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‘Odd Feelings About Books’: Affective Attachments to Middle English Literature

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Christopher David Queen

June 2023

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Andrea Denny-Brown, Chairperson

Dr. John Ganim

Dr. Carla Mazzio

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The Dissertation of Christopher David Queen is approved:

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The first chapter of this dissertation, in part, is a reprint of the material as it appears in “Negative Affect, Queer Aesthetics, and the Illuminations of *Cleanness*” in *Exemplaria* 33 (2), 2021.

Delyt me drof in y3e and ere –
My manes mynde to maddyng malte.
Quen I se3 my frely, I wolde be þere
By3onde þe water, þa3 ho were walte.

[Delight drowned both my eye and ear –
My mortal mind to madness wasted.
When I saw my queen, would that I were there
Beyond the water, where she was placed.]

- *Pearl* (1153-6)

For my mother, Sally Ann Queen, who passed before she could
see the culmination of the work she unconditionally supported
and who taught me how to pursue the things that I love.

I think I understand the Dreamer a little better now.

This is for you.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

‘Odd Feelings About Books’: Affective Attachments to Middle English Literature

by

Christopher David Queen

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2023
Dr. Andrea Denny-Brown, Chairperson

“‘Odd Feelings About Books’: Affective Attachments to Middle English Literature” examines how and why certain Middle English texts and textual objects come to be associated with extra-institutional forms of intellectual production and ‘amateurish’ modes of readerly response. I examine how Middle English authors and scribes, and the modern scholars who study them, respond materially to the literary work of the period and express feelings for their objects they study. Specifically, I consider relationalities between an individual and their object of study that are largely deemed by others to be modern criticism incongruous, inappropriate, curious, or “queer.” My dissertation examines the role of affective attachment—and its opposite, affective aversion—in the creation, alteration, and use of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English manuscripts, codices, and textual objects. Rather than being antithetical to the study of medieval literature, I argue that the kinds of attachments detailed in this project represent, in fact, deeply medieval modes of knowing and being.

In the vein of scholars such as Lauren Berlant, Rita Felski, Carolyn Dinshaw, and Stephanie Trigg, my work theorizes attachment to objects as both a relational state of being and an emotionally invested interpretive practice. In a field such as medieval book history, commonly known for its philological disinterest and technical, scientific objectivity, to what extent has feeling and emotion played an invisible yet vital role? As a concept, attachment thus asks us to consider not only how individuals imagine themselves in relation to art objects and their creators, but how that affective relationality often meaningfully alters one's understanding of the object to which one is attached. Following Sianne Ngai's work on ugly feelings and negative affect, I examine a variety of modern reactions to medieval manuscripts, Middle English authors, and early editors of medieval works that have been overwhelmingly criticized for their aesthetic peculiarities. This dissertation thus demonstrates how this well-attested tendency to upset, disturb, and unsettle readerly expectations provides a fruitful site of critical engagement with both the perceived eccentricities of the medieval past and the hegemonic aesthetics of our present.

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Introduction

“Odd feelings about books”

“Being attached is not something to be outgrown—the index of a naive or woefully underdeveloped sensibility—but a condition of any conceivable form of intellectual life.”

— Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2020, 122)

“When we break the rules of good reading, when we become bad readers, we are labeled queer, stupid, or ill-mannered. Such moments are not individual failures of reading; they signify moments of social transgression.”

— Tyler Bradway, *Queer Experimental Literature* (2017, xxviii)

The *Philobiblon*, written by bishop of Durham Richard de Bury in 1345 mere months before his death, describes de Bury’s attachment to books and love of book-collecting. De Bury defines, in no uncertain terms, the affective basis for his relationship to books. He provides the *Philobiblon* as a rationale for his passion and a bulwark against critics—“ora loquentium perversa” [the mouths of perverse speakers]—who would otherwise describe his habits as excessive:

Hic amor ecstasticus tam potenter nos rapuit ut, terrenis aliis abdicatis ab animo, acquirendorum librorum solummodo flagraremus affectu ... qui tractatus amorem quem ad libros habuimus ab excessu purgabit, devotionis intentae propositum propalabit et circumstantias facti nostril, per viginti divisus captiula, luce clarius enarrabit. (1970, 12)¹

¹ Quotations in Latin are cited from a 1970 copy of E. C. Thomas’s text and translation of the *Philobiblon* which was edited by Michael Maclagan. Translations of the Latin text are my own.

[This ecstatic love has enraptured us with such force that, leaving behind all our designs for earthly things, we burn with a singular passion for acquiring books ... this treatise will shield the love we have for books from scorn; we will detail the reason for our intense devotion, divided into twenty chapters, and the particulars of our actions with a more clarifying light.]

In this passage, we find de Bury anticipating redress for his intense affection for books. And while de Bury certainly fears the censure that would accompany his hoarding of earthly goods, he likewise becomes defensive from the *Philobiblon*'s outset on account of the various *kinds* of feelings he has towards books—*amor ecstaticus, flagraremus affectu, devotionis intentae*. De Bury's acknowledgement of the likely criticism he will receive for his book-collecting obliquely gestures toward a set of normative expectation for a man of his office.

De Bury seems to recognize that his effusive expressions of attachment—his desire to be near, to touch, to produce, and to care for books as objects—are largely incongruent with his position of bishop of Durham. Michael Camille has suggested that “[t]he problem for de Bury was squaring what he called his ‘hot’ and ‘ecstatic love’ of books with the traditional renunciation of the vanity of material objects” (1997, 45). Nevertheless, de Bury seems quite proud of his ability to commission new books: “Caeterum apud nos in nostris maneriis multitudine non modica semper erat antiquariorum, scriptorium, correctorum, colligatorum, illuminatorum et generaliter omnium, qui operant librorum servitiis utiliter insudare” [In addition, we always had in our several manors no small number of antiquaries, scribes, correctors, binders, and generally anyone who could

labor profitably in service of books] (94-6). His desire for books, which he himself describes as “cupiditate” or covetousness, meant that anyone with access to such objects could easily curry favor with de Bury (1970, 82).² De Bury’s interest in and attachment to book-objects is thus socially and theologically untenable.

As Camille has suggested of de Bury, “The bibliophile is forced to negotiate surreptitiously a desire for bodies that, though ubiquitous and highly visible, are nonetheless marked off by social convention as ‘out of bounds’” (1997, 35). Whereas this form of burning devotion might be appropriate for religious meditation à la Richard Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris*, there is a certain defensiveness, perhaps self-consciousness, with which de Bury approaches his feelings for these material, costly, and ultimately transient objects.³ Steiner has argued that “Bury’s bibliophilia, which went beyond mere appreciation for art or knowledge, unsettled ‘normal’ relations between text and material text (as his contemporaries observed), while modeling for future readers ways of

² De Bury admits this much, writing that “posse vero quemlibet nostrum per quaternos facilius quam per pecuniam adipisci favorem” [in truth, it was easier for anyone to obtain our favor through books rather than through money] (1970, 82). F. Somner Merryweather has described de Bury’s buying habits in Paris as an “intense rapture ... which tempted him to spend his money freely; and with a gladsome heart he gave his dirty lucre for treasures so inestimable to the bibliomaniac” (1849, 75). Christopher R. Cheney has described the *Philobiblon* as providing a “candid account of how he used public office to enlarge his library ... Monastic suitors plundered their libraries to win his favour ... As bishop, Bury was led by his conscience to return some of the books” (1973, 325). This influences my reading of de Bury’s ‘cupiditate’ as being more than simply ‘desire,’ but something more akin to ‘greed.’

³ As Michael Camille reminds us, “The book was an object of great value in the fourteenth century; it could cost as much as the finest horse. This was the period when the burgeoning book trade produced professionally the expensive items that de Bury travelled throughout Europe to acquire” (1997, 45).

negotiating a relationship to the past” (2018, 246). De Bury’s transgression, then, was not simply loving books, but loving them improperly—that is, *too* much. De Bury thus provides an example—albeit an extreme one—of what it means to be affected by and affect textual objects.

This dissertation is about peculiar feelings that develop between medieval textual objects and certain readers—their awkward attachments to the past. The pre-colon portion of my title, “Odd feelings about books,” borrows a phrase from Emily Steiner’s recent description of de Bury’s book-collecting proclivities to indicate how this perception of ‘oddity’ or ‘peculiarity’ animates the archive of this dissertation (2018, 245). Like the potential indecency of de Bury’s love of books, this title refers to my project’s emphasis on an archive of scribes, editors, and authors whose ‘improper’ attachments to Middle English textual material has ultimately rendered them *persona non grata* in medieval studies and its various branches. These ‘improper’ feelings—though nuanced in their particularities—stem from a perceived informality of relationship between text and reader. Specifically, this dissertation considers examples of scribes, authors, and editors who have been perceived as ‘too close’ to their textual objects and whose responses to these objects materializes their attachment.

In the cases below, I locate affect and attachment within the alterations to Middle English texts by their readers, alterations which include providing illuminations, planning manuscript construction, facilitating editorial reproduction, and postmodernist novelization. This intimacy, I argue, runs counter to larger institutional critical preference for a kind of uniformly detached objectivity—what Richard Utz has described as

“academic medievalists’ *raison d’être* to insist ... on seeing distanced and unenthusiastic work as synonymous with professionalism” (2011, 104). To this point, scholars tend to employ a network of interrelated aesthetic judgements about textual material which often signals the recognition of the potential collapsing of subject and object. These alterations are, at times, ‘haphazard’ or ‘clumsy’; at others, they are ‘amateur’ or ‘crude.’ Readers who flagrantly transgress the supposed distance that ‘should’ remain between them and their texts are thus marked as intellectually useless, unsophisticated, or regressive.

My dissertation abjures this institutional drive and, instead, centers textual objects that have otherwise been marginalized on account of their incongruence with dominant—that is, ‘objective’—modes of critical and aesthetic evaluation. My first two chapters each examine specific Middle English manuscript objects, London British Library, MS Cotton Nero A.x. (the *Pearl*-manuscript) and Oxford, Christ Church MS 152 (a copy of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*). Of course, neither the *Pearl*-poet nor Geoffrey Chaucer represent understudied or marginalized Middle English authors; in fact, these two authors are central to the formation of Middle English studies as they exist presently. Instead, these chapters consider more ‘peculiar’ elements particular to these manuscripts that suggest an unsettling kind of scribal intimacy with the poetic material therein. Indeed, the canonical centrality of these texts invite even further scrutiny when manuscripts and their remediations fail to attain a formal quality expected of them.

In chapters one and two, I explore how evidence of scribal interaction and affect suggest an intimacy between maker and object that does not neatly align with modern understandings of authorship and genre. Chapter one considers the contentious editorial

history of the *Pearl*-manuscript's twelve illuminations, the scribe-illustrator's nuanced understanding of its texts, and the potential for a queer aesthetics of 'crudity' developed through illumination. By elaborating on the *Pearl*-poet's establishment of an aesthetic dialectic between 'fayre forme' and 'dedez vnfayre' in *Cleanness*, I consider how the illuminations of MS Cotton Nero A.x. are, in fact, deeply implicated in the production of aesthetic meaning of its textual material. Chapter two takes Christ Church MS 152, a much-maligned copy of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, argues that the manuscript's arrangement and its apocryphal additions—despite their modern descriptions as 'haphazard' and 'amateur'—gesture toward a richly complex history of reception, compilation, and *corpus*-making. It considers how the first and second scribes of Christ Church MS 152 provide us with one of the earliest examples of a compilational impulse to 'finish' the *Canterbury Tales* following Chaucer's death.

Chapters three and four explore the relationship between two individuals and their relationship to the Middle English past. Chapter three takes up the curiously colloquial nineteenth-century prefaces of Frederick J. Furnivall, founder of the Early English Text Society. I consider how Furnivall's attachment to and specificities of his notion of labor expounded upon his highly criticized editorial prefaces—which I read alongside Thomas Hoccleve's own fifteenth century disclosures—reveal the consequences of the academization of medieval literature and the suppression of the autobiographical impulses at the heart of otherwise 'objective' study. Chapter four considers the largely negative response to Robert Glück's 1994 novel *Margery Kempe* and its source text, fifteenth century 'autobiography' *Book of Margery Kempe*. It argues, then, for the

aesthetic influence of Margery Kempe's self-interpolative relationship with the past on Robert Gluck's cultivation of a postmodernist queer aesthetic practice. To that end, these last two chapters consider the 'odd' relationships between medieval textual objects and their modern reception in certain editorial and authorial contexts.

This dissertation thus surveys Middle English texts from the fourteenth- and fifteenth centuries alongside their scribal choices of their nearly contemporaneous readers, the rapid decline of amateur aesthetics in nineteenth century England, and the development of the New Narrative form in 1970s San Francisco, California. This is not to say that these objects have not been studied, but rather to highlight how modern reception has worked to disqualify—both implicitly and explicitly—certain kinds of 'attached' readers and their idiosyncratic reading practices. Rather than shying away from the awkwardness and unease these objects have historically engendered, I have instead chosen to explore the broad history of affective attachments to medieval literature—the material traces of feeling toward texts that are 'excessive' or 'haphazard'—and, in turn, ultimately suggest the critical productivity of such relationships.

Bad Reading, Good Feelings

In many ways, this is a project about the performance of 'bad' reading. That is, I focus on textual materials that instantiate what is perceived to be a kind of 'improper' readerly response. The readers herein responded to the texts they read in a fashion that is largely at odds with modern sensibilities regarding the appropriate tone and content of scholarship. As Tyler Bradway has suggested, "the norms of reading also circumscribe legitimate

modes of interpretation—they establish what practices of reading will get to count as *critical* and under what conditions ... operat[ing] constantly to condition a text's field of reception and to delimit its horizons of social engagement" (2017, xxvii). Despite—or perhaps because of—the intensity of de Bury's feelings for books, the *Philobiblon* outlines strict rules for reading, though its focus is on the maintenance of the physical object as much as it is about *how* to read.⁴ To read abnormally thus makes any resulting response that might follow the act of reading categorically illicit—reading wrong means responding improperly. In other words, 'bad' reading represents a failure to enact normative 'practices of reading' as one exceeds, transgresses, or undermines the permitted 'horizons of social engagement' with textual material into which we as readers have been trained. What does it mean, then, to read and love a text 'abnormally'?

As a social act, reading is itself proscribed in ways that become naturalized over time. The identification of 'bad' affective reading practices within medieval studies is contingent on the critical drive toward scholarly objectivity. Within the context of this dissertation, "the norms of reading" emerge from a combination of the professionalization of English literary studies in the nineteenth century and the neoliberal bent of the university more broadly. Failure to read properly is thus a facet of what Arjun

⁴ De Bury provides very particular examples of what a reader *should not* do with books: "Videbis fortassis iuvenem cervicosum, studio segniter residentem, et dum hiberno tempore hiems alget, nasus irriguus frigore comprimente distillat, nec prius se dignatur emunctorio tegere, quam subiectum librum madefecerit turi rore; cui utinam loco codicis corium subderetur sutoris!" [You will probably see a stiff-necked kid, idly lazing about his studies, and when the winter season chills with frost, his nose runs over time dripping from the cold, nor does he deign to wipe himself with his purse, before he has wetted the book with that volatile dew; if only he did not have a book set before him but instead a shoemaker's apron!] (156).

Appadurai and Neta Alexander have described as a “‘regime of failure,’ in which a certain epistemology, political economy, and dominant technology come to naturalize and limit potential judgments about failure” (2020, 2). To that end, this project is a self-reflexive examination of why we read the way we do as scholars—and, more specifically, medievalists.

The title of my dissertation is a reference to such a failure. The title uses a phrase found in Emily Steiner’s 2018 chapter on the relationship between material book history, the body, and violence in Richard de Bury’s *Philobiblon*. At one point, Steiner argues that de Bury’s “odd feelings about books throw into relief the disjunction between book history and traditional forms of literary historicizing” (2018, 246). I am compelled by the question of what qualities qualify a text as ‘odd’—namely an overeager attachment to a text. To that end, I am interested in what Steiner’s description of de Bury’s feelings as ‘odd’ might tell us about the longer history of attachment to textual objects and the modern expectation of normative form and aesthetics in such objects.

I suggest that we take time to understand the disciplinary structures that compel us to describe certain objects, people, and ideas as somehow strange.⁵ Furthermore, this process of slowing down identifies the expectation of immediate affective legibility as being incongruous with the peculiar volatility that characterizes both medieval and modern readers who in some way ‘attach’ themselves to medieval texts. This dissertation

⁵ Though, in some of cases discussed throughout, scholars negotiate the threatening instability of these objects, people, and ideas through their scholarship and the language of academe; in doing so, their ambivalent affect is legitimized as a kind of objectivity that tends more toward the rejection of subversive objects of study than their unqualified inclusion.

addresses the potential ‘oddity’ of certain kinds of readerly affects, the usefulness of such affects in the study of idiosyncratic responses to Middle English texts, and the efficacy of ‘attachment’ as a historicized description of these material and emotional relationships.

Reading Like a Medievalist

We might trace the institution of a more standardized scholarly expectation for the response to Middle English textual material back to the late nineteenth century. As several scholars have pointed out, the institutionalization of medieval studies—that is, its placement among other university disciplines—marked a change in *how* scholars were expected to engage with Middle English. The study of Middle English, as David Matthews has suggested, “was a surprisingly problematic and uncertain category until the 1870s ... there was room for conjecture, speculation, and a variety of widely differing formations for the study of Middle English texts ... any antiquarian could have his say without having an institutional position” (1999, xxxiv). Up until this point, the study of Middle English literature was the object of largely unregulated amateur, antiquarian, and dilettante activity in England.⁶ As I demonstrate in my third chapter, on Frederick J. Furnivall, this non-standardized form of study led to the creation of several different kinds of engagement with Middle English texts—with the colloquial chattiness of

⁶ Matthews has described how “[b]efore the 1760s—with the major exception of the work of Chaucer—almost the entirety of Middle English literature lay undiscovered and ignored ... Middle English consequently became the preserve of antiquarian scholars who tended not to be attached to universities, though they might have university educations. Where Middle English was concerned, they were self-taught” (1999, 7).

Furnivall's editorial work clashing most immediately with attempts at disciplinary normalization.

Importantly, the amateur and antiquarian found themselves *affected by* the literature they studied and were largely unashamed of the consequences of expressing such feelings. Matthews has explained elsewhere that the antiquarian, “[t]hrough his researches into an obscure and scarcely understood disciplinary area... could alter aspects of his persona and his material circumstances thereby” (1999, 8). Work with Middle English literature, then, “was being projected ... as a demonstration of self” (Matthews 1999, 100). This self-fashioning aspect of Middle English study would persist into the late nineteenth century and meant that “[b]ad’ scholarship [was] not excluded from ordinary status by its ‘badness’” (Matthews 1999, 134). By the time Furnivall began working with Middle English texts in the 1860s for the Early English Text Society (EETS), the gesture toward ‘objectivity’ as a core tenant of scholarship was already in motion.

Despite the ostensible goal of creating affordable editions of medieval texts, Furnivall's EETS ultimately contributed considerably “toward the privatizing and institutionalizing of medieval literature” (1999, 160).⁷ In fact, W. W. Skeat, an editorial partner and friend of Furnivall, would prove to be a defining scholar in the institutionalization of Middle English studies. According to Matthews, “Few scholars

⁷ Matthews continues, “Furnivall seemed not to be able to see his great success—he had created a subject for study—perhaps because, in doing so, he had apparently destroyed any chance for a nonacademic, public-sphere community of readers, a society rather than a ‘Society’” (1999, 161).

wrote in Furnivall's overtly emotional fashion, and this peculiarly strong sense of a personal relationship with the poet is not quite recreated in Walter Skeat's writings about Chaucer" (1999, 181). Both Furnivall and Skeat helped move Middle English studies toward a kind of convincing objectivity, though it was only Furnivall who never quite achieved what was then becoming the institutional model for rigorous scholarship. Matthews identifies scholars such as Israel Gollancz as "[t]he next generation of scholars" that benefited from the foundational work of Furnivall and Skeat, work that facilitated the development of "an academic scholarly apparatus to give them their authority" (1999, 184).

Following Furnivall's death in 1910, Gollancz, "thoroughly a university man, a medievalist who had studied his subject as a university discipline," became director of EETS. This transfer in directorship marked the beginning of the transition of EETS from a public-facing society toward an academized organization. As Matthews has described it, this shift signaled that "the function of the nonacademic scholar was finished" (1999, 186). Carolyn Dinshaw has likewise argued that "[b]y the turn of the twentieth century, in England, professional disciplinary historicism ... had definitively separated itself from amateur antiquarianism, with its ... local enthusiasms, [and] soft sentiments" (2012, 25). For the rapidly 'modernizing' field of English literature, then, the work of figures like Furnivall thus represents an outdated and naïve mode of scholarship precisely because Furnivall becomes too attached to his objects of study. As Matthews has argued, "love and longing for Chaucer look alien to us because they are the stuff of medievalism, whereas what we practice is more objective, medieval studies" (2010, 770). Communing

with Middle English authors, as Furnivall and those before him did, lacked a scientific basis.

Moving away from such “soft sentiments,” English universities began valuing the more scientifically inclined philological study. As Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman have argued, nineteenth century philologists “fashioned themselves as seekers of objective truths, who, because their quests were genuinely worthwhile ... soon became the most powerful members of the profession” (2002, 262). Furnivall allegedly articulated the distinction between his work and what was materializing in academized spaces to Polish philologist Roman Dyboski: “I never cared a bit for philology; my chief aim has been throughout to illustrate the social condition of the English people in the past” (1911, 43).⁸ Popularized by German scholars, philology became the preferred field among English scholars and Furnivall’s informal mode quickly fell out of favor within scholarly institutions.⁹ Richard Utz describes the relationship between Furnivall and German scholars as collegial, but is quite clear on the fact that they persisted in refusing

⁸ This is a fascinating claim if true because Furnivall was a lifelong member of the Philological Society beginning in 1847—the only record of its being said is in Roman Dyboski’s contribution to a collection of essays dedicated to Furnivall following his passing. Utz has argued that “[t]his open admission of ‘guilt’ ... and of the primarily social and national intentions of his medievalism and Elizabethanism, explains the true motivation of Furnivall’s work” (2002, 122).

⁹ Haruko Momma provides an excellent history of the semantic evolution of ‘philology’ in her introduction to *From Philology to English Studies: Language and Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (2013). Momma’s study provides an incredibly detailed study of philology’s development into modern English studies.

him the title of ‘philologist.’¹⁰ Utz has described Furnivall’s mode of communicating and attaching himself to literary figures as “implying a source of knowledge from beyond the realm of pure rational human thought” (2002, 120). Alois Brandl, a German philologist and friend of Furnivall, wrote upon his death in 1910:

With Chaucer he literally lived on terms of personal friendship: Chaucer’s character, indeed, was perhaps most closely analogous to his own. Of Shakspeare [*sic*] he used to talk as if he had known him. Lydgate was for him a worthy neighbour, always industrious and always duly reverent toward his master Chaucer—which last quality sufficed to entitle him in Furnivall’s eyes to the privilege of a separate society for the printing of all his works, though this society never materialized. (1911, 11).

Furnivall’s work is admirable for its ‘enthusiasm’ but is not the stuff of philological scholarship. German scholars thus instituted what Utz has described as “a binary opposition of an ‘enthusiastic’ and a ‘philological’ treatment of medieval texts [that] underlines the work ethic of the professional German university scholar” (2002, 118). Indeed, we see this in motion as not one page before Brandl praises Furnivall’s ‘enthusiasm,’ he notes that Furnivall “was not a philologist of thorough linguistic training

¹⁰ For a comprehensive account of Furnivall’s relationship to philology and to German scholarship as well as German scholarship’s relationship to Chaucer more broadly, see Utz *Chaucer and the Discourse of German Philology* (2002). See also Utz’s “Enthusiast or Philologist? Professional Discourse and the Medievalism of Frederick James Furnivall” (2001), John Ganim’s *Medievalism and Orientalism* (2008, 33-4), and James Turner’s *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (2014).

... But his other qualities compensated amply for such shortcomings” (1911, 10).¹¹ And yet, it is precisely this unbridled enthusiasm and circumventing of institutional mores that provided the intellectual context for Furnivall’s discipline-defining work. As Rita Felski has suggested, “[t]o point to these attachments is not to minimize the learning that has taken place but to grant that education is also sentimental ... Critique and interpretation are not opposed to attachment; they are built upon it” (2020, 127). The apparent binary between rational thought and feeling is not quite as stark as philology would want.

I offer this overview of the development of the scientific objectivity in the English university—and medieval studies specifically—to suggest that the critical reactions catalogued in this dissertation show us that, perhaps, we have internalized objectivity in such a way that discourages the examination of idiosyncratic readers. Furnivall is foremost among them. The movement toward critical objectivity is further emphasized by what Lee Patterson has described as “the armature of scholarly techniques and abilities required of the aspiring medievalist: not just languages, but paleography, philology, codicology, [and] diplomatics” (1990, 102). Importantly, Patterson suggests that this ‘armature’ has resulted in “the continued entrenchment of an outmoded positivism ... literary meaning is seen as the effect of a determinative historical context, a context that is itself reduced to homogeneity in order to provide a sufficiently straightforward

¹¹ Utz describes this focus on titles and language as a “gradual process of the semantic narrowing of the vocabulary used between the early eighteenth and the early twentieth century to describe the medieval period as well as those who read, discuss, edit, and publish medieval texts” (2011, 104). More recently, Utz suggest that “[p]astist medieval studies is based on a predigital and hierarchal culture of knowledge production and reception” (2017, 83).

interpretive grid.” Eschewing subjectivity, then, facilitates the construction of “a homogeneous monolithic Middle Ages that has always provided ... respect for the disciplines of medieval studies in all their austere rigor” (Lee 1990, 103).¹²

More broadly, this has ultimately meant overdetermining the priority of positivistic modes of scholarship in a way that some scholars have argued “favors professional and high-tech fields that service monopoly capitalism and makes general education the primary function of the liberal arts” (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000, 75). As L. O. Aranye Fradenburg has argued, “It is not altogether surprising that we have, on the level of our institutional discourses, been prone to adopt rhetorics of need, utility, and productivity” (2002, 241). This dissertation is thus one piece of a recent critical movement toward recognizing the value of readerly subjectivity and affect in response to medieval literature. And, consequently, this project challenges hegemonic reading practices influenced by the history of English literary studies. It ultimately provides the basis for interrogating the normative assumptions which have led critics to call certain subjectivities and their aesthetics ‘odd’ or ‘strange’—or, to borrow Kathleen Biddick’s phrasing, one of the many “consequences of the ‘fathers’ work [that] still elude full acknowledgement” (1998, 1).¹³

¹² Stephanie Trigg has suggested that “Chaucer studies after Furnivall were quickly assimilated into the academic study of English literature ... It’s an important part of this professionalism to distinguish itself from the more enthusiastic, seemly less disciplined writings of Furnivall and many of his immediate contemporaries and successors” (2002, 185).

¹³ Helpfully for the purposes of this dissertation, “the professionals have not completely abandoned the traces of the more personal mode” as Trigg has observed (2002, 156).

According to Biddick, this lack of recognition has left medieval studies in a double bind. On the one hand, we seek to distance ourselves from these scholarly forefathers while, on the other, we remain “ambivalently aware” that “positivist medieval studies institutionalize the techniques that many medievalists regard as the mainstay of academic medieval studies” (1998, 2). In this sense, to make sense of our disciplinary position, medieval studies necessarily rejects modes of reading that undermine the professionalized rigor otherwise expected of scholarly work—modes of thought Utz has described as “any self-reflexive, subjective, empathic, or playfully non-scientific discussion of medieval culture” (2011, 107). This miscellanea is thus categorized as *medievalism*.

Medievalism: Our Attachments to the Past

Matthews has helpfully described the relationship between medievalism and emotion as co-constitutive: “‘Medievalism’ (however it is defined) is always bound up, necessarily and intimately, with emotional responses to the premodern past” (2018, 209). And while relatively mainstream now, the study of medievalism was rejected quite early by medieval studies ‘proper’ on account of *what* medievalism took as its object of study and *how* it explicitly examined the emotions which bind us to the past (but that, sometimes, we do not mind shouldering).¹⁴ As we saw with Furnivall, medievalism—with its amateurish basis in affect and feeling—became antithetical to professionalized medieval

¹⁴ As David Matthews describes it, “The parent discipline, however, was slow to accept the child as its own” (2015, 8).

studies. How does ‘medievalism,’ then, move beyond what Utz has identified as the institutional project of “demarcat[ing] their own work against that of their dilettante predecessors” (2011, 106)? For example, in *Editing the Middle English Manuscript*, Charles Moorman advocates for a total evacuation of the editor as a subjective individual in an edition’s introduction:

[An introduction] should not, contrary to some recent editions by scholars who should know better, itself be either startlingly original or interpretative. One cannot even estimate the critical harm done to a major writer by what is at absolute best an idiosyncratic interpretation of his work contained in the introduction in what must for years come of economic necessity be its definitive edition. (1975, 96)

Though perhaps a bit overstated, I provide Moorman’s opinion to demonstrate how concerns about the potential disclosing of the editor-as-person—and, therefore, inherently emotional scholar—underlies the very methods through which we produce the most basic of scholarly and pedagogical materials in our discipline. It was not until the incorporation—or, perhaps, the stubborn recognition of a complex genealogy—of feminist and postcolonial thought that a contingent of medievalists began to pursue a “presentist mentalité that provided conscious space within medieval subjects of investigation for investigating subjects” (Utz 2011, 107). Influenced by these theories of the self, medievalism thus provides a framework for productively examining moments of idiosyncratic affect, feeling, and emotion in those objects that we study *as well as* ourselves.

It is not difficult, then, to see how medievalism has provided an intellectual byway through which scholars have historically been able to safely approach readers who have been deemed ‘odd’ or ‘crude’ by those who ascribe—even somewhat—to the positivist model of medieval studies, without inviting critique of their own affective engagement. As Juanita Feros Ruys has argued, “medievalism itself [is] a love, with the academic as lover and the medieval world as the beloved or love object” (2014, 131). Stephanie Trigg’s work has proven an incredibly helpful model for such a task. In *Congenial Souls*, Trigg plots a history of idiosyncratic readers who are responsible for the formation of Chaucerian scholarship as we now know it. To do so, Trigg examines what she refers to “discourses of affinity” wherein “Chaucer’s reader’s write themselves into relationship of intimacy with the poet and with his various reading communities” (2002, 4-5). These ‘discourses of affinity,’ Trigg explains, “ha[ve] become a kind of unofficial, almost illicit pleasure, something we might invoke in the classroom or among our friends, but rarely in print” (2002, 15). Trigg expounds on this ‘illicit pleasure’:

And as far as that more professional, specialized discourse is concerned, it seems unable to chart a course between the sentimental and cozy identifications with Chaucer, on the one hand, and, on the other, the expression of an almost scientific detachment, as if embarrassed by any hint of the personal or the political in its own writing. Is there no other way to write about the authors of the past? (2002, 196)

The subjects of this dissertation reject this kind of ideological straddling altogether as they embrace ‘sentimental’ or ‘cozy’ identifications with Middle English texts. That is, because the subjects of my project existed or exist outside of medieval studies—whether

that is because they themselves are medieval, amateur, or otherwise ‘marginal’ readers— at no point are they beholden to the strictures of a professional discourse in which they cannot, and sometimes deliberately do not, participate.

The perception of these readers as aberrant or regressive represents the culmination of a disciplinary history that has attempted to ‘correct’ itself. As Trigg has suggested, these ‘odd’ readers’ “more adventurous modes—like the rhetorical excess of Furnivall—have been repressed by professional, academic Chaucer criticism, even when it seeks to examine its own history” (2002, 194). Furthermore, Trigg and Thomas Prendergast have likewise argued that Furnivall “stands somewhere between being a critical medievalist and one who ‘betrays’ the affect of the enthusiast” (2019, 103). It is the logical end of an institutional structure that desperately clings to a notion of ‘good reading’ to legitimize themselves as being rigorous enough for meaningful study. That said, the ‘odd’ readers of this dissertation draw into stark relief the ubiquity of feeling in our reading practices.

With a toehold in the academy, medievalism studies has worked to provide a framework for the critique of medieval studies that the discipline proper seemingly cannot bring itself to articulate.¹⁵ Because of this, medievalism studies—bolstered by the foundational work of feminist, postcolonial, and critical race studies—has developed a methodology for considering the place of affect in our work on the past and its

¹⁵ Stephanie Trigg and Thomas Prendergast have suggested that “even as medievalism was gaining acceptance as a serious object of study, medieval studies had gone into something of a defensive crouch – insisting on and even policing its own disciplinary boundaries” (2019, 95).

representations; that is, a consideration of our place in our work.¹⁶ Trigg and Prendergast's *Affective Medievalism* represents a substantial effort to refine this critique further. Trigg and Prendergast “seek to re-figure the customary, but rather more slippery distinction between the medieval and the medievalist” arguing that “these two forms have always been constitutive, though unevenly, of each other” (2019, 23). Discussing *Sir Orfeo*, they suggest further that ‘getting it wrong’—or, as I have suggested in this introduction, ‘failing to read well’—might itself be a practice more akin to the workings of medieval readers and their literary imaginary. Trigg and Prendergast suggest:

[B]oth story line and interpretative tradition vis-à-vis the ‘other’ space anticipates the imaginative freedom with sources and inherited tradition of much medievalist re-writing. We might even argue from the model of *Sir Orfeo* that to get things ‘wrong’, in temporal and cultural terms, and to change traditional narrative patterns, as modern popular medievalism often does, is to perform an aspect of medieval imaginative practice (2019, 40)

Though seemingly tentative—“[w]e might even argue”—toward the notion of medievalism’s potential reenactment of medieval reading and writing practices, Trigg and Prendergast nevertheless provide a space for considering how the rewriting and reconstruction of Middle English texts by near contemporaries is an affective practice. They note the apparent paradox of medieval studies’ tendency to reject medievalism:

¹⁶ Karrin Littau has suggested, “At an institutional level, it would be true to say that literary norms discourage affective reading as much as they frown upon literatures which aim for affect ... It is precisely this privileging of the cognitive over the affective which has spurred a number of feminist theorists to revisit the exclusion of the affective from academic discourse” (2006, 138-9).

“when medieval scholars deride medievalist fictions for this ... kind of imaginative play with multiple or layered temporalities, they are condemning them for features that are utterly medieval” (2019, 44). The scribe-illustrator of MS Cotton Nero A.x. and the scribes of Christ Church MS 152 represent, then, the potential for ‘odd’ or idiosyncratic responses, affective attachment, and their materialization as or as a feature of textual objects within the medieval period itself.

Medievalism is the historicizable practice of response to medieval materials. However, as I suggested at the beginning of the introduction, not all medievalism is considered valid. Modern scholarship’s negative affective responses to medieval readers’ ‘odd’ habits or modern peoples’ ‘strange’ attachments to the past are two sides of the same coin. Trigg and Prendergast have argued that “[t]he reception history of medieval literature suggests how emotional responses to medieval things are very difficult to disentangle from the medievalist emotions that drive the invention and recreation of the post-medieval” (2019, 45). Each chapter of this dissertation proceeds in more-or-less the same fashion using modern expressions of negative affect as the basis for a more nuanced examination of the ‘strange’ attachments that scribes, editors, and novelists perform vis-à-vis ‘odd’ forms of textual production.

Defining Affective Attachments

My use of ‘affective attachment’ as a theorizable relationality between text and reader up until this point has been relatively nebulous. I want to take a moment here to refine ‘affective attachment’ further. Discussing the state of medieval studies in 1986, Paul

Zumthor has suggested “that no critical activity can, or should, attempt this ‘objectivity’ from the outset ... Criticism will achieve some degree of coherence only by questioning those very conditions which make its practice possible, those *modalities of interference* between the text and the subjectivity of the critic (17; emphasis my own). By conceiving of ‘affective attachment’ as one of these ‘modalities of interference,’ this dissertation surveys both the past and present for the various affective ‘modalities’ that fail to reach a particular institutional standard—work trained academics might deem ‘odd’ or ‘clumsy.’

Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg have defined *affect* as a ‘force’ “found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, par-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves” (2010, 1). They argue for an understanding of “affect as potential: a body’s *capacity* to affect and to be effected ... shift[ing] its affections (its being-affected) into action (capacity to affect)” (2010, 2). To that end, I primarily study affective force through the material consequences of feelings toward an object. That is, I consider the material production or alteration of textual objects compelled in a reader vis-à-vis affect. If, as Stephen Ahern has suggested, “[w]hile such phenomena exert material effects, they evince immaterial properties,” I consider the corollary to be a significant feature of this dissertation: *while such phenomena are immaterial, they exert material effects* (2019, 7).

My own understanding of affect and emotion is largely derived from Sianne Ngai’s analysis in *Ugly Feelings* where she notes that “the difference between affect and emotion is taken as a modal difference of intensity or degree, rather than a formal

difference of quality or kind” (Ngai 2005, 27). Emotion is affect and vice-versa. Ngai continues: “Rather than also trying to dissolve this subjective/objective problematic by creating two distinct categories of feeling, [*Ugly Feelings*] aims to preserve it for its aesthetic productivity” (2005, 27-8). Much like Ngai, then, this study does not make a hard distinction between ‘affect’ and ‘emotion.’¹⁷ It views these concepts as perpetually overlapping and shifting atop one another—what Seigworth and Gregg have referred to as “emerg[ing] out of muddy, unmediated relatedness and not in some dialectical reconciliation of cleanly oppositional elements” (2010, 4).

That is, the ‘odd’ attachments of this dissertation are emotional connections to textual objects that stem from affections; the material traces of these past emotional connections elicit affective responses in critical readings. As Sarah Ahmed has suggested, “Emotions involve ... affective forms of (re)orientation. It is not just that bodies are moved by the orientations they have; rather, the orientations we have toward others shape the contours of space by affecting relations of proximity and distance between bodies” (2006, 2). Emotion and affect thus are mutually constitutive of an aesthetic of orientation—indeed, attachment—as they become intertwined and reinforced perpetually.

¹⁷ That said, there is hardly a uniformly accepted definition of affect. Brian Massumi has argued that “[a]n emotion is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal” and, for this reason, “[i]t is crucial to theorize the difference between affect and emotion” (1995, 88). Furthermore, Massumi has suggested that “[a]ffect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is” (1995, 96).

Within the context of medieval studies, affect has become the subject of a growing critical discourse. In *Medieval Affect, Feeling, and Emotion*, Glenn D. Burger and Holly A. Crocker challenge the seeming incommensurability of premodernity with affect studies: “If affect theory often seems closed off to historicist study, perhaps this is because it has too easily allowed itself to be confined to a consideration of modernity’s shaping questions” (2019, 3). In historicizing affect and emotion, Burger and Crocker seek to highlight their social constructedness by “recognizing that emotions have histories” and are “historically contingent, arising out of a set of particular cultural and linguistic practices” (2019, 7).

Trigg has elaborated on such practices within the context of the study of premodernity suggesting that scholars’ “close concern with the relationship between emotion, community ... and politics” draw to the fore how “‘emotion’ is not only the response or expression of the individual romantic subject but can also refer to collective feelings and passions” (2014, 5) Burger and Crocker suggest the necessary relationality of “affective attachments” which “must be performed for them to become culturally intelligible” (2019, 8). Historicizing affect, then, is a necessary part of this project. To refer to an attachment as ‘odd’ presumes the existence of a stable normative response over the course of history. Determining the underlying affects associated with scribal, editorial, and authorial in each social context demonstrates how variable the notion of affective attachment is over time.

Affect facilitates attachment that enables material change. It thus functions through relationships—other people and other things which exert a kind of emotional

force on an individual. As Ahern has suggested of affect, “[N]o embodied being is independent, but rather is *affected by* and *affects* other bodies, profoundly and perpetually as a condition of being in this world” (2019, 4-5). Felski has argued, in the vein of Bruno Latour’s work on Actor-Network theory, “Works cannot be cordoned off from those who actualize them; they are *constituted* via the act of reception” (2020, 147). That said, I want to also take a moment to situate what I mean by ‘attachment’ in the context of this dissertation. Broadly, ‘attachment’ provides a malleable metaphor for how we ‘affect’ and are ‘affected by’ Middle English texts.

Attachment can provide the affective matrixes through which scholars of color and queer scholars produce and reify their own identity. Matthew X. Vernon has described the distinct lack of scholarly engagement with Black Americans’ use of medievalism within the American context. Vernon notes how “[i]n the hands of African-American writers, the adoption of medieval texts can be read as an example of surrogated kinship: the convergence point where metaphorical relationships subsume literal ones” (2018, 29). Abdulhamit Arvas, Afrodesia McCannon and Kris Trujillo embrace feeling as a means of relating to the past as it helps us “account for our affective attachment to and investment in premodernity while also recognizing and safeguarding against the inequity violence, and injustice engendered by medieval and early modern institutions and forms of life” (2020, 152). They have argued for the utility of ‘confession’ as a critical genre that “foreground[s] the embodied and material experiences that shape our work, the pleasures, pains, and affects that condition our attachments to premodernity in the present ... by attending to our positionalities” (2020, 154). In this spirit, ‘attachment’ makes

possible a discussion of these relationships in material and emotional terms that eschews largely white hetero-paternalistic models of textual reception in favor of a model that takes affect to be its organizing principle.¹⁸ That said, it is important to recognize how attachment—radical as it can potentially be—is not necessarily free of hegemonic models of relationality which nevertheless reinforce notions of, as Vernon has described, “medievalism and the Middle Ages ... as the province of whiteness” (2018, 23).

Scholars have likewise reimagined the metaphors through which we express textual and affective modes of attachment. George Edmonson has employed the notion of the ‘neighboring’ text “to formulate a mode of literary history responsive to the event of reading: to encounter with the neighboring text” through “acts of critical neighbor love—that is, of loving the thing internal to the neighboring text literary, as oneself” (2011, 20). For Edmonson, the ‘neighboring text’ combines attends to both the proximal and affective dimensions of literary construction. Examining *Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam His Owne Scriveyn*, Jonathan Hsy has argued for an examination of the framework through which “the poet and scribe are profoundly ‘engrouped’ or ‘bound to one another’ through the socioeconomic and temporal circumstances of physical labor and textual production”—what he refers to elsewhere as “a dynamic triangulation of poet, animal parchment, and scribe” (2018, 294). More recently, Bridget Whearty’s examination of the ‘guild metaphor’ in Thomas Hoccleve and John Lydgate’s writing “draws into literary

¹⁸ See Bridget Whearty’s “Chaucer’s Death, Lydgate’s Guild” (2018) and Jonathan Hsy’s “Queer Environments: Reanimating ‘Adam Scriveyn’” (2018); see also Dinshaw on heteronormative textual studies *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*—eschewing heteronormativity suggests the potential for a queer kind of relationality (1989, 12-4).

history the cross-temporal affective associations that were central features of late medieval guild membership” (2018, 365). By undermining the paternal model of textual transmission, Whearty invites us to consider the possibility of relational metaphors that attempt “to remake literary history into a capacious, guild-like community” or, as I argue, a web of affective attachments (2018, 366).

Several scholars have presented working theories of aesthetic attachment. Lauren Berlant has famously argued that “[a]ll attachment is optimistic, if we describe optimism as the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying something that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene” (2011, 1). Similarly, Felski has argued, “To say we are attached to works of art is to say that we have feelings for them. It is also to say that they matter, that they carry weight” (2020, 28). Far from simply being the purview of modernity, however, the notion of affect and attachment as forces that compel further feeling or action is *fundamental* to the study of medieval literature. This dissertation reinforces the utility of such a conceit while also introducing the potential for the examination of attachments in medieval material contexts. As this introduction shows, Dinshaw has utilized the notion of ‘attachment’ throughout her work to prolific ends. More recently, in *Objects of Affection*, Myra Seaman has modeled how

one might address “the emotional allure of textual objects” and “the emotional attraction of the medieval book” (2021, 1-2).¹⁹

My second chapter discusses how the physical attachments that create poetic texts in in MS Christ Church 152—the acts of interpolation, addition, or filling-in performed by its two scribes—materialize a kind of emotional investment in the ‘completion’ of a more particular vision of the *Canterbury Tales* vis-à-vis “a fastening, connection, [or] affixation.”²⁰ These physical attachments, I argue, belie the more transitory emotional and idiosyncratic experience of a given readerly scribe—“[t]he fact or condition of being attached by sympathy, affection, or emotional commitment; a feeling of fondness, devotion, or partiality.” Similarly, as I discuss in chapter three, these registers of attachment are at work in the prefaces of Frederick J. Furnivall’s editions for the Early English Text Society. Attachment-as-metaphor asks us to consider what it might mean to express love for Chaucer in the ‘attached’ paratextual material of the edition. How is Furnivall made ‘closer’ to Chaucer in these textual objects? While easily dismissed as inconsequential, there exists in these relations of attachment, according to Prendergast

¹⁹ Working very closely with Oxford, Bodleian Library, Manuscript Ashmole 61, Seaman argues that intense attention to certain kinds of manuscript objects might help us to better understand “the varied consequences that books have as they participate in cross-temporal collaboration with shifting systems of reading, changing configurations of distribution and archiving, and diverse communities of feeling” (2021, 2). This detailed approach to a single manuscript finds precedent in Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Denise Despres’s *Iconography and the Professional Reader: The Politics of Book Production in the Douce Piers Plowman*. They argue that Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 104 that “display[s] a certain *intimacy* between text and illustration, a certain *familiarity* with their (implied) audience, and a certain *freedom*” (1999, 12).

²⁰ See *OED attachment* (II.6a) and (II.7a).

and Trigg, a kind of “subjective understanding of the past [which] need not be dismissed as inauthentic necromantic desire, or merely a narcissistic projection” (2019, 17).

Attachment thus works as an apt and efficacious description of material relationality while it simultaneously suggests emotional interest.

Attachment: A Queer Feeling?

If medievalism can help us understand various affectively inflected reimaginings of the medieval past, queer theory provides a vocabulary to help understand where those reimaginings deviate from and how those deviations can be examined productively. The theoretical basis for this project is derived in part from Jack Halberstam’s notion of failure as a ‘queer art’ which enables—perhaps, encourages—a kind of self-reflexive critique that highlights the (hetero)normative assumptions often inherited in our responses to various forms of media. In recognizing how failure functions as an arm of heteronormative capitalist systems, Halberstam suggests that a kind of ‘low theory’ might “makes peace with the possibility that alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal” (2011, 2). According to Halberstam, “while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects ... it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life” (2011, 3).

In this sense, this dissertation participates in Halberstam’s theoretical project of ‘low theory.’ Following the work of cultural theorist Stuart Hall, Halberstam has proposed the utility of ‘low theory’ as a method that acts “as a mode of accessibility ... a

kind of theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples that refuses to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the *high* in high theory” (2011, 16). In pursuit of such a project, this study gathers a motley collection of ‘crude,’ ‘odd,’ or ‘haphazard’ material forms and examines how such forms might, in fact, emerge from affective attachments to Middle English texts. Indeed, they are essential as critically productive sites by which to recognize normative expectations as well as actively undermine them. The recognition of a normative kind of affective engagement with textual objects helps us better understand the subversive potentiality of ‘odd’ feelings toward such objects. Furthermore, this recognition highlights how and why intellectual institutions have favored ‘detached’ responses to Middle English texts over their more ‘amateur’ counterparts.

To this end, my work also engages with the notion of queerness-as-performance and queerness-as-aesthetic as elaborated on by both Sara Ahmed and José Esteban Muñoz. Ahmed has suggested a queer phenomenology that centers the notion of ‘orientation’—or lack thereof—in its construction of the phenomenological subject: “For a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good ... A queer life might be one that fails to make such gestures of return” (2006, 21). Furthermore, Ahmed argues, “A queer phenomenology would involve an orientation toward queer, a way of inhabiting the world by giving ‘support’ to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place” (2006, 179). As Ahmed has argued elsewhere, “Queer lives do not suspend the attachments that are crucial to the reproduction of heteronormativity, and this does not

diminish ‘queerness’, but intensifies the work it can do. Queer lives remain shaped by that which they fail to reproduce” (2014, 152).

For José Esteban Muñoz, this means defining queerness both as the site of potential utopian thought and as an always-inevitable “failure to be normal” wherein, “[d]espite this seeming negativity, a generative politics can be potentially distilled from the aesthetics of queer failure” (2009, 173). Affective attachments can—and often do—operate regardless of how well they ascribe to dominant modes of reception. Muñoz likewise implicates heteronormativity in the construction of a hegemonically sanctioned temporality; he argues that “straight time ... ensure[s] a certain kind of queer failure [is] axiomatic for the queer subject and collectivity” (2009, 173-4). Ahmed has elaborated further on this relationship between ‘queerness’ and failure:

The failure to be non-normative is then not the failure of queer to be queer, but a sign of attachments that are the condition of possibility for queer. Queer feelings may embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us. (2014, 155)

Such a critique is integral to the current project which juxtaposes texts and their later readers. Muñoz ultimately suggests that “[t]he politics of failure are about doing something else, that is doing something else in relation to a something that is missing in straight time’s always already flawed temporal mapping practice” (2009, 174). This dissertation thus situates the ‘oddity’ of certain readerly attachments within the work of such scholars because, as a discourse, queer theory coherently addresses how deviation

from social, temporal, and aesthetic norms might, in fact, mark a delightfully strange framework for making meaning outside of heteronormative expectations of being and knowing.

I have found the work of Carolyn Dinshaw particularly helpful in articulating how queerness acts without concern for the strictures of dominant modes of temporality into which we tend to be socialized. Perhaps most important to this project is Dinshaw's foundational notion of 'queer touch' as a historiographical force—"the metonymic workings and corporeal impact of queerness on its surroundings." This dissertation takes Dinshaw's important characterization of the 'queer' as transhistorical to be an essential feature its use of the concept: "Queerness works by contiguity and displacement, knocking signifiers loose, ungrounding bodies, making them strange; it works in this way to provoke perceptual shifts and subsequent corporeal response in those touched" (1995, 76). Importantly, Dinshaw's work "contest[s] ... normativity by tracing other kinds of relations—not reproductive, not mimetic, but rather affective and metonymic" (1999, 142). Within these relations, Dinshaw implicates herself as the purveyor of a 'queer touch' wherein "sometimes the touch of the queer is *my touch*" (1995, 79). Queerness thus provides a language for the kind of transtemporal and largely idiosyncratic performativity that such 'odd' attachments to texts often entail.

