wide variety of "kynne" that Meed has – the many people related to her. Meed's kin are all those who morally compromise themselves for the love of money, thus disintegrating the social fabric of the community:

> Of many manere men that of Mede kynne were,
> Of knyghtes, of clerkes, of other comune peple,
> As sysores and sompnores, shyryues and here clerkes,
> Bydels and bailiffs and brokeres of chaffare
> Vorgoers and vitalers and voketes of the Arches
> Y kan nought rykene the route that ran aboute Mede
>
> (C:II:59ff)

The positions listed here (beadles, bailiffs, forgoers, jurymen at the assizes, summoners, etc) were all frequently practiced with some level of corruption, thus disrupting social and spiritual

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[68] See, for example: C:V:68-69, C:X:210-212. B:IX:119-120.
[69] Matthew 7:17

harmony (Pearsall, *C-Text* 71; Galloway, *Penn Commentary* 248-52). However, Will also observes knights, clerks, and "other comune peple" in the group; Meed's family is very broad indeed. This expansiveness is suggested when Will states that he "kan nought rykene the route that ran aboute Mede" – the group is so large that he cannot describe it for us. The topos of indescribability is frequently used by the *Pearl* poet in his descriptions of the Pearl Maiden and the heavenly garden, but here it is applied to something utterly earthly as opposed to the metaphysical or the heavenly.

As discussed above, Holy Church is clear in her condemnation of Meed's dubious parentage. She further emphasizes Meed's illegitimacy by sharing that she herself "com of a bettere" lineage since she is the "dere doughter" of God and the "duchesse of heuene" who gives her followers "grace to good ynow and a good ende," as opposed to Meed who hinders one's progression to heaven (C:II:30-35, 38). However, as the passus progresses Meed's nature becomes increasingly ambivalent. She is to be married to "Fals Faythlesse of the fendes kynne [who] thorw his flaterynge speche hath Mede foule enchaunted" (C:II:44-45), a statement that indicates both Fals' evil genealogy and Meed's ultimately neutral status; she is "enchaunted" into marrying Fals. The motivation for cajoling her into marriage is the many lands she possesses (C:II:91-96) and not her legitimacy, as her marriage charter states: "Wyten and witnessen that wonyen on erthe / That Mede is married more for here richesse / Then for holynesse other hendeness other for hey kynde" (C:II:82-84). This suggests not only that genealogical legitimacy is being wrongly ignored, but that Meed is not legitimate at all. However, Theology counters this notion shortly afterward, when he asserts Meed's legitimacy: "Mede is moilere [legitimate], Amendes was here dame; / Althow Fals were here fader and Fikel-tonge her belsyre / Amendes was here moder, by trewe menne lokynge" (C:II:123-125). He claims that Meed cannot marry Fals, because he is a bastard, and can "be wedded to no man bot Treuthe" (C:II:139) and then

restates her legitimate genealogy: "And Mede is moylore, a mayden of gode [good background] / A myhte kusse the kyng as for his kynnes-womman" (148-149). The description is strangely vague, in that it does not claim that Meed is of royal blood but only that she "myhte" kiss the king as if she were.[70]

The differing opinions of Meed's legitimacy are designed, of course, to illustrate the nature of *mede* or reward, and how it can be used for good or evil purposes. However, the illustration is effective because of the contested and ambivalent nature of genealogy itself. Francis Ingledew describes the emergence of aristocratic genealogies from the twelfth century onward as a colonization of both time and land. A genealogy reframes time to centre on one family line, and the determination of that line's authenticity (whether historically true or not) also served to authenticate land ownership, thus linking the aristocratic family inextricably with the land in the way that Meed is linked with hers (675-682). However, Marian Rothstein's comment about Renaissance attitudes to genealogical legitimacy held true in the Middle Ages as well: "The parameters of what a thing (actually or potentially) is can be defined by knowing its origin" (333). The authenticity of the genealogical origin, especially in the increasing consciousness of forgeries in the high to late Middle Ages (Clanchy 318, 326), meant that any such claim to authenticity was immediately subject to instability. Langland uses that instability to illustrate the complexity of Lady Meed, and the *Pearl* poet uses it to demonstrate the insufficiency of earthly origins to assist in spiritual development.