By recognizing that reception itself is not always itself a *straightforward* process, Dinshaw's 'queer touch' helps us account for modes of engagement—attachments perhaps—that are not so easily assimilated into dominant models of aesthetic and scholarly normativity. Elsewhere, Dinshaw describes the "queer historical impulse ...

toward making connections across time ... extend[ing] the resources for self-and community building into even the distant past.” The present project requires a recognition of what Dinshaw calls the “affective relations across time” that facilitate the attachment of reader to material-textual objects “that are not usually associated with one another” (1999, 2). These ‘affective relations’ are given more attention vis-à-vis Dinshaw’s examination of amateur reading and temporal practices in the history of medieval studies—“Time is lived; it is full of attachments and desires, histories and futures; it is not a hollow form ... that is the same always” (2012, 3-4).²¹

The enthusiast, “remembering the etymology of *amateur*,” operates “from positions of affect and attachment” (Dinshaw 2012, 6). The amateur thus becomes a key concern for this project insofar as it represents a way of affectively relating to textual material across temporalities that deviates—often purposefully so—from otherwise sanctioned scholarly methods. According to Dinshaw, then, it is “not ‘scientific’ detachment but constant *attachment* to the object of attention [that] characterizes amateurism” (2012, 22). Furthermore, by focusing on ‘the amateurism of medievalists,’ Dinshaw explores the more subjective aspects of the discipline as it “bears on [medievalists’] affections, their intimacy with their materials, their desires ... however austere impersonal the studies eventually become” (2012, 29). It is this drive toward

²¹ Dinshaw quite often identifies with the work of Hope Emily Allen and *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Marea Mitchell’s *The Book of Margery Kempe: Scholarship, Community, and Criticism* (2005) likewise provides an account of how Hope Emily Allen’s relationship to the text of the *Book* shaped its reception and reproduction.

‘austere impersonality’ that seeks to delegitimize the kinds of texts and peoples described here.

Queerness, then, is central to my project of examining how affect can work over, underneath, and around time. The queer provides a framework through which to examine textual responses that affectively disconcert modern readers. As Tyler Bradway has suggested, “unrepentant attachment to bad reading, to decayed ideas and musty texts, intimates modes of belonging that, in the eyes of the modern subject will appear to be uncritically queer” (2017, xxix). This dissertation considers foremost the strange attachments that unsettle and disturb—a reflection on a kind of attachment that is itself queer. As E. L. McCallum and Bradway have argued, while “[q]ueer names a practice, an approach, a way of relating,” it is important to remember that queerness “always hinges on bodies, pleasures, relations, or desires at cross-purposes with heteronormativity ... a crucial lesson of queer is that thinking – which might seem to be disembodied – is inherently a bodily practice” (2019, 3). My use of ‘queer’ here is thus always based in critique of hegemonic practices undermined by those whose sexualities and genders fail to map neatly onto heteronormative notions of being and knowing.²²

²² Sara Ahmed explains toward the end of *Queer Phenomenology* that ‘queer’ is made to work in these two distinct, but related, registers: sexual and social. She suggests that “[a]lthough this approach risks losing the specificity of queer as a commitment to sexual deviation, it also sustains the significance of ‘deviation’ in what makes queer lives queer” (2006, 161). It is this embrace of ‘deviation’ that ultimately causes certain readerly attachments to be seen as ‘odd’ or ‘strange.’

Four ‘Odd’ Chapters

The following chapters thus value a certain informality of readerly response as they examine evidence of medieval and modern reading practices that scholars have found incongruous or inappropriate. Returning to de Bury’s love of books, we find an individual whose attachment to medieval books feels somehow more ‘modern.’

According to Steiner, “bibliophilia [becomes] not only a condition or emotion shared by people across time but also an invitation to rethink the literary and material forms with which we chart our relationship to the past” (2018, 246). Indeed, the manuscript objects, editors, artists, and authors with which I choose to engage here have largely remained on the periphery of medievalist study precisely because of the discomfiting ‘gracelessness’ with which they approach otherwise rarefied Middle English materials.

The subjects of my chapters share a common marginality that accompanies things or ideas that fail to ascribe to a rather narrow set of intellectual expectations—or, as Ahmed has described, “[q]ueer pleasures put bodies into contact that have been kept apart by the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality” (2014, 165). Thus, each chapter begins with an analysis of the affectively negative criticism that surrounds the chapter’s subject and their relationship to a ‘body’ from which they have been kept apart. I argue that these affects stem from the recognition of a kind of attachment between both the reader and object as well as between the critic and the object.

In addressing how readers—medieval or modern—attach themselves affectively to the subject of their work, scholars are confronted with the reality that affective relationships to the past—those that undermine ‘objective’ study—indelibly shape our

work. With this affective foundation highlighted, each chapter then proceeds to explore how particular attention to the ‘odd,’ ‘peculiar,’ ‘clumsy,’ ‘crude,’ ‘amateur,’ or ‘haphazard’ features of medieval work and its reception should not be grounds for jettisoning entirely that which defies genre, but should instead form the basis for a closer study of the affect and motivations that spur idiosyncratic and unique responses to medieval texts.

The first chapter considers the much-maligned twelve illuminations which accompany the poetry of the manuscript known as London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero A.x. vis-à-vis W. W. Greg’s provocative description of them as “queer pictures” (1924, 227). By examining the ‘fayre forme’ [fair forms] and ‘dedez vnfayre’ [unfair deeds] of *Cleanness*, one of the four poems copied into the manuscript, this chapter suggests the cultivation of an aesthetic dialectic by which the poet details the mutually constitutive nature of divine cleanness and queer filth in the medieval Christian imagination. It then reevaluates the work of the manuscript illuminators, who are often disparaged for their ‘inattentiveness’ to the texts they depict, with respect to how they work within the terms of this aesthetic dialectic. In doing so, this chapter proposes that the illuminators, in fact, execute a deliberate artistic practice which responds to the queer content of the poetic text—particularly in their omission of a visual representation of the narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah—in a manner both unexpected by and challenging to modern sensibilities. That is, by explicitly depicting the ‘fayre forme’ of each poetic homily, the artists effectively put their illustrations in conversation with the poet’s visceral description of divine punishments enacted by God in the Old Testament.

The second chapter considers a distinctive copy of the *Canterbury Tales* found in Christ Church MS 152 which has long been considered the work of haphazard amateur scribes. This copy offers Thomas Hoccleve's "*Item de Beata Virgine*" as a tale for the originally silent Plowman, the anonymous *Tale of Gamelyn* as a completed tale for the Cook, and John Lydgate's *Churl and His Bird* as well as *The Siege of Thebes* in a gesture meant to suggest the return trip from Canterbury. This chapter argues that the additions and continuations appended to this manuscript at various points in the object's history result in what scholars have deemed an uncomfortably layered and highly idiosyncratic aesthetic. This chapter thus examines scribal practice and compilation as meaningful forms of idiosyncratic textual attachment. It suggests further that the scribes of Christ Church MS 152 added to and continued the *Canterbury Tales* using poetry from Chaucer's successors and poetry which was attributed to Chaucer at that time. That is, the poetic 'closeness' of Hoccleve and Lydgate to Chaucer as well as the contemporary textual associations between *The Tale of Gamelyn* and the *Canterbury Tales* become the affective rationale through which the scribes of Christ Church 152 architecturally produce a material aesthetic of attachment.

The subsequent chapters examine how nineteenth and twentieth century readers of Middle English texts enact this medieval form of intimate 'close' reading in the production of their editorial and adaptorial manifestations. These chapters attend to the scholarly unease with the affective foundations of medieval scholarship and its more materially idiosyncratic manifestations. Chapter three examines Frederick J. Furnivall, nineteenth century amateur editor, and his ambivalent relationship to Thomas Hoccleve,

fifteenth century poet and scribe of England's Privy Seal. Characterized by their tendency to serve as a space of self-reflection, Furnivall's highly personal and critically contentious forewords become a discursive space in which to consider the labor of textual production and the strictures of the rapidly academizing discipline of English literary studies in the nineteenth century. I suggest that Furnivall presents modern academia with an alternative form of 'odd' attachment to scholarly work that centers one's own feeling toward and experiences with textual material. Furthermore, this chapter argues for a kind of textual attachment that is predicated not on enthusiastic reception, but on the anxieties which attend the pressures looming academic labor. By juxtaposing Hoccleve and Furnivall, we might better understand how both aestheticize, formalize, and render critically productive the ambivalent affects associated with literary and bureaucratic forms of intellectual labor as well as its avoidance.

The last chapter considers the relationship between Margery Kempe's affective and narratological self-interpolation within the story of Christ's life and death described in the *Book of Margery Kempe* alongside Robert Glück's 1994 New Narrative novel *Margery Kempe*. Within the text of *Margery Kempe*, Glück—described by Raphael Kadushin's of *Lambda Book Report* as “sound[ing] like second-rate whiner”—explicitly recognizes how his appropriation of Kempe's narrative is, in part, an attempt to make sense of his own modern queer desire through his attachment to Kempe's voice (1994, 21). Leaning into New Narrative's characteristic emphasis on metafictional reflection, Glück openly admits the conceit of the novel: “I perform my story by lip-synching Margery's loud longing ... I push myself under the surface of Margery's story, holding

my breath for a happy ending to my own” (1994, 49). I suggest how the interpolative aesthetic practice of Glück’s novel—which oscillates dizzyingly between a selective retelling of the *Book*’s events and a pseudo-autobiographical account of the author’s relationship with a man only ever referred to as L.—is itself a kind of queer medievalism and which locates modern notions of queerness vis-à-vis the transtemporal narratological strategies of Kempe and sensuality of medieval devotional practice.

Ultimately, ‘Odd feelings about books’ identifies how both medieval and modern readers come to be affectively impacted by their subjects and, in turn, how that is reflected in their intellectual and creative production. It further suggests that the tenuous and contested place of attachment in the production of knowledge related to the Middle Ages, from its earliest medieval respondents to more modern editorial and appropriative engagements, and how institutions instrumentalize such attachment to marginalize and ultimately jettison certain kinds of readerly responses to Middle English literature. This dissertation suggests the critical value and necessity of our meaningful engagement with affects and feelings often considered illegible by institutions which seek to homogenize and legitimize certain forms of knowledge while simultaneously elaborating on the efficacy of an aesthetic which refuses to prioritize the normative drive for objectivity above the deeply personal, and therefore oftentimes more ‘odd’ contours of individual reception.

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Chapter One

“Done doun of his dyngnete”: Negative Affect and the Illuminations of *Cleanness*

“*Queer, amateur*: these are mutually reinforcing terms.”

– Carolyn Dinshaw (2012, 5)

Introduction

Scholars regard London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.x. as a paragon of the technical and creative heights achieved by English poets of the alliterative revival in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The manuscript’s contents—*Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—maintain a rarified place among the study of the Middle English literary canon. However, the manuscript’s twelve illuminations seldom receive such unanimous praise; in and amongst discussions of the purpose of the images, critical discourse often skews toward subjective aesthetic critique of their ‘lackluster’ quality. In 1924, W. W. Greg argued against the notion that more than one artistic hand was involved in the illumination of London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero A.x.—only a “malicious fate” would have allowed the manuscript to fall into “the hands of two such very incompetent amateurs” (227).²³ He concluded his review by derisively suggesting that “the ‘artist’ who drew these queer pictures” employed “the use of his child’s

²³ These comments appear in a review of the Early English Text Society’s facsimile reproduction of MS Cotton Nero A.x. which featured an introduction by Israel Gollancz. Paul Reichardt notes that Greg’s interaction with Gollancz’s introduction constitute “the first critical exchange ever to occur regarding the illustrations in the Pearl manuscript” (2007, 156).

paintbox” (1924, 227-8). Greg’s opinion of the images is clear enough; he found them to be a blemish on an otherwise aesthetically pleasing object. What is fascinating and instructive about this critical stance is Greg’s almost complete elision of his formal aesthetic critique of the object with his assessment of the artists and their processes. That is, for Greg, the actions of the artists of Cotton Nero A.x. actively *embody* the formal aesthetic qualities of their illuminations. In Greg’s devising, to make such ‘queer pictures’ one would surely have to be an ‘amateur’ using a ‘child’s paintbox.’ By degrading the images so, Greg aestheticizes them in a manner which appraises not only the illuminations of the manuscript, but the technique of the illuminators—and, to some extent, the illuminators themselves.

While it would be relatively easy to dismiss Greg’s criticism, and other early criticism like it, as simply being subjective reaction presented as objective truth, my goal here is not to admonish or scold scholars for this methodology. Rather, I suggest that Greg’s rhetorical maneuvering in 1924 is critically productive as it sets a precedent for, and the terms of, subsequent scholarly inquiry into the images of MS Cotton Nero A.x. Greg—and scholars who have followed since—linguistically displace their aesthetic critique from object (images) to action (process) to persons (artists), and, in doing so, employ a formulaic series of aesthetic categories which share common affective foundations. Beginning most explicitly with Greg’s use of *queer*, I argue that recurring critical terms like *crude*, *clumsy*, and *amateur*—terms historically rooted in the attempt to express negative affective response—work rhetorically to intimate queerness as they approximate those categories which suggest the upsetting of aesthetic expectations.

My goal is not to ‘recover’ the images from their crudity or suggest an alternative set of terms—to do so would mean misrepresenting and undermining what I believe is, in part, their intended aesthetic and didactic goal. Rather, I propose reading the images within the aesthetic dialectic developed in the text of *Cleanness*. Often-cited as providing the manuscript’s four poems with a cohesive aesthetic framework, *Cleanness* accounts for and historicizes both normative and queer aesthetic categories within a late medieval English context: both the well-known “fayre forme” [fair forms] described at the beginning of the text and the lesser-studied “dedez vnfayre” [unfair deeds] articulated in its conclusion (*Cl* 3, 1801).

This reading uses these modern aesthetic categories to help articulate how queerness operates in medieval contexts. Furthermore, the development of this aesthetic dialectic in the text, its “fayre forme” and “dedez vnfayre,” provides a structure by which we might begin to understand how what modern critics perceive to be clumsiness, crudity, and amateurism operate as intentional and meaningful aesthetic modes in the period. Rather than simply assessing the quality of the illuminations of MS Cotton Nero A.x., this chapter suggests that, perhaps, their crudity is the point—that it is only through the “dedez vnfayre” of the illuminators that can we truly comprehend the “fayre forme” of the poet. Such aesthetic categories, rather than simply facilitating a self-reflexive critique of scholarly language and response, ask us to consider how they come to represent a kind of deliberate and meaningful artistic practice by the poet and illuminators. And to that end, I interrogate the habit by which modern scholarship ultimately recapitulates the aesthetic logics provided in the text and images of *Cleanness*.

Crude, Clumsy, and Amateur: Affective Responses to Queer Aesthetics

To refer to the images of MS Cotton Nero A.x. as crude or clumsy or amateur would be to participate in a critical history that is over a century in the making. As Jessica Brantley has suggested, “The artist’s failure to explore these obvious opportunities for his art affronts the expectations of readers and inspires their harsh judgments ... reinforc[ing] a division whereby the transcendent visions of the text triumph over the lowly materiality of the manuscript” (2013, 202). As an instructive example, I refer to the first substantive study of the Cotton Nero A.x. images following Greg’s review, in which Jennifer A. Lee shifts slightly from Greg’s manner of aesthetic categorization. Unlike Greg, Lee places the images within a larger tradition of English manuscript illumination and goes so far as to credit the artists for the linework with the “first critical judgment of these poems” (1977, 44).

Lee further diverges from Greg’s earlier assessment by suggesting that the line-artist and the artist responsible for the application of pigment were separate persons. This hypothesis—the belief in a separate line-artist and colorist—has since been elaborated upon by later scholars; the most recent studies of the manuscript tend to recognize the presence of at least two artists working *ad seriatim*. For clarity and from this point forward, where relevant, I refer to the individual responsible for the linework as the ‘scribe-illustrator’ or ‘illustrator’ and the other, responsible for the application as the manuscript’s pigment, as the ‘colorist’; otherwise, when referring to their collective work, I will refer to them as the ‘artists.’ However, as will become apparent, the extent to which scholars differentiate between the individuality of these figures varies widely.

While some take steps to distinguish them, others simply refer to the ‘drawings’ as a homogenous whole.²⁴

However, like Greg, Lee emphasizes the inferior aesthetic quality of the images, describing the scribe-illustrator’s work as “artistically crude” and the subsequent application of pigment as “amateur” (1977, 31; 18). She argues that when viewing the illuminations, it is likely that “we feel a certain dislocation and wrongness about it” (Lee 1977, 38). These examples are, of course, Lee’s own, affectively inflected responses to the images. As affect theorist Sianne Ngai suggests, “[a]esthetic judgments ... produce a kind of illusion or apparitional quality at the level of rhetoric ... by making it *seem as if* value judgments follow from factual ones” (2012, 4). The similarity between Lee and Greg’s critique of the images is thus likely apparent enough; aside from comparable word choices, both provide readers with a semantic field of terms by which they articulate their

²⁴ The *ad seriatim* hypothesis remains contentious. While Greg believed that “hands should not be multiplied any more than other entities,” the single artist hypothesis quickly fell out of favor (1924, 227). Lee has argued, “It is more likely that a second and secondary hand did the painting ... Line drawings were first planned and executed, and the painting was done later” (1977, 19). While addressing the issue directly, Sarah Horrall has noted that “[t]here is ... some physical evidence of a time lapse between the copying of the texts and the painting of the pictures” (1986, 193). More recently, however, scholars have used multispectral imaging and paleographic evidence to suggest that there are at least two hands responsible for the linework and pigment respectively. Murray McGillivray and Christina Duffy have put forward that “the draftsperson and the colorist did not always share illustrative goals and approaches ... [which] seems more likely to be associated with two separate artists approaching the task seriatim” (2017, 114). Maidie Hilmo provides the most full-throated support of the *ad seriatim* hypothesis as she argues first that “the scribe was also the artist—in this case, of the underdrawings of the miniatures” and ultimately refers to this individual as the “scribe-illustrator” (114; 126). From this, she asserts that “[t]he colorist(s) of the miniatures did not attend to all the outlines of the underdrawings, nor did they understand the intent (or they disagreed with) the original draftsperson” (2017, 119).

own affective responses to the images as if they were the terms of an impartial assessment.

A wider review of editorial and scholarly commentary on Cotton Nero A.x. reveals that, while the illuminations have received more attention recently, a pronounced distaste for the anonymous artists' aesthetic practice persists. In the EETS facsimile of the manuscript, Israel Gollancz refers to the illuminations as being "certainly of crude workmanship" (1923, 9).²⁵ Margaret William's edition describes the manuscript's scribe-illustrator as "crude and bold, with vivid insight" (1967, 5).²⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, E. V. Gordon, and Norman Davis also refer to the images as generally "crude ... somewhat rubbed and indistinct" (1967, xiii). Sarah Pierson Prior's study of the *Pearl*-poet describes the manuscript as "a scruffy little thing ... with 12 pictures, all rather crudely done" (1994, 1). And, given its ubiquity, it is fair to ask: what do these critics mean when they define the illustrations as "crude"? A conservative reading might suggest that the illuminations "[lack] finish, or maturity of treatment," though, given the rhetorical paradigm established by Greg, it is more likely that they also mean to suggest that the images are "[c]haracterized by crudeness of thought, feeling, action, or character."²⁷

Aesthetic practice is indicative, at least in these scholarly formulations, of certain

²⁵ Sir Fredric Madden simply describes the illustrations as "several illuminations, coarsely executed" (1839, xlvi). Despite this, Madden does include his own line-drawings of the illuminations in his edition.

²⁶ Marie Borroff and Laura L. Howes would later note that the illustrations "have been pronounced substandard by critics and in places misrepresent the text, [while also] reveal[ing] a lively interest in narrative action" (2010, xi).

²⁷ See *OED* "crude, *adj.*" (7a, 8, 9ab).

embodied qualities associated with the practitioner themselves—a ‘crude’ person has ‘crude’ skill which results in a ‘crude’ product.

While critiquing the Cotton Nero illustrations, scholars ensure that, as Ngai suggests of aesthetic categorization and affect generally: “Aesthetic artifact and affective response [are] thus conflated in a way that end[s] up doubly short-circuiting the original object of aesthetic appreciation and leaving it behind” (2012, 28). Such affectively centered criticism collapses each of the modern senses of “crude” into a single epithet meant to describe both the artist’s process and his product as a means of normative aesthetic regulation—what Theodor Adorno refers to as “[t]he prohibition of the ugly ... of the incompletely formed, the raw” (1997, 45). In such an instance, criticism willingly—though perhaps unintentionally—projects such aesthetic criticisms onto the persons of the artists themselves. As Kyla Tompkins suggests of the relationship between crudity and queerness, “the deviance of crude matter aligns with a project of *déclassement*—a queer, perverse, or non-normative aesthetic through which scholars and artists might access alternative organizations of the *sensu communis*” (2017, 267). Both categories suggest a subject whose aesthetic practice circumvents or subverts normative social, disciplinary, and aesthetic mores; they act to mark deviation.

Alongside the perceived crudity of the images, scholars have often leveled the charge of clumsiness against the manuscript’s visual program. As Seeta Chaganti has pointed out, scholarship tends to lean on “the commonplace characterization [that] these pictures [are] clumsy and crude” (2008, 96). Gervase Mathew has suggested that the images are “the clumsy copies of larger illuminations in a contemporary manuscript de

luxé” (1968, 117). Elsewhere, Sarah M. Horrall has compared the illumination’s “well-drawn background [with its] clumsy foreground figures” (1986, 198).²⁸ As recently as 2015, Jane Roberts has argued that the illuminations “are clumsily coloured line drawings” (172). Here too we find clumsy being “[a]ppplied to actions and products ... [i]ll-contrived, awkward” or artwork which is allegedly “[r]udely constructed; of awkward, ungainly or ungraceful shape; inelegant, unwieldy.”²⁹ Noting the spatial (dis)orientation and relationality associated with queerness, Sara Ahmed suggests that “we could create a queer ethics out of clumsiness ... that registers those who are not attuned as keeping open the possibility of going another way” (2014, 51).³⁰ Clumsy thus serves as another aesthetic category used to classify the images meant to intimate their ‘disorienting’ quality.

Scholars have tended to hedge the explicit identification of the manuscript’s queer aesthetic practice vis-à-vis the further explication of the scribe-artist’s amateurish interpretive and technical ability. We need look no further than Greg (1924) and Lee (1977) for such usage in critical discussion of the images. The use of amateur as an aesthetic category in medieval studies is particularly fraught due to the discipline’s historical marginalization of antiquarian and ‘hobbyist’ intellectual pursuits; as Phillipa

²⁸ Sarah M. Horrall catalogues the proficiency of the line-drawing in support of the claim that the “artist had a good grasp of contemporary iconographic conventions” (1986, 196).

²⁹ See *OED* “clumsy, *adj.*” (3, 4a).

³⁰ Ahmed returns to this question of the clumsy later adding that clumsiness “attends to the bumpiness of living with difference, so often experienced as a difference in time; being too slow or too fast, out of time” (2017, 166).

Levine has explained, “‘antiquarian’ acquired the sub-meaning amateur, and with it a definite depreciation in value” (1986, 39). For this reason, referring to amateur work or practice, particularly in the context of scholarship on medieval objects, is always already a subjective value judgement of both creator and creation. To be amateur is to operate “from positions of affect and attachment, from desires to build another kind of world” (Dinshaw 2012, 6). These terms—crude, clumsy, amateur, queer—suggest most readily the aesthetic disorder associated with the illuminations of MS Cotton Nero A.x.; they represent variations of the characteristic collapsing of artist process and art which has come to define scholarly circumlocution of queer aesthetic practice.

It is through these terms of negative affect that we begin to see more clearly how queerness functions as a process and practice as well as an approximated aesthetic category. Rather than simply understanding queerness (and those words which estimate it) as an aesthetic category, though, we might begin to see queerness as creative praxis—a reminder of how queerness *works*. Lee’s feelings of ‘dislocation and wrongness’ readily suggest Dinshaw’s foundational description of the term ‘queer’ and its use in medieval studies: “Queerness works by contiguity and displacement, knocking signifiers loose, ungrounding bodies, making them strange” (1995, 76). Queerness is kinetic and actionable too, found in motion and gesture—what Jose Esteban Muñoz describes “a mode of queer performativity ... the force of a kind of queer doing” (2009, 84). Where Greg used the term queer directly, Lee’s rhetorical choices indicate a desire to articulate the apparently disorienting practice of the manuscript’s artists; she suggests queerness as an aesthetic category without ever mentioning it explicitly. Lee’s circumlocution, despite

her attempts to elevate the person and skill of the scribe-illustrator, is nevertheless characteristic of prior and subsequent critical discourse concerning and queer-coding of the illustrations of MS Cotton Nero A.x.

Admittedly, my argument so far has relied almost solely on the terms used by literary critics. In part this is because Middle English manuscript illumination has received scant art historical attention in the past. As Sonja Drimmer observes, “the majority of illuminations in Middle English manuscripts fail to hold up to the standards of aesthetic excellence that traditionally have compelled art historical research” (2019, 11).³¹ Kathleen L. Scott’s entry in *Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1390-1490* remains the most substantive art historical study of MS Cotton Nero, despite its twelve images being of “average workmanship” (1996a, 10). Likewise, she recognizes too that her “more tempered view” is likely in conflict with previous assessments performed by literary critics (Scott 1996b, 67). However, in this case, such disciplinary tension is particularly generative. Unlike the majority of comparable studies in literary criticism, Scott’s entry thoroughly contextualizes the artist and images of Cotton Nero within the larger tradition of late medieval English manuscript illumination—the scribe-illustrator seemed to be “a professional ... regional artist” who was “demonstrably aware of conventional compositions” (1996b, 67). She explains that the manuscript is of a certain distinguishable style and, perhaps, even typical, asserting the presence of “[a] context for

³¹ Drimmer argues elsewhere, “Art historians have never extended much charity to English illumination of the fifteenth century” (2019, 48). As A. S. G. Edwards noted previously, “When manuscript study is driven by connoisseurs and art historians, Middle English is likely to come off rather badly” (2000, 77). See Alexander (1983, 162) and Scott (2007, ix).

his style, which seems to have been widely acceptable to contemporary book buyers” (1996b, 67).³²

In fact, Scott’s discussion of the program bears striking resemblance to literary critics’ descriptions of contemporaneous manuscript objects like the Auchinleck manuscript (NLS Adv MS 19.2.1). Derek Pearsall and I. C. Cunningham have described “the quality of [its] illustration ... [as] modest and workaday” (1977, viii). Timothy A. Shonk similarly has suggested that it “remains a relatively plain work” (1985, 81). And while these certainly constitute a kind of aesthetic judgement, they are decidedly less affectively polemic than the majority of descriptions of MS Cotton Nero A.x. Such aesthetic judgement is never entirely devoid of affect; aesthetic appreciation, or lack thereof, is the result and retroactive formulation of affective response. However, these assessments and Scott’s entry demonstrate that the study of manuscript illumination does not *necessitate* the expression of negative affect specifically.

Scott’s study effectively de-emphasizes, to a more significant degree than its literary counterparts, the seeming exceptionality of Cotton Nero A.x.’s artistic production. And while many literary scholars have approached this kind of measured response in their discussion of the Cotton Nero images, they nevertheless tend to vacillate broadly between normative and queer descriptive categories.³³ To that end, the affective measure present in Scott’s art historical examination only highlights further literary

³² See Scott (1996b, 67) for an extensive list of comparable manuscript images.

³³ See Lee (1977), Horrall (1986), Reichardt (1997), McGillivray and Duffy (2017), and Hilmo (2017, 2019).

criticism's consistent deployment of certain queer terms in its analytic methodologies. Thus, while Scott's work is essential, my concern remains primarily with literary scholarship and those moments of rhetorical slippage which intimate the expression of negative affect in the face of distressing or disruptive aesthetic processes.

Such an analysis demonstrates the stakes of critical terminology and how easily said terminology, which on its face has little to do with queerness, can propagate notions of aesthetic normativity. These reactions draw attention to how medieval texts and images "remind us of the powerful ways that distressed sensibilities can shape readerly responses, including scholarly responses," as Andrea Denny-Brown has suggested of John Lydgate's fifteenth-century provocations (2017, 273). By interrogating the rhetorical processes by which negative affect gives rise to the descriptive terms and, consequently, the aesthetic categories that have come to characterize scholarly descriptions of the manuscript's images, we might better begin to understand *why* MS Cotton Nero A.x. elicits such reactions from critics and *what* those reactions indicate about medieval and modern practices of reception. Furthermore, we might better begin to understand the terms that scholars use to approximate queerness and how this queerness actively works as an aesthetic category to incite the collapsing of artwork and process, of form and action.

These modern affective responses encourage us to consider how queerness works through such aesthetic categories and, in turn, give rise to the potential for a close examination of how representation—or in the case of Cotton Nero A.x., lack thereof—problematizes modern aesthetic expectations. Recognizing the way persistent affective

responses—particularly those which approximate kinds of queerness—are written into modern criticism allows us to ask other kinds of questions, such as whether queer aesthetic practices might, in fact, represent deliberate artistic and compositional choices. Ngai suggests that it is possible to “recuperate several of these negative affects for their *critical* productivity” (2005, 3).³⁴ How might crudity and clumsiness thus serve as features of an aesthetic practice? *Cleanness*’s emphasis on aestheticized descriptions of Old Testament sin provides a particularly lucid textual site wherein we might find an answer. A deliberately crude aesthetic practice suggests more readily, perhaps, the existence and ultimate promise of the fair—the ‘clean,’ to borrow the parlance of *Cleanness*.³⁵ To that end, the scribe-illustrator and colorist extend the paradigm of “fayre forme” and “dedez vnfayre” found in the text into the visual medium of manuscript illumination. By employing what seems to be crudity and clumsiness and amateurism as a kind of aesthetic category in *Cleanness*’s visual program, these artists can consider how

³⁴ In a similar vein, Jack Halberstam uses “queer art to think about ways of being and knowing that stand outside of conventional understandings of success ... Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (2011, 2-3).

³⁵ For a discussion of the efficaciousness of an ‘ugly’ aesthetic practice, see Jeffrey F. Hamburger (1997). Hamburger discusses the modern perception of art objects reductively deemed *Nonnearbeiten*, or “nun’s work,” arguing that such intensely personal art “stands apart by virtue of their singular, unprofessional character ... [and] stands by definition for deficiency: not only a lack of skill and sophistications, but also a lack of identity, an anonymity that represents the opposite of ... artistic self-assertion” (1997, 18). To this end, the illustrations of MS Cotton Nero A.x. demonstrate how modern notions of aesthetic and interpretive *crudity* might, in fact, suggest more readily the depths of medieval affective and intellectual engagement present in the manuscript object. As Hamburger notes, “The ugly could only function as a reminder of rectitude because it served simultaneously as a sign of corruption” (1997, 19).

explicit description of sin might render more clearly the value of sexual normativity and spiritual purity. The recognition of the potential for an efficacious aesthetic grounded in crudity thus represents, not so much an acceptance of modern aesthetic categories, as a historicized reappropriation of those terms which undergird those categories for analytical productivity. With this in mind, I develop a more constructive description of the manuscript's perceived queerness which considers the role of both modern affective response to the images and the text's contrived aesthetic dialectic.

“Fayre Formez” and “Dedez Vnfayre” in *Cleanness*

Following *Pearl*, the poet of MS Cotton Nero A.x. introduces *Cleanness* with a statement of his ostensible goal to describe the “Fayre formez myȝ he fynde in forþering his speche” (*Cl* 3). In her fundamental study of the “fayre formez” of the *Cleanness*-poet, Sandra Pierson Prior has suggested the usefulness of such *formez* in describing physical shapes, rhetorical postures, and visual representations present in Cotton Nero A.x.—in other words, they are “the narrative and structural patterns, along with the visual and verbal images, that the poet uses to *forere* his *speche*” (1996, 10).³⁶ The *Cleanness*-poet's use of theological rhetoric and homiletic didacticism, his appeals “to the Bible and biblical exegesis for models of narrative structure,” represents a deliberate enactment of normative formal and aesthetic forms—a metatextual iteration of his “fayre formez” (Prior 1996, 12). The poet of *Cleanness* quickly establishes the normative terms of divine

³⁶ Arthur Bahr has likewise suggested that that these “fayre formez” present readers with “a distinct homiletic goal: clear articulation of theological principles and sustained construction of an arresting visual image” (2013, 465).

beauty within the discourse of late medieval court culture. God's heavenly court is likened to an earthly one wherein there are a particular set of aesthetic and behavioral mores which are to be strictly obeyed (*Cl* 17).

In the context of *Pearl*, Charlotte Gross has argued that “[t]he novelty of the *Pearl*-Poet’s use of courtly language lies in his exploitation of an ambiguous rhetoric already associated with two opposing realities, the earthly and heavenly” (1991, 80). Take, for example, the poet’s description of the two angels who seek out Lot and his family. They are described, not as common laborers, but rather as members of the courtly elite: “Bolde burnez wer þay bote with berdles chynnez, / Ryol rolland fax to raw sylk lyke, / Of ble as þe brere-flour whereso þe bare scheweod” (*Cl* 789-91). According to Elizabeth Keiser, these “fayre forme,” then, suggest “forms [which] appeal to a courtly sense of entitlement to a life crafted in accord with an aesthetic idea and lavishly adorned by the gratuitously decorative” (1997, 21). The poet thus plots *Cleanness*’s aesthetic and ethical trajectory along contemporaneous notions of courtliness and gentility as he delights in the aesthetics of an aristocratic sort (s).

However, the poet, despite his initial claim that descriptions of *uncleanness* were to be a “combraunce huge” nevertheless takes extensive measures to elaborate on the sins that invite God’s visceral punishment of Old Testament sinners (*Cl* 4).³⁷ In addressing the beauty of virtue, the poet necessarily addresses its antithesis—*fylþe* generally, the “fylþe

³⁷ See Calabrese and Eliason (1995).

of þe flesch,” and “werkez of fylþe” (*Cl* 202, 355).³⁸ The homilies provided in *Cleanness* thus rest uneasily, though perhaps purposefully so, on the disjunction between the poetry’s formal aesthetic structures and the unclean works it ostensibly sets out to describe. Importantly, while *Cleanness* begins with a reference to fair forms, it ends with a reference to Belshazzar’s violent murder and his unfair deeds, how he “[d]one doun of his dyngnete for dedez vnfayre” (*Cl* 1801). Via the use of the rhetoric of *formez* and considered in combination with his overstated concern for *dedez*, we can better trace the poet’s engagement with the kineticism and relationality of queerness. The poet’s descriptions of crude matter and his rhetoric of revulsion depend on his descriptions of queerness as aestheticized actions—as, not only *being* queer, but *doing* and *performing* queer deeds. It is in this way that *Cleanness*’s “fayre formez,” its courtly aesthetic and virtuous figures, become efficacious textual and visual structures in relation to the unruly dynamism of “dedez vnfayre.”

And though the topic of the Cotton Nero texts’ visuality is ubiquitous in literary scholarship on MS Cotton Nero A.x., relatively little, if anything, has been said about how the text’s dialectical aesthetic constructions interact with the illuminations present in the manuscript and vice-versa. To that end, the poet’s use of “fayre formez” and “dedez vnfayre” represent not simply a textual practice of image-making, but a methodology by which we might approach the queer aesthetic qualities of Cotton Nero A.x.’s illustrations. *Cleanness*’s aesthetic dialectic of “fayre formez” and “dedez vnfayre” functions

³⁸ See Wallace (1991), Calabrese and Eliason (1995), Prior (1996), Keiser (1997), and Bahr (2013).

meaningfully both as an historicized framework by which to examine both the poet's desire to engage with the righteous figures and untoward acts of the Old Testament, as well as the aesthetic and logistical decisions made by the later artists when deciding how to depict those figures and acts. The artists effectively avoid reproducing the poet's extreme terms of queerness while nevertheless providing viewers with a nuanced recognition of its catastrophic consequences. And, in doing so, they exercise a critical judgement of the poem, which gestures toward an alternative, perhaps, more intimate way of reading the text and handling its visual representation.

For additional context we might look to a comparable manuscript—Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 104—for a means of engaging with medieval scribes and artists who unsettle modern aesthetic expectations of manuscript production. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton has argued that MS Douce 104, also widely denounced as a “bad manuscript,” confounds modern scholarship “simply because its makers did their jobs so well ... [when] render[ing] a text intelligible to their *immediate* audience” (1999, 2). Medieval persons involved in manuscript production, though it seems banal to say, did not have the interests of modern scholars in mind when compiling texts and images. As Jeffrey Hamburger has suggested, “we have to forget preconceived notions of ‘Art.’ Instead, we must try to inhabit [their] world, removed from the present by the passage of time” (1997, 15).³⁹ Perhaps, then, modern designations of crudeness, amateurism, and

³⁹ Hamburger has argued that “Anachronistic considerations of quality need not, however, interfere with our appreciation of these objects, any more than they have with other genres that, while once disdained, have since found a fixed place in the art-historical firmament” (1997, 14).

clumsiness have become critical shorthand for a tacit recognition of queer relationality that suggests a ‘too-close-ness’ or a collapsing of the space between artist and art object—a kind of “immaturity, belatedness or underdevelopment, inadequate separation from objects of love, improper attachment, [or] inappropriate loving” (Dinshaw 2012, 31).

In this way, scholarly works reify and reconstitute the aesthetic logics of the poet himself. Both marginalize, though to varying degrees and extremities, what they perceive to be queer through a rhetorical practice which appeals most readily to their own affective response or their desire to suggest a particular affective response in their readers. Scribe-illustrated manuscripts, like MS Douce 104 and MS Cotton Nero A.x., thus “display a certain intimacy between text and illustration” (Kerby-Fulton 1999, 12). This is to say, the crudity of interpretation found in the images of Cotton Nero is, in fact, a typical feature of such manuscripts. Thus, it is the artists’ relationship to the work which facilitates their particular mode of aesthetic production and intellectual labor; Cotton Nero A.x. more broadly demonstrates how we might fruitfully engage with artistic production characterized by such intimate, if not unsettling, familiarity.

With this formation of supposed ‘crudity’ in mind, I turn to the three homilies of *Cleanness*, only two of which are illustrated. The first image, on fol. 60r (fig. 1.1), depicts Noah and his family on the ark as they navigate the Flood, and the second, on fol. 60v (fig. 1.2), represents a conflation of the moment in which a disembodied hand writes

on a wall at Belshazzar's feast and Daniel's interpretation of that writing.⁴⁰ *Cleanness* proposes its "fayre forme" as half of a dialectical aesthetic logic by which to read its three homilies and the images (or lack thereof) which represent them. The illuminations, while not directly depicting distinctly queer "dedez vnfayre," nevertheless provocatively intimate them using a consistent pattern of illustrative allusion to their consequences—the Flood and the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast. Furthermore, the omission of Lot's narrative from the visual program represents a meaningful contribution by the scribe-illustrator to the poets' aesthetic practice. The illustrations amount to something more akin to a multifaceted reinterpretation—between both the illustrator's and the images, and the colorist's work with the lined images—of this textual dialectic into a visual program.

The poet reproduces this broader dialectic early within the first homily of *Cleanness*. We are told that the children of Adam were "þe fayrest of form and of face als, / Þe most and þe myriest þat maked wern euer / Þe styfest, þe stalworþest þat stod euer on fete" (*Cl* 253-5). The first forms explicitly described as "fayre" in *Cleanness* are the descendants of the first man. These forms fail to stay 'fair' for long, however. Adam's descendants soon fall prey to unnatural and lustful sexual urges as they are goaded on by God's fallen angels, "þe dehter of douþe wern derelych fayre, / And fallen in felazschyp on folken wyse" (*Cl* 270-1). God variously describes their unnatural actions:

⁴⁰ Images of MS Cotton Nero A.x. come from the British Library's 'Digitised Manuscripts' site < http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Nero_A_X/2 >. Used with permission from © British Library Board. Figure description includes relevant folio number.

And þene founded þay fylþe in fleschlych dedez,
And controeued agyn kynde contraré werkez,
And vsed hem vnþryftyly vchon on oþer,
And als with oþer, wylsfully, upon a wrange wyse (*Cl* 265-8)

The poet's offended listing presents us with a tautological series of euphemisms for queer sex—their “japez ille” (*Cl* 272). In doing so, he suggests the narrative trajectory of each individual homily in *Cleanness*; that is, forms, innately fair, are corrupted by the temptation and propagation of unclean actions—here specifically the sexual intercourse between fallen angel and human. The poet figures heterosexuality as a kind of preparedness to fulfill God's will; to sexually deviate represents an active kind of *undoing* of God's aesthetic intent—in the words that will later characterize Belshazzar's sin: “ay hatz hofen þy hert agaynes þe hyhe Dryhtyn” (*Cl* 1711). Queerness in *Cleanness*, then, means to disorient oneself and act in ‘unclean’ ways.

Angered by the unclean actions of mankind, God spares Noah and his family from the torrent to come and provides for him very specific instructions for the building of his ark. God explicitly pronounces Noah to be yet another kind of fair figure, “Ful redy and ful ryhtwys, and reweled him fayre” (*Cl* 294). While not the attractive ‘fairness’ of the antediluvian sinners, the poet suggests that, in addition to those which are aesthetically appealing, fair forms are those which represent virtuous living—here associated primarily with heterosexual procreativity. We receive a rather prescriptive description of heterosexual pairing as God details how Noah is to fill the ark with animals, “Of vche clene comly kynde enclose seven makez, / Of vche horwed in ark halde bot a payre” (*Cl* 333-4).



Figure 1.1 Noah and his family on the ark (fol. 60r)

The folio image that accompanies the narrative (fol. 60r, fig. 1.1) suggests the scribe-artist's focus on the heterosexual imperative presented by Noah, his family, and charge to pair the animals. While featuring none of the animals on the ark, the scribe-illustrator does attempt to include the *persons* God intended to save. Though only seven of the eight individuals described in the poem find their way into the illumination, “þis meyney of ahte I schal saue of monnez saulez” (Cl 331-2), we can nevertheless assume that the cluster of people on the ark is meant to represent the only humans spared from

God's wrath: Noah, his wife, his three sons—each with a wife as well.⁴¹ The illustrator thus asks us to focus on three distinct pairs of heterosexual marriages and, in doing so, stresses with equal, if not greater, weight the ideological import afforded to the normativity of these “fayre formez.”

God's desire to wipe clean the “dedez vnfayre” of those on earth receives particular descriptive attention and continues the process of crafting a parallel aesthetic based on the punishment of queer sin detailed in the poem. God tells Noah that he intends to purge the earth of such sin with a flood: “For I schal waken vp a water to wasch alle þe worlde, / And quelle alle þat is quik with quauende flodez, / Alle þat glydez and gotz and gost of lyf habbez” (*CI* 323-5). This apocalyptic punishment is made all the more vivid by the colorist's decision to engage closely with the movement of the water itself. Independent of the scribe-illustrator's line drawings, the colorist responsible for the indigo water which flows up and over their single oar go so far as to include the detail of the water's eddying motion.

And while scholars often refer to how the colorist's work “obscures or crudely colors the drawing” (Lee 1977, 19), this individual skillfully depicts the plunging depths of the Flood, “Þat noht dowed bot þe deth in þe depe stremez” (*CI* 374). If, as David Wallace suggests, “the *Cleanness*-Poet takes pains to complicate and intensify our experience of terror,” we might view the work of the visual program as a kind of redoubling of this effort (1991, 93). By employing white pigment, the colorist better

⁴¹ Lee notes this artistic choice: “A bearded Noah clutches the mast while his wife rests one hand on his shoulder ... and the other five people, their sons and wives (minus one), peer at the waves with apparent concern” (1977, 35-6).

highlights the depth of the Flood while revealing the creatures beneath the ark. The oft-noted ‘crudity’ with which the artists depict this scene reveals an engaged readerly interest and attempt at textual elaboration.

The poet details the force of the Flood with startling clarity, spending some time considering the sheer destructive power of the water—“Þen bolned þe abyne, and bonkez con ryse, / ... / Watz no brymme þat abod vnbrosten bylyue” (*CI* 363-5). He later relates this event to the predominant courtly aesthetic mode and overarching metaphorical conceit of the text by explaining the necessity of attending “His comlych courte” in pristine dress and without such ‘fylþe’ staining their garments (*CI* 546). He suggests that above all other sins, unnatural lusts will forfeit one’s seat at the heavenly feast in God’s kingdom. The homily submits that even “fayre forme” can (and are, perhaps, most susceptible to) fall prey to “dedez vnfayre.” As *Cleanness* aptly demonstrates here and elsewhere, God’s only recourse for human sexual deviancy is nothing short of annihilation and reinstallation of those righteous figures God himself favors.

The poet spends little time on God’s attempt at reconciliation before returning to the apocalyptic rhetoric which characterized his description of God’s wrath initially (*CI* 565). The poet returns to the promise of God’s future judgement—“Þat ilke skyl for no scape ascaped Hym neuer / Wheder wonderly He wrak on wykked men after” (*CI* 569-70). Such a moment characterizes the poet’s tendency to match, perhaps surpass, his description of God and man’s righteousness with man’s “venym and þe vylanye and þe vycios fylþe” (*CI* 573). The aesthetic qualities of God’s “fayre forme” and eventual

mercy are quickly subsumed by a continued description of “dedez vnfayre” and their consequences. As Prior suggests of the poet’s descriptive practice, “it is precisely upon the visualization of the doomed creatures that the poet focuses our attention, in order to illustrate the wrath of God and the form of divine punishment” (1996, 70).

The illustration’s focus on the heterosexual pairing does the necessary visual labor of intimating the importance of normative “fayre formez.” Likewise, by leaving the bottom of the leaf blank, the scribe-illustrator and colorist call to mind, not only God’s promise to “wasch all þe worlde of werkez of fylþe” (*CI* 355), but its ostensible success; to leave the bottom of the leaf blank invokes the complete erasure of queer sexualities. It represents a total resetting and reinstallation of God’s chosen patriarch, Noah.

The third homily of *Cleanness* considers the writing on the wall at Belshazzar’s feast. We are first told of how King Zedechiah lost the favor of God as he began to “forloyne her fayth and folhed oþer goddes” [forsake his faith and followed other gods] (*CI* 1165). God selects Nebuchadnezzar to succeed Zedechiah and, after murdering Zedechiah’s sons before him, Nebuchadnezzar “holkked out his auen yhen heterly both” (*CI* 1222). Readers are not simply told about the destruction wrought by Nebuchadnezzar against Zedechiah; rather, the description seems to linger in its poeticizing and aestheticizing of the slaughter of every kind of citizen in Jerusalem: “Baped barnes in blod and her brayn spylled; / Presets and prelates þay presed to deþe, / Wyues and wenches her wombes tocoruen” (*CI* 1247-9). And though certainly within the context of

Nebuchadnezzar's righteous victory and its "fayre formeZ," the poet nevertheless revels in the artistry of God's violence.

The details of Nebuchadnezzar's cruel victory, however, serve as a prelude to the introduction of Belshazzar's *uncleanness*—his queer actions. The poet describes Belshazzar as an idolater who, like the late Zedichiah and Nebuchadnezzar, created and worshipped "fals fantummes of fends, formed with the hands" (*CI* 1341). The poet argues that Belshazzar was likewise overcome with excessive desire for "þe clernes of his concubines and curious wedez" and other "misschapien þinges" (*CI* 1353; 1355). Such aberrant desire, both sexual and spiritual, reaches its apex as Belshazzar requests an extravagant dinner which suggests the descriptions offered by the "fayre formeZ" of God's feast at the outset of *Cleanness*; this refashioning lends a circularity to *Cleanness* that better contextualizes it among *Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The poet describes the fanfare for the feast in characteristically rich detail: "Sturne trumpen strake steuen in halle, / Aywhere by þe woves wrasten krakkes, / And brode baneres þerbi blusnande of gold" *CI* 1402-4). He thus engages with these "fayre formeZ" only to ultimately distort this courtly aesthetic in service of the description of Belshazzar's debauchery. Belshazzar's basest sin, however, is the mundane use of Solomon's sacred vessels. Belshazzar's sensual and sinful mishandling of these objects offends God—"Þat His jueles so gent with jaeles wer fouled" (*CI* 1494-5). Much like the sinners of the first homily, the queerness of Belshazzar's actions stems from his misuse of "fayre formeZ," whether they be person or object; Belshazzar's offense to God

is only compounded further by his forms of *undoing* including his sexual proclivities and idolatry. We see most prominently the artists' attention to the courtly aesthetic of *Cleanness* in their choice to depict Belshazzar's feast (f. 60v, fig. 1.2).

The illustrator supplements a characteristic attention to the motion and folding of fabric with his rather judicious choice of objects to include on the banquet table. The poet details a range of highly aestheticized items pillaged from Solomon's temple at Nebuchadnezzar's request, noting especially the quality of their materials:

Pay caht away þat condelstik, and þe crowne als
þat þe auter hade vpon, of aþel gold ryche,
þe gredirne and þe goblotes garnyst of syluer,
þe bases of þe bryht posestes and bassynes so schyre,
Dere disches of golde and dubleres fayre,
þe vyoles and þe vesselment of vertuous stones. (*CI* 1275-80)

However, looking to the illumination (fol. 60v, fig. 1.2) we find a table which is sparsely set. As with the illustrator's depiction of Noah, it seems likely that what modern viewers perceive as deficiency of visual interpretation or content is, in fact, an attempt to focalize and bring to the fore certain parts of the text. The scene is sparingly colored as only the human figures (disembodied manicule included) and the objects before them receive the painters' attention—though the number and range of colors found in the scene remain consistent with its programmatic companions. This colorist's decision to economically apply pigment here stands in stark contrast to the scene on the banks of the river in *Pearl* (fol. 42v, fig. 1.3) where the human figures *and* the backdrop, the lush greenery and the

heavenly Jerusalem, receive significant attention. That said, paradoxically, this lack of pigment highlights all the more directly to the small assortment of objects on the table which do receive color and the additional shading of its three figures—Daniel, Belshazzar, and his “worbelych queen” (CI 1351). Maidie Hilmo has recently pointed out that these objects are not Solomon’s finely crafted vessels mentioned in the text of *Cleanness* but rather the objects associated with Christian Mass (2019, 400). She describes “the round communion host (here thoughtlessly or deliberately painted earth



Figure 1.2 Daniel interpreting the writing at Belshazzar’s feast (fol. 60v)

yellow) displayed within the center of the sunburst monstrance” and “the inclusion of the bishop’s crozier” (Hilmo 2019, 400-1; 402). Such objects do not represent the vessels described in the looting of Solomon’s temple and are wholly anachronistic to the scene itself; however, they effectively make the severity of Belshezzar’s transgression more immediately legible to medieval audiences and, as Hilmo suggests, “place an emphasis on the sin of sacrilege against consecrated holy vessels (including persons)” (2019, 402). The inclusion and coloration of these vessels constitute the illustrator and painters’ knowing engagement with the poet’s emphasis on the nature and eschatological reality of such “fayre formeز”—“the fairest *formez* are not humanity’s, but God’s, and are more available in sacrament and sacred history than in anything medieval poets can create” (Prior 1996, 16). Once again, rather than passive or flagrant misunderstanding of the poet’s “fayre formeز,” the illustrator and painters enact a working reinterpretation and translation of the text for contemporary viewing in the period.

God communicates his anger by way of a disembodied hand which writes out his retributive message for Belshazzar—“Non oþer forme bot a fust faylande þe wryste” (*CI* 1535). The hand horrifies Belshazzar and his guests as it “rasped on þe roh wohe runisch sauez” and then “vanist verayly and voyded of syht” (*CI* 1545, 1548). Confounded by the words, Belshazzar has Daniel brought forward for his ability to “expowned clene” these obscure signs (*CI* 1606). Daniel explains the meaning behind the enigmatic words: “*Mane, Techal, Phares*: merked in þrynee, / Þat þretes þe of þyn vnþryfte vpon þre wyse” (*CI* 1726-9). The image that accompanies this homily (fol. 60v, fig. 1.2) collapses the

moment of writing, the queen's recommendation of Daniel, and Daniel's interpretation. The artists' work facilitates a self-reflexive consideration of the acts of writing, transmission, and translation as it is represented through Belshazzar's crude excess.

On the far left of the illustration, the scribe-illustrator provides a piece of parchment for the disembodied hand to write on rather than the wall (fol. 60v, fig. 1.4). Hilmo has shown via multispectral analysis that "the scribe and conceptual artist who made the underdrawings was one and the same" (2017, 119). Elsewhere, Jane Roberts



Figure 1.3 The Dreamer of *Pearl* looks across the river (fol. 42v)



Figure 1.4 Detail of the writing on the Wall (fol. 60v)

has considered paleographic evidence to make a similar connection: “in script these words, like ‘Amen’ at the end of the poem, are enlarged, differentiated for display ... [t]he lettering of the prophecy on the scroll ... looks similar” (4; see fig. 1.5-7).⁴² The scribe-illustrator appears to be trying to do two things; he once again attempts to make the content of the image more legible to contemporary audiences while simultaneously

⁴² See Jane Roberts’ “The Hand and Script” published in conjunction with the University of Calgary’s *Cotton Nero A.x. Project*. < <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~scriptor/cotton/Roberts%20for%20Web.pdf> >.

recognizing *his own labor* within the manuscript itself as the disembodied hand becomes his own. Not only has he written *mane*, *techal*, and *phares* as it appears in the poem itself but as it appears on the parchment in the image too (fol. 84v; see fig. 1.8). Reichardt contends that “the depiction of Daniel interpreting script for Belshazzar evokes issues of

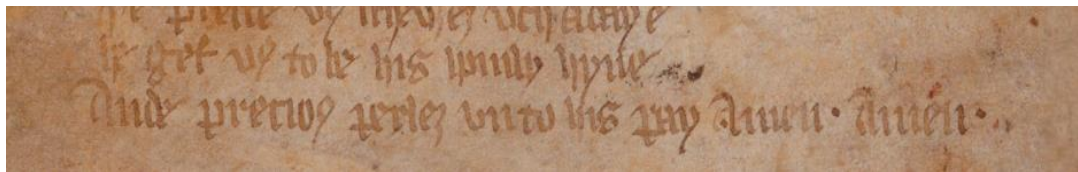


Figure 1.5 ‘Amen’ detail at the conclusion of *Pearl* (fol. 59v)



Figure 1.6 ‘Amen’ detail at the conclusion of *Cleanness* (fol. 86r)

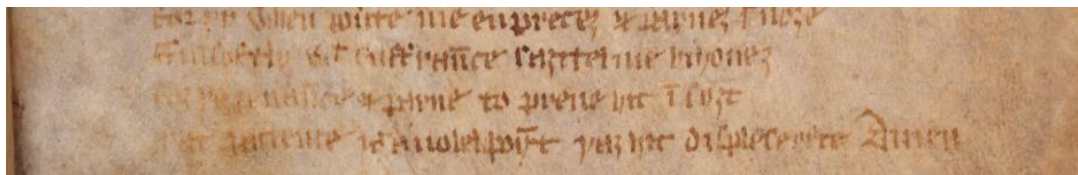


Figure 1.7 ‘Amen’ detail at the conclusion of *Patience* (fol. 94r)

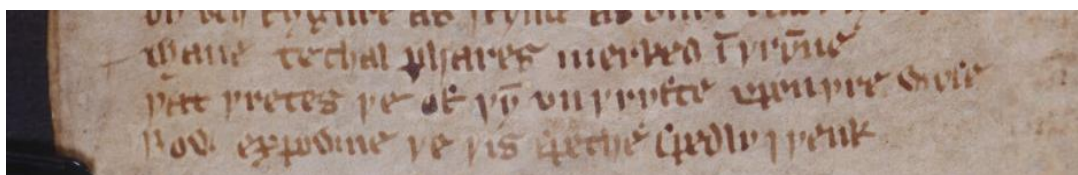


Figure 1.8 *Mane*, *techal*, *phares* as it appears in the text (fol. 84v)

textual production, literacy, and spiritual discernment that are keys to understanding the *Pearl* poems themselves” (1997, 128).⁴³

It is important to note the illustrator’s active role in these visual discourses of reading and writing, interpreting, and recreating this scene. In this image, the illustrator is responsible for, not only reading the text, like Daniel, but determining how the poet’s description of writing should be rendered visually. Likewise, the decision to leave the parchment without color suggests, perhaps, that the colorist understood the scribe-illustrator’s attempt to emphasize this point. These artists thus occupy the intellectual and creative space of the manuscript somewhere between the poet and the reader. These questions of remediation appear because the artists have provided us with a moment where those forms of media cross in visually complex and textually challenging ways; it would seem, then, that ‘crudity’ and ‘clumsiness’ need not preclude complexity.

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⁴³ Bahr argues that the poet uses “a lexicon that evokes earthly scribal practice and thus also that of the scribe whose work we are reading in Cotton Nero A.x. This similitude creates a momentary congruence between Belshazzar and the reader, both struggling to find meaning in the written intersection of verbal, visual, and material form” (2013, 474-5).

complex and textually challenging ways; it would seem, then, that ‘crudity’ and ‘clumsiness’ need not preclude complexity.

For his ability to interpret the words, Daniel is lavishly “dubbed in ful dere porpor, / And a coler of cler gold kest vmbe his swyre” (*CI* 1743-4). God’s punishment for Belshazzar’s egregious misuse of his own body and holy objects, his “dedez vnfayre,” act as the terms by which the poem concludes. Belshazzar is not spared the poet’s particular style of alliterative violence: “Baltazar in his bed watz beten to deþe, / Þat boþe his blod and his bryn blende on þe cloþes” (*CI* 1787-8). The poet’s descriptive takes significant creative liberty here as the Vulgate description is far less vivid, “Eadem nocte interfectus est Baltassar rex Chaldaeus” [That night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was killed] (Daniel 5:30; LV). By the end of *Cleanness*, then, the “fayre forme” which characterize the courtly aesthetic of the poem are recovered and restored to Daniel, a man God deems worthy and ‘clean.’

Much like the illustration of Noah and his family on the ark, the image which depicts the third homily derives its interpretive complexity from its engagement, not only with the “fayre forme” which God has selected and granted safety, but its ability to suggest “dedez vnfayre” of the narrative—all of which are revealed to be issues of aberrant desire and queer misuse. These ‘unclean’ acts are, perhaps, even more explicitly provided through the scribe-illustrator’s recapitulation of God’s warning to Belshazzar vis-à-vis text on a scroll and the colorist’s decision to highlight objects and persons using pigment relatively sparingly. The two images of *Cleanness* were astutely conceived and executed. The illustrator responsible for the images has clear knowledge of the text he is

copying and illustrating; likewise, the colorist, despite bearing a significant portion of the responsibility for the images' contentious critical legacy, quite clearly complemented vis-à-vis the application of pigment what was, perhaps, the initial readerly inclinations of the scribe-illustrator. The alleged 'crudity' of their visual combined interpretation reveals, in fact, not an 'amateur' brandishing his child's watercolors, but a nuanced engagement with the poet's conceptualization of the insufficiency of words and images in describing divine ideas and figures. To this end, I conclude with a consideration of the second homily of *Cleanness* which, unlike the ones which precede and follow, receives no illumination. This lack engages with the poet's aesthetic dialectic in manners unlike the illustrations of the manuscript and which take the logic of the dialectic to its most extreme ends.

“Dedez Vnfayre” and the Invisibility of Sodomy

The very omission Sodom's narrative from the manuscript's illuminated pages reinforces contemporary notions of queerness as both an embodied state and a kinetic act. Lot's escape from Sodom represents the most visually fraught of the “dedez vnfayre” the poet proposes. The formal structure of *Cleanness* emphasizes the uniform importance of its three exegetically extended biblical narratives. The poet explicitly suggests this tripartite structure at the end of *Cleanness*: “Pus vpon þryne wyses I haf yow þro shewed / Þat vnclannes tocleues in corage dere” (*Cl* 1805-6). Though scholars readily recognize this sermonic arrangement, few have directly addressed the discrepancy between textual and visual structure—specifically, the fact that an image of the second homily is seemingly

missing from the visual program of *Cleanness*. This section thus attempts to address more directly those reasons and situate the omission of Sodom and Gomorrah within a medieval aesthetic tradition of artistic representations of sodomy—those “dedez vnfayre” with which the text seems most concerned.

Lee has argued that the second homily may have been “too complex and [contained] too many characters to illustrate in one scene” (Lee 1977, 44).⁴⁴ Such a claim is difficult to support, however, since the illustrator elsewhere depicts seven figures at one time on Noah’s ark (fol. 60r, fig. 1.1) and collapses the entire city of Nineveh into three individuals listening to Jonah (fol. 86v, fig. 1.9). Paul Reichardt explains that it was possibly a matter of the scribe-illustrator’s recognition of the poet’s numerological practice and a sense of “personal preference” which guided his artistic choices (1997, 121).⁴⁵

Alongside their hypotheses concerning the illustrator’s personal preferences, however, Lee and Reichardt both also suggest a more helpful answer to the question of the artist’s illustrative omissions, one rearticulated by Hilmo. The images, she states, “serve as the audience’s first means of entry to the poems and introduce, at a glance, what subjects to anticipate and weight with meaning” (Hilmo 2017, 112). And while we might extrapolate from this that the absence of an image has the potential to occlude or deemphasize the particularities of a specific narrative, the scribe-illustrator’s decision not

⁴⁴ Lee describes this omission in the illustrative program of *Cleanness*, “[t]he artist chose to illustrate the first and last of these” (1977, 35).

⁴⁵ Reichardt argues, “The literacy of interpreting visual scenes compels readers of an illustrated manuscript to confront discrepancies between pictures and text” (1997, 130).

to include an image from the second narrative of *Cleanness* is simultaneously a reaction to the heterodoxy present in its accompanying text *and* the result of the artists' attempt to meaningfully engage with the poet's aesthetic dialectic of "formez" and "dedez."



Figure 1.9 Jonah preaching to the people of Nineveh (fol. 86v)

Murray McGillivray and Christina Duffy's codicological description of the manuscript seems to support this assertion of artistic intentionality and suggestion-by-omission. They explain that "the most likely scenario is that Cotton Nero A.x. had already existed as a bound volume for some time before the line drawings were added to

it” (McGillivray and Duffy 2017, 123). This would mean that the scribe-illustrator responsible for the images, in making use of the remaining spaces of the manuscript for these illustrations, either chose this configuration of images or else the individual commissioning the creation of the images dictated that four images would go to *Pearl*, two to *Cleanness*, two to *Patience*, and four to *Sir Gawain*. In any case, the artist of the manuscript utilized a single folio with which to depict the three narratives of *Cleanness*—and, for this reason, was made to exclude one narrative from the illustrative program.

In keeping with the aesthetic dialectic of “fayre formez” and “dedez vnfayre” provided by the poet, the scribe-artist and painters engage with the “cleanness” by way of a decision, perhaps refusal, to engage with the sodomitical content of the homily. As with the blank space at the bottom of fol. 60r, its absence has the potential to suggest the totality of God’s eradicated punishment. Indeed, the artists appear to allude to a particular description of Sodom’s destruction which explains both its ‘actual’ destruction as well as its lack of illumination in the text. The poet of *Cleanness* turns to simile as he explains how the destruction of Sodom proceeded; he claims that the city crumbles as if it were a book whose pages have leapt from its binding, “As lauce leuez of þe boke þat lepes in twynne” (*CI* 965). He thus briefly calls attention to the object opened before a medieval reader, the leaves which contain the text being read, and most prescient to this discussion, the leaves which seem to have leapt from the book’s binding. As Malcom Andrew and Ronald Waldron have suggested, “The startling shift of perspective, by which great rocks become like fluttering leaves of parchment, provides a powerful imaginative impression of the vast and irresistible power of God, by comparison to which

man is puny indeed” (2002, 28). As the poet describes the ruin of Sodom as though it were pages torn from a book, the scribe-illustrator cleverly performs this simile meta-textually and visually by having such a representation ‘missing’ from the illustrative program of the manuscript.

At the beginning of the second homily, Abraham, elsewhere referred to as “Habraham þe trwe,” entreats three noblemen, heavenly messengers “farande and fre and fayre to beholde,” to dine with him at his home (*CI* 682; 607). Disclosing God’s anger as God had done with Noah before, they begin to describe the ‘unclean’ male-male pairing of the Sodomites wherein “Vch male matz his mach a man as hymselfen” [Each man pairs with another man like himself] (*CI* 695). The Sodomites’ form of queer, non-procreative sexual intercourse between men, God laments, is “of fautez þe werst” (*CI* 694).⁴⁶ He proclaims that heterosexual, procreative intercourse “Bytwene a male and his make” is tantamount to “pure paradys” (*CI* 703, 704). In saying so, the God of *Cleanness* provides an unequivocal endorsement of heterosexuality’s artistry, “þe play of paramorez I portrayed then Myseluen” (*CI* 700).

The poet uses words such as “portrayed” and “compass” almost certainly because of their artistic valences and, arguably, indicates the poet’s knowledge of desire to posture God as an artist.⁴⁷ Such word choice makes clear the aesthetic interests of the

⁴⁶ This use of “fautez” recalls the poet’s initial listing of 24 sins which might cause someone to lose their seat at the heavenly banquet and the subsequent pronouncement of “fylþe of þe flesh” as the worst of these (see *Cleanness* 177-92).

⁴⁷ For these senses, see the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*) “portraien” (v. 1abc, 4ab), “compassen” (v. 2b).

poet as well as his contempt for queerness, what he might consider the result of ‘failed’ iteration of aestheticized heterosexuality. Attuned to this choice of language, Keiser has argued that the poet effectively positions God’s wrath as “an artist’s rage for order” and sodomy as “an intolerable slur on divine craftsmanship” (1997, 2-3). The poet of Cotton Nero A.x. reveals himself, then, to be an artist deeply preoccupied with notions of aesthetic and artistic normativity and, consequently, the issue of describing queerness.

The poet graphically recounts the Sodomites’ desires and the subsequent destruction of Sodom. When two angels enter Sodom to retrieve Lot and his family at Abraham’s request, the Sodomites begin to demand that Lot turn them over to “lere hym of lof, as oure lyst biddez” (*CI* 843). The “fayre formez” of the angels thus become the hypothetical objects of the Sodomites’ proposed “dedez vnfayre.” The poet seems personally offended by this request as he interjects: “Whatt! þay sputen and spoken of so spitous fylþe, / What! þay hehed and holped of hestande sorhe” (*CI* 845-6). Lot condemns the sexual games of the Sodomites, “your japez ar ille” and offers his daughters to the Sodomites in an attempt to persuade them toward heterosexual intercourse “by kynde a crafte þat is better” (*CI* 864, 865).⁴⁸ Once again, the poet’s description of heterosexual sex as a “crafte þat is better” here suggests an expressed interest in the aesthetics of heterosexuality—God’s “crafte” is both an artistic undertaking and the expectation of a proper appreciation of the beauty of its normativity.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ This reference to sinful sexual sport recalls the poet’s previous description of the intercourse between fallen angels and human women, “her japez ille” (*CI* 272).

⁴⁹ For this meaning of *crafte*, see the *Middle English Dictionary* “craft” (n. 1 [3a, 9a]).

The poet renders God's punishment as an alliterative tableau of divine punishment—he describes the Dead Sea as “Blo, blubrande, and blak, vnblyþe to neþe; / As a stynkande stanc þat stryed synne, / Þat euer of smelle and of smach smart is to fele” (*CI* 1017-9). This visceral description of Sodom's fate is, perhaps, the poem's most engaged description of the consequences of “dedez vnfayre.” As he does elsewhere in the third homily, the poet inverts the poetic force of his “fayre formez” to list, not the courtly finery found in the introduction to *Cleanness*, but substances which are materially unrefined and sensorially displeasing. The pit that once held Sodom now contains volatile substances—“alum and alkaran, þat angré arn boþe, / Soufre sour and saundyuer, and oþer such mony / ... / Þe spumande aspaltoun þat spyserez sellen” (*CI* 1035-8). The “dedez vnfayre” of the homily are thus reduced to base materials. The poet imagines the material legacy of Sodom, its *fylþe*, in terms of its residue with which it continues to corrupt the Dead Sea.

The scribe-illustrator thus astutely responds to the poet's effusive textual descriptions by depicting absolutely nothing at all. Only by visually reproducing God's complete eradication of Sodom can the illustrator detail the gravity of the Sodomites' sins. This choice has the additional benefit of allowing him to circumvent the potential complications which might arise from visually reinforcing the poet's already provocative descriptions of queer sex. Robert Mills has suggested of medieval artistic depictions of sodomy that “invisibility itself can be a powerful representational strategy in medieval sources: paradoxically, it sometimes operates as just one more way of seeing” (2015, 14).

⁵⁰ In this way, the scribe-illustrator thus participates in a longer history of sodomitical discourse wherein “[s]odomy became invisible to the Christian mind, yet the object of a thousand fantasies. It was nowhere, yet everywhere threatened society with destruction” (Johannsen and Percy 1996, 175-6). Invoking or mentioning Sodom in any capacity immediately brought the act of sodomy to the fore of the medieval imaginary with “references to ‘Sodom’ and ‘Gomorrah’ [being] shorthand, in medieval culture, for same-sex copulation between men” (Heng 2003, 92). Thus, the scribe-illustrator’s decision not to render content or subjects directly representative of sodomitic identities appears necessarily related to his own competent and critical understanding of the excessively exegetical portions found in the poem itself.

The illustrator of MS Cotton Nero A.x. does not shy away from explicit depictions of eroticism elsewhere; the bedroom illumination in *Sir Gawain* (fol. 129r, fig. 1.10) features Lady Bertilak looming suggestively over Gawain’s bed while he sleeps. His decision to have Lady Bertilak ‘chuck’ Gawain, the gentle touching of Gawain’s chin and neck, elaborates visually on her forceful, though clearly heterosexual, erotic demands.⁵¹ Michael Camille suggests that such unambiguously *heterosexual* imagery

⁵⁰ Mills continues, “it is nonetheless striking that, in comparison with the earlier volumes, which did not shy away from depicting homoerotic sexual activity, even between women, the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century examples seem to have devoted less space to visualizing such desires” (2012, 462).

⁵¹ Lee has argued that while “[t]he lady’s gesture of chucking Gawain under the chin, while entirely appropriate to the situation, is not indicated in the poem ... Generally, however, it is the lover who chucks the lady under the chin, and the reversal of roles in this picture underlines the dangerous ‘unnaturalness’ of Gawain’s position. While Lord Bertilak hunts in the forest, Gawain is pursued in an amorous ‘hunt’ in the castle” (1977, 22).

reflected “an interest in the *representation* of sexual acts, both licit and illicit (with the exception of what we would call homosexual sex)” (1997, 78). However, as I have argued, this “exception” represents a purposeful aesthetic choice on the part of the illustrator, not to simply omit Lot’s narrative because of how it might queer sexual content, but to suggest its violent obliteration.⁵² Such a choice would suggest a conscious



Figure 1.10 Lady Bertilak visiting
Sir Gawain (fol. 129r)

⁵² Discussing thirteenth-century manuscripts, Michael Camille argues that including images that represent queer sexual acts within a manuscript’s *ordinatio* in this period “would have been to normalize and place this most demonized form of sodomy within the procreative sanctions of the marriage bed” (1997, 75).

thematic connection between the visual depictions of the three homilies—an almost exclusive focus on God’s pronouncement of sin and its violent punishment.

Both the poet and the scribe-illustrator imagine sodomy as a threat to heterosexual relational structures. An examination of the poet’s language concerning the inherent visuality of sodomy and its consequences makes clearer, however, the integral difference between his own and the illustrator’s method of condemnation. The scribe-illustrator of Cotton Nero A.x. worked within this precarious paradigm which sought to roundly condemn queer identities while also attempting to obscure them when possible—what Heng describes as a “deliberate linguistic disordering and disarticulation” of sodomy itself (2003, 98).⁵³ In foregoing an image of Sodom, the illustrator enacts a similar kind of visual disorientation within in the context of the manuscripts illustrative program.

Conclusion

Like the three other poems found in Cotton Nero A.x., *Cleanness* ends with a knowing glance to how it began. Reiterating the stakes of spiritual *clanness*, the poet suggests that *fylþe*, whatever form it may take, is an affront to God and worthy of his wrath. It is not enough to simply appear clean before God—the poet warns of those who might dress themselves well but contain “inwith alle fylþez” [entirely filthy inside] (*Cl* 14). The poet

⁵³ As Mark Jordan summarizes, a confessor during the medieval period would both “not want to suggest such terrible practices to those who might never have thought of them ... [and] want to ferret out those who have practiced such acts but who would hesitate to admit them” (1997, 102). Dinshaw (1999, 5) considers this phenomenon most cogently when she asks the question: “But what is the sin of which we are not speaking?” Heng thus similarly describes sodomy in the period as “unspeakably transgressive” (2003, 98).

reproduces this return to *Cleanness*'s characteristic mode of admonition time and time again throughout the poem.

So while the poet quickly praises *clanness* at the poem's end, it is difficult to ignore the fact that just thirty lines earlier we are told of, as I discussed above, King Belshazzar's brutal murder: "Baltazar in his bed watz beten to deþe, / Þat boþe his blod and his brayn blende on þe cloþes" [Belshazzar was beaten to death in his bed, / So that his blood and his brain soaked into his sheets] (*Cl* 1787-8). To this, the poet adds that he "in his cortyn watz kaht bi þe heles, / Feryed out bi þe fete and fowle dispysed" [with drapes he was tied by his heels / Dragged about by his feet and foully loathed] (*Cl* 1789-90). Indeed, even the closing lines of the poem seem to reproduce the poet's aesthetic struggle to describe cleanness and decry uncleanness in equally evocative terms:

Þus vpon þryne wyses I haf yow þro schewed
Þat vnclannes tocleues in corage dere
Of þat wynnelych Lorde þat wonyes in heuen,
Entyses Hym to be tene, teldes vp His wrake;
Ande clanness is His comfort, and coyntyse He loyes,
And þose þat seme arn and swete schyn se His face. (*Cl* 1805-10)

The poet's final exhortations of *clanness* thus seem to ring somewhat hollow in face of the poet's seeming virtuosity in describing disgust and violence—what Andrew and Waldron have described as "the alliterative tradition's characteristic facility in describing scenes of violent action and high drama" (2002, 28). This fact is particularly difficult to reconcile with the poet's original claim that describing *fylþe* would be a "combraunce huge" (*Cl* 4); troublingly, it would seem, *Cleanness* is a poem as much concerned with

the aesthetics of *vnclaness* as it is the subject of its modern nomenclature. When situated with the aesthetic dialectic elaborated upon here, however, what seems to be a disjunction in the theological program of the poem is a deliberate turn by the poet toward *fylpe* itself. Indeed, in foregrounding *fylpe* of “dedez vnfayre” in the text, the poet fulfills “the aim in *Cleanness*,” “to use these illustrations of God’s destructive anger as a deterrent to sin” (Andrew and Waldron 2002, 28). In doing so, the poet paradoxically renders the righteous *claness* of its “fayre formez” all the more directly.

Cleanness thus attempts to warn readers away from sin through an aesthetic regimen which is meant to disturb, repulse, and upset. And while the success of this strategy with regard to medieval readers is unknowable, though likely efficacious, it seems that the poem’s dependence on *fylpe* and punishment has been relatively successful in challenging the sensibilities of modern criticism. Michael Calabrese and Eric Eliason have discussed the “apparent lack of unity and confusing organization ... [and] judgmental morality” which ultimately “make reading *Cleanness* a potentially uncomfortable experience” (1995, 247; 248). Jane K. Lecklider has argued likewise, “*Cleanness* is perceived as a rather grim and pessimistic work ... the least likely of the four poems to repay the reader’s attention” (1997, 1).

It is perhaps fitting, then, that *Cleanness* has provided the aesthetic framework by which I have engaged with the illustrations of Cotton Nero A.x. We need but compare the descriptions of *Cleanness* by such scholars to the criticisms lodged against the aesthetic experience of the manuscript’s illuminations to see just how similar they are. Where the images of Cotton Nero A.x. unseat aesthetic expectations and are thus labeled *crude* or

clumsy or *amateur*, *Cleanness* similarly challenges its reader with stark depictions of queer peoples and sex, and unmitigated, albeit skillfully described, violence. Crudity, rather than simply being the result of unskilled artistic labor, represents a deliberate aesthetic practice proposed first by the poet and taken yet further by the scribe-illustrator and colorist of the manuscript.

Beginning with Greg's provocative 1924 descriptions of the images of Cotton Nero A.x. as *queer* and *amateur*, I have attempted to clarify how scholarly reception of the images' interpretation and the evolution of the aesthetic categories into which they have been sorted have occluded consideration of the visual program's complex and understudied ability to simultaneously highlight those righteous figures the text deems "fayre" and the punishments associated with queer peoples, places, and actions "vnfayre." This chapter recontextualizes the images of the manuscript within an aesthetic dialectic provided by the poet in *Cleanness* and, in doing so, suggests more readily the competency and intention with which the illustrator and colorist of Cotton Nero A.x. worked. Likewise, it gestures toward the critical feedback loop in which scholarship on the subject has traditionally expressed negative affect and approximated queerness within a field of terms like clumsy, crude, and amateur.

And while *Cleanness* is in no way a text which celebrates queerness, we might begin to see the "dedez vnfayre" of *Cleanness*, not as solely an indictment of alterity, but rather an implicit recognition of the possibility of queer being and doing. Returning to Ahmed's discussion of clumsiness, such disorientation "attends to the bumpiness of living with difference ... different kinds of bodies, with differing capacities and

incapacities, rhythms and tendencies” (2017, 166-7). The images of MS Cotton Nero A.x. thus suggest interpretive acts by the illustrator and painters which nevertheless serve as proof of a productively *crude*, perhaps *queer*, engagement with the textual content of the manuscript.

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Chapter Two

“Ploughman Tylyer, draw the nere”: Attaching Continuations in Christ Church MS 152

“[T]he defining feature of Chaucer’s early legacy is not competition with the dead but the cultivation of a shared community with—and care for—the dead.”

— Bridget Whearty (2018, 333)

Introduction

In 1902, professor of English and scholar of nineteenth century British literature Arthur Beatty published an edition of *The Ploughman’s Tale*, an apocryphal Canterbury tale, through Frederick J. Furnivall’s Chaucer Society. This edition featured a rather perplexing title page. Beatty presents the text as “*A New Ploughman’s Tale: Thomas Hoccleve’s Legend of the Virgin and her Sleeveless Garment, with a Spurious Link*,” the edition’s title reads like a collage of medieval tropes and conceits rather than a coherent description of the text it contains. Immediately following this the title receives further description: “Edited from MS. CLII, Christ Church, Oxford (Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*).” This title page is fraught for several reasons and, in the process of clarification, makes the contents of the edition more inscrutable. Its nomenclature is particularly misleading when taken as a whole—a *new* tale? Chaucer’s Plowman does not seem to tell a first tale during his *Canterbury Tales*. Given contents of the extant manuscripts of the *Tales*, Chaucer fails provide a *Plowman’s Tale* to make ‘new’; as Gertrude Stein might say, there is no *there* there.⁵⁴ Indeed, it is not unlike saying one means to provide a new

⁵⁴ Gertrude Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography* (1937, 289).

Haberdasher's Tale or *Carpenter's Tale*. Though these pilgrims are mentioned in the *General Prologue*, they conspicuously lack a narrative voice. Nor is there any sense in referring to the, at that time, five-hundred or so year old Christ Church 152 as 'new.'⁵⁵

What is more, we are told that this "*New Ploughman's Tale*" is attributed to Thomas Hoccleve and is, in fact, a version of his legend "*Of the Virgin and her Sleeveless Garment, with a Spurious Link*." At the same time, we are also told that this text is edited from Christ Church 152 which is said to contain "Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*." At best, this is a needlessly reductive description of Christ Church 152, as it the manuscript also contains the poetry of John Lydgate. In his introduction, Beatty describes how "[t]he rest of the Manuscript is occupied by a fragment of Lydgate's *Tale of the Churle and his bryd* and *The Sege of Thebes*" (1902, viii). This title page thus makes a series of claims which are, at best, misleading. In hierarchizing the contents of the

⁵⁵ This is, of course, even though two later individuals attempted to supply Chaucer's Plowman with a tale. The present chapter focuses on the first known attempt made in the late fifteenth century by the second scribe of Christ Church 152, *The Ploughman's Tale*. Modern criticism has never recognized this version as 'authentically' Chaucerian; this is primarily because it can be confidently identified as Thomas Hoccleve's "*Item de Beata Virgine*." The second attempt, referred to as *The Plowman's Tale*, exists only in print—though, it is speculated that it was derived first from a lost manuscript copy. Published by Thomas Godfray as an independent text in 1533, *The Plowman's Tale* was reprinted by William Thynne in his 1542 edition of Chaucer's *Works* "as if [written] by Chaucer" (McCarl 16). However, beginning in the late eighteenth century, Thomas Tyrwhitt cast doubt on this provenance and subsequently removed *The Plowman's Tale* from the fourth volume of his 1775 edition: "We can therefore only judge of it by the internal evidence and upon that I have no scruple to declare my own opinion, that it has not the least resemblance to Chaucer's manner, either of writing or thinking, in his other works" (184n32). In 1972, Andrew Wawn used orthographical and thematic evidence and reached "[t]he fundamental conclusion" that *The Plowman's Tale* "in its original form written at the very beginning of the fifteenth century ... [and] was an anonymous Lollard verse tract" which was later expanded before its inclusion in Thynne's 1542 edition (39).

manuscript as such, the title page of the 1902 edition proposes a kind of logical quandary which does not necessarily reflect the material and textual reality of the manuscript itself. This formulation characteristically foregrounds the centrality of Chaucer's textual contributions in Christ Church 152 and positions the work of those that followed as somehow supplementary.

If the edition is a portion of Christ Church 152 which is allegedly composed entirely of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, it cannot simultaneously be Hoccleve's Marian legend nor can it be Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*. And yet, this is how Beatty introduces his edition of this *new* tale. Christ Church 152 is a compiled manuscript which simultaneously engages with the works of Chaucer, Hoccleve, and Lydgate. Its contents are a copy of *The Canterbury Tales* and, at the same time, something more. And rather than attempting to extricate Chaucer from Hoccleve from Lydgate, I want to examine what their entanglement might tell us about the mutability of medieval texts and the immediate fungibility of Chaucer's *corpus* following his death. I want to consider the kinds of attachments which Beatty's title page implies and, in some ways, makes manifest.

To that end, I am concerned with how fifteenth-century readers, particularly those who copied texts, might have perceived the professed relationships between authors and how such perceptions potentially coalesced in the readerly imaginary in fashions both textual and material. I argue that this title page—in its invocation of Hoccleve in and evacuation of Lydgate from Christ Church 152—illuminates how the work of Chaucer's later interlocutors come to be 'attached' to Chaucer via expressions of affection and,

consequently, how their works come to be ‘attached’ to his *Canterbury Tales* in a physical sense. While the title page of Beatty’s edition suggests the subordination of Lydgate and Hoccleve’s work to Chaucer’s *Tales* in Christ Church 152, its material and textual composition nevertheless reveals the more complex notions of authorial and aesthetic relationality with which the fifteenth century scribes assembled the manuscript.

In this chapter I take interest in how the open expressions of attachment to Chaucer articulated by Hoccleve and Lydgate may have influenced the decision by the first and second scribes of Christ Church 152 to include their work as additional tales. I argue that this “*New Ploughman’s Tale*” invites us to consider how ‘attachment,’ what Lydgate refers to as a “humble affection” in *The Churl and the Bird*, is—at its most literal—a description of a certain kind of relationality which indicates a physical closeness and material collapsing of the space between textual subjects (fol. 281v [312]).⁵⁶ By looking to the first texts copied of Christ Church 152 in addition to *The Canterbury Tales*, such as Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes* and the anonymously composed *Tale of Gamelyn*, we are better able to understand how fifteenth-century readers of Chaucer’s work conceived of his textual *corpus*, the mobility of its boundaries, and the already burgeoning genre of pseudo-Chaucerian literatures. Ultimately, this chapter

⁵⁶ Quotations, (folio numbers), and [line numbers] from *The Churl and the Bird* and *The Siege of Thebes* are rendered here as they appear in the text of Christ Church 152. Expanded abbreviations appear in brackets. Because of the rearrangement of the leaves sometime after the initial construction of the manuscript, the foliation for *The Churl and the Bird* is a bit muddled. The poem itself begins on fol. 278 and then ‘continues’ onto fol. 277. From there, the poem occupies fols. 279-281v relatively uninterrupted—though, according to the Bodleian’s description, it “lacks lines 274-341, owing to a missing leaf.” This accounts for the significant disparity in line numbering between the copy of Christ Church 152 and other copies.

considers the affective geometries which shape and bind Chaucer, Hoccleve, Lydgate, and the scribe responsible for the “*New Ploughman’s Tale*” within the material architecture of Christ Church 152.

“No trace of supervision”: The Organizational Illogic of Christ Church 152

The Bodleian Library offers a comprehensive description of the production of Christ Church 152.⁵⁷ John Manly and Edith Rickert have described the first of two hands in Christ Church 152 as writing in anglicana, “[a] graceful, fluent cursive hand,” dating from sometime between 1460–1470 (1940, I.86).⁵⁸ According to the Bodleian, the first hand is responsible for three items found in Christ Church 152: *The Canterbury Tales* (fols. 2–276v), John Lydgate’s *The Siege of Thebes* (fols. 282–342v), and the later inclusion of *The Tale of Gamelyn* as a possible substitution for the incomplete *Cook’s Tale* (fols. 58v–71v). The first scribe of Christ Church 152 very clearly intended for the manuscript to be completed later; a series of gaps in Chaucer’s *Tales* attest to this fact. Notably, the first scribe leaves a series of blank pages between an

⁵⁷ Description and images of Christ Church 152 can be found at < https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_3935 >.

⁵⁸ There is a bit of contention as to whether there are two or three distinctive scribes responsible for Christ Church 152. Manly and Rickert (1940, vol. I), Owen (1991) and Higl (2012) argue for the presence of three identifiable scribes. However, the Bodleian Library mentions only two as does the entry for Christ Church 152 “Late Medieval English Scribes.” Furthermore, Ralph Hanna and David Rundle (2017) and Daniel Sawyer (2020) find evidence of only two scribes. For the purposes of this chapter, I agree with the work of the latter in suggesting that there are two scribes which we might confidently refer to: the first scribe and the second scribe. The third scribe to which the former refers is, in fact, also the second scribe.

unfinished *Squire's Tale* and *The Second Nun's Tale* (fols. 228v–231). Perhaps in anticipation of obtaining a more comprehensive copy of Chaucer's *Cook's Tale*, the first scribe left fols. 58v–71v blank—only to later insert the more 'complete' *Tale of Gamelyn* immediately following Chaucer's unfinished text. Finally, there is a gap between the end of *The Parson's Tale* and Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* which stretches from fols. 282–342v.

Manly and Rickert estimate that the second scribe began working “not much later ... perhaps 1500” and took up the task of adding, editing, and making sense of the first scribe's tale order in a “looser, more flourished” *anglicana*.⁵⁹ In addition to the construction of a table of contents (fol. 1v), the interpolation of *The Ploughman's Tale* (fols. 228v–231), and Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird* (fols. 278, 277, 279–281v), the second scribe likewise “made many corrections, inserted omitted lines, [and] wrote directions for reading in correct order certain disarranged leaves” not long after the work of the first scribe (Manly and Rickert 1940, I.86). Christ Church 152 is a manuscript which was revisited and reshaped on multiple occasions. It is thus a product of two individuals working *ad seriatim*—the second responding to the work of the first in

⁵⁹ The University of York's “Late Medieval English Scribes” suggests that this second hand could possibly belong to a scribe they refer to as the Morganus Scribe; they argue that the Morganus Scribe is likewise responsible for copying Oxford, Bodleian Library Ashmole 45 (see < <https://www.medievalscribes.com> >). Ralph Hanna and David Rundle contends however, that while “[t]he second scribe has been tentatively identified with the ‘Morganus Scribe,’” “the contrast between the script in the Ashmole manuscript and in ours goes beyond a matter of grade; the differences of ductus suggest the identification should be rejected.” They recommend instead “the possibility that this second scribe is the Thomas Vause who adds his name in the margin at fol. 72” (Hanna and Rundle 2017, 328). I find that Hanna and Rundle's assertion the more likely as the letter forms of the second scribe of Christ Church 152 and the Morganus scribe are, at best, dissimilar.

capacities both editorial and literary—which nevertheless suggests the possibility of a shared aesthetic goal. And yet, like Beatty’s title page of his 1902 edition of *The Ploughman’s Tale*, Christ Church 152 is not without its more puzzling elements. The text has proven a rather unruly object for Chaucerian and manuscript studies scholars alike.

Christ Church 152 is often lost amongst the “competition” between more ‘authoritative’ copies of *The Canterbury Tales* such as the National Library of Wales’ Hengwrt manuscript or the Huntington Library’s Ellesmere manuscript (Magnani and Watt 2018, 255). As John M. Bowers has explained, “The appeal of Ellesmere to modern critics is partly explained by its undeniable appearance as a book in the medieval as well as the modern sense” (1985, 25). It is little wonder, then, that the aesthetic merits of Christ Church 152 likewise fail to capture scholarly attention; it is a comparatively plain manuscript relative to one more lavishly decorated such as the Ellesmere. However, as Bowers has suggested of Ellesmere, Christ Church 152 “takes its place among other early manuscript collections as the enterprise of a proto-editor coming to terms with the challenge of ordering a large work which, when all the pieces were put together, was still painfully incomplete” (1985, 26).

In eschewing the desire for the orderly aesthetics which objects like Ellesmere have come to embody, this chapter asserts the importance of Christ Church 152 in the history of this proto-editorial project. I echo what Stephanie Trigg has argued elsewhere, “If Ellesmere focuses on its *ordinatio* and its rubrics, other versions and responses are more concerned with establishing and expanding a sequence of tales and prologues or,

indeed, with adding tales” (2001, 83).⁶⁰ I suggest, then, that if we only attend to those objects that ‘look’ and ‘feel’ like a book, we risk losing more idiosyncratic and bespoke understandings of the *Tales* which compilations like Christ Church 152 potentially represent.

In the introduction to his edition of *The Ploughman’s Tale*, Beatty notes that, in addition to the presence of the apocryphal tale in question, “[t]he order of the Tales in this Manuscript is peculiar” (1902, vii). The order of the tales in Christ Church 152 has elicited similar reactions from more contemporary critics. Manly and Rickert conclude that the manuscript bears “[n]o trace of supervision” and likewise note “the wild order of [its] tales” (1940, I.87; 90). Charles Owen has described Christ Church 152 as the work of “an amateur scribe” (1991, 78). Andrew Higl has more recently echoed this sentiment as he refers to the order as “irregular” and describes Christ Church 152 as “clearly an amateur production” (2012, 121; 122). This is a position to which Higl holds as he continues describing Christ Church 152 in no uncertain terms:

Everything about this manuscript seems to be amateurish, from the spelling of Plowman, to the irregular tale order, to the irregular lines per page, to the various other manuscript features that point towards a rather haphazard and unplanned production. Though becoming more typical by the second half of the fifteenth century, paper manuscripts were most commonly associated with small pamphlets and amateur and/or student productions. ... [T]he amateur venture that is Christ Church 152 reveals a

⁶⁰ Elsewhere, Trigg has argued, “Ellesmere’s very bookishness—its running titles, its obviously edited nature, the complexity of its rubrics, its scribal source annotations—make it an attractive ... source of authority for *The Canterbury Tales*” (2002, 77).

social model of textual production different than the one exemplified by the later and presently dominant medium of print. (2012, 127)

I quote Higl's conclusion concerning Christ Church 152 at length because it is, perhaps, the logical terminus of the critical rhetoric of haphazardness which has come to be predominately associated with the manuscript's production. These reactions are ultimately problematic, however. I do not necessarily take issue with the charges of amateurism or hastiness of assembly. As I argued in my chapter on MS Cotton Nero A.x. and its illuminations, however, the aesthetic traditions that engender such charges deserve more critical attention than they have heretofore garnered. I find the notion that Christ Church 152 features a tale order which is 'wild' or 'peculiar' to be itself curious as such notions undoubtedly assume that there is an agreed upon and standardized order for them.

Several scholars have problematized this assumption. As Derek Pearsall has argued, the imposition of order on the *Tales* is "provisional and merely pragmatic" (1985, 19). Larry D. Benson notes that "[t]here are no explicit connections between the fragments ... and, consequently, no explicit indication of the order in which Chaucer intended the fragments to be read" (1987, 5). Such an understanding of the inherent order-lessness of the *Tales* allows for a better understanding of how modern editions represent what Robert J. Meyer-Lee has described as "a hypostatization of an editor's idea about the *Tales*' organization, or lack thereof, that the editor has included in his or her physical constitution of the work" (2013, 48). Despite the condition of the modern edition as a stable textual object, the reality of the *Tales*' ordering is anything but fixed. Rather than simply confounding our understanding of the *Tales* as a narrative text, this

apparent lack of codified order allows us to navigate how the *Tales* embodies a literary and aesthetic practice of narratological and material assemblage.

Arthur Bahr has considered the implications of Chaucer's own understanding of the "the compilational play that the *Tales* offers" suggesting that Chaucer likewise extends "invitations to compilational construction, a kind of ever-evolving and interactive poetics of assemblage" to his readers (2013, 156). Alexandra Gillespie has argued for the foundational relationship between the text of the *Tales* and its material form; multi-text manuscripts, like those of the *Tales*, present "a risky gambit" as they "abbreviate, dislocate, expand and confound even the greatest literary works." To that end, Gillespie describes how "the pilgrimage represents the medieval multi-text codex as an opportunity for *planned planlessness*; a fixed and bound space that is nevertheless open to change" (2018, 74; emphasis my own). And while it is certainly true that Christ Church 152 does not reproduce the more well-attested tale orderings shared by its fellow *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts, this is not to be confused with the notion that these somehow reflect *the*, or even *a*, 'correct' organization.

Christ Church 152 is particularly helpful as it helps us understand the extent to which Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* were perceived to be a text which, to a significant degree, lacked order and which invited readerly reorganization. Like the MS Cotton Nero A.x. which I discuss in my first chapter, my goal here is not to redeem or set right the terms of scholarly response to Christ Church 152. Rather, it is to make clear the reality that even the most haphazard and irregular textual arrangements are generative of a

meaningful aesthetic practice and manuscript architecture. Such features do not impede analysis; rather, they ask us to take such analyses to their utmost extremes.

Christ Church 152 utilizes such textual and material instability as a guiding aesthetic principle by which to encourage the continued inclusion of Chaucerian texts and apocrypha in pursuit of the production of a more comprehensive, if not capacious, copy of *The Canterbury Tales*. It is characterized by the desire to complete Chaucer's notoriously incomplete text and the acceptance of what Bahr characterized as an 'invitation' to compile the *Tales* in novel ways. And, to do so, Christ Church 152 renders itself a purposefully unstable and inchoate object. As Stephanie Trigg has persuasively argued, its earliest interlocutors considered the *Tales* "an open, unfinished text, a text that needs more work" (2002, xvi). Higl has likewise suggested that "[b]ecause the storytelling game and the pilgrimage remain incomplete in the canonical text, readers and authors converged in the production of the work beginning in the fifteenth century" (2012, 19). My argument here, then, works in concert with Trigg or Higl's insofar as it suggests that the scribes responsible for Christ Church 152 fall into this category of actants who are simultaneously responsible for "authoring, reading, and producing text[s]" in service of the creation of "a profound, responsive system" (Higl 2012, 18).

This chapter thus argues for the assertion of scribal agency in the compilational process. As Matthew Fisher has argued concerning scribal intentionality, "The danger posed by scribes was only rarely their incompetence ... The true threat of scribes was their competence, not only to provide textual corrections, but precisely their ability to make the 'improvements' snidely condemned by modern editors" (2012, 58). Such

scribes can elucidate on the more idiosyncratic kinds of response possible in the Middle Ages by providing a kind of affective geometry by which to relate scribes to authors to texts. The scribes responsible for Christ Church 152 typify, in its earliest stages, the desire to meaningfully add to what rightly qualifies as a ‘Canterbury tale’ and are formative figures in the development of the accretive impulse characteristic of Chaucer’s early modern editors and readers. I thus consider the pseudo-Chaucerian attachments and additions integral to Christ Church 152 as they indicated the presence of “writerly readers” and, perhaps, more individualized notions of how to formulate Chaucer’s *Tales*.

The First Scribe and Continuing the *Tales*

In following Chaucer’s *Tales* with the *Siege of Thebes*, the first scribe of Christ Church 152 overtly follows Lydgate’s directive in composing the *Siege* as a self-declared continuation of the *Tales*. And despite the explicit linking of the two texts and the compilational nature of book production in the fifteenth century, there exists only a small coterie of manuscripts that pair and make editorially explicit the relationship between Chaucer’s *Tales* and Lydgate’s *Siege*. In fact, Christ Church 152 finds itself in rarefied company as it is one of five total extant manuscripts that append the *Siege* to the *Tales*. These manuscripts suggest a mode of compilation which is not dependent on authorship but rather on “compilation based on shared narrative principles” (Edwards 2000, 103).⁶¹

⁶¹ A. S. G. Edwards identifies the five manuscripts as “BL, Add. MS 5140 and MS Egerton 2864, Oxford, Christ Church, MS 152, Longleat MS 257, and Austin, University of Texas, MS 143” (2000, 110n19).

Indeed, at least two of the five manuscripts explicitly identify Lydgate's *Siege* as a kind of coda to Chaucer's *Tales*. British Library Add. MS. 5140 follows the closing colophon to *The Parson's Tale* with this introduction to the *Siege*: "Incipit ultima de fabulis Cantuarie translate et prolata per Dompnii Johannem Lidgate Monachii in redundo a Cantuaria" [Here begins the last of the Canterbury tales, written and offered to our Lord by the monk John Lydgate upon his return from Canterbury] (fol. 359v).⁶² Similarly, British Library MS. Egerton 2864 follows the concluding colophon to the *Parson's Tale* by introducing the *Siege* as "the Laste tale of Cauntirbury talis told homeward and maad bi dan Iohn Lidgate Monk of Bury" (fol. 292r) and concluding with "Heere endith the Laste tale of Caunturbury maad and told bi dan dan Ion Lidgate Mon[ke of Bury]" (fol. 341).⁶³ The first scribe of Christ Church 152 thus more than likely included Lydgate's *Siege* because of its explicit textual relationship to Chaucer's *Tales*. The physical appending of the *Siege* represents a meaningful extension of the scribe's understanding of the narrative continuity which Lydgate contrives in his prologue.

It is no stretch of one's creative and critical imagination to assume that this first scribe recognized the narrative relationship between Chaucer's *Tales* and Lydgate's *Siege*. Lydgate composes the prologue to the *Siege* so that it gives the reader permission to imagine it as a continuation of Chaucer's *Tales* while unambiguously identifying its

⁶² Description and images of Add. MS. 5140 can be found at < http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_5140 >.