The insufficiency – the un*kynde*-ness – of earthly origins is demonstrated in *Pearl* when the Dreamer's status as owner, creator, or father of the pearl is proved wrong. The Dreamer first defines himself as the pearl's creator or owner (a jeweler) when he asks the Maiden why she, his pearl, has been torn from him (lines 251-2). The Maiden responds to the Dreamer's implied

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[70] This vague type of claim is paralleled in *Pearl* when the Dreamer describes the Maiden as nearer to him than an aunt or a niece (line 233) and she responds by temporarily removing the crown that marks the spiritual imbalance between them.

ownership of her by replacing the crown she had recently removed and admonishing him for grieving the loss of something that does not belong to him. The pearl belongs in this otherworldly landscape in which jewels form the very ground, and therefore the Maiden concludes that he is "no kynde jueler" (276) because he does not understand the "kynde" of the pearl itself.

The Maiden's response suggests that the Dreamer believes his status as a jeweler gives him ownership over the pearl and its removal from his possession is therefore unnatural. However, the changing nature of the pearl[71] complicates both its origin and its identity. As the poem progresses, it is clear that the pearl is not an object owned and, in a sense, created by the jeweler, but a thing which is never fully knowable. The jeweler's role as a judge of gems is also diminished, since the next section of the poem employs the concatenating term "deme" or "judge," with the emphasis being upon God as the ultimate judge. If the jeweler does not own, create, or judge the pearl, what is his role with respect to it? Why is he referred to, here and elsewhere, as a jeweler at all? One reason may be that the poet is making pearl-jeweler analogous to daughter-father, thus suggesting a genealogical role for him that is almost immediately destabilized. An additional possibility is that a jeweler not only judges but also understands the true value of a gem. It is the dreamer/jeweler's task to develop that kind of understanding – to realize the value and the nature of the Pearl Maiden. Finally, taking on the role of jeweler indicates that the Dreamer defines his own identity by the objects with which he is associated: jewels. Ian Woodward suggests that objects become extensions of our own identity and deeply associated with our own social portrayal: "try to picture Jimmy Hendrix without his guitar, Satchmo without a trumpet, Groucho Marx without a cigar, Charlie Chaplin without his cane, a bus conductor without his portable ticket machine" (152). A jeweler without his pearl no

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[71] "At the start of the poem, the pearl is literally a lost gem, but as the poem progresses, the word *perle* has an increasing number of referents, including a dead girl, purity, the immortal soul, the kingdom of heaven, the Eucharist, and Christ himself" (Garrison 311).

longer can claim a solid identity for himself and therefore needs to establish a new one. The pearl-as-object as well as the Pearl Maiden both, therefore, influence the Dreamer's spiritual growth.

Later in the poem the Dreamer comes to a better understanding of his limited role with respect to the Maiden. Although his understanding is not complete, he realizes that he does not own and did not create the pearl or the Pearl Maiden. After hearing her recount the Biblical story of the pearl of great price, the Dreamer asks: "Quo formed þe þy fayre figure? / þat wro3t þy wede he watz ful wys / þy beaute com neuer of nature….quat kyn offys [what kind of office / role] / Berez þe perle so maskellez?" (747-755). This is an important step for the Dreamer: he does not fully comprehend the Maiden's new genealogy, her true *kynde,* but he realizes that it is not earthly and that he himself has no control over it. It is significant that this moment of comprehension is followed by the Dreamer's slip into renewed confusion when the Maiden attempts to explain her relationship with the Lamb; it is here that he asks, perplexed, what kind of "thing" the Lamb is (a passage discussed in more detail above). His moment of knowing is destabilized by further obfuscation of the Maiden's true origin.

The poem ultimately does not resolve the question of what is truly *kynde* or natural but the implication is that *kynde* does not mean, in this context, from nature, and therefore does not present physical bloodlines or the natural world as ultimate determinants of truth. Instead, the material world serves to represent truth, either through metaphor or foil. Just as Langland uses *kynde* to describe family connections that correspond with God's original intent for humanity (thus barring bastardy, prostitution, etc), the *Pearl* poet also interprets a *kynde* genealogy as one with divine origin. In this sense artificial objects (usually jewels here[72]) actually illustrate the divine source more effectively than natural plants: they are foreign to earthliness, as the

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[72] "Artificial" is not a completely accurate term here. Jewels inhabit a liminal place between being made by man and made by earth, and thus fall into the same kind of unclassifiable vortex as the Pearl Maiden.

description of the strangely bejeweled dreamscape makes clear. The land that sprouts in fecundity under the Dreamer's feet before he falls asleep is fertilized by the pearl rather than the sun or rain. Because origin here is divine, the genealogical impulse ultimately does not locate origin, but instead, through the illustration of creator/created and subject/object, indicates that the origin will be unknowable until we cross the divine river after death. Lacan's *das Ding* and Freud's death drive (see Note 41) therefore have a strange and unexpected resonance with the depiction of desire, origin, and identity in both poems.