⁶³ Colophons rendered as they are recorded on the website "Late Medieval English Scribes." The exact quotations can be found here: < <https://www.medievalscribes.com/index.php?browse=manuscripts&id=77&navlocation=London&navlibrary=British%20Library&nav=off> >.

non-Chaucerian authorship. This distinction will become important as I discuss the first scribe's addition of *The Tale of Gamelyn* and the second scribe's addition of *The Ploughman's Tale*. However, at this juncture, it is enough to simply note that Lydgate takes up the Chaucerian frame without assuming the Chaucerian name. In fact, Lydgate elides Chaucer's name in the prologue entirely.⁶⁴ Lydgate begins the *Siege* by describing its setting at "The tyme in soth whan canterbury tales / Complete [and] tolde at mony sondry stage" (fol. 282r [18-9]). He thus recognizes the structure of the existing 'canterbury tales' while also explaining that he was not one of its originary pilgrims as described by Chaucer—"as the coke [and] the miller [and] the reve" (fol. 282r [28]).⁶⁵

Lydgate credits Chaucer, though indirectly, with the recording of the pilgrims' numerous tales: "worde for worde w[ith] eu[er]y circumstaunce / Echon y writte [and] put in remembraunce" (fol. 282r [37-8]). Lydgate regals Chaucer as the "Floure of poetes though all breteyne" who will "alwey fressh be in my memory" (fol. 282r [40]; fol. 282v [45]). As Trigg has suggested, "Lydgate affirms that Chaucer's memory will never fade, though this in turn underlines Chaucer's death and absence from his own work" (2001, 93). Briefly overwhelmed by Chaucer's memory, Lydgate soon returns to his truncated outline of the tale-telling structure provided by Chaucer's *General Prologue*, "And fro

⁶⁴ This, however, does not prevent the first scribe from identifying Chaucer by name in a marginal annotation—see fol. 282r.

⁶⁵ I imagine Lydgate's invocation of the genre of 'Canterbury tayls' in the terms which Darryl Ellison provides in his examination of the early modern *Plowman's Tale*: "a genre of fiction with a complex history of interpretation and reinterpretation, of admiration, imitation, and exclusion. It is a genre that perseveres only insofar as it is able to inform, to circumscribe, and to escape the historical ambit of its long-dead progenitor" (2014, 101).

southwerk shortly forto seye / To canterbury ridynge on hye wey, / Tellyng a tale as I reherce kan” (fol. 282v [61-3]).

Be it by “[h]appe or fortune,” Lydgate finds himself in Canterbury likewise having sought “[t]he holy seynt plainly to visite” as the pilgrims make their plans to depart the holy site (fol. 282v [69; 71]). The Host takes notice of Lydgate’s sickly appearance and asks the pallid monk for his name (fol. 282v [88]). Lydgate obliges and identifies himself for the Host:

I answerd my name was lydgate,
Monk of Byry ny fyfty wynter of age,
Come to this town to do my pilgrymage,
As I haue hight I haue ther of no shame (fol. 283r [91-4])

Lydgate emphatically reaffirms that he is not Chaucer—a point which the first scribe literally reinscribes by rewriting Lydgate’s name in the margin of fol. 283r—and takes his place among the Canterbury pilgrims.⁶⁶ The Host then asks Lydgate to dine with the company of pilgrims and make plans to leave Canterbury with them the next day, “ye shall home ride with vs to morowe” (fol. 283r [105]). The next morning, the Host entreats Lydgate to participate in “the custume of this companye” (fol. 283v [134]) and “Telle som tale [and] make ther of no jape” (fol. 283v [164]) which “draweth to effette / Only of joye” (fol. 284r [169-70]). The Host, who Chaucer describes as the “gou[er]nour, / ... jugge and reportour” of the game, thus offers Lydgate an invitation to participate in the

⁶⁶ It appears that a different reader underlined “lydgate / Monke of Byry” on this page sometime later as if to further emphasize Lydgate’s role in the composition of this tale (91-2).

framing conceit of the *Tales* (fol. 12v [811-2]).⁶⁷ As Trigg has argued, “Lydgate unabashedly puts himself where he wants to be as a reader of Chaucer, displacing him as poet-narrator at the diegetic center of the poem” (2001, 92). With the sanctioning of his tale by the Host, Lydgate imagines his *Siege* as a fragment of the *Tales* which is meant to offer some resolution to the otherwise incomplete collection of stories.

The Host’s invitation becomes how “Lydgate attaches his ‘tale’ to a well-established story canon” (Higl 2012, 49). Though Lydgate’s addition is textual, the first scribe materially appends Lydgate’s *Siege* to Chaucer’s *Tales* and recognizes the Host’s invitation for Lydgate to join the other pilgrims. Lydgate’s affective attachment thus becomes materially quantifiable in Christ Church 152. In aligning himself with Chaucer and forging a kind of literary relationality, Lydgate develops a poetics of attachment which the first scribe literalizes in material structure of Christ Church 152. And while the five-folio gap (fols. 277-81v) between *The Parson’s Tale* and Lydgate’s *Siege*—later filled by the second scribe with Lydgate’s *The Churl and the Bird*—forces us to speculate how the first scribe intended to bridge the two texts, it nevertheless suggests a kind of compilational continuity and narrative similitude between them. Christ Church 152 provides us with a potential framework for understanding how contemporary readers

⁶⁷ Quotations, (line numbers), and [folio numbers] from *The Canterbury Tales* are rendered here as they appear in the text of Christ Church 152. Expanded abbreviations appear in brackets.

might have conceived of the *Tales* organization.⁶⁸ That is, compiling Chaucer's *Tales* was a project less concerned with ascertaining what was authentically Chaucerian and more about the various avenues by which the textual pilgrimage might be 'completed' and narrative gaps assiduously filled.

In addition to Lydgate's *Siege*, the first scribe added *The Tale of Gamelyn* in the folio space following Chaucer's 'incomplete' *Cook's Tale* at some date following his initial copying of Chaucer and Lydgate's work. *Gamelyn* helps us understand how the first scribe of Christ Church 152 perceived of and managed the continuations of the *Tales* he copied. Like Lydgate's *Siege*, the first scribe positions *Gamelyn* as a 'piece' of the *Tales* and, in effect, seeks to complete the seemingly unfinished *Cook's Tale* associated with Chaucer's text. However, at one-fifth the length of Lydgate's *Siege*, *Gamelyn* is a somewhat more manageable in size and lacks a 'named' author, and, perhaps because of this, is more easily insinuated into the structure of the *Tales* as implicitly Chaucerian.

Like Lydgate's textual invitation to append his *Siege* to Chaucer's *Tales*, the more particularized reading practices of the first scribe—in combination with the likelihood that he encountered the apocryphal tale already interpolated into the body of the text in other extant copies—might have recommended *Gamelyn* as an appropriate option for addressing the Cook's silence. Furthermore, by copying both Lydgate's *Siege* and the anonymous *Gamelyn* into Christ Church 152, the first scribe demonstrates the potential

⁶⁸ Ralph Hanna describes the text as "disarranged and lack[ing] lines 274–341, owing to a missing leaf" (2017, 329). Its modern arrangement requires you read from fol. 278, followed by fol. 277, and then fols. 279–281^v to better match the order of other extant copies.

for a ‘compilational construction’ of the *Tales* which is capacious and reflects a more idiosyncratic understanding of how the *Tales* function as a narrative.

Indeed, of the five manuscripts which pair Chaucer’s *Tales* with Lydgate’s *Siege*, Christ Church 152 is the *only* manuscript to also include *The Tale of Gamelyn*. In doing so, Christ Church 152 triangulates these texts into what we might consider a late fifteenth century attempt at the compilation of Chaucerian apocrypha and additions—an aesthetic goal which the second scribe, as I will later discuss, seems aware of. Daniel W. Mosser has argued of University of Texas MS. 143, which similarly pairs the *Tales* with Lydgate’s *Siege*, such “manuscript collections often represent conscious efforts to produce an organized compilation rather than a random collection of miscellanea” (1985, 99-100). In adding this apocryphal tale to Christ Church 152, the first scribe moves beyond such one-dimensional associations and introduces a matrix of textual and material attachments which ultimately unsettle and rearticulate the notion of a medieval compilation as it simultaneously recognizes and shapes the potential breadth of what Lydgate referred to as ‘canterbury tales’ in his prologue to the *Siege*.

Gamelyn presents us with an apocryphal tale which intimates itself into the *Tales* not with explicit reference to Chaucer but seemingly through a series of textual and narrative associations. Unlike the *Siege*, wherein Lydgate situates himself within the framework of the tales, the *Tale of Gamelyn* is presented as belonging to an already established pilgrim from the *General Prologue*, the Cook. Among the pilgrims described on their way to Canterbury in the *Tales* proper, we are told what we might have rightly assumed of the Cook. He seems able to prepare a meal—“He koude rooste and sethe and

broille and frie / Maken mortreux and wel bake a pie (fol. 7r[375-6]). Chaucer breaks from this recounting of the Cook's culinary abilities and focuses on the pilgrim's body as he points out a physical malady, a "greet harm" which visibly afflicts the Cook: "on his shyne a mormal hadde he" (fol. 7r [377; 378]).

Chaucer's attention to the Cook's "mormal," an open sore or abscess, unsettlingly juxtaposes the Cook's food preparation with his untended wound.⁶⁹ The description of the Cook's "mormal" is followed then by a description of his "blak manger that made he with the beste" (fol. 7r [379]). Chaucer's use of "mortreux" and "blackmanger" as examples of the Cook's featured dishes surround the mention of his "mormal" and highlight the wound's disconcerting materiality and visible unctuousness. Though brief, the Cook's description in the *General Prologue* appeals to the affective sensibilities that undergird the *Tales* broadly—especially as they are emphasized vis-à-vis the additions in Christ Church 152.

In the *Cook's Prologue*, we learn that the Cook is from London and that he appreciates the kind of bawdy, retributive humor which characterizes the Reeve's tale of a reckless miller. "A ha," the Cook exclaims, and observes that "for cristes passion, / This miller hadde a sharpe conclusion" (fol. 57r [3-4]). The Host criticizes the Cook's business and culinary practices in a manner which reinforces Chaucer's unflattering survey of the pilgrim. The Host tells the Cook that his tale needs to "be good" unlike the spoiled pies which the Cook has attempted to resell or those which have been served

⁶⁹ See *Middle English Dictionary*, "mor-mal(e)" (n.1).

“twyes hoot and twies colde” (fol. 57v [20; 23]). Likewise, the Host implies that the poor quality of the Cook’s food and filthy shop often makes his customers ill:

Of many a pilgryme hastow crystes curs
Ffor of thy p[er]sely yet fayre they the wurs
That they han eten in thyn stuble goos
For in thy shoppe is many a flie loos (fol. 57v [24-7])

The accusation of loose flies suggests a work environment rife with decay and rot; it is little wonder, then, that the Cook’s leg wound has failed to heal properly. In the *Manciple’s Prologue*, the Host turns to the Cook to tell another tale only to find him sleeping and demands he wake up, “A wake thow cook ... god yeve the sorwe” (fol. 174r [15]). The Manciple likewise mocks the Cook by complaining that his “breeth ful soure stynketh” (fol. 174v [32]). Thus, the Cook is foul in manner, in profession, and in hygiene; his description is affectively charged in the sense that it provokes a visceral kind of revulsion.

Though angry at the Manciple for this slight, the Cook cannot manage a rebuttal and is unceremoniously bucked from his horse (fol. 174v [46-9]). The text scolds the Cook for his anger in terms he might well understand: “Allas he nad holde hym by his ladel!” (fol. 174v [51]). And, though this episode takes place long after the Cook attempts to tell his tale, it does help explain the content of *The Cook’s Tale* and align him more closely with the Miller and the Reeve’s provocative storytelling. Indeed, it might also help us understand where *The Cook’s Tale* might have gone narratively, was it to be completed; we might here recall Lydgate’s conscious grouping of these three pilgrims in his prologue to the *Siege*—“as the coke [and] the millere [and] the Reve” (fol. 282r [28]).

The Cook begins his tale ‘proper’ by introducing an apprentice and seller of food—with little sense of subtility—“cleped perkyn revelour” (fol. 58r [7]). As we might expect based on his name alone, Perkyn “laued bette the tavernne than the shoppe” and “[t]o hoppe and synge and made hym good disporte” (fol. 58r [12; 18]). Though Perkyn manages to finish his apprenticeship, his work ethic is hardly celebrated by his teacher; he is quickly sent away by his “maister” who “bade hym goo with sorwe and myschaunce” (fol. 58v [47; 48]). Free to “ryote all the nyght or leve,” Perkyn begins living with “a compere of his owne sorte” who can match his desire for revelry (fol. 58v [50; 55]). This ‘compere’ likewise “hadde a wife that helde for counten[au]nce / A shoppe and swyued for sustyn[au]nce” (fol. 58v [57-8]). And, rather provocatively, this is where Chaucer’s *Cook’s Tale* leaves its reader—with the promise of deception, revelry, and sex work. Various scholars have posited explanations for the abrupt ending of *The Cook’s Tale*. However, these tend to rest uneasily on several imaginative suppositions concerning the conditions under which Chaucer was producing the *Tales*.⁷⁰ Of course, there is no way to know what Chaucer intended for the ending of *The Cook’s Tale* or if he

⁷⁰ Manly and Rickert have suggested the absurdity of presuming Chaucer would have left *The Cook’s Tale* unfinished: “That Chaucer wrote thus far and stopped is difficult to believe ... Only sudden illness or some other insurmountable interference could have prevented him from going on” (1940, III.446). This kind of speculation further belies modern scholars’ attachment to Chaucer’s ineffability as a poet and reveals a fundamental desire to explain away some of the poet’s more perplexing choices—if that is indeed what they are. Higl aptly describes this desire for closure in terms of its relationship to affective attachment, “Though Manly and Rickert stop short of painting a vivid picture, one can imagine such dramatized scenes as Chaucer keeling over at his desk ... Such imagined narratives of the *Tales*’ production make manifest a desire to know Chaucer intimately ... Though critics are not likely to admit it in writing, such imaginative speculation is indicative of a love for Chaucer and his works and the natural desire to want to know what happened” (2012, 147).

ever actually meant to finish the story.⁷¹ Thus, my interest here is not whether Chaucer meant to complete *The Cook's Tale* as, all things considered, it is likely an unanswerable question.

Rather than attempting to do so, then, this section of the chapter addresses the implications of the literary and material gestures employed by scribes upon receiving this truncated story. How did scribes respond to this 'incomplete' tale? More specifically, how did the first scribe of Christ Church 152 make sense of the narrative thread which Chaucer seemingly cuts short? It would seem, from all appearances, that he chose to supplement the existing text of *The Cook's Tale*, perhaps after conceding that the end to Chaucer's text was unlikely to reveal itself, with a 'new' second tale, *The Tale of Gamelyn*. As mentioned previously, the first scribe of Christ Church 152 is in well attested company, as *The Tale of Gamelyn* appears in some 24 other manuscripts of the *Tales*.⁷² However, it bears reiteration that Christ Church 152 is the only known manuscript which triangulates the *Tales*, Lydgate's *Siege*, and *Gamelyn*. In keeping with

⁷¹ As Higl has argued, there is a distinct possibility that "Chaucer's genius was to be a master of his own story material ... and to present an open, unfinished work in spite of his complete control of his narrative" (2012, 146).

⁷² A significant number of the 25 *Gamelyn* manuscripts predate or are roughly contemporaneous with Christ Church 152. See Manly and Rickert (1940), and Franklin R. Rogers (1959) for a detailed analysis of the textual history and proposed genealogy of manuscripts which contain the text of *Gamelyn*. Rogers argues that Christ Church 152 belongs to the "Ha⁴-Cp tradition" which likewise includes Laud 600, Delamere, Trinity Oxford, Royal 18 C II, and Sloane 1686 (1959, 58). Higl has described *The Tale of Gamelyn* as "the most substantial response to the sudden ending of the *Cook's Tale*" and "the most prolific apocryphal *Canterbury Tale* in the extant manuscripts of the *Tales*." Likewise, the manner of its inclusion is incredibly regular: "it is always placed in the voice of the Cook if it is assigned to a pilgrim at all and always follows the *Cook's Prologue* and the fragmented tale of Perkyn" (Higl 2012, 156).

the argument presented in this chapter, the attachment of *Gamelyn* suggests that the first scribe sought a kind of imagistic, thematic, and narrative continuity between the *Tales* and the chosen additions. The question shifts and becomes, then, how does *Gamelyn* reflect this desire for continuity and the compilational impulse which the first scribe seems to be nurturing throughout the construction of Christ Church 152?

Much like the question of why Chaucer fails to complete *The Cook's Tale*, scholars have similarly attempted to discern how and why *Gamelyn* found its way into the *Tales* in the first place. And much like the estimations given in response to the former question, scholars have provided equally vague and spurious reasons with regards to the latter. With little evidence to support their claim, Stephen Knight and Thomas H. Ohlgren have suggested that *Gamelyn* is, in fact, Chaucerian in origin, claiming that “[i]ts survival depends on its presence, at some stage, among Chaucer’s papers, and it is intriguing to think that he saw something worth his embellishing touch” (1997, 184). Higl has taken issue with this assertion, however, arguing that “[i]f Chaucer had this tale in his so-called ‘papers’ as Knight suggests, it might have existed as a kind of free-floating textual entity ... However, this is not the case based on the extant document witnesses” (2012, 161).

The unfounded assumption here that Chaucer needs be responsible for the introduction of *Gamelyn* into the idea of the *Tales* is problematic. It is just as likely that *Gamelyn*’s addition was the work of, to borrow Higl’s phrasing, a ‘writerly reader’ who, in encountering Chaucer’s short *Cook’s Tale*, was for any number of reasons reminded of *Gamelyn*’s outlaw narrative. Indeed, I argue that this kind of interaction by a ‘writerly reader’ is precisely what invites the second scribe to assume the role of fellow compiler

alongside the first. Prior assumptions about the nature of the *Tales* and what Chaucer *must* have known or composed fail to bear the weight of scrutiny.⁷³ Chaucer's text both is and is not Chaucer's text; by leaving the *Tales* unfinished, if that is what they are, Chaucer invites involved and readerly response in the form of supplement, reorganization, and reconceptualization.

After copying the bulk of the *Tales* and Lydgate's *Siege*, the first scribe of Christ Church 152 returned to the manuscript to complete Chaucer's narrative project. And while it is unclear whether the first scribe understood *Gamelyn* to be 'authentically' Chaucerian, it has little bearing on the present argument. As Fisher has suggested, "Granting medieval scribes agency and intentionality, and viewing the products of their hands as something more than the variously defective copies of a forever-lost archetype ... medieval codices become very different artifacts, no longer only or primarily clues to what might have come before them" (2012, 57).

By including Lydgate's *Siege*, which is explicitly not Chaucerian, the first scribe has already proposed an idea of the *Tales* which invites extension and looks beyond

⁷³ Higl refers to Knight's opinion as "a long-held claim" (2012, 161). However, Knight merely claims that *Gamelyn* "has no separate status, being merely found in the *cd** tradition of *The Canterbury Tales* manuscripts" (1999, 15). Manly and Rickert suggest that "[w]hen it was believed that the MSS of CT were derived from various arrangements tried successively by Chaucer himself, it was only natural that scholars should guess that *Gamelyn* was found in Chaucer's literary chest. This may be true, but there is no reason to believe that either the supervisor of Ha⁴ or the man responsible for the formation of the ancestor of *cd** had access to Chaucer's MSS and materials" (II.172). I tend to agree with Higl's conclusion concerning this desire for Chaucer to be directly responsible for *Gamelyn* in some capacity: "Arguments that fill in gaps by imagining lost or destroyed documents ... point primarily to our human desire to solve mysteries and imaginatively interact with cultural objects we love and love to figure out" (2012, 150).

Chaucer for its ‘canterbury tales.’ That is, simply witnessing a manuscript of the *Tales* which added *Gamelyn*’s narrative in addition to Chaucer’s *Cook’s Tale* was likely sufficient impetus for the first scribe to then copy it into Christ Church 152. However, I suggest further that the first scribe understood the implications of this addition and, in copying *Gamelyn*, recognized the textual features which make *Gamelyn* a viable option for the Cook. Indeed, *Gamelyn* competently plays off several images and thematic conceits present in the brief 56-line *Cook’s Tale* and the *Tales* themselves.

What I propose, then, is that the first scribe of Christ Church 152 engaged in a kind of practice of surface reading. That is, this first scribe “locate[ed] narrative structures and abstract patterns on the surface, as aggregates of what is manifest in multiple texts as cognitively latent but semantically continuous with an individual text’s presented meaning” (Best and Marcus 2009, 11). While Lydgate’s text performs a significant amount of the narrative aggregation necessary for the kind of surface reading, I suggest here—falling short of explicitly mentioning Chaucer’s name—the frame narrative and overarching thematic conceits of the *Tales* themselves do little to dissuade the compilational aesthetic practices of someone like the first scribe of Christ Church 152.

A brief example from *The Tale of Gamelyn* makes clear enough the series of potential connections a contemporary reader of the *Tales* might make between *Gamelyn* and Chaucer’s text. We are told that Gamelyn the youngest of three brothers and, following the death of their father, is tricked out of his portion of inherited land by his eldest brother. The eldest brother treats Gamelyn poorly and the land which was meant

for Gamelyn poorer still, “He clothed hym [and] fedde hym evel [and] eke wroth / And lete hys lands forfare [and] his houses both” (fol. 59v [73-4]).⁷⁴ After a series of insults culminating in the eldest brother’s demanding dinner service from Gamelyn, the youngest brother exclaims, “Thow shalt goo bake thy selfe I wil not be thy coke” (fol. 60r [93]). Offended by what he perceives to be insubordination, Gamelyn’s eldest brother ordered his guards to “Gooth [and] beteth this boy [and] reueth hym his wit” (fol. 60r [111]).

At that moment, in what can only be described a darkly humorous reversal of Gamelyn’s role as cook to his brother, Gamelyn takes up a sizeable “pestel” from the kitchen and begins to beat his brother’s men (fol. 60v [121; 127]). Now afraid for his life, the eldest brother pleads with Gamelyn to “Cast away the pestel [and] wrath the nomore” and successfully assuages Gamelyn’s anger (fol. 60v [139]). Gamelyn’s refusal to ‘be thi coke’ and his wielding of a ‘pestel’ rather straightforwardly recommends *Gamelyn* as a possible supplementary tale for the Cook—whose ‘ladel’ becomes an object and symbol of admonition following his fall from his horse. And while we might be tempted to say that such a connection is superficial, we must remember that this is not unlike the kind of connection Chaucer himself makes between the Cook and the subject of his canonical tale. While Knight and Ohlgren suggest in their introduction to *Gamelyn* that “Chaucer deals by displaced projections” with regards to the textual details which relate a pilgrim to their tale, compilational entities, such as the first scribe of Christ Church 152, similarly traffic in such ‘displaced projections’ (1997, 191). That is, it is *the readerly writer* too

⁷⁴ Quotations, (line numbers), and [folio numbers] from *The Tale of Gamelyn* are rendered here as they appear in the text of Christ Church 152. Expanded abbreviations appear in brackets.

imposing such textual connections—connections which Chaucer may or may not have perceived at the time of composition.

The Cook's Tale begins by introducing Perkyn who, as we might recall, was “[a] prentise whilom dwelled in oure citee / Of a crate of vitailleurs was he” (fol 57v [1-2]). Perkyn is only nominally associated with the selling of food and his relationship to the profession of cooking is tangential. Though perhaps lacking “papier” Perkyn acquired from his teacher, Gamelyn is more directly associated with a kitchen and the preparation of food (fol 58r [40]). Here, I take my cue from Michel Foucault who argued, “What I’m looking for are not relations that are secret, hidden, more silent or deeper than the consciousness of men ... I attempt to make visible what is invisible only because it’s too much on the surface of things” (1996, 57-8).

Such an association does not ask a reader to uncover some clandestine ‘truth’ concerning the relationship between the Cook and *Gamelyn*. Rather, it recognizes these kinds of textual relationships and suggests medieval reading and responsive practice which is far more associative and reflexive than we might first want to believe. These associations push us, as Brendan O’Connell suggests of the modern reception of sixteenth century *Plowman’s Tale*, “to engage in an act of counterfactual imagination and interpret the apocryphal text ... to understand more fully how it was read and interpreted during the centuries in which attribution to Chaucer was accepted” (2018, 428). It foregrounds the potential critical productivity of such a process of connection-making; here, like Lydgate’s *Siege*, textual connections provide the foundation for material attachments within the manuscript itself.

To this, one could add a myriad of other viable textual links. Was it the fact that Gamelyn assists a “ffrankelyn” in the tale which reminded the first scribe of Chaucer’s Franklin (196)? Or, perhaps, it is Gamelyn’s love of food and drink—he does, after all, feast for “[seven] daies [and seven] nyght”—which ultimately recommended the frame narrative provided by the *Tales* and Chaucer’s Cook to be the teller of his tale (fol. 63v [326])? We might wonder as to whether the scribe’s potential disgust regarding the Cook’s “mormall” was recalled on account of the visceral scenes of injury in *Gamelyn*, “Gamelyn up with his staf that he wele knewe / And grette hym in the nekke that he ou[er] threwe / A litell a boue the girdell the riggebon to barst” (fol. 66v [531-3]). One could rehearse these kinds of questions without end.

Ultimately, however, I believe there is little need to do so. *Gamelyn* was likely associated with the Cook for these reasons and many others which have been lost to time. This is not to say, of course, that attempting to understand the compilational impulse which perhaps motivated the first scribe to include the *Siege* and *Gamelyn* is entirely fruitless. On the contrary, it reveals the potential for a critical model of scribal reading and response which does not conceive of the medieval scribe as always already “meddling” in the affairs of *auctors* like Chaucer nor eschews “playful interactivity ... as corruption” (Higl 2012, 20; 153). Furthermore, by putting these texts in proximity within Christ Church 152, the first scribe materially suggests their textual intimacy vis-à-vis a very literal physical closeness to and attachment with one another.

As scholars have shown, this is perhaps one way of truly apprehending the ‘genius’ of Chaucer’s *Tales*; that is to say, this ‘genius’ is not entirely his own. It is, in

fact, a product of his ability to facilitate readerly interaction with and attachment to his text. Such a textual conceit speaks to Gillespie's argument that Chaucer developed a literary aesthetic which is equally material in its considerations: "Chaucer crafts his story collection as an elaborate artistic response to the conditions of medieval book production that so often produce manuscripts in multi-text and composite forms" (2018, 72). The first scribe of Christ Church 152 has ensured, then, that the manuscript into which Chaucer's *Tales*, Lydgate's *Siege*, and the anonymous *Gamelyn* were copied ultimately represent the "idea of the text [of the *Tales*] as an elastic story collection" (Trigg 2001, 85). Though 'incomplete,' the *Tales* manage to reach outward vis-à-vis its compilational structure and, in doing so, invites the attaching of several narrative forms from the period.

The Second Scribe and the Spatial Aesthetics of *The Ploughman's Tale*

It is with this material and textual foundation in mind that the second scribe of Christ Church 152 set to work correcting and adding to the manuscript. There is immediate evidence that the second scribe of Christ Church 152 had a particular idea of what Chaucer's *Tales* should look like. He sees fit to rearrange and offer reading direction for the extant work of the first scribe. To that end, it becomes clear just how mutable and 'compilational' the *Tales* were for fifteenth century readers—even within a single manuscript we find 'writerly readers' adjusting and changing the reading arrangement a mere decade or so after its initial construction. Furthermore, there is the matter of *what* the second scribe adds to the manuscript: a table of contents, *The Ploughman's Tale*, and an incomplete copy of Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird*.

This portion of the chapter attends to these additions and ultimately argues that, while the second scribe of Christ Church 152 had their own notion of the tales and their order, they nevertheless represent an extension of the first scribe's compilational aesthetic practice. As Bowers has argued, the oft-maligned additions to the *Tales*, "while usually dismissed as spurious accretions to a masterpiece, bear witness to the ways some medieval readers were responding to the *Canterbury* collection in the first decades after Chaucer's death" (1985, 49). Furthermore, the second scribe's use of one of Thomas Hoccleve's poems for *The Ploughman's Tale* presents us with the opportunity to examine how such compilational practices gesture toward affective attachments to authors and their work as one of the more ephemeral criteria for a manuscript's textual and material assemblage. In this way, we begin to see not just how medieval readers responded to the *Tales*, but also how near contemporaneous readers responded to the earliest readings of Chaucer's text.

The second scribe of Christ Church 152 engaged in quite a bit of editorial work with respect to the first scribe's work. As mentioned previously, Manly and Rickert have noted how the second hand "made many corrections, inserted omitted lines, [and] wrote directions for reading in correct order certain disarranged leaves" (1940, I.86). This alone might suggest the desire for a particular kind of aesthetic cohesion and deployment of textual authority on the part of the second scribe who, while certainly engaging with the compilational impulse of the first scribe, was ultimately unhappy with the manuscript's initial construction. Manly and Rickert note the folios which feature these 'directions for reading,' "on ff. 21b, 26b, 31b, 36b, and 41b are directions in a 15 C [*sic*] hand later than

the scribes (Hand No.2)” (1940, I.88).⁷⁵ Turning to these pages, we find the second scribe implementing a system of directions and symbols to guide readers through the *Tales*. The second scribe, apparently wary of disassembling Christ Church 152 to physically reorganize its contents, opted for a series of marginal directions which asked the reader to turn to a certain number of pages for the location of the correct reading.

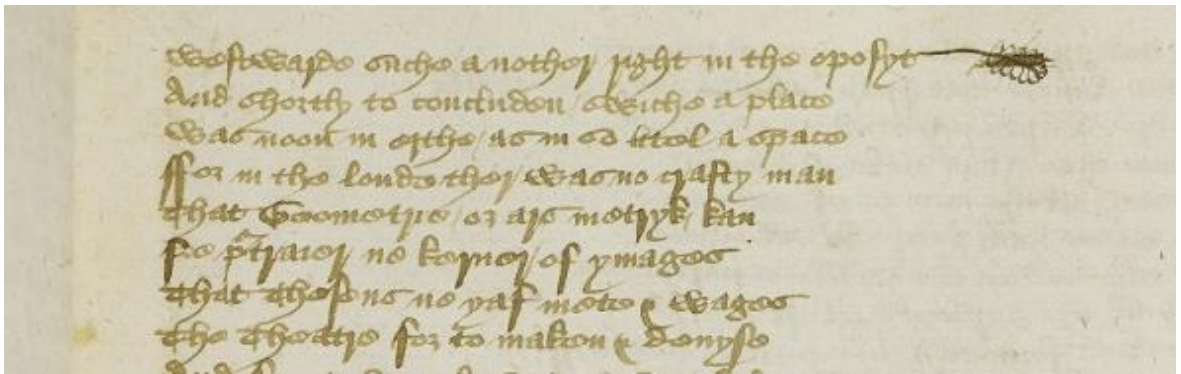


Figure 2.1 Christ Church 152, *The Knight's Tale* with directive marginalia (fol. 26v)

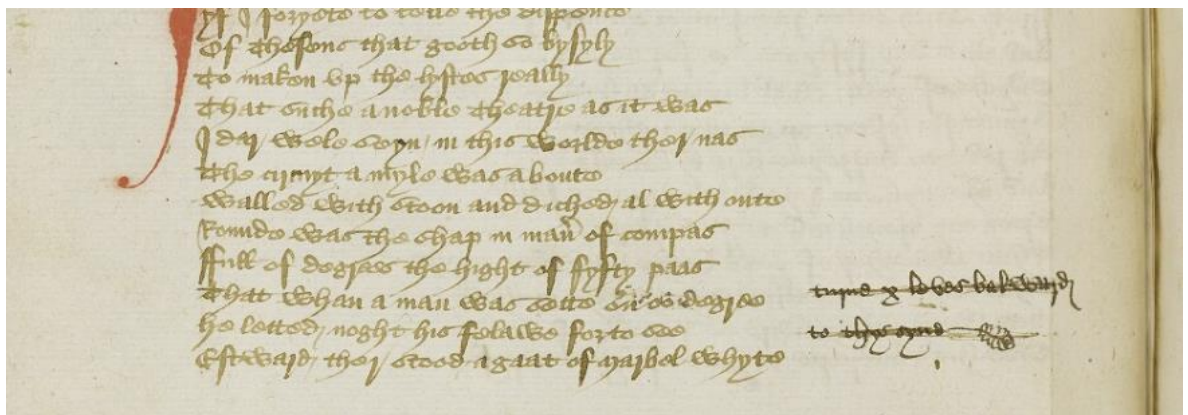


Figure 2.2 Detail of directive marginalia (fol. 26v)

⁷⁵ These should be read as fols. 21v, 26v, 31v, 36v, and 41v.

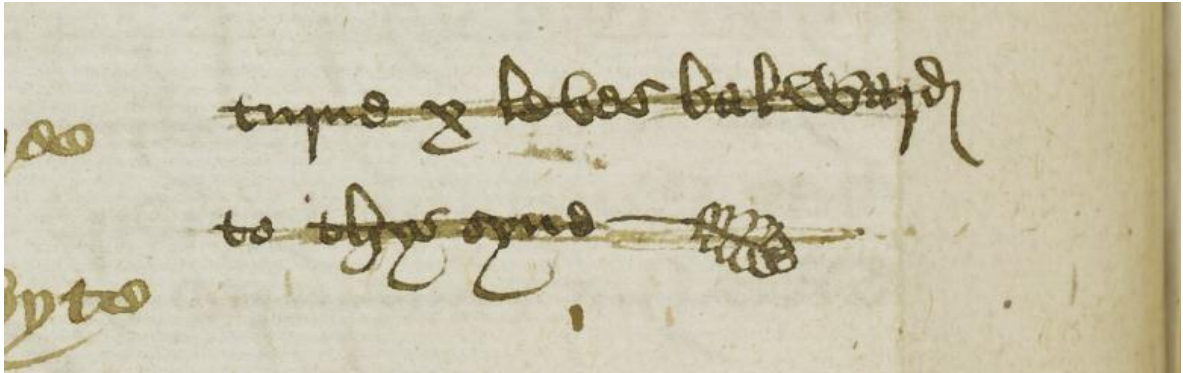


Figure 2.2 Christ Church 152, resulting symbol of directive marginalia (fol. 27v)

For example, at the bottom of fol. 26v, the second scribe has written the following alongside the last line on the page: “turne x [ten] lefys bakwurd to thys sygne” followed by a scribal illustration of a plant leaf (see figs. 2.1-2.3).⁷⁶ This direction has since been struck through by, presumably, a later hand. The second scribe’s directions here make little sense in Christ Church 152 as it is currently assembled; since the writing of these directions, the manuscript has been rebound in a more ‘correct’ order. That is, it has been rebound according to the second scribe’s suggestions. Thus, we find the scribe’s small illustration of a plant leaf on the subsequent leaf (fol. 27r) rather than 10 leaves later. Indeed, as Christ Church 152 exists presently, fols. 31v, 36v, and 41v are each followed by the corresponding symbol provided by the second scribe on the following page (32r, 37r, and 42r respectively). Only the first direction given on fol. 21v by the second scribe, “turne v [five] lefes to thys sygne,” is missing its match—this is due, however, to the fact

⁷⁶ Owen notes that these directions “suggest a non-professional origin for the manuscript,” “[t]he elaborate directions for reading the text correctly by turning backward or forward a number of leaves to a given ‘signe’ remain as a prominent feature of the manuscript, though a subsequent binding corrected the mistakes” (1991, 78).

that Christ Church 152 is missing both fols. 22r and 22v, the latter of which would likely hold the ‘sygne’ given by the scribe. At the level of codicological architecture and marginal notation, then, we see the second scribe channeling Chaucer’s famous reading directive included in *The Miller’s Prologue*:

And therefore who so list it nat tohere
Turne ou[er] the leef and chese another tale
Ffor he shall fynde jnowe grete and smale
Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse
And eke moralite and holynesse (fols. 42v-43r [66-9])

Gillespie has provided invaluable insight into this moment of the *Tales* as both a material and textual moment, arguing that “[i]f actual books make a bit of a mess of the *Tales*—well, Chaucer’s Miller has already muddled up the order of things, by preventing the Monk from telling a tale after the Knight” (2018, 74). That is, the second scribe simultaneously acknowledges the potential disorder inherent to the *Tales* while attempting to provide an individual reading of the text should the reader heed his directions. In doing so, the second scribe recapitulates Chaucer’s directive in *The Miller’s Prologue* to ‘turn the page’ as he recognizes the assembled aesthetic and often-contradictory materiality of the *Tales*. He thus marks Christ Church 152 in a fashion that encourages the active turning of pages and inter-page placeholding. Christ Church 152 thus becomes an object in which we see the second scribe responding meaningfully to the first scribe’s attempt at copying the *Tales*.

What is more, the second scribe adds a table of contents by which to index the order of the tales on fol. 1v (see fig. 2.4). This table provides a glimpse as to how the

second scribe conceived of Christ Church 152 as a cohesive compilational unit. It likewise reveals some of the quirks associated with the second scribe's editing and organizing of the first scribe's texts. Fol. 1v is a rather curious list as it notably starts with a faded first entry: "The knyghtys and the squiers talle." Presumably, this is an error which the second scribe sought to erase; it is possible that he mistook the ordering of Chaucer's *General Prologue* as the order in which the tales are told. The Knight's description is, of course, followed by that of the Squire—the Knight's son—in the *General Prologue*. Following this, however, the listing is regular, with each 'title' receiving a rudimentary manicule to mark it as distinct from the next. The second scribe provides a generic title for the tale, "the knyghtys tale," and then provides a descriptive 'subtitle,' "of palamon & arcyte." This is followed by "the myllers tale of the carpenter" and "the Revys tale of a myller."

From here, however, we begin to see how the first scribe's later insertion of *Gamelyn* has come to shape how the second scribe describes the order and content of the tales. The second scribe's table of contents makes no mention of the Cook's first tale of Perkyn and, instead, lists only "the cokys tale of Gamelyn" despite the fragment of Perkyn's tale occupying 57v through 58v. For the second scribe, then, there are two distinct possibilities when he conceived of the table. Either the second scribe believed *Gamelyn* to be *The Cook's Tale* or, to some extent, he desired for *Gamelyn* to be understood as *The Cook's Tale*. The table continues with "the wyfys tale of bathe" and "the squyers tale."

Tightly squeezed between “the squyers tale” and “the nonnys tale,” we find the nearly illegible title surreptitiously marked by two manicules, “the plough mans tale.” “The awkwardly interlinear position” of the title, as Daniel Sawyer has described it, suggests that it is a later addition to the table of contents, which more than likely followed the second scribe’s insertion of *The Ploughman’s Tale* in the space left by the unfinished *Squire’s Tale* (2020, 78). I will return this addition later. However, as the table of contents of Christ Church 152 has yet more to show us about how the second scribe conceived of the extant manuscript in which he wrote and the flexibility of the *Tales* themselves. Following “the parsons tale,” the second scribe has listed the Lydgate’s “tale of the churle & hys byrd” and “the monk of buryys tale of the Sege of tebes” as the final two Canterbury tales.

This selection of ‘titles’ highlights second scribe’s editorializing impulse as his decision to refer to these texts as ‘tales’ appears to be entirely his own. A quick turn to the text of the poems at the end of the manuscript shows us that his copy of Lydgate’s *The Churl and the Bird* lacks any sort of rubricated title, and the first scribe has simply provided “the sege of thebes” as the heading for Lydgate’s poem. In this case, the second scribe has used the index to retroactively contextualize Lydgate’s works within the titular conceits of the other *Tales*. Daniel Sawyer has recently argued that “[t]he later hand’s table of contents contributes to these extra-Chaucerian texts’ integration, listing them as tales alongside the others. This is a codex-specific table, for this particular book, since these poems do not routinely appear in the *Tales*, but it masquerades as a non-codex specific table to the text” (2020, 78). The second scribe’s decision to then refer to these

texts as ‘tales’ and include them in the running table of contents at the beginning of the manuscript suggests a desire for them to be read as ‘canterbury tales.’

The second scribe thus extends the compilational aesthetic practice of the first scribe but is seemingly more interested in obscuring the non-Chaucerian elements of the manuscript. Whereas the first scribe may have conceived of Christ Church 152 as an object which attempted to collect ‘canterbury tales’ while simultaneously delineating between Chaucerian and pseudo-Chaucerian texts to some extent, the second scribe’s table of contents seems invested in smoothing over these differences and presenting a unified, perhaps ‘more complete,’ copy of Chaucer’s *Tales*. Indeed, Sawyer argues that the second scribe participates in a “knowing obfuscation” of the non-Chaucerian texts which appear in Christ Church 152; Chaucer’s capacious frame narrative incorporates the work of both John Lydgate and Thomas Hoccleve (2020, 78). There is, of course, the matter of the second scribe’s interpolation of *The Ploughman’s Tale* and Lydgate’s *The Churl and the Bird* into the course of the first scribe’s copy of the *Tales* and the *Siege*. These additions, I argue, are integral in understanding the potential for an affectively inflected compilational aesthetic practice which attempts to group texts, not simply through their narrative similarities, but through the perceived relationships of their authors.

This chapter began with an examination of the title page of Arthur Beatty’s edition of *The Ploughman’s Tale* in the hopes that it might accurately demonstrate the inherent difficulty in talking about texts which bear the name of two distinct authors. I am afraid that my examination thus far has raised more questions about the contents of Christ

Church 152 than it has answered. *The Ploughman's Tale*, despite being a Canterbury tale found in Christ Church 152, is not Chaucerian; rather, it is the appropriated Marian narrative of Thomas Hoccleve, a fifteenth century clerk of the Privy Seal and professed poetic protégé of Chaucer. It is this personal-professional relationship between Hoccleve and Chaucer that I wish to explore more closely with relation to Christ Church 152's claim to contain unique 'canterbury tales.' By doing so, I explore further how such relationships can shape compilational practice and implicate the compilers—in this case, the first and second scribe—in the very network of authors they collect and attach to one another. I think it best then to begin by offering a brief description of Hoccleve's "*Item de Beata Virgine*"—the poem which would become *The Ploughman's Tale* of Christ Church 152.

Hoccleve's "*Item de Beata Virgine*" is a rather straightforward Middle English Marian miracle poem which appears in the author's own hand in San Marino, Huntington Library manuscript HM 744. As David Watt has argued, as a compilation of texts, HM 744 is characterized by "a profound interest in personal reform through contemplation" or, as Hoccleve describes, *remembraunce* (2013, 70). The "*Item de Beata Virgine*" appears to be derived from Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS Digby 86 which contains an earlier version of the poem, "*Coment le sauter noustre dame fu primes cuntroue*," though the text of "[t]he story has not been found in Latin or in French" (Boyd 1964, 119). Likewise, the well-documented Auchinleck manuscript (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, NLS Adv. MS 19.2.1) contains a version of this same poem. The poem has been described as evidence of Hoccleve's poetic acumen; Beverley Boyd has suggested

that “[f]rom a literary point of view, the poem compares favorably with Hoccleve’s best writing, though it is strongly under the influence of Chaucer’s style” (1964, 122).⁷⁷

The poem lacks, however, the distinctly human interests which have come to see Hoccleve’s poetry described as being “poised between delightfully careless *clappe* [noise], and almost dumbing self-consciousness” which gesture toward a more nuanced notion of medieval poetic subjectivity (Atkinson 2017, 492). Despite this, Hoccleve’s poem effectively becomes the object of the first of two known attempts to introduce a tale told by the Plowman into a copy of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*—in this case, a single copy found in Christ Church 152.⁷⁸ Of the two faux tales, modern scholarship undoubtedly sees *The Ploughman’s Tale* of Christ Church 152 as the lesser achievement as it has “received hardly any critical attention” (Higl 2012, 118). From a critical standpoint, it is an almost direct reproduction of Hoccleve’s poem and seems to lack the prolific readership which the printed editions of the later anti-clerical *Plowman’s Tale* evince quite clearly. It has been, to quote Higl, “relegated to the margins of the history of the *Canterbury Tales*” (2012, 127). However, the use of Hoccleve’s “*Item de Beata Virgine*” raises intriguing, if yet unconsidered, questions about the motivation behind the

⁷⁷ Beverly Boyd provides a more complete analysis of the manuscript, its possible sources, and its analogues in *The Middle English Miracles of the Virgin* (1964, 119-22).

⁷⁸ Whether or not this was the only example of the *Ploughman’s Tale* copied in the fifteenth century is a matter up for debate. John M. Bowers has argued that “[b]ecause the scribe corrected his text by inserting words carelessly omitted from the new two-stanza section of the prologue, he was apparently copying from some exemplar in which the narrative had already been adapted as a supplementary Canterbury tale” (1992, 25). Nevertheless, Christ Church 152 is the only extant copy.

poem's placement into the narrative course of the *Canterbury Tales* and its role in the aesthetic program of the "amateur venture" that is Christ Church 152 (2012, 127).

What this section suggests, then, is a reading of the interpolation of *The Ploughman's Tale* within the context of Christ Church 152 which considers the potential for the contemporary recognition of Hoccleve's affective relationship to Chaucer. Despite the seemingly belated insertion of *The Ploughman's Tale* into Christ Church 152, this placement nevertheless asks us what it might mean for the second scribe to attempt to position Hoccleve's poem as Chaucer's work—as he does with *Gamelyn* and Lydgate's *Siege*. And though the second scribe likely recognized the similarities between Hoccleve's poetic production and Chaucer's style, which suggests a kind of surface reading not unlike the first scribe's reading of *Gamelyn*, I argue further that the second scribe of Christ Church 152 used Hoccleve's professed attachment to Chaucer as the grounds by which to render the "*Item de Beata Virgine*" as *The Ploughman's Tale*.

What is more, the scribe-reader's appeal to Hoccleve's alleged 'closeness' to and with Chaucer exemplifies the recognition of an 'amateur' relationality in the Middle Ages. Hoccleve's proximity to Chaucer, whether factual or contrived, provides an alternative and more idiosyncratic criterion by which to attach the *Ploughman's Tale* to a compilation of Chaucerian and extra-Chaucerian works. This kind of attached relationality, I argue, is ultimately materially represented by the fashion in which *The Ploughman's Tale* is physically enfolded between Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and *The Second Nun's Tale*. What is more, it highlights retroactively the manners in which

Lydgate's *Siege* belongs alongside Chaucer's *Tales* not simply for their textual affinities, but the personal affinity which Lydgate articulated for Chaucer the poet.

Like the first scribe's insertion of *Gamelyn* into the course of the *Tales* proper, there are textual details which serve as points of potential contact and overlap between Hoccleve's "*Item de Beata Virgine*" and Chaucer's *Tales*, and description of the Plowman pilgrim. In fact, the most salient of these details is the additional two stanzas which the second scribe appends to the beginning of Hoccleve's original poem. These two seven-line stanzas recontextualize Hoccleve's poem and render it a continuative text more like Lydgate's *Siege* insofar as it appears to ingratiate itself within the narrative structure of the *Tales*.

While not original to Hoccleve's poem, these introductory stanzas, composed in rhyme-royal to match the story itself, prime readers for the suggestion that what follows is, in fact, a 'canterbury tale.' Likewise, they constitute the only substantive addition to the text of Hoccleve's poem which, by all appearances, is otherwise unchanged. In the first stanza, the Host of this spurious addition seeks yet another pilgrim to tell a tale:

As the pylgrymys fforth ded ryde,
Owr host be-gan to loke a-boute,
And seyde, "ffelawys, we most prouyde,
Hoo that best of alle thys route
Kan tell hys tale, as lot comyth aboute.
Ploughman Tylyer, drawe the nere,

And tell thy tale, and we wyl here.” (1-7)⁷⁹

These lines do a considerable amount of contextualizing work for *The Ploughman's Tale*. Namely, they immediately reintroduce the Host as a kind of adjudicatory and authorizing figure within the narrative structure of the *Tales*. According to Higl, “this link recycles the Host’s function as game master and inscribes the ‘spurious’ tale into the frame narrative’s storytelling game” (2012, 118). As mentioned previously, the pilgrims agree at the outset of their journey that the Host would set the terms of the game and “wold be oure gou[er]nour / And of oure tales juggle and reportour” (fol. 12v [811-2]). Both the arbiter of their game and the single most textually visible of the group, the Host is uniquely able to enforce “the narrative contract that sustains both the drama of the pilgrimage and the structure of the story anthology” (Trigg 2002, 90). His reintroduction in the *Ploughman's Prologue* and recollection of the gamified structural conceit of the *Tales* is essential to the legitimizing of its narrative placement in Christ Church 152.

The second additional stanza provides a summary of *The Ploughman's Tale*. He explains that his tale will be about a monk’s vision of the Virgin Mary and the practice of repeating the psalter daily. He explains that it will be a tale which demonstrates how best to serve Mary vis-à-vis contemplative practice:

“Syr,” he seyde, “y shalle telle, as y can,
A tale of Crystys modyr dere,
Mary that bare both god and man,

⁷⁹ Quotes of *The Ploughman's Tale* from Beatty (1902). I have chosen to use Beatty’s edition because it uses Christ Church 152 as its base text—as it is the only known extant known copy.

How to a monk she ded a-pere,
That euery day seyde here sauterne,
And heuene blysse had to hys mede:
Hoo seruyth owr lady, the better shalle spede.” (8-14)

This rather straightforward synopsis suggests that the Plowman’s tale will be of a timbre quite different than those of the Miller or the Cook. These two stanzas represent the most significant changes to Hoccleve’s “*Item de Beata Virgine*.” The Plowman’s summary gives way to serious contemplation of the Virgin, “Who-so dsyryth to gete and conquere / The blysse of hevene, holsom ys a guyde / Hym to condue, and hym to brynge there” (15-8). He describes Mary’s role as “meadiatrice” between God and man and how the tale that follows serves as “seruyce, honour, & pleasaunce; / ... a remembraunce” to her (22; 34-5). Unlike his fellow manual laborers, the *laboratores*, the Plowman appears to opt for a more reflective, penitential, and certainly more morally upright tale.

Set in France, the Plowman begins his tale by describing a “ryche man” who was particularly devout “vnto crystys modyr specially, / That noble lady, that blessyd virgyne” (40-1). This man is said to have a son whom he teaches to repeat the *Ave Maria* fifty times a day, “The angelyk[e] salutacioun / .l. sythys, in worchype and honoure / Of cristys modyr” (47-9). According to his father’s desire, this son became “a monk, afterward, / In the abbey of seynt gyle” where he “Obseruyd wel hys Ordres deute” (50-1; 53). The father then recalls his son home where he repeats the *Ave Maria* 50 times in a chapel constructed there “at our ladyes reuerence” (57). At the end of this, the Virgin appears before the monk “clothyd in a garnement / Sleueles,” a sign which the monk has difficulty understanding—“the monk toke good auyement, / Meraylyng hym what this

myght haue ment” (65-6; 67-8). The monk ventures to ask Mary why her garment appears this way; she explains that her clothing represents the incomplete state of his prayers, “thys clothing / Thow hast me yevyn, for thow euery day, / .l. syth ‘Ave Mary’ seying” (71-3). She explains that to complete her garment the monk must triple his prayers and for every tenth *Ave Maria* “Ioyne also A Pater-noster” (76-7). Following her departure, the monk obeys her instructions meticulously “aftyre here doctryne & enformyng” (102).

Making good on her promise to return “the next halyday,” Mary appears again before the monk—this time with her garment completed: “behold[e] now / How good clothing, and how good apparayle / That, thys wyke, to me yvyn hast thowe” (103; 106-8). She notes specifically the addition of sleeves to her garment, “Sleves to my clothing now not faylle” (109). For his studiousness, Mary promises that the monk will “be qwyt, her in thys lyf present” and rewards him with the position of Abbot of St. Giles so that he might teach others of her psalter. What is more, when he passed some seven years later, Mary once again rewards the monk’s work by ensuring that “he heven had[de] to hys mede” ensuring that “She sufficiently qwyteth euery dede” (135; 137). This is where the *Plowman* ends his tale—which in *Christ Church 152* is then followed by *The Second Nun’s Tale*. One could list a series of textual circumstances and connections which recommend Hoccleve’s “*Item de Beata Virgine*” as a suitable tale for the *Plowman* to tell. We might first look to the fact that, beyond the *General Prologue*, we never hear from the *Plowman* again. As Higl has argued, “the writerly reader interacts with and adjusts the religiosity of the *Tales* as a result of the potential religious positions left unexpressed

by the silence of the Plowman in the *General Prologue*” (2012, 121). He receives a description but little else; thus, he represents an extremely malleable narrative figure whose more precise characterization is left in the hands of the reader—or, in the case of Christ Church 152, the readerly second scribe.

Furthermore, we might look to more specific narrative details which link Hoccleve’s Marian miracle poem to the character of Chaucer’s Plowman. What description we are given of the Plowman in the *General Prologue* does shed some light on why a contemporary reader might associate the laborer with the visionary poem. We are told that the Plowman is the brother of the Parson and that he is known as a dependable worker:

A trewe swynkere and a good was he
Lyvyng in pees and p[ar]fit charite
God love he best with all his hole herte
Atte alle tymes though hym gamed or smerte
And than his neighebore right no hym selve. (fols. 8v [531-6])

In addition to working diligently, the Plowman is said to love God wholly and to take seriously the charge to care for one’s neighbor whether it benefited him. In fact, Chaucer seems to be intimating here that the Plowman embodies Christ’s commandments in the book of Matthew:

Ait illi Jesus: Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et in tota anima tua, et in tota mente tua. Hoc est maximum, et primum mandatum. Secundum autem simile est huic: Diliges proximum tuum, sicut teipsum.

In his duobus mandatis universa lex pendent, et prophetae. (22:37-40; LV)⁸⁰

[Jesus said to him: You shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind. This is the greatest, and the first commandment. The second is like this: Love your neighbor as you do yourself. On these two commandments depend the entirety of the law and the prophets.]

Chaucer thus associates the Plowman with a kind of sincere religiosity that stands in stark contrast to figures like the Summoner and Pardoner. This is, perhaps, unsurprising as the cultural figure of the plowman during the later Middle Ages is one which is strongly evocative of religious work, “an emblem of Christian preaching and leadership” and “a metaphor for the act of penance” (Baily 2014, 361). We might begin to see, then, how the second scribe of Christ Church 152 began to draw parallels between the ‘trewe swynkere’ the Plowman represents and the work of the monk in *The Ploughman’s Tale* which is described by Mary as “thy trauaylle” (110).

Such a reading reconsiders the appropriateness of this tale for the Plowman, as Higl has questioned the likelihood of the pilgrim’s engagement with a religious narrative which “is far removed from the fields in which Ploughman Tylyer would have toiled digging and delving” (2012, 121). However, I do not believe the schism between the Plowman’s work and the story’s formal content is as wide as Higl suggests. I see little

⁸⁰ Latin quoted from the Vulgate; translations are my own.

issue with the interpolation of Hoccleve's poem as *The Ploughman's Tale*.⁸¹ The second scribe's emphasis on the associative and religious qualities of labor suggests a calculated ambivalence toward the formal poetic elements which might otherwise disassociate the tale and its teller. The Plowman and the monk share a kinship in the labor they perform in good faith. The Plowman's physical work is spiritualized while the monk's spiritual effort is described physically.

Likewise, a continued look at the Plowman's introduction in the *General Prologue* suggests yet more connections to be made—this time between the Plowman and Mary herself. The Plowman's "tithes paide he full fayre [and] well / Bothe of his p[ro]pre swynke and his catell" (fol. 9r [540-1]). We are to understand that the money which the Plowman does make is almost immediately given to the church in payment of his tithes. In fact, the Plowman's meager clothing and means of transport reflect the kind of budget on which he operates: "In his tabard he rood upon a mere" (fol. 9r [522]). The Plowman thus goes on pilgrimage wearing what he dons for his manual labor—a sleeveless tunic. This is, of course, in marked distinction to a figure like Chaucer's Monk who rejects Augustinian notions of the fruits of physical and spiritual labor:

What sholde he studie [and] make hym seluen wood
Upon a book in cloistre alwey to poure
Or wynk with his hondes [and] labour
As Austyn bit how shall the world be serued

⁸¹ Pearsall has convincingly argued against a kind of scholarly discourse which might deem certain subjects or thematic elements 'appropriate' for pilgrims, "Some tales, for instance, have been allocated to pilgrims with little or no care for appropriateness or congruence: nothing in what is heard of the Man of Law or Physician in the General Prologue prepares us for the tales that they tell" (1985, 44).

Lat Austyn to hyme haue his swynk reserued (fols. 4r-4v [185-9])

Indeed, the Monk is a man of sport, “Of prykyn and of hunting for the hare / Was all his lust fo no cost wolde he spare,” with a taste for more luxurious forms of clothing—“I saugh his slefes purfiled at the hond / With Grys and that the finest of a lond” (fol. 4v [192-3; 194-5]). The Plowman, on the other hand, wears the clothes in which he works and seemingly carries nothing more. I raise this issue of the Plowman’s clothing for a particular reason, however. I want to suggest that one of the more likely associations the second scribe of Christ Church 152 made between Chaucer’s Plowman and Hoccleve’s poem is that of sleeveless garments. That is, the second scribe of Christ Church 152 related the work garment of the Plowman, his likely sleeveless tabard, to the initial sleeveless garment in which Mary in Hoccleve’s “*Item de Beata Virgine*.” The second scribe thus participates in a kind of surface reading akin to the first scribe of Christ Church 152 which Chaucer encourages through his own narrative and aesthetic practice.⁸²

⁸² See *Middle English Dictionary* entry for *tabard(e)* [n. 1a]. With particular attention to Chaucer’s Plowman, Joe Horrell has argued that “[t]he tabard was originally an elaborate coat worn by nobles, but there is evidence indicating that by Chaucer’s time it was the usual dress of plowmen — doubtless a rude imitation of its aristocratic prototype ... it may have been either sleeveless or with loose, wide sleeves open at the sides” (1939, 86). Elsewhere in Middle English poetry, the tabard is described as a garment which is often in a state of disrepair and, though this appears untrue for Chaucer’s Plowman, indicates a kind of spiritual degeneration and corruption. Shortly before the composition of the *Tales*, William Langland described Avarice’s clothing in *Piers Plowman* (see Kane and Donaldson’s edition of the B-text) as being a ripped and aged tabard, “Wip an hood on his heed, a hat aboute, / In a [torn] tabard of twelf wynter age” (V.194-5). In *Cleanness* (see Andrew and Waldron’s edition of the *Pearl*-poems), the poet likens those who sin and wrongly believe they will have a seat in God’s heavenly court to an improperly dressed rogue at a banquet whose “tabarde totorne, and his totez oute” (41).

While not explicitly referred to as a ‘tabard,’ the Mary of Hoccleve’s poem wears a garment which lacks sleeves, “Our lady, clothid in a garnement / Sleeelees” (51-2). The monk’s confused reaction makes clear that the absence of Mary’s sleeves is unexpected; his surprise is potentially justifiable, however, as his initial vision of Mary falls short of her splendors described elsewhere. The Mary presented at the beginning of the *Ploughman’s Tale* lacks a kind of sensorial richness of Mary’s description found in the lyric tradition, as in the following fifteenth century lyric found in London, British Library, Addit. 20059:

Tota pulcra, to the lillé like,
She was set with saphures celestiall;
The odour of hir mowthe aromatike
Dyd coumford the world unyversall.
Moche clerer she was then the cristall;
She is the flower of all formosité,
Devoide of actes crymynall:

Ecce virgo, radix Jesse. (§50 [9-16])⁸³

Compared to such a lyric, the monk’s initial vision of Mary in the *Ploughman’s Tale* is relatively underwhelming and apparently quite jarring. She is neither adorned with sapphires nor is she likened to a lily—rather, her garment is missing sleeves and thus in a state of disorder. In this sense, the Mary of *The Ploughman’s Tale* appears in clothing akin to Chaucer’s own Plowman’s tabard, ostensibly marking her potential poverty and

⁸³ See *Middle English Marian Lyrics* (1997) edited by Karen Saupe, “The Assumption and Mary as Queen of Heaven,” §50 (9-16). Saupe notes that “this is a fifteenth-century addition to an older MS” (113 n§50).

lack. And though images of Mary's finery and crystalline skin are common, there is parallel tradition of portraying Mary as impoverished and wanting. There is a distinct focus on the state of her clothing and her ability to clothe a newborn Christ. Another fifteenth century Marian lyric found in Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates' 18.7.21 emphasizes the Virgin's lack of clothing at the Nativity:

“Ler to loven as I love thee;
On al my limes thu mith i-se
Hou sore thei quaken for colde;
For thee I suffer michil wo.
Love me, suete, an no mo;
To thee I take an holde.” (§24 [1-6])

Jesu, swete, beo nout wroth;
I have neither clut ne cloth
Thee inne for to folde,
I ne have but a clut of a lappe;
Therefore ley thi fet to my pappe
And kepe fro the colde. (§24 [13-8])⁸⁴

In this lyric, we find Mary cradling Christ as she laments her lack of clothing. She expresses concern not for her own wellbeing, but her inability to properly clothe her child. She describes a state of undress so severe that “al my limes thu mith i-se.” While brilliant visions of Mary certainly served as a vehicle for devotional practice, poems that

⁸⁴ See *Middle English Marian Lyrics* (1997) edited by Karen Saupe, “The Nativity,” §24 (1-6, 13-8).

engaged with Mary's suffering as a human mother were likewise able to elicit affective reactions of a different order.

As Ethan Knapp has suggested of the Marian tradition in Hoccleve's work, "Hoccleve guides the reader/worshiper into a mimetic repetition of Mary's affective responses" (2001, 150).⁸⁵ Indeed, meditations on Mary's suffering as an unhoused and poorly clothed mother appeal to medieval notions of affective piety wherein lyricists, as Stephen J. Shoemaker has argued of the phenomenon more broadly, "stress Mary's maternal relationship with her son, portraying her deep affections for him and their emotional intimacy ... a profoundly human and personal bond" (2011, 572). In these examples, though to a more extreme degree than in the *Ploughman's Tale*, Mary is presented, not as the resplendent Queen of Heaven, but as a poor woman and, to that end, she occupies the socioeconomic station akin to the Plowman.

The body of Hoccleve's "*Item de Beata Virgine*" and *The Ploughman's Tale* thus offer Chaucer's Plowman, at least initially, an image of Mary with which he can identify and take solace. By focusing on more material details of the Plowman's description in the *General Prologue*, the second scribe finds and develops associations enough for the use of Hoccleve's poem as the *Ploughman's Tale*. And while the Plowman's choice of tale is, perhaps, more conceptually sophisticated than we might expect, this need not be the result of an error or misunderstanding on the part of the second scribe. The scribe's

⁸⁵ Knapp suggests that "the poem goes beyond most orthodox meditative exercises in its suggestion that the deeds of a man like the monk might have a concrete significance in the reality of the Virgin's life ... Mary's physical state [is] made dependent on the action of the monk" (2001, 153).

particular focus on the Plowman and the Virgin Mary's clothing suggests a more nuanced attention to the material realities and representative qualities of garments and garment-making in the Biblical narrative of Christ's birth. To that end, the *Ploughman's Tale* provides a novel reading of Hoccleve's poem which centers on the symbolic value and affective registers of the Virgin's clothing and so, perhaps, the Plowman himself.

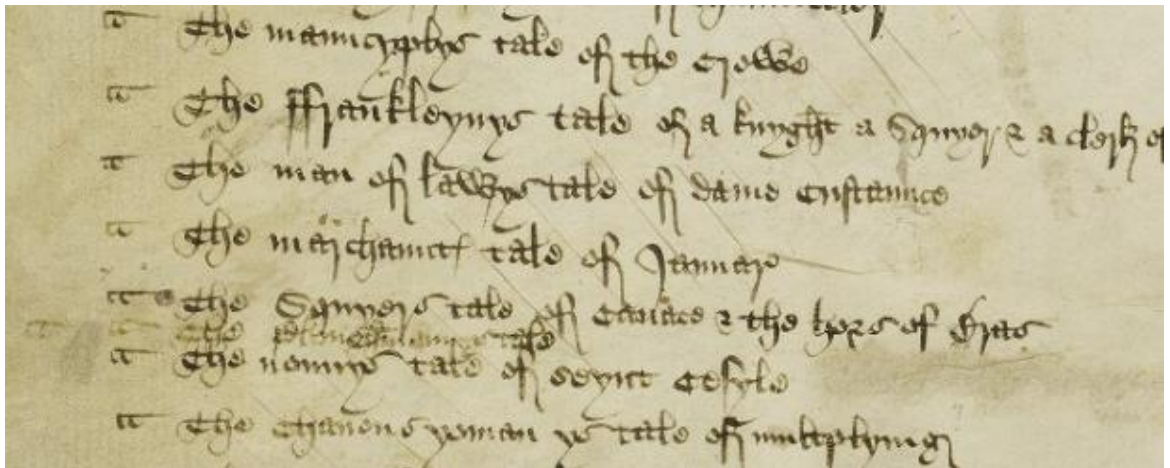


Figure 2.5 Portion of table of contents (fol. 1v)

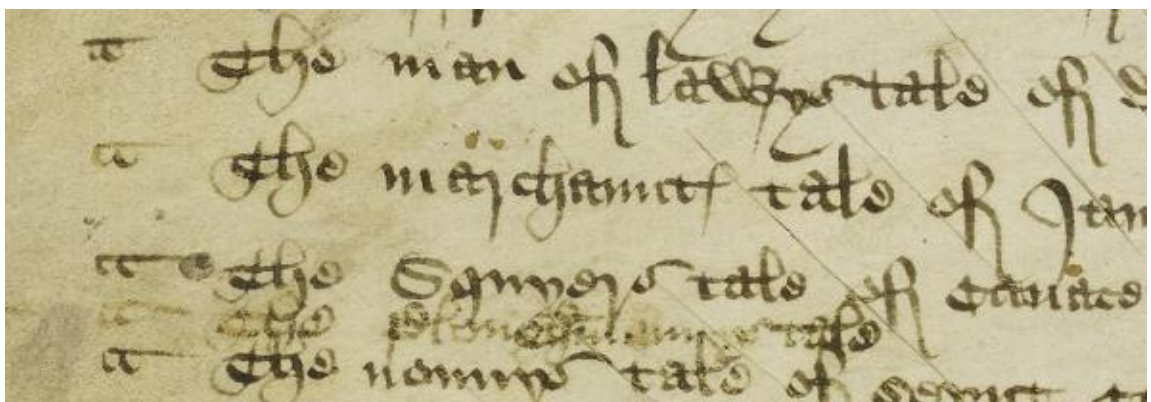


Figure 2.4 Detail of table of contents (fol. 1v)

As with my reading of *Gamelyn*, I do not mean to suggest that this is the *only* reason that the second scribe uses Hoccleve's Marian miracle poem. Rather, this is one of many possible associative connections which help better situate the inclusion of Hoccleve's poem in the *Tales* and in the mouth of the Plowman. Higl has argued convincingly for the numerous other possible reasons why the second scribe may have turned to Hoccleve's "*Item de Beata Virgine*." He suggests that "the redactor potentially chose to include this tale not only because it expressed a particular ideology, for there were certainly other orthodox text to choose from, but also because the tale itself reiterates and reshapes the pervasive themes of game and contestation that run throughout the canonical tales" (2012, 120). Mary's desire to 'qwyt' the Monk for his diligence recalls the numerous pilgrims who similarly wish to 'repay' their fellow taletellers.

In addition to this, he discusses the particular social context in which the Christ Church manuscript was produced—specifically, he posits that "an early connection between the manuscript and Winchester College is extremely likely with the presence of the motto of Winchester on the first leaf of the manuscript in a medieval hand and the Hampshire dialect ... throughout the manuscript" (2012, 122). Citing the formative relationship between Winchester College and the Virgin Mary, Higl "imagine[s] the scribe visually and ideologically surrounded by the iconography of the tradition of Marian devotion at Winchester" and consequently "enact[ing] the voice of orthodoxy, ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the foundational traditions of Winchester" (2012, 124).⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Manly and Rickert (1940) come to this conclusion in their examination of Christ Church 152, see pp. 90-1.

Chaucer's Plowman, a hardworking neighbor and diligent payer of tithes, is made to tell a tale which reflects the ideological investments and socio-religious pressures under which Christ Church 152 was conceived.

However, I intend to push this question of compilational aesthetic practice found in Christ Church 152 yet further by considering the extent to which 'attachment,' material and affective, serves as a structuring principle for the manuscript itself. Higl considers the language of attachment when he discusses Lydgate's *Siege* and its relationship to the *Tales* proper. However, in discussing Christ Church 152 as I have, I find the language of attachment unavoidable—particularly where compilation is concerned. If we take Lydgate's *Siege* to be the expression of a kind of textual attachment to Chaucer's *Tales*, we need to consider *Gamelyn* and *The Ploughman's Tale* as similar kinds of attachment. That is, while these texts make no pretense about their relationship to Chaucer's text—aside from the spurious two-stanza introduction of *The Ploughman's Tale*—the scribes responsible for their compilation in Christ Church 152 nevertheless saw fit to place them in conversation with the *Tales*.

As Higl contends, "The game is physically played out on the folia of the manuscript in which the evidence suggests an involved reading of the text so that the reader inputs textual material that shapes the very meaning of Chaucer's religious identity and configures a new *Canterbury Tales*" (2012, 118). Much like Lydgate, the first and second scribe of Christ Church 152 desired to expand the boundaries of potential narrative attachments to the *Tales*. As texts were added to Christ Church 152, they were appended to and within the *Tales*. To that end, the 'attaching' of sleeves in *The*

Ploughman's Tale becomes an apt visual metaphor for the accretive material praxis which characterizes the scribal composition of Christ Church 152. Scholars have discerned the 'seams' of these attachments throughout the construction of the manuscript beginning first with addition of *Gamelyn* and ending the interpolation of *The Ploughman's Tale*. And while these moments of codicological and structural imprecision are often pointed to as evidence of the manuscript's amateurish execution, I also want to note how they visually and materially reinforce the manuscript's overarching emphases on closeness, authorial relationalities, and material attachments.⁸⁷ Perhaps, the most prescient example of this comes in the form of the table of contents added by the second scribe. As mentioned previously, the positioning of the entry for "the plough man's tale" is conspicuously wedged between "the squyers tale" and "the nonnys tale" (see figs 2.5 and 2.6). It likewise lacks the descriptive 'subtitle' which accompany most of the other *Tales* listed in the table.

The placement of this entry has been described by Owen as "crowded in" (1991, 78) while Higl has suggested that "the cramped list" indicates that *The Ploughman's Tale* was "an afterthought" (2012, 125). And while I do not intend to disagree with Owen or Higl about the late addition of *The Ploughman's Tale* to the manuscript, I do want to suggest that—rather than simply dismissing it as a haphazard attempt at correcting the table—the way in which the second scribe tightly fit *The Ploughman's Tale* between

⁸⁷ As Margaret F. Rosenthal has suggested of this style of clothing, "Sleeves, bodice, doublet, partlet, shirt, cape, undergown, head covering, and other clothing parts acted as material and symbolic currency whose circulation could make and unmake the clothed subject" (2009, 462).

Chaucer's *Tales* intimates the kind of physical and affective closeness with which he conceived of Hoccleve's personal relationship to Chaucer. Such a feature attests to *Church 152* as a 'living' text which was, at least for a time, always in flux and subject to significant change.

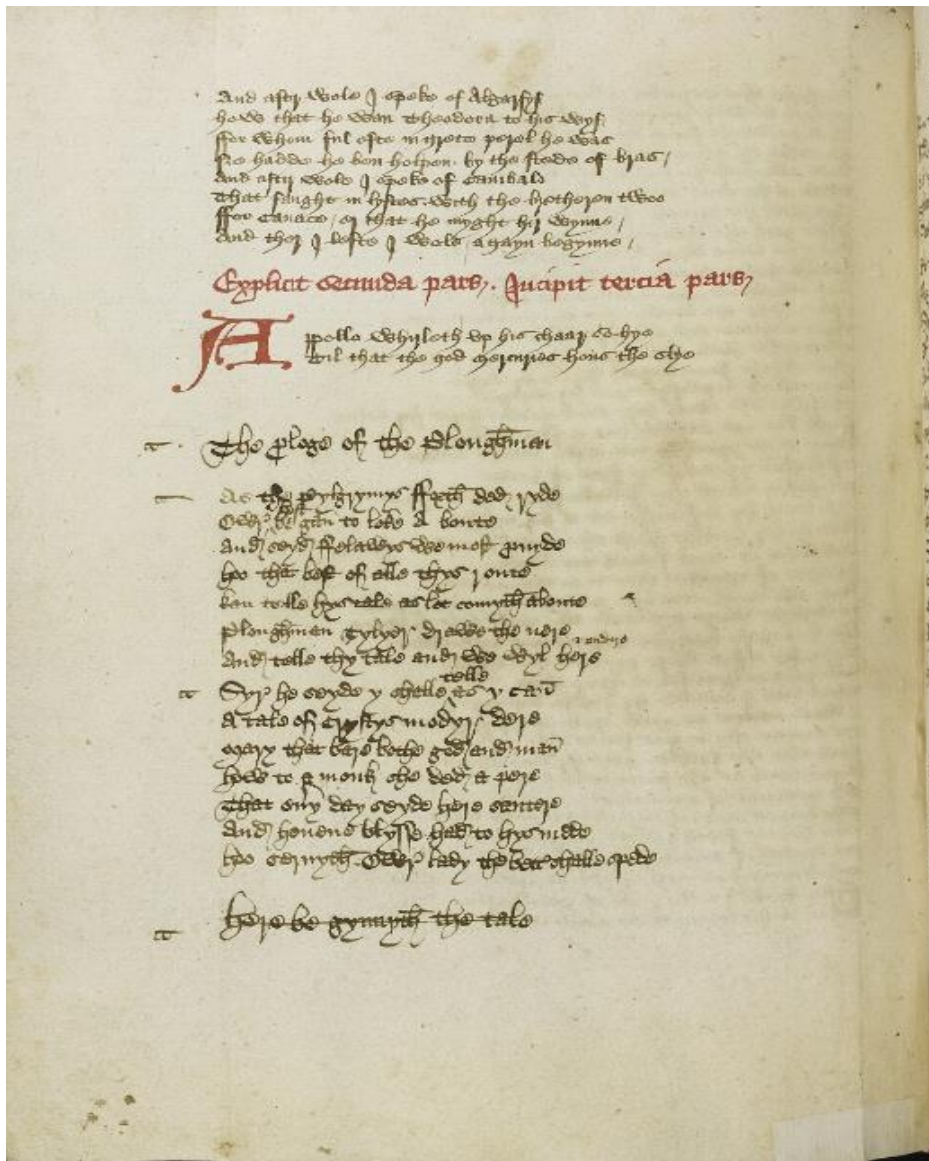


Figure 2.5 *The Squire's Tale* into *The Ploughman's Tale* (fol. 228v)

We might also look to the folios which feature the prologue of *The Ploughman's Tale*. Fol. 228v features the abrupt end of *The Squire's Tale* and moves immediately into the second scribe's copying of "the prologue of the ploughman" (see figs. 2.7 and 2.8). The spurious two stanzas of rhyme royal which introduce Hoccleve's text are followed by the pronouncement that "here be gynnyth the tale" which has been unceremoniously crossed through. Higl argues that the scribe responsible for copying *The Ploughman's*

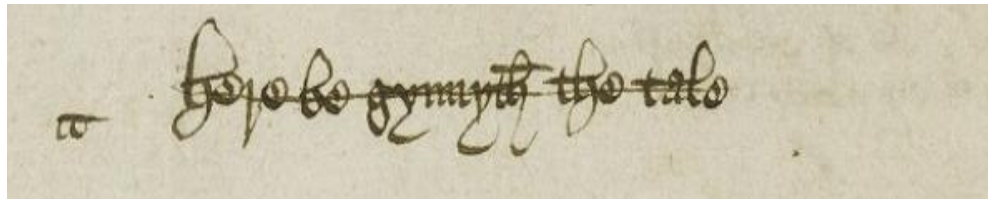


Figure 2.8 Detail of the beginning of *The Ploughman's Tale* (fol. 228v)

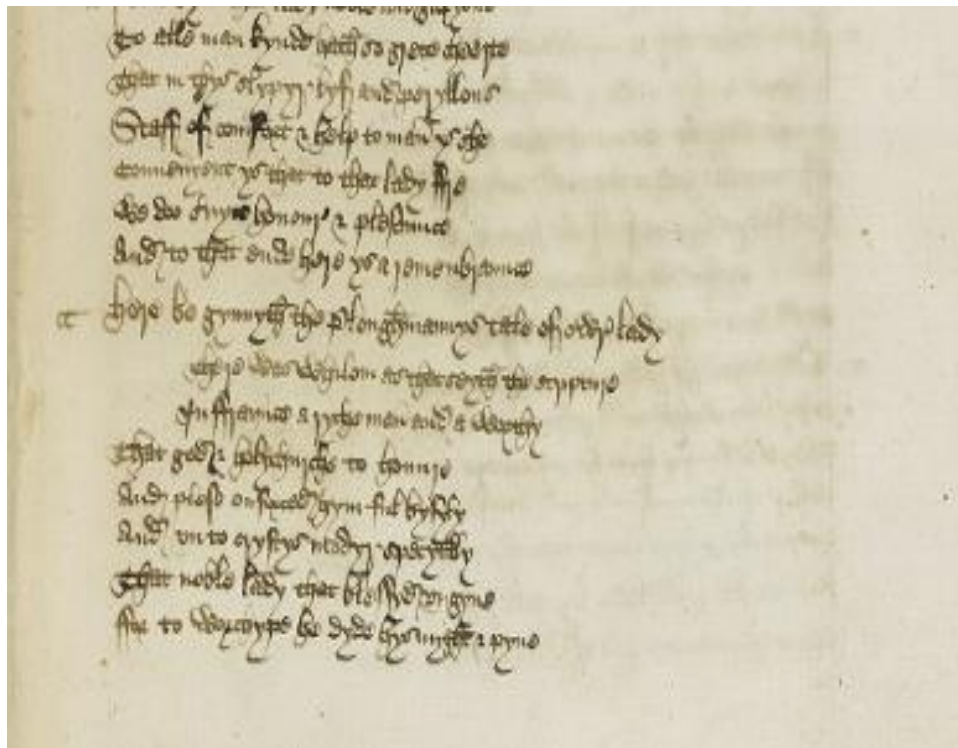


Figure 2.9 Prologue and incipit of *The Ploughman's Tale* (fol. 229r)

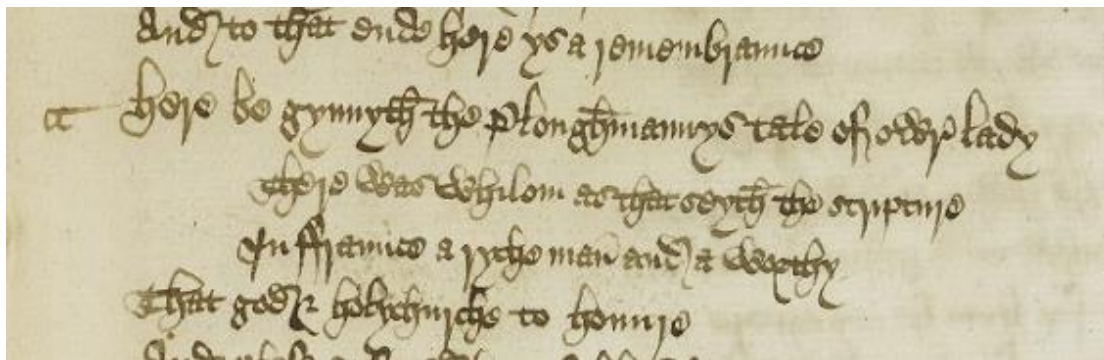


Figure 2.6 Detail of incipit (fol. 229r)

Tale “slipped up and began to write an incipit announcing the beginning of the tale ... forgetting that Hoccleve’s poem had a prologue of its own.” He concludes that “the addition of the *Ploughman’s Tale* is rather sloppily done and reflects the non-professional production of the whole manuscript” (Higl 2012, 126). Indeed, turning to fol. 229r we find the completed incipit, “here be gynneth the ploughmannys tale of our lady,” in its intended place at the bottom of the page (see figs. 2.9 and 2.10).

In this instance, the tale provides the descriptive ‘subtitle’ it lacks in the table of contents on fol. 1v. However, Higl’s assumption that Christ Church 152 was constructed with the hope that it would represent an ‘idealized’ manuscript object is problematic. I would argue that, while perhaps aesthetically unsettling, these moments reinforce the compilational structure and aesthetic practice which characterize Christ Church 152. If the text appears ‘sloppy,’ we might better understand this—not as an aesthetic failing—but rather the fulfillment of a particular aesthetic intention. The material arrangement of the additions and continuations are thus equally enlightening as they demonstrate how such ‘compilational construction’ is an aesthetic choice which is simultaneously a textual and material act. Furthermore, with respect to the second scribe, I want to extend this

notion of closeness and attachment yet further outward as I consider how knowledge of Hoccleve's relationship to Chaucer may have provided an actionable criterion by which to include Hoccleve's work as a *Tale* in Christ Church 152. Hoccleve's 'attachment' to Chaucer is well documented by scholars.

Nevertheless, I do want to review the pertinent pieces of the primary textual detail which intimate this attachment. Despite his ostensible goal of providing guidance to the soon-to-be Henry V, Hoccleve nevertheless makes his association with Chaucer clear enough. Such invocations serve to provide evidence of Hoccleve's association to Chaucer and, in turn, implicates his poetry in a kind of Chaucerian lineage. Hoccleve identifies himself in the *Regiment* but is not the first to bring up his relationship to Chaucer. Hoccleve puts these words in the mouth of the unnamed Old Man with whom he speaks throughout the 'Prologue':

“What schal I callē þe? what is þi name?”
“Hoccleuë, fadir myn, men clepen me.”
“Hoccleuë, sone?” “I-wis, fadir, þat same.”
“Sone, I haue herd, or this, men speke of þe;
Pou were aqueynted with Caucher, pardee—
God haue his soulë best of any wyght!— (RP 1863-8)⁸⁸

David R. Carlson has suggested that Hoccleve's motivation for including such references “was not disinterested ... Hoccleve was trying to use an image of Chaucer to advance his

⁸⁸ Middle English text and line numbers for the poetry of Thomas Hoccleve's *De Regimine Principium* (or *The Regiment of Princes*) use Furnivall's 1897 of *Hoccleve's Works* (vol. III) unless otherwise noted. *De Regimine Principium* (or *The Regiment of Princes*) is abbreviated *RP* in parenthetical citations.

own interests” (1991, 286). Like many of his other poems, Hoccleve submitted the *Regiment* in the hopes that he would be compensated for his work. Carlson has wryly described Hoccleve’s intention for writing the *Regiment* in no uncertain terms: “The *Regiment of Princes* is about money. Hoccleve wants it” (2004a, 92). The presence of such explicit financial interests, however, do not mean that Hoccleve’s claims of attachment to and affection for Chaucer were wholly insincere. Indeed, this stanza suggests that Hoccleve understands his relationship to Chaucer to be the subject of common public knowledge as the Old Man has “herd ... men speke of þe” (*RP* 1866). Carlson has elsewhere argued that these lines “impl[y] that Hoccleve already enjoys a reputation for Chaucer’s familiarity” (2004a, 96). Hoccleve thus imagines himself in relation to Chaucer; he finds himself attached.

Until this point, however, the nature of Hoccleve’s attachment to Chaucer is somewhat unclear. All we are given is the old man’s observation that Hoccleve was “aqueynted with Caucher” which, unlike its modern form, refers to a gradient of relationalities ranging from mere familiarity to more significant forms of intimacy (*RP* 1867). Hoccleve’s feelings for Chaucer do not remain imprecise or nebulous for too long, though, as his acquaintance is clarified some three-hundred lines later. Hoccleve mourns Chaucer’s passing and lack of guidance; such a relationship would help explain why Chaucer’s death causes Hoccleve to hesitate “[w]ith hert as trembling as þe leef of aspe” when beginning to compose the *Regiment* (*RP* 1954). He simultaneously suggests Chaucer’s larger influence on the burgeoning category of ‘English literature’ while articulating his own feelings of endearment to the individual poet. He laments to the Old

Man, “But weylaway! so is myn hertë wo, / That þe honour of englyssh tonge is deed, / Of which I wont was han conseil and reed” (*RP* 1958-60). Hoccleve thus attests to the closeness of his relationship to Chaucer; the clerk claims that Chaucer personally read and, to some extent, advised his poetical output.

Hoccleve continues his remembrance of Chaucer as he refers to the author of the *Tales* in terms which Lydgate later echoes in his *Siege*: “Mi maister Chaucer, flour of eloquence, / Mirour of fructuous entendement, / O, vniuersel fadir in science!” (*RP* 1961-4). He likewise makes a brief reference to John Gower, a contemporary and poetic consort to Chaucer, in his *Regiment*: “Hast þou nat eeke my maister Gower slayn, / Whose vertu I am insuffcient / ffor to descreyue?” (*RP* 1975-7). And while minor, Hoccleve’s triangulation of himself with Chaucer and Gower suggests, perhaps, the nascent presence of an English poetic community whose members share both creative and interpersonal relationships. Hoccleve suggests a relationship to Chaucer as he refers to the author of the *Tales* in terms deferential, “[m]i derë maistir” and “fadir, Chaucer” (*RP* 2077; 2078).

Again, Hoccleve grieves Chaucer’s death, “Deth, by thi deth, hath harme irreparable / Vnto vs doon,” as having robbed of the greatest rhetorician since Cicero, “Despoilèd hath þis land of þe swetnesse / Of rethorik; for vn-to Tullius / Was neuer man so lyk a-mongës vs” (*RP* 2082-3; 2084-6). Of course, this argument rests on the possibility that the scribe-reader responsible for the *Ploughman’s Tale* was aware of Hoccleve’s relationship and professions of attachment to Chaucer. Indeed, this would mean determining whether there was any chance that the second scribe had encountered

Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* wherein Hoccleve speaks most candidly concerning his relationship to and knowing of Chaucer.

While it is impossible to say for sure whether the second scribe crossed paths with Hoccleve's *Regiment* directly, it is likely given the apparent popularity of the text as evinced by the 43 extant copies which remain.⁸⁹ To some extent, this argument is bound to the act of speculation as very few recorded examples of personalized contemporary responses to medieval literature are still extant. As Rory G. Critten has pointed out, “[m]edievalists with an interest in establishing the reception of the texts they study by their early readers have very little in the way of the diaries, literary letters and society reviews which scholars of later periods can use to reconstruct contemporary reactions to a given work or author” (2013, 387). However, Bahr and Gillespie have offered invaluable insight into the speculative nature of medieval manuscript studies, “To speculate is not to guess, but rather to look both carefully and imaginatively: carefully to see the surviving picture as fully as possible, and imaginatively in due recognition of what that picture has lost and cannot include” (2013, 358). Thus, with the information available—I want to suggest the very real possibility that the second scribe of Christ Church 152 was familiar with some, if not all, of Hoccleve's *Regiment*.

The *Regiment* dates from the early fifteenth century and its associations with the ascension of Henry, Prince of Wales, to the throne as King Henry V in 1413 help localize the date of its composition to 1411–12.⁹⁰ To that end, the dating of the composition of the

⁸⁹ See Rory G. Critten (2013, 403).

⁹⁰ See Charles R. Blyth's introduction to Hoccleve's *The Regiment of Princes* (1999, 4-5).

Regiment and its evident popularity invite a reading in which the second scribe of Christ Church 152, aware of the purported relationship Hoccleve claims with Chaucer, used Hoccleve's proximity to Chaucer as one of the compilational criterion for his interpolation of the *Ploughman's Tale*. It is worth noting also how Hoccleve's writing was subject to various forms of compilation and excerpting which sought to contextualize the clerk's writing into highly individualized and mutable contexts. Hoccleve's work was commonly extracted for use in such contexts; though, compilers and scribes appear to have actively avoided the more personally inflected portions of Hoccleve's *corpus*. Critten has convincingly shown the degree to which "few fifteenth-century readers beyond the authors initial addressees enjoyed the poet's artful self-portraiture *per se*" and, in the process of copying Hoccleve's texts, "it seems that the acutely personalized texts ... were the first to be sidelined" (2013, 387). Hoccleve's writing was candidly self-conscious, to their exclusion, it would seem.

Critten finds, however, that the *Regiment* was, unlike Hoccleve's other works, most often copied almost entirely intact—in this case, most of the extant copies of the *Regiment* dutifully attend to Hoccleve's personalized affect. The *Regiment* "circulated without the personalizing frame provided by its 2000-line Prologue only in exceptional cases ... the manuscript evidence thus argues for an early awareness of the integrity of the *Regiment* among its fifteenth-century readers" (2013, 403). Hoccleve's professions of attachment to Chaucer were thus likely widely disseminated. And while Critten refers to the 'Prologue' as sole source of Hoccleve's 'personalizing' mood, I think it is quite easy to extend such a function to Hoccleve's invocations of Chaucer which seek to establish

the terms of an equally individualized relationship. If the second scribe of Christ Church 152 encountered Hoccleve's *Regiment*, he most likely did so with it more-or-less intact. What is more, if the scribe-reader encountered one of these many complete copies of the *Regiment*, he doubtless was acquainted with Hoccleve's professed admiration of Chaucer. Thus, as I argue, being simultaneously familiar with Hoccleve's "*Item de Beata Virgine*" and his *Regiment*, the second scribe's potential knowledge of Hoccleve's attachment to Chaucer facilitated the interpolation of the former's Marian devotional poem into the text of *The Canterbury Tales* under the auspices of the *Ploughman's Tale*.

Furthermore, it is likely the commonly accepted style of Hoccleve's statements, written in the style of Chaucer's humility *topos*, that ultimately rendered them intelligible to medieval audiences as "the more idiosyncratic aspects of the poet's self-presentation ... may have rendered these parts of his collection illegible for a significant part of his audience" (Critten 2013, 405). In what appears to be rote rhetorical formula, we catch glimpses of the potential for Hoccleve's reflexive articulation of the terms of his attachment to Chaucer. It was, perhaps, Hoccleve's codification of his connection to Chaucer vis-à-vis his appeal to modesty which ensured the perpetuity of such details in future copies of the text. Such a possibility problematizes the more prescriptive critique concerning Hoccleve's jarringly frank recognition of his shortcomings; it asks us to consider how and to what extent Hoccleve might actively be attempting to articulate the

more unwieldy affections he holds through conventional forms.⁹¹ I want to suggest that the expression of affect and the use of ‘more’ literary forms are not mutually exclusive. In fact, Hoccleve appears to use them cooperatively. Atkinson has argued thus, “Though the speaker may really report autobiographical truths of the poet, the poet may frequently refer only to a namesake of himself—mediated through literary convention—in the speaker” (2017, 482). Taking Hoccleve at his word means confronting the fact that we might be responsible for examining how the ‘dul’ clerk was ultimately attached to and affected by Chaucer.

Bridget Whearty has recently demonstrated what a meaningful reconsideration of terms of the relationship between Chaucer, Hoccleve, and Lydgate might look like. Namely, Whearty moves away from the always already paternalistic positioning of Chaucer regarding Lydgate and Hoccleve. She imagines, then, not a vertical hierarchy of poetic lineage but a collective wherein “the defining feature of Chaucer’s early legacy is not competition with the dead but the cultivation of a shared community with—and care for—the dead” (Whearty 2018, 333). These prayers, far from simple rhetorical gestures, suggest a certain kind of intimacy with and love for Chaucer. Hoccleve’s “formulaic early prayers” in the *Regiment* act by “strengthening his claims of intimacy and continuity” with the dead poet (Whearty 2018, 343; 344). Indeed, Lydgate demonstrates a similar proclivity for poetic prayer which we see in his prologue to the *Siege*. His prayers,

⁹¹ Ethan Knapp has “suggest[ed] a new source and read Hoccleve’s autobiographical verse side by side with his bureaucratic production to show that Hoccleve’s autobiography is actually born out of that most impersonal of textual traditions, the bureaucratic exchange of petition and response ... bureaucracy and autobiography appear not as opposites but as two sides of the same coin” (2001, 13).

however, are distinct from Hoccleve's insofar as they "develop an ethic of care that does not depend on a living, personal connection" (Whearty 2018, 356).

George Edmondson has also explored the implications of such a connection in terms of medieval neighborly imperative: "Neighboring thus speaks to a different logic of textual relationality than that assumed by traditional genealogical models of literary history, a logic much closer in spirit to the miscellaneity ... that characterized medieval manuscript culture" (2011, 20). Lydgate's separation from Chaucer—temporal and physical—leads to an articulation of his relationality to Chaucer which effectively accounts for such a distance, "the guild metaphor draws into literary history the *cross-temporal affective associations* that were central features of late medieval guild membership" (Whearty 2018, 365; emphasis my own). Attachment to Chaucer, then, is attainable even for those never met him. Time and space need not impede the efficacy of their prayers nor the kind of literary closeness to which they aspire.

Whearty's work here is integral to my current argument. Indeed, she convincingly demonstrates the potential for a kind of literary communal subjectivity that exists outside of the exclusive and problematic notion of literary primogenitor. If Hoccleve and Lydgate imagined their relationship to Chaucer vis-à-vis the "rhetoric of friendship, duty, and care based on something other than intimacies shared while alive," there is the potential for the scribes of Christ Church 152 to share similar notions of attachment to Chaucer, Hoccleve, and Lydgate's 'guild' of poets (Whearty 2018, 363). To that end, we find the first and second scribe of Christ Church 152 actively participating in the creative poetic community of fifteenth century England and contributing to a notion of Chaucerian

literature which is still the subject of study today—“Chaucer’s poetry, in a quite literal sense, *is* the product of his fifteenth-century readers and writers” (Lerer 1993, 8). The scribes of Christ Church 152 demonstrate how textual attachments ultimately work to shape the material realities and affective networks which serve as the very foundations of literary history.

In this sense, then, the Host’s request for the Plowman to approach in the prologue to *The Ploughman’s Tale*—“Ploughman Tylyer, drawe the nere, / And tell thy tale, and we wyl here” (6-7)—serves as an introduction to the spatial and proximal affective aesthetics which are at work in Christ Church 152. The first and second scribe thus ‘draw’ close the various textual and affective threads which bind Christ Church 152 as a compilation. As Daniel W. Mosser has argued, “a great deal remains to be learned from the examination of individual manuscripts of the Canterbury Tales. When one approaches this task with the attitude that the individual text is but one of many important features of the manuscript, one begins to discover much that is interesting and illuminating” (1985, 84). In beginning the compilational project that Christ Church 152 would become, the first scribe provided the basis for the second scribe’s continued additive work. Christ Church 152—far from simply being an errant copy of *The Canterbury Tales*—is a testament to how the idiosyncratic and localized aesthetic practices of individual readers can inform our understanding of not only the *Tales* themselves, but the development of a responsive—and importantly, an affective—literary community in the later Middle Ages.

Conclusion

We are left, then, with the second scribe's addition of Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird*—a poem which he refers to as the “tale of the churle & hys byrd” in the table on fol. 1v. Curiously, it is this text which ultimately stands out against the backdrop of Christ Church 152—not because it fails to make a suitable tale or lacks aesthetic merit—but because unlike Lydgate's *Siege*, which is upfront concerning its ‘additional’ nature, as well as the anonymous *Gamelyn* and *The Ploughman's Tale*, which legitimize their addition through interpolation *into* the text of *Tales*, Lydgate's *Churl and the Bird* rests in the interstices of the two. Indeed, it follows *The Parson's Tale* and precedes Lydgate's *Siege*, yet it neither identifies itself explicitly as a Chaucerian tale nor as a work by Lydgate. Within the context of Christ Church 152, *The Churl and the Bird*, or “the tale of the churle and hys bryd” as it is copied in the table of contents, signifies then a hybridization of the Chaucerian and the Lydgatian canon such that it blurs the distinction between the two.

The Churl and the Bird thus acts as a kind of transitional piece between Chaucer's *Tales* and Lydgate's *Siege*. The explicitly moralistic tone of the tale compliments the Parson's sermon on righteous behavior. Since there is little distinction between the end of the *Parson's Tale* and beginning of *The Churl and the Bird*, the latter appears to be an appropriate continuation of the former. Likewise, in telling the tale of songbird trapped in a “cage forged were of gold,” Lydgate's poem, perhaps obliquely, calls to mind the various occasions in Chaucer's *Tales* where such an image is invoked

both metaphorically and literally (fol. 279r [161]).⁹² The second scribe's inclusion of *The Churl and the Bird* seems to make knowing glance back at his interpolation of *The Ploughman's Tale*; during one of his songs, the bird discusses how each creature is made for its environment. He explains how "Eche thyng draw[e]th to hys semblaunte / ffysshes in the see [and] beste on the lond" and, in the course of this explanation, suggests the place of the plowman in the order of things—"a ploughman to tylle ys lond" (fol. 277v [123-4; 126]). Lydgate concludes the poem with a supplication, "Go lytyl quayer and [re]comaunde me / But to my maystr w[ith] humble affecion" (fol. 281v [311-2]). Though this reference to a 'maistir' is indirect, the language of deference here is not unlike the other occasions in which Lydgate suggests his attachment to Chaucer.⁹³ By couching Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird* in Christ Church 152, the second scribe not only takes advantage of how it relates to Chaucer's *Tales*, but how it refers to Chaucer himself.

Sawyer aptly describes Christ Church 152 and the always mutable and hybridized compilational aesthetic practice which characterizes its creation: "As the fifteenth century

⁹² In the *Miller's Tale*, an elderly carpenter named John is said to have a young woman as his wife, Alison—"Of xviii. Yere she was of age" (fol. 43v [37]). Afraid of her potential infidelity, John is extremely strict with Alison, he "holde her narwe in a cage," in the hopes that this might avoid being made "lyke a cokewolde" (fol. 43v [38, 40]). Later, the *Manciple's Tale* provides a particularly lucid addition to this narrative conceit. In addition to the keeping of a speaking crow in a cage, the Manciple moralizes concerning the irredeemable and innate wantonness of women using this same image. He argues that if one were to "Take any brydde [and] put it a cage" made of gold and treat it well, the bird would nevertheless attempt to escape since "His liberte thys bride desyeth ay" (fol. 176r [59, 70]).

⁹³ See David R. Carlson's (2004b) "The Chronology of Lydgate's Chaucer References."

ended, readers could find themselves navigating through Chaucer disguised as Lydgate, or Lydgate and Hoccleve disguised as Chaucer” (2020, 78). Though the first scribe began Christ Church 152 with, perhaps, the hope of compiling the *Tales* and adjacent texts, like Lydgate’s *Siege*, we find the second scribe turning this aesthetic direction on its head as he adds, obscures, and hybridizes various elements of the manuscript to simultaneously bolster and undermine the compilational practice which undergirds its creative project.

To exhaust the visual metaphor of the attached sleeves found in *The Ploughman’s Tale* and to take it to its utter conclusion, we might see the scribes of Christ Church 152 as not unlike the praying monk in *The Ploughman’s Tale*. By returning to the manuscript and putting in the labor required for its ostensible ‘completion,’ the scribes hold and stitch together a version of the *Tales* which is entirely unique, and which appears in no other contexts, manuscript or otherwise. As Whearty has argued, “For Lydgate, to be a reader of Chaucer, or indeed a speaker of English, is to be bound in a similar way to the creative genius of Chaucer” (2018, 362). In the case of Christ Church 152, to be a reader of Chaucer could very well mean binding disparate works together or having your creative output physically bound to—attached to, perhaps—the work of Chaucer himself. Christ Church 152 thus asks us to consider the malleability of texts in the Middle Ages and the potential for alternative, perhaps more ephemeral, means such as affect and attachment through which scribes ultimately compiled texts.

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Chapter Three

“Adieu my studie!”: Digression, Boredom, and Tedium in Furnivall’s Editions

“Any reader whom these bits bore, can easily skip ’em.”

— F. J. Furnivall (1877, xxviii)

“In this sense, the fictional preface ... does nothing but aggravate, by exploiting, the preface’s underlying bent toward self-consciousness both uncomfortable and playful: playing on its discomfort.”