6.4   Conclusion

Many of the analyses in this chapter focus upon either origin or identity. The tangled genealogy of *Piers Plowman* manuscripts is one that ever searches for but never truly finds an origin – the closest we come to one is the hypothetical A, B, and C archetypes as constructed from the family tree of extant manuscripts. In contrast, *Pearl*'s unique copy makes it easy for us to treat *Pearl* as its own origin. Since there are no other extant *Pearl* manuscripts in circulation, *Pearl* becomes defined by its originality – its literary perfection and its author's exertion of textual control are difficult to debate. *Pearl* seems circular in every sense, contained within itself, controlled by its own boundaries, its manuscript tradition limited to one perfected copy. It is, as Spearing puts it, "perfect in its artistry, pearl-like in its circularity of structure, so 'smothe' that its surface gives no purchase for any attempt to lever apart the real and the imagined" (120). *Piers Plowman,* on the other hand, constantly transgresses its own boundaries. It is rambling and digressive, frequently moving off into a different discussion or entering a different dreamscape. Its manuscript tradition is similar: full of fragments, mixed versions, edited passages, and annotations. The *Pearl* poet seems like a disciplined monk, working at his craft diligently each day, while Langland appears in contrast like a mad professor, constantly changing his mind and

revising his text, pages flying around him (and perhaps out the window, where they are then picked up by an opportunistic scribe – hence the corrupted B text).

The material nature of *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl* therefore corresponds to some extent with their poetic structure, reinforcing the differences between the two poems. Furthermore, as I discussed earlier, their physical characteristics have influenced how we understand their formal literary qualities. However, because we tend to turn automatically to these codicological, generic, or structural categories, we miss the many thematic interests and literary strategies that the poems share – similarities that may indicate a common readership or common reading paradigms anticipated by the poets. Both poets understood and valued personal identity and spiritual growth in similar ways, using the broad paradigms of genealogy and divine (or profane) unknowability or thingness to inform their work. These are paradigms echoed centuries later in the work of modern theorists such as Lacan, Heidegger, Brown, and others, and thus they are useful tools for us, as modern readers, to use when approaching medieval texts.

Piers Plowman and *Pearl* both focus in large part on how individual identity develops and how spiritual growth occurs – two issues which coalesce into one through each poem's Dreamer. Although *Pearl* seems enclosed and *Piers* seems sprawling, in fact both poets use the genealogical trope of new origins, new beginnings, to structure their respective poetic endeavors. Sarah Stanbury argues that *Pearl* is composed of a series of enclosures and thresholds from which the Dreamer looks in and out: "in the poet's vision, man is ever a sojourner, poised at the threshold to depart his space or the framework of his reference" (*Space* 476). The Dreamer must continue to move on; there is no "home space" set out for him. Anne Middleton sees a similar pattern of episodic and unresolved movement in *Piers Plowman*, whose Dreamer also moves continuously through various visionary and literal spaces, beginning with the Malvern Hills and

ending with the coming of the Antichrist and the destruction of the House of Unity.[73] It is within

this pattern of new beginnings and re-formed origins that the Dreamers establish a relationship

with their respective "Others" (Piers and the Pearl Maiden) and go through the process of

shedding their old identity and developing a new, spiritually sound one.

Both poets explore a process of identity formation that is largely (though not completely)

individualistic as opposed to communal. In this way, they take a step, uncommon for their time,

towards a notion of private selfhood that would not come into its element until the early modern

period. It is difficult to see such similarities when we use stylistic and structural criteria to

separate these poems. The genealogical and material paradigms employed by *Piers Plowman* and

Pearl offer a much more nuanced understanding of the values each poem espouses and show

their common ground more clearly. Each new origin – the rebirth of the pearl through the earth,

the movement of Will into new dream landscapes – drives the Dreamer forward to a new sense

of himself and his divine Other. I therefore will conclude this chapter with Langland's own

evocation of the potential of and ultimate need for such new beginnings:

> "So hope Y to haue of hym that is almyghty
> A gobet of his grace and bigynne a tyme
> That alle tymes of my tyme to profit shal turne."
> "Y rede the," quod Resoun tho, "rape the to bigynne
> The lyf that is louable and leele to thy soule."….
> And thenne mette me muche more then Y byfore tolde
> Of the matere that me mette furste of Maluerne hulles.
> (C:V:99-101,109-10)