— Gérard Genette (1997, 292)

Introduction

In his foreword to the first volume of *Hoccleve’s Works* (1892), Frederick J. Furnivall recalls his earlier work “back nearly ten years” of copying the Philipps MS 8151—now known as San Marino, Huntington Library, mssHM 111. He quickly abandons his description of this work, however, in favor of a description of his relationship with “a young-lady lover of Shakspere and Browning ... [who] had written to me.” Furnivall describes his time with this ‘young-lady’ which often followed his daily work on Hoccleve’s manuscript; as Furnivall recalls, “my gifted and sweet-sould young friend took me for one of the pretty walks round the town ... talking of the writers and people she honourd, telling me of her Indian life, her work at Cheltenham College, and in the evening singing my favourite songs.” This relationship, however, ended suddenly after the death of this ‘sweet-sould young friend’: “little did I then think that the happy and brilliant future which I lookt forward to for my young friend would be so soon ended by

her sad burning, and her death a week after, on Sept. 4, 1883” (1892, I.xlvii).⁹⁴ This unnamed ‘sweet-sould young friend’ is identified elsewhere in Furnivall’s dedication of the first volume of *Hoccleve’s Works* “[t]o the memory of Teena Rochfort Smith, my much-respected and deeply-regretted girl-friend the lover of Shakspere and Browning” (1892).⁹⁵ This small remembrance in honor of fellow scholar and philologist Teena Rochfort-Smith in the foreword to *Hoccleve’s Work* is certainly unusual and, arguably, inappropriate.⁹⁶ Rochfort-Smith’s relationship to Furnivall and her walks with him seemingly have nothing to do with Hoccleve insofar as Rochfort-Smith did not directly work on *Hoccleve’s Works*.

⁹⁴ A memoir of Rochfort-Smith, written by Furnivall himself, vividly recounts the circumstances of the injuries which led to her eventual death in 1883: “In order to burn some letters—as was her wont—she struck a match, of the bad kind called ‘Domestics.’ The lighted head flew off on to a needle work mat, which caught fire. She threw it down and stampd on it, but did not notice that her dress had caught fire behind ... She made herself walk upstairs, where a surgeon, Mr. Bramwell, had come in, and the terrible extent of her injuries must have shown an experienced eye that her speedy death was certain” (1883, 8).

⁹⁵ This dedication follows the title page of the first volume of *Hoccleve’s Works*.

⁹⁶ This portion of the foreword might be construed as inappropriate to both his contemporary and modern readers, though likely for different reasons. As William Benzie notes, Furnivall’s relationship to Rochfort-Smith was far from platonic and became the subject of criticism from his contemporaries. A scandalized Lucy Toulmin Smith wrote to James A. H. Murray concerning the relationship between Furnivall and Rochfort-Smith, “[T]here is a much worse thing which I must tell you, tho’ odious to me. Furnivall is being separated from his wife, at his own desire, as he has become infatuated with a young girl ... I tell you this for the sake of the poor innocent wronged wife, to whom he owes *much*. She needs all the manly & womanly sympathy of her friends” (qtd. in Benzie 1983, 29-30). Modern readers, while potentially aware of and upset by the circumstances of Furnivall’s relationship with Rochfort-Smith, might be more unsettled by the relative ease with which Furnivall inserts himself into a foreword which is ostensibly about Hoccleve’s poetry.

I qualify Rochfort-Smith's involvement in the labor of producing *Hoccleve's Works* because, regardless of how we might perceive her role in his work, Furnivall very clearly positions her as a significant feature of his process of labor and the edition's production.⁹⁷ That is, for Furnivall, his time *not working* on Hoccleve's poetry was as important and productive, if not more so, than his work copying manuscripts. Intellectual work, then, is not necessarily conceived of as a sedentary or isolating venture. As Antonia Ward has suggested, unlike his professionalizing contemporaries, "Furnivall does not enforce the same separateness in the time and space of work and leisure" (2000, 89). However, I might amend Ward's assessment slightly as Furnivall's fundamental understanding of work means that leisure itself is a labor. That is, rather than constituting two bounded and opposing discourses, Furnivall understood work to be a process of leisure, digression, and distraction.

In this sense, I suggest a notion of leisured labor which engages with Theodor Adorno's work on the commodification of 'free time': "Free time ... does not merely stand in opposition to labour. In a system where fully employment itself has become the ideal, free time is nothing more than a shadowy continuation of labour" (2001, 194). Even those who spend time participating in sport, which Furnivall valued more than anything else, "are unwittingly trained into modes of behaviour which, sublimated to a greater or lesser degree, are required of them by the work process" (Adorno 2001, 195).

⁹⁷ This is not to say, of course, that Rochfort-Smith was anything less than a formidable editor of Shakespeare herself. Ann Thompson has suggested that were it not for her premature death in 1883, Rochfort-Smith's work with the *Hamlet* would have yielded an "edition [which] would have been the most complex presentation of the texts of *Hamlet* ever attempted" (1998, 128).

This is not to say, of course, that Furnivall's work ethic was by any means orthodox. Furnivall's insistence on the primacy of leisure and assessments of self-interest as forms of work ran counter to the developing notions of professionalization which came to characterize the academic study of English literature and language in the late nineteenth century.

Furnivall's invocation of Rochfort-Smith's presence in his life and work gives way to further fond recollection, "The pain of that has now past, and the pleasure of the friendship ... mingles in my mind with the delightful summer Saturday afternoons and Sundays last season on the river" (1892, I.xlvii).⁹⁸ With the pleasure of sculling in the company of friends in mind, Furnivall addresses the reader directly and asks, "I find life worth living. Don't you?" (1892, I.xlviii). Upon returning to the matter of producing *Hoccleve's Works*, however, Furnivall's tone changes dramatically. The editor, who just moments ago affectionately recalled his outings with Rochfort-Smith and sculling, takes a decidedly more restrained tact. Gesturing toward the immense labor that handling Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes* represents, Furnivall once again speaks to his readers. However, on this occasion, it is a request for help—"If any one will volunteer for the editing of this poem, it shall be committed to his charge, for I haven't time for it. Still, if

⁹⁸ Furnivall's 1882 foreword to *The Fifty Earliest English Wills in the Court of Probate* explicitly addresses Rochfort-Smith's contributions to his work: "To my friend Miss Teena Rochfort-Smith, I am also indebted for the List of Words and Places in the first 8 pages of the book, and for soothing my soul when, on certain evenings, I was grinding at the rest of that wearing work, by singing me all my old favourite mezzo-soprano songs ... May all opprest Indexers hav [*sic*] the like sweet consolement!" (xv-xvi). In a short note to this acknowledgement, Furnivall notes, as he has and will several times, the amount of effort taken to publish these wills, "The Lists don't profess to be exhaustive, tho [*sic*] they took a long time" (1882, xvi[n1]).

no one else will do it, I will.” Furnivall is hopeful, eager perhaps, to see Hoccleve’s *Regement* taken up by someone, ‘any one’ else. There is an air of begrudging resignation that follows this request as if Furnivall himself is aware that no one will volunteer. Little of the joy Furnivall receives from socializing and sculling is to be found in his work with Hoccleve—“if no one else will do it, I will” (1892, I.xlviii). As if to emphasize this fact, Furnivall points out that he had tried to delegate this work among his volunteers in 1872.

In a circular appended to the fourth volume of *MS Ellesmere of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, Furnivall suggests that “[f]rom the amount of work before the Early English Text Society that they cannot hope to print Lydgate’s and Occleve’s Works for something like 20 years, though these works are wanted by students at once.” To remedy this, Furnivall proposes the formation of a ‘Lydgate and Occleve Society’ whereby the Early English Text Society might be relieved of “the chief burden of their fifteenth-century work” (1872, 166). However, the proposed ‘Lydgate and Occleve Society’ failed to muster any significant interest among Furnivall’s subscribers—a point which Furnivall is happy to emphasize in his foreword to *Hoccleve’s Works*. “[N]ot half of the 150 men I wanted for a start, agreed to join,” Furnivall explains, “and so the Society never was.” At the conclusion to the foreword of first volume of *Hoccleve’s Works*, Furnivall warily articulates his professed goal: “I feel bound to try and see Hoccleve cleared, and Lydgate well started, before I die” (1892, I.xlviii). Furnivall describes his labor on Hoccleve as

onerous and exhausting; it might be, as Furnivall himself speculates, a project capable of haunting him until his death.⁹⁹

Furnivall's frank admissions of disinterest in the labor required of editorial and textual production is, on its face, perplexing. Why take up a several voluntary projects like the work required of the Early English Text Society or the Chaucer Society if you are, by your own admission, made unhappy by the prospect of their attendant labor? And to be clear, these expressions are not a feature which is exclusive to Furnivall's work on Hoccleve; he expresses apathy toward the work of copying and printing the texts of several authors whose literary societies he nevertheless insisted on founding. These

⁹⁹ This is not to say that those who did agree to join were unenthusiastic about the work it required. Several letters held at King's College, London suggest at least *some* interest in the society. In fact, the 150-member benchmark seems to be the suggestion of the society's would-be editor Lucy Tomlin Smith, "I have made up my mind to undertake the editing, if we can get the necessary number of 150 subscribers to begin with ... It is work I shall like, I will do my best at, relying upon your [Furnivall] for suggestions & help now & then (7/1/1). William Cavendish, seventh duke of Devonshire, sought a subscription to the ill-fated society, "The Duke of Devonshire presents his compliments to Mr. Furnivall & will be much obliged to him to have his name put down as a subscriber to the Lydgate & Occleve Society" (7/1/3).

Perhaps most telling is a letter received in 1872 from W. T. Culley, editor of *Caxton's Eneydos* (1890) for the Early English Text Society. After apologizing for his overdue response, Cully agrees to join the society—"I shall be most glad to be a member ... of your proposed Lydgate & Occleve Society, to which I wish all success." Culley continues, however, suggesting that Furnivall's latest endeavor "is very enterprising ... when the Chaucer & Ballad Societies maintain such a struggling existence ... I sadly fear that one of the members I procured for you for E. E. Text Soc. has proved a backslider!" (7/1/3).

Quotations of these materials copied from the collection of Furnivall's letters kept at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives and King's College London Archive (GB0100 KCLCA K/PP132 Furnivall). Parenthetical citations for the quotations refer to the box, bundle, and sub-bundle.

expressions render Furnivall's forewords texts worthy of examination unto themselves. As Ruth Evan's has argued of Chaucerian introductions, Furnivall's introductions "[o]ften verg[e] on the brink of taking on an existence separate from the works they introduce ... affronting the audience's sense of discursive decorum" (1999, 371). Taking as its archive the Furnivall's expressions of ambivalence toward the labor of textual and editorial production, then, this chapter considers the implications of Furnivall's attachment to the notion of academic labor, the extent to which his intellectual practice undermines emerging notions of the professional academic, and the consequences of his desire to comprehensively catalogue the language and literature of the English.

In addressing Furnivall's conflicted relationship with the work of producing editions, I examine how his role as an 'amateur' editor—affected and self-interested—allows him to engage in a form of academic labor which unsettles the more regimented and disciplinary forms of knowledge production taking shape in the nineteenth century academy. That is, I think through how Furnivall's frustrations, distractions, digressions, avoidances, and tangents found in his forewords are themselves motivated by intellectually productive affects. In her work on Christine de Pizan as 'professional amateur,' Louise D'Arcens has provided an argumentative framework from which to assess how Furnivall's work "offers contemporary medievalists a thought-provoking model of intellectual and professional authority in which passion and reason are not mutually exclusive ... and suggests instead that autodidactic impulses and practices have abided within the professionalized discipline of medieval studies" (2004, 124). And while it would be easy enough to disregard Furnivall's habits as mere eccentricities, there is

critical value in understanding what Nick Salvato has described as the “circumstances in which obstruction is a constitutive condition of the work and of the life shaping and shaped by that work” (2016, 31).

I am interested in theorizing how Furnivall’s desire to avoid work is itself an alternative form of scholarly labor which, as Salvato has argued, amounts to “*lazing*, a cultivation of attention and rumination that we might profitably distinguish from the sense of state of stasis or ossification” (2016, 69). In the process of articulating this alternative formulation of labor, I find Kathi Weeks explanation of ‘antiwork’ ethics particularly helpful: “to call these traditional work values into question is not to claim that work is without value ... It is to suggest that there might be a variety of ways to experience the pleasure that we may now find in work, as well as other pleasures that we may wish to discover, cultivate, and enjoy” (2011, 12). That said, I also wish to complicate the notion that Furnivall’s idiosyncratic mode is an always an entirely radical praxis or, as Carolyn Dinshaw has suggested of amateur labor, “miraculously free of the shaping institutions of modernity” (2012, 23). In acknowledging Furnivall’s responsibility in the production of an ‘English’ literary canon, I address how ‘shaping institutions of modernity,’ including Furnivall’s role in the violence of the English colonial project—to which Furnivall’s mention of Teena Rochfort-Smith’s ‘Indian life’ so clearly gestures—make unavoidable the problematics associated with his amateur attachments to academic work ethic.

This chapter concludes with an analysis of Furnivall’s rhetoric of labor deferred as it relates to Hoccleve’s poetical descriptions of unremunerated and tedious work.

Though Furnivall was certainly skeptical of Hoccleve as a man and as a poet, Hoccleve's autobiographical and affectively rich poetry traffics in many of the same expressions of unhappiness with textual labor that we find later in Furnivall's forewords. To this end, I want to consider more closely transhistorical notions of scholarly labor and textual ambivalence vis-à-vis the practice of reading Furnivall through Hoccleve.¹⁰⁰ Boredom, tedium, and digression itself might be, as D'Arcens has suggested of Christine de Pizan's passionate autodidacticism, inherited in medieval studies itself. What can Hoccleve's expressions of boredom and uncertainty tell us about Furnivall's work and vice-versa? And while I do not intend to claim that Furnivall consciously reproduces Hoccleve's work ethic, I propose that by juxtaposing these two literary individuals we might better understand how both aestheticize, formalize, and render critically productive the ambivalent affects associated with literary and bureaucratic forms of intellectual labor and its avoidance.

Working Like a Jackanapes

Furnivall's manner of work is potentially problematic as an object of study because of its seeming illegibility as intellectual labor for both his contemporaries as well as for modern scholars attempting to identify his role in the formation of disciplines related to medieval studies. Furnivall's various labors, though formalized through his creation of several literary societies, was incredibly erratic, self-interested, and, often times to the chagrin of

¹⁰⁰ David Matthews has described "editions which aim to reconstruct originals are themselves postmedieval artefacts ... coloured by contemporary ideologies and ways of going about things" (2015, 168).

his peers, methodologically esoteric. Paradoxically, it was a desire to get away from work that seemed to motivate—perhaps, were intrinsic to—Furnivall’s processes of labor. His notion of scholarly labor, one which was both antiquarian and quickly becoming antiquated, found little support in the halls of more academized institutions in the nineteenth century. This proscribing of Furnivall’s work was the result of what Michel Foucault has described as the desire for “the emergence of something like a great uniform apparatus of knowledge” (2003, 183).¹⁰¹ To the greater academic apparatus taking shape in the nineteenth century, Furnivall’s style of work was untenable and dangerous; it threatened to undermine, perhaps distract from, the standardization of scholarly detachment quickly solidifying in academic institutions.

Rather than reproducing the terms of institutionally sanctioned forms of labor, however, this section contends Furnivall’s methodological idiosyncrasies are critically valuable precisely because of their illegibility within academic institutions. Furnivall’s labor practices reveal the extent to which notions of academic rigor were formulated and, to great extent, are still predicated on the denial of a scholar’s personal subjectivity and normative notions of productive time. Lee Patterson has argued that medieval studies as a discipline “requires a dauntingly long apprenticeship, with all the implications of servitude within a patriarchal system that the term implies ... compliance rather than

¹⁰¹ Jack Halberstam has elaborated on Foucault’s ‘great uniform apparatus’ suggesting that “[d]isciplines qualify and disqualify, legitimate and delegitimate, reward and punish; most important, they statically reproduce themselves and inhibit dissent” (2011, 10). Dinshaw later explains that within the context of professionalized labor: “The intended audience for their work consists of others like them or aspiring to be like them; they themselves have been trained, after all, in the fields that they are now furthering” (2012, 22).

originality tends to be the earliest career objective of the medievalist” (1990, 102). By engaging with and reframing those features of Furnivall’s work for which he is most often criticized, I suggest the potential efficacy of such features insofar as they undermine the very premise of and usefully challenge academic institutions’ overdetermined valuation of a detached and disaffected approach to intellectual labor.

One of Furnivall’s most vocal contemporary critics was Sir Frederic Madden, Keeper of Manuscripts for the British Library and editor of the magisterial *Syr Gawayne: A Collection of Ancient Romance-Poems*, harbored a notorious distaste for and noted suspicion toward the quality of Furnivall’s work. In 1868, Madden described his feelings toward Furnivall’s editions: “As to that jackanapes Mr. Furnivall, I think it is a matter of great regret that he should be allowed to edit any works of the Society. His style of writing is thoroughly disgusting, and his ignorance is on par with his bad taste” (qtd. in Benzie 1983, 130-1).¹⁰² Madden’s attitude toward Furnivall was ambivalent, however, as Madden would later go on to write a letter of recommendation for Furnivall’s hiring as a Professor of English Literature at King’s College, “he did not object to speaking well of the man [Furnivall]” (Ackerman 1979, 27). Furnivall did not ultimately receive this position.

Others were decidedly more aggressive in their articulation of their dislike of Furnivall. In 1873, Professor E. A. Freeman, Regius Professor of Modern History at

¹⁰² A few months later, Madden detailed his correspondence with Furnivall, “I received a note from that coxcomb Furnivall ... I do not choose to take any trouble for a fellow like F[urnivall] and I wonder he is not ashamed to write to me after his base conduct in 1866” (qtd. in Benzie 1983, 131).

Oxford in the late nineteenth century, likens Furnivall's behavior to a kind of insanity in his correspondence with James A. H. Murray, primary editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary* following Furnivall's abdication. "Put Furnivall in an asylum," Freeman declares, "and I will join E. E. Text Society at once!" Elsewhere Freeman wrote to Murray affirming that he "was not going to be bullied into joining it by the outrageous abuse which the Society's madman ... thought good ... to hurl at me in some of his prefaces. Why do not some of the sane members of the Society chain him up ... or gag him" (qtd. in Murray 1977, 90). Though Murray himself was far less severe in his criticism of Furnivall, he was not without his own quarrels regarding Furnivall's habits of communication and eccentric self-fashioning. Murray observes of Furnivall's work on the *New English Dictionary*: "Mr F. J. Furnivall (who has an itching for annoying people) has been worrying me for some time ... I do not believe in the soundness of his judgement or the sufficiency of his scholarship; and therefore he tries to get me in trouble" (qtd. in Murray 1977; 192).¹⁰³ There is no lack of contemporary examples, then, of those who would distance themselves from Furnivall's style of work and unconventional person.

What is more interesting are the opinions of the individuals who worked closely with Furnivall and still managed to consider him a friend despite his idiosyncrasies. In now infamous correspondence with James A. H. Murray, Walter W. Skeat professor of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge University and improvised institutional interlocutor for

¹⁰³ Furnivall found ample means to upset those around him; as W. P. Ker suggests, "It is not to be denied either by his best friends, that he was often aggressive and inconsiderate" ([1910] 1976, 378).

Furnivall, wrote to Murray warning him of the EETS creator's floundering reputation among the institutions from which he sought publishing support: "Somehow, [Furnivall] isn't believed in at the Universities. It has arisen from his odd prefaces, etc., & modes of expression ... your present chance, a good one, will all come to grief unless you listen to all he says, & then *systematically & effectively disregard* it all in practice" (qtd. in Murray 1977; 148). Despite this call to actively ignore Furnivall's manner of work, Skeat remained close to Furnivall.

In an essay collection celebrating Furnivall's seventy-fifth birthday, Skeat composed a poem in mock Middle English which placed Furnivall alongside the "clerk ... of Oxenford" described in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*:

A CLERK ther was of Cauntebrigge also
That unto rowing haddè long y-go.
Of thinnè shids wold he shippès make
And he was nat right fat, I undertake. (1911, 1-4)¹⁰⁴

In praise "of the great services rendered to English literature ... by the late Dr. Furnivall," Skeat gives Furnivall precisely what he most wanted; that is, Skeat posthumously facilitates Furnivall's conversation with Chaucer, albeit textually, through his addition to the *Canterbury Tales* (1910, 174). In correspondence from 1869, Henry Bradshaw, who likewise worked closely with Furnivall, bluntly told Furnivall that he was "very aggravating sometimes, particularly about the poisonous way in which you insist on editing and prefacing your books" (qtd. in Prothero 1888, 217). Even these criticisms

¹⁰⁴ See Skeat (1911, 178-80). Skeat even attributes this poem to a fictitious page of MS. Harley 7334, "fol. 999, back."

were tempered, however, with regard for Furnivall's work ethic. Skeat expresses confusion concerning while nevertheless praising Furnivall's energy: "Your 'go-a-head-iveness' puzzles me sometimes, but it's an element of success, so go-ahead, old fellow, say I, and good luck go with you" (qtd. in Benzie 1983; 126).¹⁰⁵ Both Skeat and Bradshaw recognized the potential consequences and stresses which might result from working with Furnivall but continued to do so out of an apparent admiration for Furnivall and respect for his work.

Anonymous reviews of Furnivall's editions expressed similar incredulity regarding the tone and content of his forewords. For example, in the 1867 issue of *The Athenæum*, an anonymous review of *Education in Early England* describes the public reception of Furnivall's prefaces, which are "marked by some eccentricity of expression," as leaving "some members of the Society hav[ing] felt their propriety a little shocked" (532). The reviewer responds here to a direct address made by Furnivall to any of his readers unsettled by his choice of terms in a footnote to the 1868 edition of *The Babees Book*:

If any Member should take offence at any expressions in this or any future Preface of mine, as a few did at some words in the last I wrote, I ask such Members to consider the first maxim in their Boke of Curtasye, *Don't look a gift horse in the mouth*. Prefaces are gift horses; and if mine buck or shy now and then, I ask their riders to sit steady, and take it easy. On the

¹⁰⁵ Bradshaw notes that Furnivall "writes (letters) with the most perfect fluency, and gets through an immense amount of work besides (I wish I could)" (qtd. in Prothero 1888, 117).

present one at least they'll be carried across some fresh country worth seeing. (1868b, i[n4])

Furnivall articulates a self-reflexive understanding of the volatility of his prefaces; his introductions, as Evans has argued of medieval prologues, “are in fact notoriously unstable” (1999, 373). While Furnivall cannot promise that all his textual excursions will be productive, the foreword’s instability, metaphorized here as a horse ‘bucking’ and ‘shying,’ is “[o]n the present one at least” is worth seeing through (1868a, i[n4]). We might begin to see, then, how Furnivall acts to “redefine distraction itself ... by way of alighting on its uses” (Salvato 2016, 163-4). Furthermore, as Anna Cotterill has argued of early modern digression, Furnivall’s “circuitous, distended progress [is] shaped by pressures to defend, to complicate and resist, and to attack—pressures that appear to kidnap his narrative away from the conventional expectations of the genre” (2004, 6-7).

The reviewer sympathizes, however, with those readers who found Furnivall’s remarks in poor taste. Indulging Furnivall’s equestrian metaphor, the reviewer suggests that though Furnivall “has called [the preface] a gift horse, warranted to go easy if the rider will not bother him,” “the warranty fails in many respects.” The reviewer describes the unruliness and unpredictability of Furnivall’s introductory materials in similar terms—“The steed will not go straight; he is half way over a road when he turns suddenly round is off with his rider back, beyond the place where the ride began.” The reviewer concludes that Furnivall “must have had mischief in his mind when he told those who

had complained of his former prefatory nags, that if they would only mount this one, they would find him easy to ride or drive” (*Ath.* 1867, 533).¹⁰⁶

This unruliness is, despite our potential discomfort, an integral part of the prefatory form. According to Jacques Derrida, the preface exists “only after the forging of the irruptive track of a method that is actually *put in practice* as a path that breaks ground and constructs itself as it goes along, without a predetermined itinerary” (1981, 38). Thus, contrary to this reviewer’s understanding of Furnivall’s request, we might recognize Furnivall’s appeal to his readers not as a failed warranty, but an explicit expression of how his digressiveness, meandering, and misdirection function in service of more idiosyncratic forms of intellectual production.

In an issue of *The Saturday Review*, an unnamed reviewer takes umbrage with Furnivall’s theological discussion: “One would have thought that it was among the objects of an Early English Text Society to preserve the purity of the English tongue, and that it was not among its objects to meddle with controversial theology.”¹⁰⁷ The reviewer accuses Furnivall of trading in “Protestant twaddle” which “is hardly civil ... before people some of whom may quite possibly think that the comical notions with which Mr. Furnivall amuses himself are essential articles of faith” (*SR* XXIV 1867, 259).¹⁰⁸ The

¹⁰⁶ Parenthetical citations for *The Athenæum* will be abbreviated using *Ath.* as well as the issue year and page numbers.

¹⁰⁷ Merle Mowbray Bevington suggests that this unnamed reviewer is, perhaps unsurprisingly, “pretty certainly E. A. Freeman”—the same scholar who suggested that Furnivall belonged ‘in an asylum’ ([1941] 1966, 252).

¹⁰⁸ Parenthetical citations for *The Saturday Review* will be abbreviated *SR* as well as the issue, year, and page numbers.

cultivation of this contentious religious discourse, however, appears to have been Furnivall's intention; he plainly explains his work on the texts serves as an attempt to "know of our forefathers ... what their religious belief and superstitious fancies were ... all the nonsense, as well as the expressions of the pure, simple faith, that through life and death our men of old held to" (1867a, vi).¹⁰⁹ The reviewer for *The Saturday Review* still manages to find some virtue in Furnivall's otherwise controversial introduction applauding the fact that Furnivall clearly enjoys the literature—"we are cordially glad to find that Mr. Furnivall can appreciate the poems which he edits" (*SR* XXIV 1867, 259-60).¹¹⁰

At one point, the reviewer considers the relative eccentricity of Furnivall's foreword, "we are quite convinced that there is no one among Mr. Furnivall's fellow-workers who would begin a preface in this sort of jaunty fashion" (*SR* XXIV 1867, 259). A review of *Education in Early England* found in the same issue of *The Saturday Review* likewise criticizes Furnivall's "very peculiar doctrines of editorial responsibility" (*SR* XXIV 1867, 227). This 'jaunty fashion' no doubt derives from the conversational tone Furnivall adopts in his foreword in which he describes the manuscript on which the

¹⁰⁹ Furnivall would later persist in this kind of inflammatory writing elsewhere. In *The Fifty Earliest English Wills*, Furnivall writes, "the most surprizing [*sic*] and regrettable thing in these Wills is the amount of money shown to hav [*sic*] been wasted in vain prayers ... I only hope some sensible Executors handed over the money to the Testators' wives and children, or the poor" (xii).

¹¹⁰ Bevington describes this style of review as "giv[ing] the reader an adequate idea of the editing, but only after abuse of Furnivall, whether for his ignorance of history or for insinuating Protestant, anti-Puseyite sentiments into a facetious preface" ([1941] 1966, 252-3).

edition is based, Lambeth Palace Library MS. 853, as “a chubby vellum quarto ... As nice a little volume as one would wish to handle; a pleasing contrast to the shabby, scrubby, paper Percy folio of two hundred years later that I am now working at” (1867b, v). Furnivall’s fond and highly personalized description of the Lambeth Palace manuscript and his open admission of preferring the ease of one scholarly task to another appears to surprise the reviewer. Regarding Furnivall’s 1866 edition of *Political, Religious, and Love Poems*, a reviewer cautions Furnivall against his uncouth style of writing directly:

we must really warn Mr. Furnivall that the sort of garrulity and small jocularities with which he amuses himself in his preface is altogether out of place in any writing which is meant to take its chance in the wide world ... We ourselves, for instance, are wholly indifferent to Mr. Furnivall’s little troubles. We do not care to hear how some other member of the Society called Mr. Furnivall’s book a pig-stye. We don’t see why anyone should be expected to pay the most infinitesimal fraction of seven shillings and sixpence to be told any such nonsense (SR XXII 1866, 764)

The reviewer is unmistakably agitated by Furnivall’s tone in his preface. Likewise, the reviewer is indifferent to Furnivall’s interpersonal quarrels, his “little familiar squibs,” which take up a sizable portion of the preface’s conclusion (SR XXII 1866, 764).¹¹¹ The reviewer takes further issue with where Furnivall chooses to spend his intellectual

¹¹¹ Furnivall devotes the conclusion of his preface to addressing a very specific critic: “I am sorry that the way in which the text of one of these Poems is here printed, has led one learned and much-esteemed friend—who (unluckily for us) devotes his spare energy to denouncing the Committee in general and me in particular, instead of editing texts for us all--into calling this volume a pig-stye” (1866, xviii).

energies as it appears in the preface to *Political, Religious, and Love Poems*. Furnivall freely admits that “[o]f the pieces now issued some have been printed elsewhere, and of most, perhaps better texts exist” but he is elsewhere quick to suggest that *some* version of the text is better than none. “He wants *some* text, and that at once,” Furnivall explains as he invokes a hypothetical subscriber desperate for these Middle English works (1866, ix). As Antony Singleton has argued, publication was no longer a means to an end but an end unto itself—“the aim of publication was simply publication itself” (2005, 94).¹¹²

Furnivall clarifies that, while this is not meant “as a justification for an Editor to make no trouble about his work,” his personal method for selecting texts requires that he ultimately be sole “judge [of] how the trouble he can, and must, take, can best be applied” (1866, ix[n1]). Furnivall advocates for his own method of printing while recognizing that it may not, often will not, reproduce the ‘best’ text available. Furthermore, Furnivall suggests that printing the ‘bad’ manuscript is as important as his eventual printing of a ‘better’ copy. Their differences, according to Furnivall, are critically valuable insofar as they serve “as an instructive instance to readers in general, and a caution to careless people like myself, of how one of those scribes to whom we owe almost all our knowledge of our forefathers’ minds, had chanced to go astray” (1866, xviii-xix). Furnivall thus juxtaposes his process of labor with that of the medieval scribes themselves; he finds medieval precedent in his modern methods. His paralleling of “careless people like myself” and “those scribes ... [who] chanced to go astray” is an

¹¹² This echoes an earlier sentiment of K. M. Elisabeth Murray, “[Furnivall’s] aim was always to get the text—any text—into print and made available as soon as possible” (1977, 96).

explicit recognition of his own idiosyncratic tendency and a broader work ethic which provides unexpected intellectual and creative results.

Furnivall's reviewer in *The Saturday Review* is, however, less convinced of the efficacy of this method: "Mr. Furnivall seems to be so anxious to print poems that he does not care what poems he prints. This is hardly the frame of mind in which a man should sit down to edit Early English Texts" (*SR* XXII 1866, 764). The reviewer's appeal to the proper 'frame of mind' suggests that at least some part of Furnivall's readership found his impetuous mode incommensurable with the perception of the subtlety and patience required of work with Middle English texts. It likewise signals an explicit interest in what D'Arcens has described as the "upholding of fastidious methodology as a means of disciplinary self-regulation" which has little interest in Furnivall's personality, his reactionary mode of writing, and autobiographical forms of self-critique (2004, 134).

This does not mean, however, that Furnivall was content to let this perceived slight pass without response. In his 1867 edition of *The Stations of Rome*, of the five pages used for the preface, the first three are spent on textual matters and the remaining pages are filled with a lengthy postscript addressed to the reviewer of *Political, Religious, and Love Poems*. Using his prefatory postscript as a bully pulpit, Furnivall admonishes the reviewer claiming that they "[do] not understand in what sense we publish our Texts." Furnivall then elaborates further on this 'sense': "I conceive myself entitled to write Prefaces as to a circle of my friends; for such I look on Subscribers as being" (1867a,

vii).¹¹³ This same page is consumed almost entirely by a footnote that details yet another of Furnivall's grievances with *The Saturday Review*. He reproduces at length from an earlier publication, *The Reader*, a defense of fellow EETS editor G. H. Kingsley's 1865 edition of *Francis Thynne's Animaduersions* in which, due to an uncorrected printing error, the thorn (*þ*) appears in the text as the letter *r*:

For this [Kingsley] was jeered at by his reviewer in the regular vulgar-little-boy fashion; and then, by way of displaying his own learning, the little boy went on to explain the difference between *th* and *r*. But as strutting daws unwittingly drop the peacock's feathers out of their tails, so this unlucky boy either did not know or did not notice, that he or his printer had put an Anglo-Saxon *w* (*þ*) for the *th* (*þ*); so that there, while he (the clever reviewer) was pointing at Dr. Kingsley for his ignorance or carelessness, he was all the time displaying his own, and deliberately forcing every one's attention to the display. (*TR* 1866, 123)¹¹⁴

Well aware by this point that his opponents think his mode of discourse to be puerile, Furnivall continues to accost the reviewer telling him that rather than “sneer[ing], it would be more like a generous gentleman to send his subscription to the Society, and print a text for it with his *Saturday* pay.” He then turns to “a very stupid public” to criticize England's broader societal failure in supporting the labors of EETS: “Every man

¹¹³ Writing for the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, W. P. Ker suggested of Furnivall's rhetorical stylings that “there [was] little grace, except what comes from his sincerity and the likeness of his written to his spoken words, and of his spoken words to his own nature” (1910, 378).

¹¹⁴ Parenthetical citations for *The Reader* will be abbreviated using *TR* as well as the issue year and page number.

of culture is bound to support us; and yet hardly any do ... The apathy of English lettered men on this subject is a disgrace to them” (1867a, ix). Furnivall’s use of postscript, footnote, and citation here creates a labyrinthian paratextual apparatus—a veritable nesting doll of digression—that is as rhetorically complex as it is amusing.

Aside from the incredibly combative stance taken in several of Furnivall’s prefaces and self-referential asides, contemporary criticisms of Furnivall’s work likewise insisted on the inappropriateness of the congenial discourses of his introductions. As Stephanie Trigg has suggested, “Of all modern Chaucer scholars, Frederick Furnivall ... was the one who most loved to commune with Chaucer in his voluble and eccentric prefaces” (2001, 102). Furnivall’s 1871 *Trial-Forward to My ‘Parallel-Text Edition of Chaucer’s Minor Poems’* suggests this desire to speak with Chaucer quite lucidly. Furnivall concludes the preface by explaining how he must now leave his current work and, in doing so, disrupts any sense of the foreword as a solely pragmatic paratextual apparatus which itself exists ‘out-of-time.’ In a pseudo-epistolary voice, Furnivall bids farewell to the reader: “Here for the present I must break off, as I haven’t time to study further the rest of the poems just now” (1871, 91). We are made to inhabit Furnivall’s present moment; no matter how many times a reader returns to this *Trial-Forward*, a title which itself suggests temporal instability and textual impermanency, they too must leave with Furnivall. With it, our consideration of the poems necessarily ends as well.

Furnivall continues by detailing more precisely what it is that is pulling him from his textual study. On holiday “for six weeks” at the moment of writing the present foreword, Furnivall explains how he is “away from almost all my books and literary

friends.” Holiday is not the place for work, least of all because Furnivall’s materials and friends are not available for consultation. Furnivall continues by relating Chaucer to England’s flora and fauna: “among bluebells, honey-suckles, laburnums, cuckoos, and nightingales; Chaucer’s daisies under my feet, his heavenly harmony of birds about me, and his bright old England all around.” Furnivall likewise unsettles with readers’ sense of temporality through a series of rhetorical questions:

Wasn’t [Chaucer] at Windsor Castle that we see so well from Cooper’s Hill? Didn’t he see and love ‘the river winding at its own sweet will’, and rejoice in all the sights and sounds of spring and early summer—chill and late though they were, like ours this year! Truly he did; and loved the sweet English girls around him—not only girls, but women all. His early hopeless love didn’t harden, but opened his heart. (1871, 91-2)

As David Matthews has argued of this moment, “[w]riting *about* Chaucer ... is suddenly replaced by something much more primitive and immediate: being absorbed into Chaucer’s England” (1997, 17).¹¹⁵ Furnivall likewise uses a line from William Wordsworth’s ‘Composed upon Westminster Bridge,’ “the river winding at its own sweet will,” to engage in a kind of poetic juxtaposition which pairs ‘old and new’ English versifiers.¹¹⁶ The very form of the Wordsworth poem which Furnivall chooses to quote—

¹¹⁵ As Matthews has likewise argued, “Chaucer is out of time ... he participates in something universal in poetry, which transcends time” (1997, 9).

¹¹⁶ I think it worth pointing out that Furnivall seems to misquote Wordsworth’s ‘Composed upon Westminster Bridge.’ Where Furnivall writes “the river winding as its own sweet will,” the text of Wordsworth’s poem reads, “The river *glideth* at his own sweet will” (1802, 12; emphasis my own). While a small detail, it suggests that despite the complexity of Furnivall’s trans-temporal coupling of Chaucer and Wordsworth, Furnivall was prone to this kind of error in several contexts.

that of the Petrarchan sonnet—represents a formal association of Chaucer’s fourteenth century Italian influences and Furnivall’s own nineteenth century study of Chaucer. Even the weather suggests Chaucer’s England as the poet’s “spring and early summer—chill and late though they were” are nevertheless “like ours this year!” For Furnivall, the value of working on Chaucer was self-evident—“one ought to work for the sake of him.” And yet, Furnivall is quick to suggest too that Chaucer would approve of and encourage the avoidance of work and the taking of holiday: “he’d have given us all a holiday, I’m sure.” Like the medieval scribes who “chanced to go astray,” Furnivall derives his work ethic from a medieval source—or, at least, what he imagines a medieval source would think.¹¹⁷ Furnivall likewise begs his readers to excuse his choosing leisure over further work: “so, reader, let me put off Part II of these *Trial-Forewords* for a time” (1871, 92). Chaucer becomes a sympathetic literary figure whose poetry is necessary but whose work can always justifiably be deferred.¹¹⁸

Furnivall’s habit of representing himself as always needing to leave for more pressing matters suggests a practice of work which is meandering, digressive, and leisurely. Because of the incredible scope of the project which Early English Text Society

¹¹⁷ As Stephanie Trigg has suggested, “it is an important trope for modern criticism to assure itself that Chaucer would have approved, or been pleased by, what we do” (2002, 230).

¹¹⁸ Dinshaw suggests that despite being “[i]ntimately attached to his object of study, [Furnivall] nonetheless takes a break, in the comforting knowledge that his author, Chaucer, would want him to” (2012, 28). While I agree with the sentiment broadly, my goal here is to consider how attachment and leisure are not diametrically opposed nor mutually exclusive. Here, Furnivall’s performance of attachment means engaging in leisure.

sought to complete, Furnivall and his subeditors were prone to delays and often worked quite slowly. Singleton has suggested that the causes of such delays varied significantly: “unforeseen disruption to editors’ work ... [s]ometimes illness or death intervened ... [i]n some cases, production was delayed because the scale of the project turned out to be much larger than originally envisaged” (Singleton 2005, 109). Furnivall himself seemed to have an incredible ability to estimate just how much time such projects would take—even if that amount concerned him. He correctly predicted that the third and final volume of *Hoccleve’s Works* would take around twenty years due to the other work of EETS. To this point, Singleton has argued that “the average length of time between the publication of the first and final parts of multiple-part editions was 10.7 years ... [t]his was in fact EETS’s common working practice, irrespective of whether an edition was issued in a single or in multiple parts” (2005, 110). Like Furnivall and, perhaps, because of Furnivall, EETS had a way of taking its undue time.

And these delays were likely inevitable as editorial methodologies were only beginning to formalize in the late nineteenth century. In the case of the those enlisted for help compiling words for the *New English Dictionary*, Furnivall was convinced of “the efficacy of voluntary cooperation ... he seems to have envisioned the production of the new dictionary as flowing seamlessly from the unpaid labor of volunteers” (Naiman 1997, 128).¹¹⁹ Similarly, most of the Furnivall’s work with EETS depended exclusively on the unremunerated labor of volunteers. To that end, Furnivall could not afford to be too fastidious about the volunteers he employed. As Singleton has noted, “As labour was

¹¹⁹ See also Murray (1977, 137).

in short supply, the only qualifications necessary appear to have been an enthusiasm for the subject, available time, and a willingness to work” (2005, 114). However, it would be misleading to simply attribute Furnivall’s practices of labor to simple necessity. This form of cooperative labor was essential to Furnivall’s political investments as well; as Sidney Lee has argued, Furnivall’s literary work represented the “pursuit [of] the principles of association and co-operation which he advocated in other relations of life” (1912, 64).

As Trigg has suggested, Furnivall “worked from the optimistic assumption that given enough enthusiasm, anyone could read, transcribe, and edit a medieval text” (2002, 164-5). Renate Haas has suggested Furnivall viewed his literary labor as actively providing the working class with the means “to lead working men to a deeper understanding of their language, to encourage them to think for themselves and trust their own experience in the face of inherited or pseudo-learned authority” (1989, 321). In taking on these volunteers, Furnivall put into practice the political principles which he developed in his time as a Christian Socialist, and which led him to contribute to the establishment of the Working Men’s College in 1854. In response to Furnivall’s often unqualified geniality and ability to work across divisions of social class, Edith Rickert described him as being “delighted to bring about intercourse between people of the most varied types and ranks, sometimes indeed to their discomfort” (1911, 167). Furnivall’s consideration of socioeconomic issues in England and desire to put medieval texts in the hands of quotidian peoples had a demonstrable material impact on the production of EETS editions. In addition to having most of the work done for EETS performed by

volunteers, the editions' use of a "cheap format and ... paper covers" ensured the integrity of their modest price (Singleton 2005, 95). For Furnivall, then, textual work was necessarily socio-political work.

This kind of cost conscious and inexpensive style of production stands in stark contrast to the more exclusive antiquarian societies that preceded EETS. For example, the Roxburghe Club ensured that only its thirty-one members had access to the editions produced for the organization.¹²⁰ John Munro describes the conditions of textual production via the Roxburghe Club as incongruous with Furnivall's political sensibilities: "the Roxburghe Club, with its very limited editions, was by no means a democratic body ... Furnivall desired a far greater output than it was capable of ... to bring home to modern men the story and thought of their fathers" (1911, xlvi).¹²¹ That said, while several other literary societies consulted their members for suggestions regarding future editions, EETS offered no such opportunity to its members. Benzie has suggested, however, that this feature was the not a result of "Furnivall's peculiar brand of democracy" but rather a necessary consequence of the organization's comprehensive aims, "[t]he EETS ... was obviously far more concerned with seizing opportunities when they arose" (1983, 126). Furnivall's goal of making medieval texts more widely available meant that the

¹²⁰ See also Matthews (1999, 104-9)

¹²¹ See also Benzie (1983, 71-3); Phillipa Levine has suggested that organizations like the Roxburghe Club found few contemporary supporters aside from its members, "The deliberate attempt by the tiny and exclusive Roxburghe Club in 1812 to create rare and luxurious editions was greeted with disapproval amongst the antiquarian community at large" (1986, 14-5).

organization would print any manuscript that he or his volunteers were allowed to handle—regardless of consumer interest in its contents.

This lack of regularized methodology combined with the fact that the work of the Philological and Early English Text Societies was done by volunteers meant that Furnivall was saddled with the task of training individuals in editorial processes. Furnivall taught these volunteers to work with texts according to his own idiosyncratic method. The notorious haste and carelessness with which Furnivall sought to finish projects was brought to bear on his unsuspecting volunteers. Like Furnivall's later endeavors, his work on the dictionary "[a]s an editor ... lacked the accuracy and the patience essential" to ensure the kind of meticulousness necessary for such a project; despite this, Furnivall's "sustained enthusiasm—however misdirected" managed to spur projects ever onward (Murray 1977, 137). In time, however, "Readers began to lose interest and fall off and so did subeditors. Some grew too old or too sick ... Furnivall himself had diverted his interest to his other manifold activities and without his drive the machine ground slowly to a halt" (1977, 139). Furnivall's waning interest in his work as an editor for the *New English Dictionary* eventually led to the appointment of James A. H. Murray, a man who could appreciate the "exact, tedious work [that] would have to be done," to the position in 1879 (1977, 147).

And while the Early English Text Society would occupy Furnivall until his death in 1910, he never truly standardized his methods. W. P. Ker described Furnivall as maintaining "the spring and energy of a life unimpeded by routine" (1911, 94). Furnivall was thus prone to making mistakes in his editions. Though, Furnivall was never

particularly ashamed of such foibles. In fact, Furnivall often drew attention to his own mistakes.¹²² For example, in his 1885 edition of *Harleian MS 7334*, Furnivall acknowledges his editorial shortcomings: “It is as accurate as twice reading of every line with the MS by me can make it; but no doubt little slips have happened: they always will befall” (vi). This lenient methodology almost certainly helped shape his belief that *any* person, regardless of education or background, could edit. In practice, however, this belief caused Furnivall and his volunteer editors constant grief. Alfred W. Pollard recalls being asked to work with medieval texts on behalf of Furnivall without any sort formal training:

I first came to know the Doctor [Furnivall] about 1885, when he took me ... to edit a volume for the Wyclif Society, a good instance of his lightheartedness, as at that time I had never read a page of Mediaeval Latin, nor looked at a manuscript except through a glass case. The first book, however, happened to be fairly easy, and I got through it well enough to be given another, which was very far indeed from being easy, and over which I at first went so wrong that the Clarendon Press sent a private memorandum to headquarters to report that they had never had any proofs so heavily corrected. (1911, 147)

¹²² Donald C. Baker has suggested that “[i]t is owing to Furnivall’s own blunt honesty that we are as aware of his imperfections as we are” (1984, 158).

Though Furnivall's intention was to train volunteers as editors, they often reproduced his characteristic proclivity for mistakes.¹²³ Ironically, when faced with the fruits of his unique brand of guidance, Furnivall was often disappointed by the resulting work of his volunteers. However, even this admonition was tempered by Furnivall's characteristic self-deprecation. William Benzie has suggested that "despite Furnivall's anger at the mistakes of his editors, his own work was not at all times flawless or meticulous, and at least some of his helpers' shortcomings can be traced to his occasionally unsatisfactory editorial methods and supervision" (1983, 150). On the topic of the perceived 'errors' in Carl Horstmann's 1893 edition of *The Life of St. Katherine of Alexandria*, Furnivall ultimately admits, "I don't pretend to set myself over him as a person who hasn't made as bad or worse messes; no doubt I've made plenty more ... All our workers can't be of the first class; we must often put up with some of the third and fifth ... No very great harm has been done" (1893, xxvii).

Indications of Furnivall's operative form of amateur time and work ethic appear throughout his forewords and communications. Furnivall admits to bouts of laziness throughout his forewords. In Furnivall's 1885 edition of *The Harleian MS 7334 of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, he lists the various activities which distract him from his work. He lists several of his societies for which he owes labor—"the Philological Soc.,

¹²³ For example, Carl Horstmann's 1893 edition of *The Life of St. Katherine of Alexandria* contains a foreword in which Furnivall openly criticizes the manuscript chosen for the text of the present edition. Furnivall explains, "[I]t is clear that any moderately careful editor would not have adopted [Arundel MS 396] as the basis of his text ... I could not help telling Dr. Horstmann that his edition was a 'mess'" (1893, xxviii-xxviii).

and occasional work for its Dictionary, Early English Texts, and Wyclif’ and so on. These work-related delays give way to more leisurely pursuits which nevertheless consume Furnivall’s time in a similar fashion: “Sculling-Fours, Kangaroo bicycles, evenings out, and general laziness” (1885, viii).

Importantly, Furnivall then suggests that he will not *ever* get to this work, nor does he have any serious intention to. He admits, “I fear that edition must be left for some more learned and energetic person than myself. Let it suffice that the Chaucer Society has cleared the way for the coming man.” Of course, editing all of Chaucer’s works is a monumental task unto itself; Furnivall knew this. However, he appears—as he always has been—more interested in starting the process than finishing it. Indeed, Furnivall’s work ethic was less invested in the exactitude of the edition as it was in the process of its creation. For Furnivall, the conditions of textual production were more edifying than its ‘completeness.’ We might begin to understand Furnivall’s admissions of laziness as articulations of a self-invested work ethic, one which is “more or less commonly liquidifying certain regimes of truth, order, education, economy, and labor as they celebrate lazing and the kind of work that it conduces” (Salvato 2016, 71-2). Furnivall concludes this forward with the familiar suggestion that some other event, this time “our Rowing-Club Dance,” pulls him away from his present task of composing a foreword (1885, viii).

Similarly, Furnivall’s 1868 edition of *The Babees Book* features a footnote which I have previously described in this chapter wherein he expresses boredom with the task of editorial work and compares his prefaces to proverbial ‘gift horses.’ The first line of this

footnote articulates his irritation with the project of locating, editing, and printing the present texts: “If any one thinks it a bore to read these Prefaces, I can assure him it was a much greater bore to have to hunt up the material for them, and set aside other pressing business for it” (1868b, i[n4]).¹²⁴ In addition to offering further evidence of Furnivall’s prefatory congeniality and candor, his use of ‘other pressing business’ here suggests a habit of rhetorical deferral by which Furnivall can always, and often does, gesture to other labor he needs to finish. In doing so, Furnivall provides justification for the state of his present work. As Singleton has suggested, “While Furnivall accepts that scholarly propriety requires the production of a Preface, he asserts his right to execute in the manner he sees fit” (2001, 178). It allows him to offer such reasoning *ad infinitum*: the present work appears as it does because of work on another project.

There are cases too where Furnivall makes no attempt to conceal his dislike of the author or poetry he is presently working with. There is a marked contrast between Furnivall’s unbridled adoration of Chaucer, whose work makes one “delight and love ... [his] genial bright soul,” and his treatment of someone like early modern poet John Lane (1868a, 2). Lane, who Furnivall derogatorily refers to as “the old versifier,” attempted to finish Chaucer’s ‘incomplete’ *Squire’s Tale* and, in doing so, becomes the object of

¹²⁴ Elsewhere Furnivall describes the various forms of boredom associated with his textual production. In Furnivall’s 1868 *Temporary Preface to the Six-Text Edition of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, he explains that his boredom affected his editorial methods. Furnivall explains that “the want of a hyphen or letter often threw me out so, that I had to read a word or a line twice to know what it was.” Furthermore, presuming a like-minded readership, he suggests that because the process of having to reread the text was “a bore to me, [it] would, I supposed, be a bore to others” (1868a, 88).

Furnivall's defensive fury (1887, xii).¹²⁵ In the foreword to Lane's *Continuation of the Squire's Tale*, we find Furnivall actively warning his readership that they would be better off reading Lane's *Tom Tell-Troth's Message* which was published by the New Shakspeare [*sic*] Society in 1876.¹²⁶ "[R]eaders of the present volume may perhaps care to look at [*Tell-Troth*]," Furnivall admits, "It is better worth reading than this Continuation of the *Squire's Tale*, little as that is to say for it" (1887, xi).

Furnivall continues to excoriate Lane just one page later, "The present reprint is due to no merit in Lane's poem, *for it has none*, but only to the fact that it is a continuation of one of Chaucer's Tales, and therefore ought to be put in type for the Chaucer Society" (1887, xi-xii; emphasis my own). Furnivall expresses pity for Lane's attempt, "he'd have written a better poem if he had been able," and condescendingly suggests that the only virtue to be found in the poem is that Lane "did his best, for his Master's love" (1887, xii). Furnivall thus reveals that his work ethic includes working on subjects, figures, and topics despite his clear aesthetic distaste and, perhaps, personal contempt for them. In this case, Lane's poem is reprinted for no other reason but for its relationship to Chaucer's works. While Furnivall's dedication to Chaucer was productive insofar as it gave rise to an edition of Lane's *Continuation*, Furnivall's foreword catalogues precisely how unhappy he felt about having to do so.

¹²⁵ While potentially a more benign use of the word 'versifier' to simply mean "[o]ne who versifies or composes verses; a verser or verse-maker; a poet," it is more likely, given the verbal lashing of Lane that follows and the use of 'poetaster' as a descriptor for him later, that Furnivall means to describe Lane "[w]ith depreciative force: [as a] mere or poor writer of verse(s); a rimester, a poetaster"; see *OED* "versifier, *n.*" (1ab).

¹²⁶ Furnivall *insisted* on spelling Shakespeare as Shakspeare.

Furnivall does not stop there, however, as he then attempts to justify the incomplete state of the *Squire's Tale*. According to Furnivall, "The completion of the *Squire's Tale* would have taxed Chaucer's utmost power, even when he was at his best. The subject is one into which he could have imported little humanity ... a constant strain on his invention and fancy." The text of the *Squire's Tale* was itself a hopeless cause and one which Chaucer was right to abandon—"[t]he work wouldn't have repaid the effort." This kind of Chaucerian *apologia* once again serves an important role in determining how Furnivall imagined himself with relation to the medieval past. If Furnivall imagines that Chaucer abandoned certain works on principle, Furnivall's erratic movement from one project to the next could likewise be justified. He admits as much as he asks his readers, "Who of us, in his own line, has not done the like? Man is mortal; and when a fellow man doesn't see his way thro' a bit of work, it bores him, and he drops it" (1887, xii).¹²⁷ Like the holiday Chaucer would have no doubt approved of, Furnivall's meandering interests and inevitable boredom, rather being detrimental to his work, is yet another point of attachment between himself and Chaucer.

It should be clear, then, that Furnivall's scholarly output was in no way an attempt to curry favor within an institutional structure which "came to legitimate itself through its

¹²⁷ Furnivall continues, "Naturally no real Poet tried to take up Chaucer's unfinished task. But where Angels dare not tread, we know who rush in; and so the Poetaster Lane wrote his Continuation of the *Squire's Tale*, and we wise folk have printed it" (1887, xii-xiii). In referring to Lane as a 'poetaster,' Furnivall consciously adopts the language of the period in which Lane was writing. Although a word coined by Erasmus in Latin in the sixteenth century, 'poetaster' was used by Ben Jonson in English in the seventeenth century to describe "[a]n inferior poet; a writer of poor or trashy verse; a mere versifier"; see *OED* "poetaster, *n.*" (1a).

adherence to scientific standards” and imposition “to ‘forget’ this awkward past with its amateurism and subjectivism” (D’Arcens 2004, 135). As Cotterill has proposed of the digressiveness practiced by early modern authors, though it bears application to Furnivall too, “male writers whose relative privileges of gender then, and canonicity today, need not obscure for us the paradox of the loquacious speakers they produced when they found themselves in weakened and powerless or dangerously ambiguous social and political positions” (2004, 5).¹²⁸ The rise of more formalized notions of English literary and philological study meant the rapid professional and social marginalization of Furnivall and his approach to academic labor in more discrete disciplinary contexts. As Dinshaw explains, “[O]nce the historical and linguistic and literary professions emerged, those working in the shadow of professionals would ever be regarded as underdeveloped” (2012, 26). Furnivall’s forewords are not merely idiosyncrasies but a praxis of self-fashioning and reification against hierarchical institutions that would have him change—or deny altogether—the nature of his attachment to literature.

Learning to Appreciate the Jackanapes

As Joan M. Ferrante and Robert W. Hanning have suggested, “Furnivall’s unregulated enthusiasm, mixing of schemes for textual editing and social reform, lack of concern for procedural niceties or consistency, and ‘in your face’ attitude ... rendered him *persona*

¹²⁸ Joseph R. Urgo has likewise suggested that such distraction does not stem from a lack of attention; rather, inattention is an indication of attention reoriented and reassigned, “We move with distraction past our predicament and turn inattention into art—we require inattention as a mode of survival” (2000, 146).

non grata among more conventional scholars” (1998, xxii). And while Furnivall’s contemporaries held tightly to a work ethic which amounted to an ascetic denial of pleasure, Furnivall himself purposefully refused to make a distinction between his work and his leisure. Frederick M. Padelford, then professor of English language and literature at the University of Washington, recalls the difference in complexions of the sporting Furnivall with the other scholars working in the reading-room of the British Museum: “[Furnivall’s] appearance had been as striking as his manner of work ... His colour was high and his forehead and neck showed evidence of recent sunburn, a contrast to the pale, dull-eyed elderly men about him” (1911, 139). Compared the sallow scholars of the reading-room, Furnivall’s ripe sunburn signaled a commitment to sport—or, at the least, time spent outside—as a manner of preserving his physical and mental health that was ultimately indistinct from his work.

Furnivall thought that a healthy combination of exercise and lazing could do wonders for one’s health. Upon hearing of James A. H. Murray’s stress-induced illness in 1880, Furnivall suggested that Murray simply stop working for a while: “go for a walk, have a bath, or do nothing & rest ... mind, keep well first, do the Dicty [dictionary] next” (qtd. in Murray 1977, 198). As Ward has suggested, though, Murray’s conception of labor meant that “[f]amily, home, nature and leisure [were] incompatible with the hermetic, ascetic, urban workplace” (2000, 93). It is worth noting that Furnivall does not conflate the wellness of the mind with the productivity of Murray’s work on the dictionary; mental and physical health was itself an end worth pursuing. James A. H. Murray, however, insisted on maintaining a standard of taxing meticulousness for his

work on the dictionary—quite unlike Furnivall. Of course, this standard could only be met by “sav[ing] time only at his own expense, by sacrificing his holidays, his family life, his outside interests, his serenity and ultimately his health” (Murray 1977, 217). Furnivall ensured that leisure became an integral part of his work; avoiding work was a necessary feature of work itself. Furnivall’s habit of work, then, suggests a viable alternative to more methodical and academized notions of scholarly production.

And while Furnivall’s insistence on a rapid pace of textual production might at first seem in conflict with his desire to avoid work as often as possible, this seeming contradiction—like his expressions of boredom with work, autobiographical interpolations, and digressive tangents—is part-and-parcel of his highly idiosyncratic notion of intellectual labor. As J. C. Castell and C. F. W. Mead have suggested, “[d]emocratic and radical as he was in his opinions, [Furnivall] was autocratic and obstinate in personal matters” (1911, 24). Furnivall’s need for speed, while certainly moving certain projects ahead, inevitably caused substantial delays in the production of his literary societies. Furnivall’s entire body of work, what John M. Ganim has described as Furnivall’s “indiscriminate attempts at comprehensiveness,” is a testament to the kind of productivity associated with academic projects that have no foreseeable end—or, at least, an end well beyond a single person’s lifetime (1996, 155).¹²⁹

It is worth noting here too that Furnivall had a particular issue with textual work specifically. Furnivall’s enthusiasm as honorary secretary for the Philological Society

¹²⁹ As Matthews has suggested, “A utopian and positivist ambition was at the heart of Furnivall’s societies” (1997, 13).

from 1853 to his death in 1910, a period in which he “had practically done all the secretarial work for many years,” suggests no problem with the more bureaucratic work of managing an organization (Murray 1911, 123). Likewise, as will be discussed later, he finds the work of locating and cataloguing word usage for the *New English Dictionary* to be easy work compared to the editing required for EETS.

This might too have as much to do with Furnivall’s effervescent sociability and desire to be around others than it does the textual work itself. While society meetings meant being around people who challenged Furnivall’s intellect and creativity, textual work was often a solitary and isolating experience. As Dinshaw has suggested, “It was such a sense of pleasure borne of connectedness to the people (or just to people), not some narrowly chronological urgency, that impelled him to edit—or to take a break from editing” (2012, 28). It helped too that Furnivall faced few of the external pressures, like disciplinary or institutional expectations for timeliness, which would otherwise force him to finish his proposed projects. This lack of rigorous scheduling allowed Furnivall to “enjoy the chance irruptions that occur when all is not synched up” (Dinshaw 2012, 22). This temporal elasticity is not a failure of one’s so-called ‘amateur’ attachment to labor, it is a meaningful feature inhered in the quality of amateurism itself.

The forewords to Furnivall’s editions thus suggest that there is a subversive value to and indecorous pleasure in registering one’s own thoughts and feelings within the paratextual margins of an editorial project. Gérard Genette has described the tendency for preface-writers to regard the form as “an obligation ... and often feel [it] is either a duty that is onerous to perform or an exercise that yields a text too tiresome to read even when

the author ... has, nevertheless, devoted himself to it with obvious pleasure, though a pleasure he deems perverse.” Genette continues, “the most appropriate and most productive compromise consists of expressing the sense of unease in the preface itself, in the form of apologies or protests” (1997, 230). The paratextual apparatus thus becomes a lively site of textual experimentation for Furnivall. The effective implementation of this apparatus asks us to consider Furnivall’s editorial and personal eccentricities such that his work is considered affectively entangled and therefore critically illegible. Furnivall, the preface-writer, thus extends “somewhat beyond the supposed subject of his discourse and argue in support of a cause that is broader or possibly wholly different ... a manifesto, a confidence, a settling of accounts, a digression” (Genette 1997, 271). It asks us to feel something toward Furnivall’s personalized practice of labor.¹³⁰

The apprehension caused by Furnivall’s work, like modern critical responses to the images of MS. Cotton Nero A.x. discussed in my first chapter, is critically productive. In this sense, then, Furnivall’s ‘uncouth’ forewords act as a critical form of personal writing. As Nancy K. Miller has explained, “by turning its authorial voice into spectacle, personal writing theorizes the stakes of its own performance ... The embarrassment produced in readers is a sign that it is working” (1991, 24). As Dinshaw has pointed out, amateur modes of work provide the basis for meaningful evaluation of hegemonic institutional structures of knowledge: “Amateur literary activities can expose and critique professional literary activities. Amateur readings, participating in nonmodern ways of

¹³⁰ As one scholar has suggested, we are trained to approach Furnivall’s work with “a grin and a wince” (Upchurch 2003, 1).

apprehending time, can help us to contemplate different ways of being, knowing, and world making” (2012, 24). Both contemporaneous and modern reactions to Furnivall’s work suggests that, even when operating within an institutional apparatus which rewards a scholarly pose of disaffection, such disaffection is never truly possible.

Because Furnivall did not deny the affective dimensions of his work, both personal pleasures and messy in-fighting alike, contemporaries described his forewords as ‘disgusting,’ ‘odd,’ or otherwise ‘poisonous.’ William S. Peterson has argued that Furnivall “placed ammunition in the hands of his enemies by his chatty, self-deprecating ‘Forewords’ ... and by his public pose of breezy carelessness” (2004). Scholarship was no longer a matter of considering and detailing oneself in relation to an object of study; rather, it became a process of disaffection and detachment—qualities by which Furnivall could not abide. Furnivall’s amateur eccentricities thus came to be viewed as detrimental to the more dignified study of English literature and language taking place in universities.

As Trigg has explained, “In terms of scholarly practice and critical decorum, Bradshaw, Skeat ... and other historians of medieval studies clearly become the dominant models for later scholars and professional academics. Furnivall’s own practices are now at best regarded with suspicion and at worst demonized” (2002, 181). By juxtaposing the pleasures of socializing outside of work with the oppressive isolation of his editorial duties, however, Furnivall frankly admits to not always enjoying his work and to having a life apart from his scholarly endeavors. Furnivall’s laziness, his meandering, and leisure are thus better understood, then, as meaningful processes for producing and sharing knowledge. Moreover, it became a means of self-preservation, of recording for posterity

the potential for alternative forms of attachment to our work that do not insist on our absolute consuming our attention, dedication, and well-being.

Furnivall Working on *Hoccleve's Works*

Contemporary reactions to Furnivall's forewords and social comportment highlight how his work ethic and political ideologies, as the two were invariably intertwined, became incommensurate with Furnivall's advancement within the solidifying disciplines of English literary and linguistic study. Furnivall's labor on *Hoccleve's Works* presents a particularly complex instantiation of the work ethic I have described thus far. While Furnivall's forewords to both volumes of *Hoccleve's Works* are characterized by the same pronouncements of boredom, desires for leisure, and twisting digressions, Furnivall's reaction to Hoccleve as an author and as a historical figure is far more ambivalent. Furnivall's middling interest in Hoccleve rests uneasily somewhere between his lambasting of Lane's *Continuation* and his unbridled praise for Chaucer's virtuosity. Rather than simply being indifferent toward the labor of editorial production of *Hoccleve's Work*, Furnivall appears unsure of Hoccleve as both a man and a poet.

As Ward has argued, "This [editorial] idiosyncrasy is significant because Furnivall's own life and times are legible in his readings of Hoccleve's life and work" (1998, 105). However, as this section contends, this diffidence derives, at least in some part, from Furnivall's own social and intellectual marginalization—a feature which likewise characterizes much of Hoccleve's textual production. Furnivall's complaints about the woes of editorial labor find meaningful precedent in Hoccleve's fifteenth-

century depictions of the tedious work for the Privy Seal. As Dinshaw has suggested, “Amateur medievalist readings bring out or enact temporal multiplicities found in the medieval texts that are the foci of their affections: they make manifest that in the present we have not left the past entirely behind” (2012, 29). In juxtaposing these two figures and their attitudes toward labor, we find their mutual turn toward autobiography reveals a shared, transtemporal desire to identify, speak of, write about, and catalogue oneself as having been.

In the first volume of *Hoccleve’s Works*, Furnivall reconstructs a timeline of Thomas Hoccleve’s life using various legal sources and payment records which mention Hoccleve explicitly. Furnivall addresses gaps in this documentary history using details from Hoccleve’s poetry; this engagement with Hoccleve’s poetry likewise produces a theoretical timeline of Hoccleve’s poetic production. For example, Furnivall takes Hoccleve at his word in his *La Male Regle de T. Hoccleue*, from this point forward referred to as *La Male Regle*, where Hoccleve “confesses his ill-regulated youth, and says that for twenty years past he had eaten and drunk outrageously,—ever since he’d been in the Privy-Seal Office.” Furnivall, always eager to locate himself somewhere in the texts of the English Middle Ages, notes that Hoccleve “begs my namesake ... to pay him his Michaelmas £5” (1892, xii). Hoccleve does ask his “lord the Fourneval” to consider “[t]o paie me þat due is for this yeer” (*MR* 417; 420).¹³¹ There is a selfish—certainly, at least,

¹³¹ Middle English text and line numbers for the poetry of Thomas Hoccleve’s *La Male Regle de T. Hoccleue* use Roger Ellis’s 2001 edition of *My Complainte’ and Other Poems* unless otherwise noted. *La Male Regle de T. Hoccleue* is abbreviated *MR* in parenthetical citations.

self-interested—kind of gratification in claiming the family name to which Hoccleve is clearly beholden for his livelihood.

Furnivall is quite blunt in his estimation of Hoccleve’s poetry. Furnivall states that “[t]he chief merit of Hoccleve is that he was the honourer and pupil of Chaucer. Dukes don’t matter; Chaucer does” (1892, xxx). This later confirmed when Furnivall describes “Hoccleve’s poems to the Virgin—poor tho they be—are ... better than his other productions” and “Hoccleve’s metre [as] poor” (1892, xl; xli). While certainly less inflammatory than Furnivall’s descriptions of John Lane’s work, Hoccleve’s poetry matters to Furnivall only insofar as it reflects his learning from and relationship with Chaucer. Furnivall argues that there is a demonstrable relationship between Chaucer and Hoccleve based on Hoccleve’s references to Chaucer scattered throughout his poetry. For example, in Hoccleve’s *De Regimine Principium*, an unnamed Old Man asks the poem’s speaker for his name to which the speaker responds, “Hoccleuë, fadir myn, men clepen me” (*RP* 1863).¹³² Once the speaker identifies himself as Hoccleve, the Old Man claims that he has heard of Hoccleve by way of his association with Chaucer: “Sone, I haue herd, or this, men speke of þe; / Þou were aqueynted with Caucher, pardee—” (*RP* 1867).

When the Old Man entreats Hoccleve to “[s]harpë thi penne, and write on lustily” in didactic service to Prince Henry, Hoccleve expresses doubt in his ability to produce poetry without Chaucer’s guidance (*RP* 1905). Concerned with the poetic insufficiency of

¹³² Middle English text and line numbers for the poetry of Thomas Hoccleve’s *De Regimine Principium* (or *The Regiment of Princes*) use Furnivall’s 1897 of *Hoccleve’s Works* (vol. III) unless otherwise noted. *De Regimine Principium* (or *The Regiment of Princes*) is abbreviated *RP* in parenthetical citations.

his “simple conceyt,” Hoccleve laments Chaucer’s passing (*RP* 1956). Extolling in death both his “maistir Chaucer” and “eeke my maister Gower,” Hoccleve denigrates his own ability yet further (*RP* 1962; 1975). Hoccleve tells the Old Man that he “I am no thyng fourmeel; / My yongë konyng may no hyer reche, / Mi wit is also slipir as an eel” (*RP* 1983-5). Valuing Hoccleve for his professed relationship to Chaucer, Furnivall takes the poet at his word concerning the lackluster quality of his creative and poetic intellect.¹³³

Furnivall takes particular interest, however, in the portion of Hoccleve’s *De Regimine Principium* which refers to an accompanying portrait of Chaucer found in MS Harley 4866 (fol. 88r). So much interest, in fact, that he reproduces the lines and a reproduction of the portrait within the foreword itself concluding that “Hoccleve was either with Chaucer when he died, or saw him on his ‘bed mortel’ just before his death ... Surely the pupil must have often visited his Master before the latter’s death” (1892, xxxi). Hoccleve explicitly references the image of Chaucer within the text of *De Regimine Principium* and explains its purpose:

Al-þogh his lyfe be queynt, þe résemblunce
Of him haþ in me so fresh lyflynesse,
Pat, to putte other men in réembraunce
Of his persóne, I haue here his lyknesse

¹³³ Elsewhere in *De Regimine Principium*, Hoccleve reiterates his feelings of inadequacy when faced with Chaucer’s instruction:

Simple is my goost, and scars my letterure,
Vnto your excellence for to write
Myn inward loue, and yit in áuenture
Wyle I me puttë, thogh I can but lyte.
Mi derë maistir—god his s soulë quyte!—
And fadir, Chaucer, fayn wolde han me taght;
But I was dul, and lernèd lite or naght. (*RP* 2073-9)

Do make, to þis ende in sothfastnesse,
Pat þei þat haue of him lest þought & mynde,
By þis peynturë may ageyn him fynde. (*RP* 4992-8)

The portrait, Hoccleve explains, is meant to recall Chaucer's memory for any reader who may have forgotten his likeness. This is an invitation which Furnivall gladly takes as he reproduces the relevant text and portrait in his foreword to the first volume of *Hoccleve's Works*.¹³⁴ In this sense, Furnivall provides more public access to Chaucer's memory; one need not have the privilege of viewing Harley 4866 to pay due homage to Chaucer. Furthermore, by reproducing the image of Chaucer, Furnivall participates in a commemorative practice not unlike that of Hoccleve himself. David Matthews has suggested that this arrangement allows the viewer to elide Hoccleve's presence momentarily: "To look at this image of Chaucer is to remember him like Hoccleve, but Hoccleve himself is forgotten" (1997, 16). If Hoccleve's chief merit is his physical and intellectual proximity to Chaucer, Furnivall, despite his reservations about Hoccleve himself, is obliged to remember Chaucer in the manner proscribed by Hoccleve. If closeness with Chaucer is what Furnivall desires, there is no better contemporaneous model for such attachment than Hoccleve.

¹³⁴ Furnivall places the image below the given stanza (*RP* 4992-8) rather than relatively parallel and to the right of it as it appears in MS Harley 4866. For this reason, Chaucer's pointing in the portrait gestures toward a blank portion of the printed page rather than the stanza which invokes his image. If this portrait 'authorizes' Hoccleve's work in MS Harley 4866, Furnivall's dislocation of the image in his edition challenges this legitimization.

Furnivall also participates in the production of a vicarious fantasy vis-à-vis Hoccleve's relationship to Chaucer. Beneath the portrait of Chaucer, Furnivall suggests that "[o]ne likes to think of Chaucer's wishing to teach the young Privy-Seal clerk, and giving him advice." Here Furnivall literalizes Hoccleve's claim to Chaucer's guidance: "But weylaway! so is myn hertë wo, / That þe honour of englyssh tonge is deed, / Of which I wont was han conseil and reed"" (*RP* 1958-60). Furnivall likewise considers the honor—the perverse pleasure—of being with Chaucer before his death, "as also of the probability that the pupil was with Chaucer sometimes during his illness and at his death" (1892, xxxiii). Furnivall's habit of imagining himself as the direct recipient of Chaucer's wisdom is not unprecedented. The language found in the foreword to *Hoccleve's Works*, is quite like that which can be found in the 'Hindwords to Part I' of his *Trial-Foreword to My 'Parallel-Text Edition of Chaucer's Minor Poems.'* In these closing remarks, Furnivall delicately describes the qualities of Chaucer's face in the Harley portrait:

The face is wise and tender, full of a sweet and kindly sadness at first sight, but with much bonhommie in it on a further look, and with deepset, farlooking, grey eyes. Not the face of a very old man, a totterer, but one with work in him yet, looking kindly, though seriously, out on the world before him. Unluckily, the parted grey moustache, and the vermilion above and below the lips, render it difficult to catch the expression of the mouth; but the lips seem parted, as if to speak ... One feels one would like to go to such a man when one was in trouble, and hear his wise and gentle speech. (1871, 93)

In Furnivall's estimation, Chaucer's congeniality and physical vitality—after all, the poet is no 'totterer'—complement his determination, kindness, and wisdom. And while this

elaboration is purely speculative, it does tell us quite a bit about Chaucer's function for Furnivall and his larger role in the nineteenth century. In such a moment, Furnivall finds himself face-to-face with Chaucer; Matthews has suggested that "Chaucer, here, is scarcely more distant from the perceptions of his admiring follower than he was from Hoccleve's memory" (1997, 18).¹³⁵ By positioning Chaucer as a paternal source of guidance for England itself, Furnivall articulates what Antonia Ward has described as "the social-historical rationale of safeguarding the future by connecting Englishmen of the Victorian present to the forebears in the past" (1997, 52).¹³⁶ I would suggest, then, that Furnivall's description of Chaucer intimates the qualities Furnivall asked of a great poet and those which Furnivall himself hoped to embody.

If Furnivall hoped that Chaucer's behavior would be imitated, it meant that Hoccleve's creative, intellectual, and physical instability needed to be avoided wherever and whenever possible. Several of Furnivall's criticisms derive from his perception of Hoccleve's poetical persona—which Furnivall has taken as historically accurate and mostly autobiographical. And while the debate about the autobiographical features of

¹³⁵ In Daniel Scrymgeour's 1866 compilation *The Poetry and Poets of Britain*, he describes Chaucer in similar terms. In the brief preface to Chaucer's section of the book, Scrymgeour suggests, "The mind of Chaucer appears to have been joyous and happy, generous and affectionate. He possessed that intense relish for the beauties of nature that is so characteristic of the genuine poet ... But his mind has no effeminacy, and it is strong in many moods; his life busy, and in some measure stormy, made him familiar with all phases of human life and human character" (1866, 2).

¹³⁶ Matthews has thus argued that Furnivall's speculative reconstruction of Chaucer's character as "the kind of man they wanted and needed, Chaucer to be" meant that he might better serve as "the center of a program of moral renewal" in nineteenth century England (1997, 17).

Hoccleve's works remains a controversial topic, I do not necessarily wish to add my voice to that argument. Rather, I am interested in the fact that Furnivall *believed* that Hoccleve's poetry reflected historical reality. Whether Hoccleve's use of self-denigration, madness, and modesty were sincere or conventional is not necessarily my concern here.¹³⁷ Likewise, while provocative and fiercely debated, the question of whether Hoccleve was a literal acquaintance of Chaucer's has little significance on the present analysis. Because this chapter reads Hoccleve through Furnivall, we must consider the contexts in which Furnivall himself understood Hoccleve's poetry and relationships. In the foreword to the third volume of *Hoccleve's Works*, Furnivall explains that "the *Regement's* contents shows how valuable the book is for the social life of the England of its time" (1897, xiii).¹³⁸ That is, Furnivall reads Hoccleve's poetry as a creative expression of Hoccleve's 'actual' lived experience; he reads it alongside and on

¹³⁷ As I discussed in my chapter on MS Christ Church 152, I find myself most drawn to notion that Hoccleve's poetry is a complex and often frustrating mixture of lived experience expressed through conventional rhetorical expression, and that these need not be mutually exclusive poetic qualities. John A. Burrow has argued thus, while "[George] Kane warns of an 'autobiographical fallacy' ... there is also the opposite error, which must be called 'conventional fallacy. Victims of the latter combine a learned and sophisticated awareness of literary convention with an apparently naïve and reductive notion of what real life is like—naïve and reductive, because they talk as if non-literary experience were not itself shaped by convention" ([1989] 2012, V.228). See also Atkinson (2017).

¹³⁸ Contemporary James Munro suggested that "Chaucer, Lydgate, Hoccleve, Borde,—to all of them and to others [Furnivall] had got close by a sympathy, a natural genius of his own for understanding and loving *men* ... He had worked at the subtle (and not yet sufficiently studied) connexion between political movements, social conditions, and literature" (1911, lii-liii). Likewise, Roman Dyboski attributes this now infamous declaration to Furnivall: "I never cared a bit for philology; my chief aim has been throughout to illustrate the social condition of the English people in the past" (1911, 43).

equal terms with legal and bureaucratic record as worthwhile evidence of the ‘social conditions’ of medieval England.

It is also important to note that Furnivall’s social context invariably affected the way he responded to his work and thus how we receive Hoccleve’s work. Whereas Chaucer’s wit and amiability stand in for the ideals of the English nation, Hoccleve’s self-disclosed bouts of mental illness, cowardice, and submissiveness run counter to and, in some ways, undermine Furnivall’s notions of a Victorian masculinity. If Furnivall’s construction of Chaucer was always in some ways a reflection of his own textual and ideological priorities, Hoccleve presented Furnivall with a troubling foil. In the first volume of *Hoccleve’s Works*, Furnivall is quick to question Hoccleve’s participation in physical outdoor activities.

Furnivall’s interest in Hoccleve’s physicality once again suggests his desire to measure literary-historical figures vis-à-vis the expectations of masculinity he held for himself and other men. As Ward has suggested, “when a critic interprets an author’s masculinity, he or she does so from within – and with reference to – the dominant discourses of masculinity of their own time” (1998, 103). Furnivall explains that because Hoccleve does not often mention the countryside in his work, he rarely visited or spent time there: “There is so little of the country in Hoccleve’s works, that he was no doubt a cockney.” This use of *cockney* registers both Hoccleve’s perceived urbanity as well as his

physical and emotional weakness.¹³⁹ To that end, Furnivall concludes that “I see no evidence that [Hoccleve] had ever crost a horse; and he was too much of a coward ... to play football or any other rough game” (1892, xxxv).

Furnivall’s use of sport and ‘rough’ activity as a barometer for Hoccleve’s masculinity is unsurprising given Furnivall’s passionate interests in exercise and physical health. Furnivall was well known for his athletic endeavors and especially for his love of exercise. J. C. Castell and C. F. W. Mead referred to Furnivall as a “[s]cholar, social worker, and athlete ... who combined gallantry with his sport” (1911, 16). J. Schick likewise described Furnivall as a “splendid example of English manliness” (1911, 170). Furnivall’s 1912 entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* describes him as “believ[ing] in the virtue of athletics no less than of learning” (Lee, 65). Hoccleve’s failure to engage in sport and play gives way to Furnivall’s discussion of Hoccleve’s meekness and tendency toward subservience. Highlighting the fact that Hoccleve was “[m]eant to be a priest ... no doubt brought up at some Monastery School,” Furnivall suggests that Hoccleve was conditioned into subordination from an early age. This conditioning also likewise meant that Hoccleve “was probably driven and lunged with a

¹³⁹ *Cockney* is certainly a loaded term. It might be that Furnivall is simply referring to Hoccleve’s existence as “[a] native of London, *esp.* a working-class person” (*OED* “cockney, *n.*” [4a]). However, it is far more likely that Furnivall also means this as a criticism of Hoccleve’s masculinity by way of describing Hoccleve as “an indulged or undisciplined person ... [and] a person who lacks strength of character” as well as identifying Hoccleve as “[a] person from a town or city ... typically characterized as delicate, pampered, feeble, or affected” (*OED* “cockney, *n.*” [A.2 & 3]).

sharp curb, and kept on the dumb-jockey all day.”¹⁴⁰ Furnivall suspects that this monastic training was the cause of Hoccleve’s excessive spending and drinking described in *La Male Regle*: “When he got free, and was his own master, he naturally kickt up his heels, and at 18 he seems to have turnd into a smart Government-Clerk while waiting for a benefice that he never got” (1892, xxxv).

This process of emasculation continues elsewhere when Furnivall brings up the matter of Hoccleve’s marriage. Furnivall considers Hoccleve’s marriage in terms of Chaucer’s marriage. Pointing to moments in Hoccleve’s poetry, Furnivall speculates that “[a]s to the relations between Hoccleve and his wife, they were, I suspect ... like those between Chaucer and his wife, *only much more so*” (1892, xxxvii; emphasis my own). And though Furnivall seems coy here about his meaning, elsewhere he has been far more direct in his description of Philippa Chaucer: “If Chaucer’s wife was not a bit of a tartar, and most of his chaff of women meant for her, I have read him wrongly” (1871, 31n3). As Samantha Katz Seal has suggested of this moment, “Furnivall simply thought he knew the man and, ‘unless I have read him wrongly,’ Furnivall’s Chaucer detested his wife”

¹⁴⁰ Furnivall maintains his interest in sporting even in his idiomatic expressions. He equates Hoccleve with a broken horse; it is likewise worth noting that Furnivall’s heading for this passage, “*Hoccleve’s Associates and Character. Bred a Priest*,” likewise extends this metaphor (1892, xxxv). A curb refers to the bit which is held in the horse’s mouth by which the rider exerts considerable force so as to control the horse’s movement; a dumb-jockey is a piece of equipment that is fitted to the horse’s back to that it simulates the presence of a rider. In both cases, the equipment Furnivall suggests are meant to train a horse into obsequiousness.

(2019, 275).¹⁴¹ According to Furnivall, much like Hoccleve's time in monastic settings, Hoccleve's marriage was defined by a mutual distaste for one another that stemmed from his wife's domineering disposition. As Thomas, Hoccleve's poetic persona in his *Dialogue*, claims in response to his friend's question concerning the state of his marriage: "My wyf mighte haue hokir and greet desdeyn / If I sholde in swich cas pleye a soleyn" (741-2). Furnivall concludes that "Hoccleve was surely meant by nature to be under his wife's thumb, but couldn't take it out of her in chaff, as Chaucer did out of his" (1892, xxxviii). In all matters marital, the virile Chaucer again trumps lowly Hoccleve. Ward has suggested that "Furnivall ... found Hoccleve's masculinity problematic because his

¹⁴¹ Furnivall's use of a racialized description of Philippa Chaucer "as a bit of a tartar" should be addressed here (1871, 31n3). Furnivall uses it for Philippa Chaucer to mean "[a] person supposed to resemble a Tartar in disposition; a rough and violent or irritable and intractable person" (*OED* "tartar" *n.2 & adj.* [3a]). For as familiar as Furnivall was with Chaucer's works, he would almost assuredly have recognized his usage of 'tartar' as potentially deriving from Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* which describes how "[a]t Sarray, in the land of Tartarye, / Ther dwelte a king that werreyed Russye, / Thurgh which ther dyde many a doughty man" (9-11).

Despite the tale's striking *lack* of description of an explicitly Orientalized 'East,' Alan S. Ambrisco has suggested that "[t]he Squire's vacillation between moments of representational control and moments of rhetorical ineptitude does not so much reveal the naiveté of a narrator who turns a tolerant eye toward the world and its diverse peoples as it reminds us of all the ways that overt displays of sympathy can mask antagonism and intolerance" (224). See also "World II" in Geraldine Heng's *The Invention of Race* (2018, 287-416) and Schildgen (2001, 47); for a similar discussion of these topics in the context of *The King of Tars*, see Cord J. Whitaker (2013) and Sierra Lomuto (2019). See Richard W. Cogley (2005) for an overview of how 'Tartar' was used in England in the seventeenth century.

I note this because it is a feature of Furnivall's writing that overtly suggests his participation in racialized discourses of the nineteenth century and the English colonial project—a subject I will discuss in more detail elsewhere in this chapter. In tandem with Furnivall's rather casual sexism, there is something to be said about the way oppressive systems—particularly imperial and colonial projects—intersect in a figure like Furnivall.

physical weaknesses and occupational status were at odds with the dominant masculinities of the 1890s” (1998, 109). However, Furnivall’s suggestion that Hoccleve is a “weak, sensitive, look-on-the-worst side kind of man” insinuates that, in addition to Hoccleve’s lack of physicality and volatile means of income, Furnivall believed Hoccleve’s predominant affects were unbecoming of a man—specifically a Victorian man (1892, xxxviii).¹⁴²

Others were kinder to Hoccleve. American librarian and scholar Lucy Toulmin Smith provides a reading of Hoccleve’s character which is entirely antithetical to Furnivall’s list of criticisms. In Smith’s reading of Hoccleve’s *Ballad to Sir John Oldcastle*, she describes Hoccleve in far more affectionate terms:

We get to feel this old poet was a lovable character, free-handed in his youth though perhaps too free-living, much fonder of song and poetry than of desk-work: who understood real woman-hood so well ... who married for love, who was a friend of Chaucer and Gower, whose heart was torn with distress when those he honoured and esteemed took what he deemed the lost and bitter way of heresy. (1882, 16-7)

Such a description highlights Furnivall’s adherence to a kind of compulsory heterosexuality and demonstrates the extent to which these notions often overwrite his engagement with Hoccleve. This is not to say, however, that Furnivall was singularly minded in his assessment of Hoccleve. Despite this condemnatory description of

¹⁴² Holly A. Crocker has stressed the intentionality in this self-representation, “Rather than the sad-bastard masculinity that historicist analysis yields, Hoccleve’s representation of himself as vulnerable, as powerless in a world of the powerful, is a reorganization of selfhood that produces a different model of poetic identity” (2019b).

Hoccleve's manhood, Furnivall nevertheless acknowledges Hoccleve's ability to "recogniz[e] his weakness, his folly, and his cowardice" (1892, xxxviii). And while these features do not ameliorate Hoccleve's deficiencies—Furnivall still "wish[es] he had been a better poet and a manlier fellow"—Furnivall still seems to sympathize with Hoccleve's ill-managed youth: "all of those who've made fools of themselves, more or less, in their youth, will feel for the poor old versifier" (1892, xxxviii).¹⁴³ This moment provides us with a clear example of the textual intersection of Furnivall's ambivalent feelings toward Hoccleve.

While Furnivall is speaking collectively, he places himself among "those who have made fools of themselves" as he assumes a friendly rapport with his readership. Furnivall and his readers thus feel some affinity for Hoccleve precisely because of his frank admissions of his imperfections. Furnivall's use of "poor old versifier," however, suggests that this affinity is not entirely stable. While a point of contact between Furnivall and Hoccleve, there is certainly the potential for a less generous reading of Furnivall's epithet. While 'versifier' might simply refer to a poet, it likewise refers to an unskilled poet.¹⁴⁴ Like Furnivall's use of 'poetaster' to describe John Lane's

¹⁴³ There is an explicitly gendered angle to Furnivall's critique here. As Jennifer E. Bryan has noted of Hoccleve's Marian complaints, Furnivall finds himself at odds with Hoccleve "not just [because] of Furnivall's late Victorian sense of proper masculinity (and poetry) but [because] of gendered dynamics central to Hocclevean complaint—among them the complainer's enforced marginality, the feminization of private suffering, and Hoccleve's successful commodification of his interiority as an object of scrutiny for eyes more powerful than his own" (2002, 1173).

¹⁴⁴ See *OED* "versifier" *n.* [2], "With depreciative force: A mere or poor writer of verse(s); a rimester, a poetaster."

Continuation, ‘versifier’ in this context underscores the deprecatory tone of the descriptors before it. Hoccleve is not just a ‘versifier’ but a “poor old versifier” who Furnivall only finds value in vis-à-vis his relationship to Chaucer. The epithet, then, draws into sharp relief Furnivall’s criticisms of Hoccleve’s financial, physical, and poetic deficiencies.

Furthermore, Furnivall commends Hoccleve for the features of his poetry which might be effectively paralleled with Furnivall’s own contemporary ideological investments. Hoccleve thus becomes politically expedient as an example in Furnivall’s persistent attacks on the Tory parliamentary party of the late nineteenth century. Just as Furnivall expresses no hesitation when describing others’ religious convictions in terms of senseless superstition, he has no issue with directly addressing those who he found to be politically maligned. Referring to Hoccleve’s *Address to Sir John Oldcastle*, Furnivall considers the various forms of violence enacted in the pursuit of ideological homogeneity.¹⁴⁵ According to E. H. Thompson, “[t]he eminent Lollard” John Oldcastle was apparently “hung in chains over a slow fire, and roasted to death” for his heretical beliefs (1890, 14).

Furnivall willfully misrepresents Hoccleve’s goal with the *Address*; Hoccleve’s poem is not a call for violence but a plea for Oldcastle’s public repentance. However, such misreading allows Furnivall to circumvent analogy and suggest nothing short of

¹⁴⁵ The nomenclature for this poem is inconsistent. Lucy Toulmin Smith refers to as the *Ballad to Sir John Oldcastle, A. D. 1415* while Furnivall titles it *Address to Sir John Oldcastle, A. D. 1415*. When referring to the poem, I will refer to it with the title used by its given editor.

euthanasia for his political opposition. In what is assuredly Furnivall's most egregiously problematic introductory discourse, he suggests:

If [Hoccleve] was willing to make amends for his own faults by burning Oldcastle and heretics, and uttering moral precepts, we Radicals and Teetotallers [*sic*] are willing to provide a painless lethal chamber for Lordly and other Tories, and drink-suppliers—after the manner of lost dogs,—and to provide a like serene end for sweaters and anti-Home Rulers. The mere idea of the thing makes one feel virtuous. (1892, xxxviii)

And while Hoccleve's *Address* in no way celebrates Oldcastle's heretical beliefs, it is unfair to cast it as an entirely damning piece of poetry. Hoccleve asks that Oldcastle "to [Christ's] faith torne agayn" and "[f]rom hennes forward trouble nat thy brayn / As thow has doon, ageyn the faith ful sore" (*Add.* 490; 493-4).¹⁴⁶ And herein lies the danger of what can only be described as a Furnivall-ian process of misreading.

By aligning Hoccleve's alleged political ideologies and their consequences with his own, Furnivall seeks to legitimize his rhetoric of political violence vis-à-vis the authority assigned to the history, figures, and writing of the English Middle Ages by Furnivall himself. And while this might simply be dismissed as a kind of darkly humorous jab at Tories broadly, it is difficult to reconcile the tone of this digression with the rest of his foreword. This practice of misreading is harmless enough when Furnivall imagines Chaucer's posthumous endorsement of a holiday away from work; it becomes

¹⁴⁶ Middle English text and line numbers for the poetry of Thomas Hoccleve's *Address to Sir John Oldcastle, A. D. 1415* uses Frederick J. Furnivall's 1892 edition of *Hoccleve's Works* unless otherwise noted. *Address to Sir John Oldcastle, A. D. 1415* is abbreviated *Add.* in parenthetical citations.

far more troubling, however, as Furnivall so overtly shapes the meaning of Middle English texts to his own political ends. This is not to say that editions should try to be—or somehow even could be—apolitical. Rather, there is a clear difference between the political uses of Furnivall’s complaints about editorial labor and this moment of imagined violence.

Rather than calling for Oldcastle’s execution, Hoccleve pleads for his repentance and return to his former place among the English court. Furnivall sees no use in begging his political opposition, however, and recommends ‘a painless lethal chamber ... after the manner of lost dogs.’¹⁴⁷ Furnivall’s rhetoric here suggests that anyone who crossed his ideological interests were morally untenable and, as Scott Christianson has suggested of the unwanted animals bound for such ‘lethal chambers,’ “a pressing social problem” (2010, 25). It is during this disturbing discussion that Furnivall admits, “There’s a good deal of human nature in man. So we’ll not throw stones at old Hoccleve” (1892, xxxix). Moving from lethal chamber to stone-throwing, Furnivall’s rhetoric here reinscribes violence as a quintessential feature of manhood. To this end, Furnivall finds common ground in what he believes to be Hoccleve’s fervent physical defense of his political

¹⁴⁷ These ‘lethal chambers’ were considered a humane form of animal euthanasia in the late nineteenth century. As Susan Hamilton has shown, “The lethal chamber ... had been designed in 1883 by Benjamin Ward Richardson, pioneering British anesthesiologist ... it was Richardson’s inventions, with its careful calibration of gases, exacting design, and elaborated techniques for operation, that brough the efficiencies of the latest science to the work of killing stray dogs” (2017, 94). The lethal chamber would quickly become the object of interest for American and British proponents of the ‘science’ of eugenics for its use on members of various marginalized communities, “At first such use was reserved for small animals ... but soon many prominent eugenicists openly remarked about what others had only privately imagined: why not try it out on humans?” (Christianson 2010, 25-6).

convictions. Furnivall thus articulates this unsettlingly convenient form of identification with Hoccleve only when he believes that Hoccleve has performed the kind overt display of masculinity he expects and, perhaps, desires of the Privy-Seal clerk. Hoccleve is a man worth praising when its useful to Furnivall to identify with him.

Furnivall's other significant engagement with Hoccleve comes at the end of his foreword to the third volume of *Hoccleve's Works*. Furnivall describes his idiosyncratic rationale for selecting Harley MS. 4866 for printing, "it has the best portrait of Chaucer," and nonchalantly suggests his readers actively correct his work (1897, xvii). He apologizes to his reader about the state of the present foreword, "I am sorry that these Forewords are so slight and scrappy; but they have been written at intervals, other work or laziness coming between the bits, and putting the details of this text out of my head." Furnivall insisted on providing his time and labor to the collection of words for the project: "Dictionary work is always going on; and marking words and cutting slips out of books and papers is so pleasant and easy, that it makes one neglect work that needs effort." Furnivall thus hierarchizes the work that he has volunteered to undertake; work for the dictionary is 'pleasant and easy' while preparing Hoccleve's poetry for print 'needs effort.' He continues describing the various activities that supplement his work with Hoccleve: "the starting of my Hammersmith Girls' Sculling Club ... Sunday whole-day outings, Socials, dances and classes" (1897, xix). Like his other editions, Furnivall is eager to use his foreword to document the tedium of his present editorial work with his readers.

In a section comparable to his explanation for leaving the work of Chaucer's poetry behind, Furnivall recalls taking his "bundle of Hoccleve papers down to the pleasant farm in which we spent our holiday month." Furnivall brought along Hoccleve's work—brought Hoccleve—with him "[b]ut, alas, [he] never untied the string" (1897, xix). However, whereas Furnivall suggests that the value of his editing of Chaucer's poetry is clear, Hoccleve receives little of this qualification. In fact, Furnivall describes Hoccleve and his work as a frustrating imposition on his holiday. Chaucer would have encouraged Furnivall's leisure; the presence of Hoccleve's works, on the other hand, weighs heavily on Furnivall. And while Furnivall returns to his pastoral mode of description, its application in Hoccleve's case alienates the poet from the natural world of England rather than endearing him as a fundamental part of its landscape:

There was nice soft lawn to walk on barefooted, or lie on, all the morning; beautiful lanes and cross-country paths to stroll over in the afternoon or evening; songs and pieces to listen to at nightfall; crops and cattle to look at and chat about; a grand view round three-fourths of the horizon to see from our hill; visits to pay, churches to inspect, neighbours' stories to hear;—bother Hoccleve! (1897, xix-xx)

Exclaiming as if Hoccleve were somewhere nearby to hear, Furnivall lists several things he would rather do—and did—instead of focusing solely on Hoccleve's texts. In fact, he makes it a point to suggest that he never looked at them. And yet, like Furnivall's strolls with Teena Rochfort-Smith at the beginning of this chapter, these digressive and meandering activities suggest not necessarily an interruption of Furnivall's process of labor, but the processes which facilitate his style of work. Leisure becomes part of an

interstitial scholarly and creative process of production which Hoccleve threatens to upend.

Furnivall continues to express irritation with Hoccleve's work. "Where could [Hoccleve] come in," Furnivall questions, "with the sunshine, flowers, apple-orchards and harvest about?" Furnivall's rhetorical question suggests that Hoccleve's poetry has no place during a holiday; Hoccleve proves too anxious for Furnivall's leisure. Furnivall concludes by telling us the one place Hoccleve does belong: "But here, in his London—his, and yet how different from his" (1897, xx). So, while Furnivall desires to be in Chaucer's England, he is irritated by the thought of having to remain in Hoccleve's London. Though Furnivall worked and socialized throughout London, he was incredibly wary of the city's ability to seduce and corrupt healthy young people.

Furnivall's motivation for the founding his sculling club came from witnessing what Harold Spender described as "the neglected, empty life of the working girl of London ... the emptiness of their lives exposed them to every kind of temptation." Furnivall's solution, like his unorthodox approach to labor, was to get away from work via socializing and exercising: "the idea struck him that [the girls] too might enjoy the great diversion of open-air exercise" (Spender 1911, 181). The fact that Hoccleve admits in *La Male Regle* to yielding to the temptations offered by London's nightlife to the point of physical illness—"Seeknesse, Y meene, riotoures whippe"—was enough to garner the scorn of a teetotaler like Furnivall (*MR* 118). A weak-willed Hoccleve submitted to the excesses of London, excesses that Furnivall considered a real and present danger.

Furnivall demurs to the next editor of Hoccleve's work for a more useful edition. Recalling his previous description of his foreword as 'slight and scrappy,' Furnivall remarks that "the present scraps have been put together, mainly under the electric light in the British Museum" (1897, xx). His reference to the electric light in the British Museum is typical of Furnivall; though, he most often includes it in his signature, along with a time and date as well, not the text of the foreword itself. The electric light here highlights Furnivall's own displeasure with his removal from 'the country' and his place inside the artificially lit reading rooms of the British Museum.

Like Furnivall's association of Hoccleve with the negative qualities of London itself, the electric lights of the reading room become indicative of Furnivall's perception of Hoccleve as somehow alien or incongruent. Hoccleve's evaluation of his body in *La Male Regle* as a "carkeis replete with heuynesse" becomes an apt description of the conditions under which Furnivall handles the burdensome contents of Hoccleve's poetic *corpus*—that is, his textual body (350). Furnivall seems flippant about the lackluster quality of his work with Hoccleve; he claims to hope "that the poet's next editor treats him thoroughly, as Prof. Schick treated Lydgate" (1897, xx).¹⁴⁸ Whereas Furnivall recognizes how J. Schick's edition of Lydgate's works gave the poet his due diligence, Furnivall is certain that his work with Hoccleve will need revision.

¹⁴⁸ The topic of Lydgate and his works were a source of entertainment for Furnivall and J. Schick; Schick recalls that they both found Lydgate was "a source of never-failing amusement and good humour on both sides. I shall never forget the Doctor's laughter when I told him I should not join his projected Lydgate Society" (1911, 171).

As Christopher Healy has suggested and the previous discussion has hopefully shown, Furnivall considered his work with Hoccleve “a distasteful necessity” (2002, 92). And, to this point, Furnivall’s willing, eager, criticism of Hoccleve has given the impression that Furnivall found Hoccleve’s character irreconcilable with his own. Furnivall certainly believed this to be the case. However, if we look more closely at Furnivall’s method of work and attitudes toward labor, we might recognize some similarities between Furnivall and Hoccleve. To be clear, I do not intend to suggest that Furnivall consciously recognized these similarities. But as Rita Felski has argued concerning the potential for identificatory forms of attachment, “a felt affinity can be underwritten by diverse, conflicting, or ambivalent affects ... Identifying, then, implies something shared, but this does not mean obliterating overriding differences” (2020, 81-2). Lest this chapter bury Hoccleve as Furnivall does in his forewords, I want to suggest that, in addition to Furnivall’s work with Hoccleve providing a more backdrop for how we understand Furnivall’s relationship to Chaucer, it allows us to explore Furnivall’s ambivalent attachment to and identification with Hoccleve himself.

As Ward has suggested of Furnivall’s conflicted expressions of affect for Hoccleve, Furnivall’s simultaneous critique of Hoccleve’s masculinity and his “legible affection for ‘the poor sensitive old poet’ comes perhaps because [Furnivall] was ‘least embarrassed’ by the intimacies of Hoccleve’s writing: in fact, [Furnivall] himself addressed his readership in a similar way” (1998, 111). Ward assembles several examples of modern scholarly assessment of Hoccleve’s constant self-referential mode as

feminizing and emasculating; however, these critiques might just as easily describe Furnivall's prefatory and autobiographical discourses.