---

[73] See Middleton (1982) for her full discussion.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In the final lines of *Piers Plowman,* Conscience flees from the collapsing Church of Unity and goes in search of Piers Plowman, who throughout the poem has been an elusive and ever-changing figure. Despite the plethora of characters, visions, and events that we encounter in *Piers Plowman,* we are left with no final conclusion. Indeed, Conscience's departure suggests that another journey has begun, and that we as the readers of the poem are supposed to follow Conscience in his search for the Christ-like Piers Plowman. One has the impression that the entire poem was designed not to provide conclusive moral answers, but to spur the reader on into this spiritual search.

This project uses a similar technique in anticipation of achieving a similar end. Because I have deployed two relatively unusual theoretical models, it would be difficult (if not impossible) to explore thoroughly the variety of ways these models could be used to analyze medieval texts and our reception of those texts. I therefore chose to diversify my use of genealogy and thing theory in order to explore the different contexts in which they could be applied. The result of this approach is that the variety of analyses I undertake – both medieval and modern – hold the potential for expansion. The discussion of HM 114 and HM 143 in Chapter Five, for example, would benefit from a similarly thorough examination of contemporary compilations that "Anglicize" foreign or classical narratives – perhaps even compilations such as Tanner, Bodley, and Fairfax, which I touch upon in Chapter Three. HM 114's deployment of an Eastern genealogy within its own intertextual genealogy corresponds with what John Ganim sees as the self-orientalizing that was characteristic of medieval textuality: "rather than conceiving of an

Eastern origin as a contamination or hybridization of Western identity, [medieval writers] imagined a true European identity as in fact tracing its descent from the point of origin of human creation" (58). Medieval texts (such as HM 114, for example) absorb that Othered origin and receive it as part of the purity, the reality, of ultimate origin.

This absorption is different from translation or imitation; it is an act that allows the English writer to control the narrative in a clear and specific way. The Other comes under the narrative control of the English pen. It was in this climate of English authorial consolidation and assertiveness that Chaucer's dual function as Father and compatriot flourished. The writers who constituted the Chaucerian tradition anchored themselves to their own English origin – Chaucer the Author – if only for the purpose of surpassing it. During his lifetime and the early fifteenth century, Chaucer's status as Father or root was qualified by his position within an emerging authorial network that was producing mutually-referential poetry. In this way, the Chaucerian tradition echoes genealogical histories themselves, in which fictionalized linearity effaces the layered networks of bloodlines; "the representation [of the genealogy] does not follow the practice" (Stahuljak 117). In contrast, the *Piers Plowman* tradition was characterized by a complete rejection of the primary genealogical line – a break with the Father, or even a suggestion that there was never a Father. The lack of an easily identifiable author for the poem and the presence of a memorable, yet fictional, name meant that there was little struggle for control in the *Piers* tradition; the niceties of literary negotiation and allusion are not there. For these reasons, to call these two textual streams a dual tradition, to set them up as a matched set, does a disservice to our reading of them.

The first three case studies (Chapters Three, Four, and Five) use thing theory and genealogy to understand manuscripts themselves and the medieval sense of genre or textual relationships. The ideas explored in these case studies – linearity, family, hidden histories,

control, origins, Otherness – coalesce in Chapter Six's comparative literary analysis of *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl.* Applying these theoretical models to close readings in these poems reveals an intense interest in, first of all, the development of individual identity, and, secondly, the ultimate instability of that identity when a strong framework of family or community is not available. *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl* thus explore interiority in a way that reinforces the importance of communal ties as well as the unknowable Other. While genealogical metaphors are used to illuminate this idea, the poets place value not upon the truth of the literal genealogy but what genealogy represents: a social context for the unstable individual self. This dissertation has thus travelled from the macro analyses begun in Chapter Three to the micro undertaken in Chapter Six; from landscape photography to a portrait.

The readings throughout this dissertation have, I hope, shown the applicability of my chosen theoretical models to codicological, genre-based, and literary analyses. I would hope that in my own future work I will have the opportunity to focus on one or two of the different angles I have explored and work with them in more depth. I believe both the genealogical paradigm and thing theory have much to offer the medievalist and I anticipate that more scholarship in these areas will be forthcoming. Until then, I, like Conscience, call after grace in the hope that this project contributes to new ways of understanding the medieval mind.

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