For example, Albrecht Classen has described Hoccleve's authorial voice contains "too much of [his] inner self in autobiographical terms ... his private life, his intimate feelings, his idiosyncrasies, and other aspects of his personality" (1991, 303). These are precisely the kinds of criticism lodged against Furnivall by his contemporaries regarding his style of writing. In addition to this, I would also suggest that this clear example of Furnivall's ambivalence toward Hoccleve provides a precedent for understanding other aspects of Furnivall's, perhaps unwilling, identification with Hoccleve. That is, despite his criticism of Hoccleve, Furnivall is keenly aware that he too occupies a similar position to Hoccleve with respect to their relationship to Chaucer.

If we push a bit further, we find several similarities between Furnivall and Hoccleve—particularly regarding how Hoccleve's understanding of textual labor prefigures Furnivall's characteristically frank forewords. Most striking is how well Hoccleve's complaints anticipate Furnivall's expressions of boredom caused by textual and editorial work. However, whereas Furnivall is free to leave his work behind, Hoccleve is burdened by the strict conditions at "þe office of þe priuee seal" (*RP* 802). Because of this, we find in Hoccleve's works descriptions of the debilitating results of stationary bureaucratic labor which Furnivall made tolerable through a work ethic which made digression and leisure essential to its function. In *De Regimine Principium*, Hoccleve addresses the misconceptions others hold about the physical toll scribal work:

“Many men, fadir, wenen þat writyng
No trauaile is; þei hold it but a game:
Aart hath no foo but swich folk vnkonyng:
But who so list disport hym in þat same,
Let hym continue, and he schal fynd it game;
It is wel gretter labour þan it seemth;
þe blynde man of coloures al wrong deemeth.” (*RP* 988-94)

Here Hoccleve summarizes the precise reason that Furnivall values leisure as a meaningful part of his process of labor; Furnivall prefers games and sport and, as Hoccleve says, writing is no simple game. Speaking more specifically of his work at the Privy Seal, Hoccleve notes that he is unable to speak with his coworkers or sing while he works, “Who so schal wrytē, may not holde a tale / With hym and hym, ne syngē this ne that” (*RP* 1002-3).

Hoccleve even goes as far as to suggest—in a moment that I am sure Furnivall himself would approve of—that song and chatter are the only thing that make his work tolerable: “And syn, he speke may, ne syngē nat, / But bothē two he needs moot forbere, / Hir labour to hym is þe alengere” (*RP* 1006-8). “The text here makes it quite clear,” Elisabeth Kempf has suggested, “that distraction is strictly forbidden, and that, as a result, the scribes’ work feels even longer and more boring” (2016, 40). Though Hoccleve desired distraction during his work, his bureaucratic position at the Privy Seal meant that he was beholden to the king himself. Furnivall, of course, made it known to everyone that his work was bound to be flawed and that it was finished only at his leisure.

Bitterly, Hoccleve explains how he watches others working without such restrictions—how they “Talken and syng, and make game and play, / And forth hir labour passith with gladnesse” (*RP* 1011-2). Instead, Hoccleve and his peers “labour in trauaillous stilnesse” and “keepë must our song and wordës in” (*RP* 1013; 1015). As Steven Justice has argued, Hoccleve highlights “pain and boredom of script, work he paints as destitute of the fellowship and cheer that laborers (he imagines) provide for themselves” (1994, 7-8). What Hoccleve describes and envies here is precisely the kind of work Furnivall enacts in the nineteenth century. Likewise, in a moment that aptly describes the later work-related illness of James A. H. Murray, Hoccleve explains that “Wrytyng also doth grete annoyës thre, / Of which ful fewë folkës taken heede / Sauf weoure self” (*RP* 1016-8). These three annoyances include:

Stomak is on, whom stowpyng out of dreede
Annoyeth soore; and to our bakkës, neede
Mot it be greuous; and e third, our yen,
Vp-on þe whytë mochel sorwe dryen. (*RP* 1019-22)

All these bodily aches, Hoccleve emphasizes the strain such work has on his eyes, “And yen moost it greeueth trwëly / Of any crafte þat man can ymagyne” (*RP* 1027-8).

Hoccleve expresses concern about the degeneration of his sight in another poem addressed to one of his patrons, *Balade to the Duke of York*. Hoccleve asks the reader to excuse his mistakes on account of his being too prideful to wear his glasses: “Þat pryde is

vn-to me so greet a fo, / þat the spectacle, forbedith he me” (*DY* 56-7).¹⁴⁹ He suggests that his “sighte blyue hastith me fro” and “is hurt through hir aduersitee” (*DY* 59; 63). Thus, while Hoccleve may have failed to live up to Furnivall’s standard of masculinity, Hoccleve clearly understands that the cause of his ailments is his bureaucratic work; he clearly fears a physical and emotional burnout.¹⁵⁰ Ethan Knapp has argued that Hoccleve imagined his scribal work at the Privy Seal as bound by “a common experience of tedium and resentment” (2001, 93). Furthermore, Hoccleve blames the requirements of his work which prevent any kind of leisure or socializing while writing for his disposition and physical state. Hoccleve’s idealized form of textual labor, then, is incredibly like the ethical position Furnivall takes in his nineteenth century editorial work; sometimes work is most efficacious when it is the result of distraction, digression, and leisure.

And while their motivations differ, Furnivall and Hoccleve seem eager to address the financial precarity that attends the business of poetry—both its initial production of poetry and its later reproduction in print. A considerable number of Hoccleve’s poems are petitionary and explicitly seek forms of remuneration for his work. In *La Male Regle*, Hoccleve is quite straightforward with what will be the overarching rationale for his petitions: “my poore purs and peynes strong / Han artid me speke as I spoken haue” (*MR* 395-6). Atkinson has suggested that “Hoccleve was dependent on a system of patronage

¹⁴⁹ Middle English text and line numbers for the poetry of Thomas Hoccleve’s *Balade to the Duke of York* use Furnivall’s 1892 edition of *Hoccleve’s Works*. *Balade to the Duke of York* is abbreviated *DY* in parenthetical citations.

¹⁵⁰ Linne R. Mooney has suggested a timeline for the composition of Hoccleve’s works that demonstrates that Hoccleve’s physical and mental breakdown may have very well been the result of overwork at the Privy Seal (2007, 307-8).

caught between the traditional distribution of royal gratuities and the institution of new, less dependable, annuities ... the petition became a vital tool in the repertoire of the government servant” (2019, 312-3).¹⁵¹ Kempf has argued that it is “impossible to overlook the numerous references to the daily routine in the Privy Seal Office, the unoriginality of the office writing, and the fact that the narrator and his colleagues are frequently cheated out of their wages by the servants of lords who keep the scribes’ payments for themselves” (2016, 41). Ward suggests that Furnivall found this petitionary mode distasteful because Hoccleve’s financial insecurity was perceived as emasculating; Hoccleve’s “physical weaknesses and occupational status were at odds with the dominant masculinities of the 1890s” (Ward 1998, 109).

It would be incorrect, however, to assume that Furnivall never asked for financial assistance from his readers and peers. In fact, when it came to running his societies, Furnivall was almost always struggling to secure funds for their continuation. Hoccleve’s petitions arose from the cost of living and work unremunerated; Furnivall’s requests were mostly the result of a series of financial indiscretions associated with the several literary societies he had volunteered to make. Singleton has noted that “EETS was committed to its objective of offering affordable publications ... even when its financial situation was parlous” (2005, 95). This commitment was soon revised, however, as “[o]verestimation of income in 1866 and 1873 led to serious financial difficulties” (Singleton 2005, 103). In

¹⁵¹ Robert J. Meyer-Lee has argued of Hoccleve’s petitionary mode, “conflated with literary exchange in the very form of the petition, the structure of monetary exchange infects his writing both thematically and formally and becomes the source of poetic anxiety that is also his poetic inspiration” (2001, 175). See also, Knapp (2001, 24-9).

a letter to Roman Dyboski, Furnivall commented on the troubled financial state of EETS: “If only some capitalist w[oul]d take pity on us and give us a few thousands, we c[ould] get on. Now we are hampered every year and scholars are too poor to contribute to us” (1911, 41). Even if the previous comment is taken in jest, it nevertheless suggests that even as an unfettered amateur scholar Furnivall was not exempt from the material cost that attend poetic and textual production.¹⁵²

Furnivall’s boundless enthusiasm and energy meant little when it came time to pay to produce his editions. As Marjorie Plante has suggested of this model, “the author,” or, in this case, the editor, “placed himself in the importunate position which he had occupied in the old days of patronage” (1939, 230). The kind of subscription-publication model Furnivall adopted for EETS meant that the success of his ideological project was entirely subject to the whims of his readers; like Hoccleve and his patrons, Furnivall was necessarily compelled to petition for timely payment from his subscribers. Furnivall’s failed formation of a Hoccleve and Lydgate Society is a direct result of EETS’s readerly disinterest in the concentrated production of their texts. As David Matthews has wryly observed, “Furnivall later speculated that the market would bear a Lydgate and Occleve Society, and was completely wrong. Only Chaucer could stand alone in this way” (1999, 172).¹⁵³ Hoccleve produced poetry in the hopes of payment, Furnivall reproduced it under the assumption that its value was self-evident and assumed that payment would

¹⁵² Padelford described Furnivall as unique in “hav[ing] persisted in carrying this work of publish the Old and Middle English literature through two hundred and forty volumes, *despite an indifferent public and fortuitous financial support*” (1907, 505).

¹⁵³ To quote Benzie, “the response was poor, and he abandoned the idea” (1983, 254).

intuitively follow. Skeat's poem in which he refers to Furnivall as a 'clerk ... of Cauntebrigge' highlights, though perhaps unintentionally, the similarities between the clerk of the Privy Seal Hoccleve and the clerk of EETS Furnivall.

However, the greatest discernable point of identification between Furnivall and Hoccleve is their fundamental belief that textual production is necessarily a social project. In both their estimations, then, the creation of a text is a communal exercise. For Furnivall, this meant creating editions via his own labor and the labor of anyone he might conscript into volunteer service. Singleton has pointed out, though, that the reader-subscriber of EETS publications "were not simply customers, but were consistently addressed in committee reports as fellow workers for the Early English cause ... they were repeatedly exhorted to proselytize on behalf of the society and so help increase its membership" (2005, 99). Hoccleve provides a meaningful touchstone for Furnivall's relationship to his readers and peers—who, as mentioned previously, Furnivall considered his 'circle of friends.' Throughout Hoccleve's poetry, he mentions the names of his friends and colleagues at the Privy Seal. In *La Male Regle*, Hoccleve suggests that no one at the Privy Seal could match his ability to stay out and drink: "fynde kowde I no macche / In al the Priuee Seel with me to endure" (307-8). He goes on to name two other clerks by name, "Prentys and Arondel," who he accuses of sleeping in, "they hir bed louen so wel / Þat of the day it drawith ny the pryme / Or they ryse vp" (MR 321-2).

Elsewhere, in his petitionary poem *Balades to Henry Somer*, Hoccleve attempts to legitimize his request for payment by noting that other clerks too are waiting for their pay: "We, your seruantes, Hoccleue and Baillay, Hethe and Offorde, yow beseech and

preye” (*HS* 25-6).¹⁵⁴ Malcolm Richardson has suggested that, though there is little documented evidence of Prentys and Arondel’s work at the Privy Seal, several others—including those named in *Balades to Henry Somer*—have been corroborated by substantial bureaucratic record due to their relative professional success (1986, 320-1). Sebastian Sobecki has made considerable progress in identifying Hoccleve’s relationship to these figures suggesting that “these four men—Hoccleve, Bailey, Hethe, and Offord—formed the nucleus of active scribes at the Privy Seal from the second half of Henry IV’s reign until the death of Henry V” (2019, 66).

Sobecki has suggested that Hoccleve was, in fact, quite close with his coworkers; this is particularly true of John Bailey makes Hoccleve “the most generously treated individual” in Bailey’s will (2019, 70). Hoccleve’s poetry thus reflects a social poetics which considers the literary and financial concerns of his friends at the Privy Seal. In fact, Sobecki has more recently suggested that there is “significant circumstantial evidence for the cultivation of literary interests at the Privy Seal Office in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries” concluding that “Hoccleve wrote for a bespoke audience whom he knew, and that the audience knew him well, too—a closed inner circle” (2022, 57; 84).

More abstractly, Hoccleve introduces the figure of ‘the Friend’ in a collection of poems known as the *Series*. The Friend of these poems provides a fascinating contrast to the relative specificity Hoccleve used when addressing his friends from the Privy Seal in

¹⁵⁴ Middle English text and line numbers for the poetry of Thomas Hoccleve’s *Balades to Henry Somer* use Roger Ellis’s 2001 edition of *‘My Compleinte’ and Other Poems* unless otherwise noted. *Balades to Henry Somer* is abbreviated *HS* in parenthetical citations.

his other poetry. Despite the abstract, however, Hoccleve's discussion of textual matters with the Friend of the *Series* is far more illuminating with respect to Hoccleve's perception of scribal labor, its investments, and its performative nature. As Ethan Knapp has suggested, "The *Series* is ... a poem marked by both a self-referential meditation on writing and a form" wherein "friendship itself is one of the subjects at issue" (2001, 161;179). Friendship as a social institution has incredible influence over the structure of the text itself and, in some sense, accounts for the text's seeming instability.

Hoccleve decentralizes and dislocates his work so that it reflects a network of textual relationships, genres, attachments, and potential audiences. At the beginning of the *Dialogue*, a "good frende of fern agoon" interrupts Hoccleve's writing of his *Complaint* and Hoccleve is compelled to show his friend the text of the *Complaint* itself, "Ne my labour from him to hide or leine, / And riȝt anoon I redde hym my compleinte" (*Dia.* 8; 16-7).¹⁵⁵ His Friend, however, is afraid of the consequences of Hoccleve's circulation of the *Complaint* "[a]monge þe peple" believing that it is better to not remind people of his previous illness lest it become a fresh topic of gossip once again, "Kepe al that cloos for thin honours sake" (*Dia.* 24; 28). Jane Griffiths has suggested that "the first lines of the 'Dialogue' completely alter our understanding of the 'Complaint', as the assumption that it is a finished piece of writing in an established genre is overturned by Hoccleve's reference to the business of writing it" (2017, 99). The *Dialogue* thus accounts for the creation of the *Complaint* and the stories which follow it while also

¹⁵⁵ Middle English text and line numbers for the poetry of Thomas Hoccleve's *Dialogue* use Roger Ellis's 2001 edition of *'My Compleinte' and Other Poems* unless otherwise noted. *Dialogue* is abbreviated *Dia.* in parenthetical citations.

immediately considering its audience and the consequences of its public reception vis-à-vis the figure of the Friend.

Hoccleve's Friend suggests that he quit writing altogether as it is one of the sources, if not *the* source, of Hoccleve's mental anguish. Hoccleve explains that his next step in this project is to translate *Learn to Die* into English but, following this translation, he intends to step away from writing poetry:

‘And whanne that endid is I neuere pinke
More in Englissh after be occupied.
I may not labour as I dide, and swinke.
My lust is not therto so wel applied
As it hatben: it is ny mortified. (*Dia.* 239-43)

As we have seen elsewhere, Hoccleve is aware of the toll that writing has on his body. At 53 years old, Hoccleve notes that his “lymes sumdel now vnweldy be; / Also my sizt appeiriþ faste, and wasiþ” (*Dia.* 248-9). As D. Vance Smith has argued, “Hoccleve makes it quite clear that the recognition of the ending of this project and the ending of his life are coterminous, and that his translation will be the end of his poetic career” (2020, 222). The Friend, however, suggests that Hoccleve would live more prosperously if he simply abandoned these projects altogether (*Dia.* 295-301). The Friend's concern is that such projects might agitate Hoccleve's latent illness—“Although past be the grete of thy seeknesse / Yit lurke in the may some of hir warmnesse” (*Dia.* 314-5). Hoccleve, ever the poet, rebukes his companion for such a suggestion citing Cicero and Solomon on what it means to be a ‘true’ friend.

Hoccleve explains that he will not be spending much time on matters which do not interest him. To convince his Friend that he will not be harmed by further study, Hoccleve expresses a method of textual and intellectual production which is strikingly like the “peripatetic working practices” described in the hasty conclusions of Furnivall’s forewords (Ward 2000, 102):

If I lightly nat cache may the’effect
Of thing in which laboure I me purpose,
Adeiu my studie! Anoon my book I close.

By stirtes, whan þat a fresh lust me takith,
Wole I me bisye now and now a lyte,
But whan þat my lust dullith and asslakith,
I stynte wole and no lenger wryte (*Dia.* 502-4; 505-8)

Here Hoccleve admits that at the first signs of difficulty or tedium, he happily stops working and moves onto something else. Recall that in Furnivall’s preface to his 1868 edition of *The Babees Book*, he boldly admits that “[i]f any one thinks it a bore to read these Prefaces, I can assure him it was a much greater bore to have to hunt up the material for them, and set aside other pressing business for it” (1868, 1[n1]). The boredom and digressions that Furnivall admits to in his forewords align with Hoccleve’s self-attested practice of study. And while Hoccleve does not necessarily ask that readers skip any part of his texts, he does share with Furnivall a critical valuation of the implications of boredom. In both cases, boredom is not necessarily a stagnation of thought or interest but a sign that one’s attention might be better used elsewhere. Boredom tells us when it might be more productive to move on to something else. This

shared affective response to monotony becomes, as Jennifer Doyle has described in modern contexts, “a paradoxically generative form of inattention” (2006, xxviii).

Acquiescing to this explanation, Hoccleve’s Friend reminds him that he “of a book thow were in dette” to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester; Hoccleve suggests that “For him it is þat I this book shal make” (*Dia.* 532; 541). Hoccleve, unsure of what else to include in the book, appeals to his Friend for help: “Good freend, telle on what is best / Me for to make, and folwe it am I prest” (*Dia.* 552-3). Hoccleve’s Friend suggests writing to make amends for Hoccleve’s former insults to women, “on women greet wyt and lak / Ofte haast thow put” (*Dia.* 667-8). However, lacking the moralization for the resulting tale, *Fabula De Quadam Imperatrice Romana*, his Friend offers his own completed text for Hoccleve to copy: “Hoom wole Y walke and retourne anoon— / Nat spare wole Y for so small trauaille— / And looke in my booke” (*Dia.* 969-71).¹⁵⁶

This moment of textual circulation suggests, then, that in addition to helping shape the various genres which constitute the *Series*, Hoccleve’s Friend quite literally provided poetic material for copying. As Knapp has argued, “by refocusing his poem on the relation with his Friend, [Hoccleve] depicts an ideal extension of *communynge* into even that most solitary of activities—literary composition” (2001, 180). With an eye toward the affective registers of Hoccleve’s *Series*, Holly A. Crocker has suggested that “the act of managing of these [affective] states becomes an aesthetic endeavor ... it is a

¹⁵⁶ Middle English text and line numbers for the poetry of Thomas Hoccleve’s *Fabula de quadam imperatrice Romana* use Roger Ellis’s 2001 edition of *My Complainte’ and Other Poems* unless otherwise noted. *Fabula de quadam imperatrice* is abbreviated *Fab.* in parenthetical citations.

dialogic practice of communal (self) creation that the friend explicitly connects to poetic composition” (2019a, 71). The *Series* is thus a text which is indelibly marked by communal participation in the processes of its production.

Following this, Hoccleve believes his book to be done but his Friend once again changes the trajectory of the project, “This book thus to han endid had Y thought, / But my freend mad me change my cast” (*Fab.* 1-2). His Friend now suggests a story which details the wickedness of women for the education of his son; Hoccleve expresses frustration at his Friend’s contradicting desires for the text, “This þat yee me now reed is al contrarie / Vnto þat yee me red han heerbefore” (*Fab.* 50-1). Again, the Friend offers a copy of the text for Hoccleve’s use, “let the copie / Of þat tale, whan yow list, be me sent” (*Fab.* 78-9). Hoccleve acquiesces and renders another tale, and it is here that the *Series* ends sans resolution. The figure of the Friend himself becomes a form of productive distraction—much like Furnivall’s sporting or socializing.

Knapp concludes that—as I would argue is true of Furnivall’s chattiness in his forewords—“[t]he interspersed conversations ... represent Hoccleve’s poetic activity in the *Series* as less a matter of raw creation or even compilation by one man than as a product of dialogue and negotiation” ultimately representing “communal assemblage as a collaborate form” (2001, 181; 183). Likewise, Griffiths has argued that Hoccleve’s authorial glosses found in Durham University Library MS. Cosin V.ii.’s copy of the *Series* “are a material manifestation of his interest in the processes by which text come

into being” (2017, 91).¹⁵⁷ Much like Furnivall’s forewords, the *Series* is a text which indexes its own creation and speaks to the conditions of labor under which it was produced while performing the collective interactions required of textual production.

Furnivall quite clearly positions Hoccleve as antithetical to Victorian notions of masculinity and as a far less talented student of Chaucer. And yet, as I have shown here, it is worth considering how Furnivall’s insistence on the differences between himself and Hoccleve—itsself a kind of attachment—provides the motivation for a critical examination of their shared notions of labor, textual production, and sociality. As Felski has argued of ambivalent forms of attachment and identification, “As I recognize myself in another, I may also see something new in myself, and I may be startled or discomfited by what I see” (2020, 101). Their mutual turn toward autobiography reveals a shared, transtemporal desire to identify, speak of, and catalogue oneself as having been. Ethan Knapp has suggested that “Hoccleve’s interest in the self as its own end is thus generated only in opposition to bureaucratic anonymity. The language of bureaucracy and that of autobiography are, in effect, mutually constitutive” (2001, 36). Only by looking to Hoccleve, then, might we also more clearly understand Furnivall’s autobiographical discourses not simply a result of mere eccentricity or vanity, but as a response to the process of textual production and the rapidly formalizing profession of English literary

¹⁵⁷ Griffiths argues for a distinction between Hoccleve’s practice of glossing in the *Regement of Princes* and the poems of the *Series*. Glosses found in Hoccleve’s *Regement of Princes*, which are “citation glosses” that “visibly link his work to previous writing” (2017, 91; 92). Glosses in the *Series*, however, “gives fictive representation to the transfer of authority that is implied by the glossing of the *Regiment*: by showing the construction of the text makes the compiler more important than the component parts, the author more important than his inherited material” (2017, 100).

studies which sought to obscure intellectual subjectivities in service of larger homogenizing project undertaken by academic institutions.

Conclusion, or, One Final Digression

Of course, as Dinshaw has warned and as any responsible study of Furnivall must do, we cannot assume that Furnivall's turn toward amateur modes of thinking and production are in some way beyond critique. In fact, in addition to discussing Furnivall's alternative form of intellectual production and socialist educational practice, we must also address how his amateurism and positionality nevertheless worked in service of hegemonic institutions. In addition to his work in London, Furnivall considered the work of EETS and his other organizations to be social projects on an international scale. This chapter thus ends with a consideration of Furnivall's participation in the English imperial project as a distinct form of literary and linguistic colonial violence.

In doing so, I hope to productively digress from Furnivall himself and highlight the more radical forms of autobiographical and self-indexical scholarship—particularly within the fields of medieval and early modern literary study—which have emerged from distinctly Black, brown, and indigenous as well as queer intellectual and creative traditions which explicitly run counter to Furnivall's imperialist interests. In drawing attention to these forms, it is my goal that, while we account for Furnivall's founding role in the history of medieval literary and linguistic study, we make sure that we do not ignore how such forms have since been taken up by various scholars as a means of addressing, subverting, and exceeding that very foundation.

As Dinshaw has argued of the founding of EETS, “Middle English textual editing in mid- to late-nineteenth-century England, on the one hand, and British colonial enterprises in India, on the other, were ideologically and circumstantially related” (2001, 31). Organizational material for the Chaucer Society, Furnivall quite clearly articulates this relationship. One report distributed by EETS refers to English as “the language that shall one day be the ruling tongue of the world, which is now the speech of most of its free men” (2).¹⁵⁸ Elsewhere, Furnivall scolds the English for not properly giving their due to Chaucer: “In England’s thirty millions we can reckon only some seventy souls who care to make the small yearly sacrifice we ask for Chaucer’s fame ... and may it be, that as the work goes on, literary England and her Colonies will wake up to a sense of their duty in this matter” (1870, 1).¹⁵⁹ Many of the materials circulated in the nineteenth century that detailed the goals of the Chaucer Society and EETS suggested that the texts were meant to reach well beyond England.

Kathleen Biddick provides a detailed description of the imperialist project inherent in the foundations of EETS: “Imperial colonial identities also framed the institutionalization of English studies in the mid-nineteenth century ... Its early membership lists reflect its metropolitan, class, and imperial mission” (1998, 93). Biddick thus advises that “[t]he juxtaposition of national and colonial members and national and colonial scholarship in the EETS cannot be reduced simply to the

¹⁵⁸ Early English Text Society *Fifth Report of the Committee, January, 1869*

¹⁵⁹ Chaucer Society *Second Report (by Mr. Furnivall), February, 1870*

eccentricities of mid-nineteenth-century philology” (1998, 95).¹⁶⁰ Furnivall and EETS must be considered within a sociopolitical context which gives due attention to Furnivall’s participation in England’s ongoing colonial project during the nineteenth century. Thus, as Lisa Lampert-Weissig has argued, “F. J. Furnivall ... held some progressive views regarding the education of the working class and women. At the same time, however, the Society ... was clear in its goal of using the English literary canon instrumentally for imperial ends” (2010, 26).

Just as Furnivall’s forewords provide unmediated insight into the work ethic of Furnivall, the various materials associated with the Chaucer Society and EETS lay bare the imperialist nature of Furnivall’s goals for such organizations. To that end, we must read Furnivall’s forewords with such ideological motivations in mind. If “[p]ersonal criticism ... is often located in a specified body (or voice) marked by gender, color, and national origin,” as Nancy K. Miller has argued, we cannot approach instances of personal criticism as if they exist in an ideological vacuum (1991, 4). By attending to these intersections as they are represented in Furnivall’s forewords, we become acutely aware of how Furnivall’s digressions, lazing, and leisure are manifestations of the privileges afforded to those who can perform a particular white Victorian masculinity. And so, while Furnivall presents modern scholars with a model of intellectual labor that

¹⁶⁰ With reference to England’s colonization of Australia, Louis D’Arcens has suggested that “antipodean scholarship has been correlated with amateurism ... it is of interest here not only for its equation of the colonial with the amateur—indeed, the very notion of higher learning in the colonies invites ridicule—but also for its feminization of colonial Sydney’s ‘amateur’ intellectual community” (2004, 142). Elsewhere, D’Arcens has articulated the terms of this self-consciousness as “an anxiety about the spectre of New World amateurism” (2004, 143).

manages to remain self-reflexive and self-interested in the face of impersonalizing institutions of knowledge, we cannot forget the social conditions which allowed Furnivall to engage in such work.

In writing this chapter, it has been my goal to examine the affective attachments to texts which have shaped the editorial history of medieval texts as well as the ethics of intellectual labor that is unabashed in its celebration, criticism, and complication of the scholarly self. However, while Furnivall might help us understand how alternative forms of intellectual production and autobiographical criticism have inhered in medieval studies since its formalization as a discipline in the nineteenth century, more recent work in medieval and early modern studies addresses more directly the importance of the explicit recognition of our positionality in scholarship and the instrumentalization of premodern English literature against scholarly discourses which destabilize homogenizing narratives about the past.

Abdulhamit Arvas, Afrodesia McCannon, and Kris Trujillo have modelled a more radical approach to autobiographical criticism and self-reflection in their 2020 special issue of *postmedieval* which considers the critical productivity of the confessional form. They suggest that their issue is predicated on asking their authors “to take up the first-person singular in order to bring the past and present ‘into productive critical relation.’” This confessional mode regards “moments of praise as also opportunities for self-critique — to account for our affective attachment to and investment in premodernity while also recognizing and safeguarding against the inequity, violence, and injustice engendered by medieval and early modern institutions and forms of life” (Arvas et al. 2020, 152). By

design, then, these institutions are structured to foster a “residual misgiving that [one’s] attachment to the medieval period is too imaginary, too inauthentic, distorted by too much distance—in short, too amateur” (D’Arcens 2004, 141). Confession, thus, serves as a medium for the consideration of what it means to be who you are in the field of medieval and early modern history and literature.

The scholarly-autobiographical thus becomes—particularly for Black, brown, and indigenous scholars—“a generative, maybe even essential, mode of academic inquiry ... an opportunity to foreground the embodied and material experiences that shape our work ... and the newfound forms of knowledge made possible by attending to our positionalities” (Arvas et al. 2020, 154). Locating the emergence of this critical form in feminist writings of the 1970s and 1980s, Linda Anderson has suggested that, through writing about oneself, “criticism could openly address those vulnerabilities and desires which it was usually forced to conceal; it could admit the ways the intellectual was necessarily joined to the social, domestic and physical life” (2012, 138).

Such a critical mode does not eschew the self, nor does it work in the service of hegemonic institutional powers; it appropriates and repurposes the personal mode of Furnivall’s forewords to problematize and challenge the very colonial institutions Furnivall believed supported the study of medieval literature and language. For white scholars of medieval and early modern literature, then, these confessional modes of scholarly engagement should provide an introspective impetus for recognizing and acting to dismantle what Ayanna Thompson has identified as the “unwritten codes of conduct ... meant to serve those in the know and to disadvantage those who are not already in the

club,” or, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has described it, the “exclusions upon which the fields of medieval and early modern studies were founded” (2020, 339; 341). Attending to the self in one’s scholarship suggests, then, not simply an inverting of the existing hierarchies of academia but a critical reconstitution of the structures of academia itself.

And to be perfectly clear, I do not mean to liken Furnivall’s autobiographical gestures to those utilized by more recent scholars. Throughout the process of writing this chapter, my sense has been that, despite the several and varied protestations levied against Furnivall by his peers and his lack of an academic appointment, he was never in danger of truly being disqualified from the emerging scholarly community of medieval studies by virtue of his positionality. Thus, his forewords, while autobiographical, bespeak a certain kind of disciplinary and institutional privilege, and his forewords suggest a form of labor which is largely untenable for scholars who are not white men.¹⁶¹ As Arvas, McCannon, and Trujillo’s argue in their introduction to their issue of *postmedieval*, the history of the field of medieval and early modern studies has been one marked by the exclusion of Black, brown, and indigenous as well as queer and trans scholars whose work, by its mere existence and often contested reception, expose the

¹⁶¹ This is particularly true of Furnivall whose work with Middle English texts served a distinctly homosocial function. As Ward has argued, “we can see Furnivall’s desire for Chaucer more as a function which allows further homosocial interactions between himself and other critics or readers, a desire for others to desire Chaucer, rather than a singular feeling of Furnivall’s for Chaucer alone” (1997, 51). We cannot ignore, then, how such homosocial relationships consist almost exclusively of the “pale faces ... [of] the Britons who established the modern textual study of Chaucer and edited his works, who sought to edit and make readily available the entire corpus of early English texts, and whose editing of medieval texts mapped the medieval world” (Dinshaw 2001, 30).

inner workings of “an academic system that, itself, suffers from deep-rooted racial, class, and gender biases” (2020, 154).

Because the scholarly necessarily becomes the personal for such scholars vis-à-vis these exclusionary practices, personal and self-indexical analysis has become a mode of critical thinking which addresses the lived experience of the scholar behind the work. Likewise, it has “offer[ed] a way of inserting their difference into a discourse which was otherwise oblivious to it” or, as several scholars have suggested, purposefully crafted to avoid its discussion altogether (Anderson 2012, 140). This kind of work thus “deconstruct[s] the unity and hegemony of the critical subject and its claims to objectivity, and attest[s] to the variety of different points of view which have been overlooked or disenfranchised by the academy” (Anderson 2012, 139).

The institutionalization of medieval literature and language may have somewhat paradoxically started in earnest with Furnivall’s ‘odd’ prefaces; however, it certainly did not end there. While contemporary and modern responses to Furnivall’s forewords and correspondences certainly suggest the potential subversiveness of his scholarship, it is only through the modern intellectual labor of those traditionally marginalized or explicitly excluded that we can begin to see just how Furnivall himself nevertheless contributed to the regulatory intellectual institutions of the modern university. This chapter began with a consideration of Furnivall’s methods of work, his uncouth formulation of leisure as labor, and its implications for modern scholars. I believe that Furnivall does teach us about how academia itself, at least as it exists presently, is an institution unwilling or to unable to—recognize individual subjectivity. Acutely aware

that he would never occupy a position within the academy proper, Furnivall demonstrates how lazing, digression, and distraction—far from being incommensurable with scholarly work—might help us better recognize and respond to our affective responses and attachments to textual material. As Dinshaw has pointed out, Furnivall’s methods meant “pushing forward vigorously with whatever resources he had, bringing people together in order to create even broader attachments, all on his own, *sui generis*, and in his own time” (2012, 27).

Furnivall’s enthusiasm noticeably dimmed, however, when it came to working with Hoccleve’s poetry. Furnivall’s response to the Privy Seal clerk was, at best, ambivalent. However, this chapter has also shown how ambivalent attachment to the subject of one’s work is still grounds for a kind of identificatory practice. By reading Furnivall through Hoccleve’s autobiographical gestures, we can see how Furnivall’s intellectual practice is, in fact, a deeply medieval approach to textual production. I likewise consider the problematics of Furnivall’s imperial investments when considering his scholarly production and how recent work in the fields of medieval and early modern studies provide more radical forms of personal criticism that explicitly challenge Furnivall’s association between English colonialism and the premodern past. I purposefully digress from Furnivall’s example to highlight the methods of Black, brown, and indigenous scholars whose work explicitly engages in personal forms of criticism that articulates how “work, including its absence, is both important to and differently experienced within and across lines of class, gender, race, and nation” (Weeks 2011, 17). To that end, Furnivall’s attachments—textual, personal, and political—provide a

significant, if not complex, backdrop for the consideration of the history of medieval studies and the more equitable and affectively attuned direction in which it is headed.

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Chapter Four

“The two stories are like transparencies”:
Queer Medievalism in Robert Glück’s *Margery Kempe* ¹⁶²

“Jesus and Margery act out my love. Is that a problem?”

— Robert Glück, *Margery Kempe* (1994, 81)

“Yet Margery Kempe could not control the experiences of readers in the centuries that followed the dictation of her book; nor could she ensure that her truths would remain embodied in the text, the ‘sentence’ in the ‘experiens,’ in future editions which were made of her book.”

— Karma Lochrie, *Translations of the Flesh* (1991, 203)

Introduction

The *Book of Margery Kempe* is a text marked by its persistent desire to experience the past and future simultaneously as a singular present moment. Throughout the *Book*, Margery Kempe finds herself face-to-face with and participating in the events of Christ’s life through a devotional practice of contemplation. Kempe’s expression of the intense immediacy of these events finds supplement in the extreme affective registers elicited by Kempe’s asynchronous participation in these scenes. Early in the *Book*, Kempe attempts to follow Christ’s order that she “ly style & speke to me be / thowt, & I schal zefe to þe

¹⁶² I want to begin this chapter with a sincere thank you to Robert Glück, author of *Margery Kempe*, for his gracious and illuminating correspondence over email. I fear I lack the ability to ‘speak’ to the past like Dryden or Furnivall; my work is an attempt to make sense of texts. I am therefore incredibly grateful for the opportunity to discuss this text with its author. The quotation in the title is taken from Glück’s essay, “My Margery, Margery’s Bob,” and in its entirety reads: “The two stories are like transparencies; each can be read only in terms of the other” (2016, 166).

hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon” (17.29-31).¹⁶³ However, Kempe is unable to think of a subject to serve as the basis for her meditation—“sche lay styлле, nowt / knowing what sche mygth best thynke” (18.10-1). Christ suggests that Kempe should “thynk on my Modyr” (18.14). With Mary in mind, Kempe sees “Seynt Anne [mother of Mary] / gret wyth chylde” and asks Anne if she might be “hir mayden & hir seruawnt” (18.15-16, 17). Here we find Kempe’s visionary practice not simply one of observation, but of active participation—what Anne Clark Bartlett has described as “script[ing] herself into biblical narratives” (2004, 446).

Kempe describes raising Mary alongside Anne “tyl it wer twelve 3er of age with good mete & / drynke, with fayr whyte clothys & whyte kerchys” (18.19-20). Kempe then proceeds to explain to Mary that she will be “þe Modyr of God” (18.22). Kempe’s disclosure of Mary’s miraculous pregnancy represents a kind of temporal and narratological rift in the orthodox narrative of Mary’s annunciation—what Jessica Hines has described regarding Kempe’s visions of Mary Magdalene Kempe’s as a “hypothetical” or “counterfactual past”—as it preempts Gabriel’s announcement of

¹⁶³ Middle English quotations cited from Early English Text Society’s edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1940). Because line numbering resets for each page, my parenthetical citations will feature the page number followed by the line numbers of that respective page.

Christ's conception found in the gospel of Luke (2019, 282).¹⁶⁴ Mary leaves Kempe for some time and returns to explain that she has "be-kome þe Modyr of God" causing Kempe to "fel down on her kneys wyth gret reuerens & gret wepyng" (18.29-30).

Kempe then attends to Mary as they arrive in Bethlehem and prepare for the birth of Christ. Kempe dutifully "purchasyd [Mary] herborwe euery nyght / wyth gret reuerens" and "beggyd owyr Lady fayr whyte clothys & kerchys for to swathyn in hir Sone" (19.11-2, 13). Upon seeing the newborn Christ, Kempe "swathyd hym wyth / byttyr teerys of compassyon, hauyng mend of þe scharp / deth þat he schuld suffyr for þe lofe of synful men" (19.18-20). Kempe speaks directly to the newborn Christ and asks that the infant "beth not / dysplesyded wyth me" (19.22-3). Kempe's present apprehension when swaddling Christ and her affective reaction, her 'byttyr teerys of compassyon,' result from her knowledge of Christ's future death. That said, Kempe's corporeal body—that which is still meditating—exists in fifteenth century Lynn. These entangled temporalities and states of feeling demonstrate how, as Hines has suggested, Kempe's "[p]rocesses of cognition, including remembrance, imagination, and knowledge acquisition, are entwined with processes of feeling" (2019, 267-8).

¹⁶⁴ In fact, this is a scene that Kempe elides entirely. The annunciation details the angel Gabriel's declaration that the virgin Mary would bear the son of God: "ecce concipies in utero et paries filium et vocabis nomen eius Iesum / hic erit magnus et Filius Altissimi vocabitur et dabit illi Dominus Deus sedem Devid patris eius" [Behold, you will hold in your womb and give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus / and he will be great and named the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give to him the seat of David his father] (Luke 1:31-2; LV). Kempe seems to assume the role of Gabriel in her meditation as an arbiter of divine revelation.

Kempe reinforces her role in the narrative of Christ's birth by detailing her emotional state when three magi visit Christ with gifts while Kempe, ever-present as "owyr Ladys / hand-mayden," witnesses "þe processe in contemplacyon" and "wept wondyr sor" at the sight (19.27-8). Kempe complicates the temporality of this meditation further by explaining how during Mary and Joseph's flight into Egypt experienced time passes "day be day" as Kempe considers "swet thowtys & hy medytacyons & also hy / contemplacyons, sumtime during in wepyn ij owyres / & oftyn lengar in þe mend of owyr Lordys Passyon wyth-owtyn sesyng" (19.36-20.1). At some point during this period of thought, though it is not made clear when exactly, Kempe wishes to die—"to be / delyueryd owt of þis wretchyd world" (20.7-8).

Seemingly removed from the narrative of Christ's birth which she was describing moments ago, Christ tells Kempe that she must remain to "prey for al þe world, for many / hundryd thowsand sowlys schal be sauyd be þi prayers" (20.11-2). As Zimbalist Barbara has suggested, Kempe's text "locate[s] Christ's speech in the present moment, not only of the narrator but of the reader, while simultaneously referencing the historical, biblical temporality of Christ's original utterance" (2005, 19). It is with this divinely ordained directive in mind that Kempe continues the composition of her *Book* vis-à-vis a strategy of affective and narratological self-interpolation within the story of Christ's life and death. Kempe's relationship with and attachment to Christ thus becomes a matter of the past, present, and future not just for herself, but a broader transtemporal devotional community.

In this vein, Rebecca Krug has argued for how Kempe's *Book* "invites its readers ... to read themselves into the pages of the *Book* itself as active agents participating in the same process of reflection, revision, and self-creation in which Kempe, as both author and reader, engages" (2017, 3). Krug's description of readers' familiar encounters with the *Book* recalls my previous chapters' work on the critical utility of idiosyncratic acts of interpretation in the production of an 'attached' aesthetic practice. And, as my previous chapters have shown, attachment is, perhaps, most legible when distinctive facets of a text very clearly attract the attention of a reader—whether that attention be the result of admiration, provocation, or misrecognition.

And while I began with an example from Kempe's *Book*, the focus of this chapter will be split between the Middle English text and a specific twentieth-century adaptation of Kempe's text—Robert Glück's 1994 novel *Margery Kempe*. By working with the Middle English *Book of Margery Kempe* alongside the modern *Margery Kempe*, this last chapter synthesizes the central arguments which have structured the previous three chapters: the efficacy of queer textual practices of 'crudity' and omission, the material aesthetics of attachment in the physical production of a text, and the autobiographical urge to identify with the proclivities of Middle English subjects.

Within the text of *Margery Kempe*, Glück explicitly recognizes how his appropriation of Kempe's narrative is, in part, an attempt to give a language to his own modern queer desire. He reflexively indexes the queer terms of the novel's production: "I perform my story by lip-synching Margery's loud longing but I wonder if that visible self-erasure is just a failure to face L. ... I push myself under the surface of Margery's

story, holding my breath for a happy ending to my own” (1994, 49). This chapter thus considers how the interpolative aesthetic practice of Glück’s novel—which alternates dizzyingly between a selective retelling of the *Book*’s events and a pseudo-autobiographical account of the author’s relationship with a man only ever referred to as L.—is itself a kind of queer medievalism which locates modern notions of queerness within the context of the erotics of medieval devotional practice. As Mary Burger has suggested, “It’s only through this assemblage of disparate stories as overlapping words, through the fabrication of symmetries between Margery’s story and Bob’s, that Glück can narrate his own experience” (2021, 389). Furthermore, this chapter explores how the queer medievalism of Glück’s interpolated narrative and descriptions of queer desire are constitutive of an aesthetics of attachment which consciously replicate Kempe’s notion of the continuum between textual and physical intimacy.

‘Second-Rate Whining,’ or the Displeasure of Reading *Margery Kempe*

Glück’s text has found new life in the form of reviews, interviews, and scholarly articles which consider the contours of queer time, love, and being in *Margery Kempe* because of the 2020 rerelease of *Margery Kempe* by the New York Review of Books. This reissue motivates my reconsideration of Glück’s novel and its relationship to *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Upon its release in 1994, Glück’s novel was met with a range of reactions by mainstream publishing outlets—often perplexed and almost always

negative—that dared even bring it to their readers’ attention.¹⁶⁵ An anonymous *Publisher’s Weekly* review describes the novel with an almost palpable contempt, “Margery Kempe lives up to neither its potential nor its premise ... It’s not the idea of Jesus having a sex life that is so repellent but the strident explicitness ... Gluck’s Margery is so ugly and coarse she doesn’t come across as a woman at all—just a man’s skewed rendering of one.”

This reaction, however, was likely anticipated by Glück and others who populated the New Narrative movement. As a form of experimental writing with its aesthetic and formal roots in 1970s San Francisco, New Narrative was imagined as communally motivated and provocative from its outset. Kevin Killian and Dodie Bellamy have described New Narrative as “a writing prompted not by fiat nor consensus ... it would be unafraid of experiment, unafraid of kitsch, unafraid of sex and gossip and political debate” (2017, i). As Glück explains, New Narrative works “were theatrical and they seem ... to pressure even sometimes reverse the positions of reader and writer” (2016,

¹⁶⁵ The most extreme of these reviews, perhaps, comes from the conservative news outlet the *Washington Examiner* in 2020. Adrian Nathan West suggests that “in his self-regard, Gluck has taken a rich vein of material ... and turned it into a cipher for a love affair that is part bodice-ripper, part pornography, part pop psychology, and part pedestrian rehash of the radical credos of yesteryear.” He accuses the book of “an insistent, petulant lewdness that feels less like literary provocation than the drab drolleries of a high school pervert ... what Gluck offers here is a mere index of preferred objects of lascivious contemplation. That is fine for him, but it is vanity to deck it all with a few fancy phrases and call it art.” I think it is important to recognize how similar the rhetoric of vocally anti-queer publications like the *Washington Examiner* is indicative of more mainstream understandings of the text regardless of explicit political affiliation.

16).¹⁶⁶ To that end, New Narrative work tended to be self-reflexive—or bent toward self-critique of its own form. Furthermore, Glück has explained how the New Narrative form is a product of autobiographical thought:

by autobiography we meant daydreams, nightdreams, the act of writing, the relationship to the reader, the meeting of flesh and culture, the self as collaboration, the self as disintegration, the gaps, inconsistencies and distortions, the enjambments of power, family, and language. Bruce [Boone] and I brought high and low between the covers of a book, mingling essay, lyric, and story. (2016, 18)

Killian and Bellamy have suggested that New Narrative is conceived of as “[a] system of writing designed to be optimally responsive to cultural and political changed has to go with the flow, bend with it” (2017, ii). For example, Glück juxtaposes Kempe’s narrative alongside the political and social scene of his own modern queer experience: “L.’s ex died of AIDS. They’d had some unsafe sex. Is that how it will go?—Will sickness weaken L. till he accepts my love?” (67). New Narrative was particularly affected by the loss of life and the further marginalization of queer communities spurred the AIDS epidemic: “AIDS robbed us of that particularly theoretical framework, and in our eyes reduced New Narrative to just another useless clump of ego delaying or even preventing direct political action” (Killian and Bellamy 2017, xviii). In this sense, New Narrative

¹⁶⁶ Though New Narrative is a community-driven form, the origin of New Narrative is often attributed to the result of Glück’s aesthetic sensibilities in tandem with the work of authors Bruce Boone and Steve Abbot. For more on Bruce Boone, see *Bruce Boone Dismembered: Poems, Stories, and Essays* (2020) edited by Rob Halpern. For Steve Abbott, the first to describe the form as ‘New Narrative,’ see *Beautiful Aliens: A Steve Abbot Reader* (2019) edited by Jamie Townsend. See also the 2021 special issue of *Textual Practice* 35 (8) on the significance of the New Narrative movement.

was very much invested in the aesthetic and formal particularities of San Francisco's queer community in the 1970s and 1980s and, in turn, its literary production largely reflected these queer political interests.¹⁶⁷

Another anonymous review published by *Kirkus Reviews* highlights the mainstream perception of New Narrative's emphasis on narrative fragmentation, communitarian political thought, and formal complexity. The review suggests that "Glück pushes the envelope way too far as he attempts to use the history of a failed, would-be saint from the 15th century to explore his own romantic obsession in the 1990s" while pathologizing Kempe's belief as "the unhealthy psychology of [a] Jesus-crazed heretic." The reviewer continues, "the author sprinkles in his own unrequited-love story with a pretty little rich boy who refuses to make a commitment ... Numbingly frenzied, frustrated, and futile." Reviewing the novel for *Booklist*, Whitney Scott admits to finding Kempe's character "peculiarly appealing" but ultimately suggests it is only "the book's sheer audacity [that] may help it find an avid niche audience." These reviews demonstrate the prevailing discourses surrounding queerness at the time of *Margery Kempe's* publication—what Daniel Felsenthal has described as, "the squeamish landscape of the late 1980s and 1990s" (2020). According to these outlets, then, Glück's novel has little to offer the anticipated—perhaps, normative—reader.

In a situation not unlike my examination of the illuminations of MS Cotton Nero A.x., these reviews make clear that the text's initial reception is characterized by the

¹⁶⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the fiercely political aspect of New Narrative, see Rob Halpern's "Realism and Utopia: Sex, Writing, and Activism in New Narrative" (2011).

seeming incommensurability of Glück's queer narrative practice with their own notion of what a novel should be or do for the reader. Norman W. Jones has suggested that gay and lesbian historical fiction, a genre to which *Margery Kempe* belongs and exceeds, often engages in a practice of 'metafiction' which "breaks the implicit contract fictional stories make with readers in that it pulls the reader out of the story by thwarting the reader's expectations for how the laws of the fictional world work" (2007, 34). By looking more critically at these reactions, we might begin to see how, as Tyler Bradway has suggested of New Narrative broadly, the text of *Margery Kempe* "becomes an animate social scene for catalysing [*sic*] and meditating on affective relations ... combin[ing] the psychic and physical violence of homophobia and patriarchy with the ecstatic pleasures of queer embodiment" (2021, 1302). Glück's novel stages queer desire, its 'strident explicitness,' alongside the potential for queer community-building, its 'avid niche audience.' To that end, early reviews of the novel provide us with a small glimpse into the anti-queer sentiments that pervade the reception of unambiguously—perhaps, excessively—queer texts like *Margery Kempe*.

Queer publications have tended to engage with Glück's novel on its own terms—that is, queerly. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these write-ups have been more keenly attuned to the issues, tensions, and anxieties that attend queerness. Sexuality and eroticism fail to register as points of concern for these reviewers. This does not mean, however, that they spare any criticisms on account of this shared interest. With the explicitness of Glück's *Margery Kempe* rendered a non-issue, it is Glück's insistence on himself which as a textual concern for queer reviewers. Writing for *The Lavender Salon Reader*, Tony

Leuzzi begins by noting the breadth of categories by which the Library of Congress has classified *Margery Kempe*: “Women Authors, in Middle English (1100-1500); Women mystics; Gay men in the US; Obsession; and, of course, Fiction.” Leuzzi suggests that the novel’s paralleling of Kempe’s story with Glück’s own narrative “reveals the generic nature of the love experience.” In a parenthetical aside, Leuzzi describes how, even though “[n]othing, after all, could appear to be more different than Margery’s mystical union with Jesus and a gay love affair,” Glück effectively demonstrates how “the two situations are eerily similar in the dimension of feeling and emotions they project.” Ultimately, Leuzzi describes Glück’s ability “to document love and emotions so intensely personal and accurate that it is uncomfortable and even embarrassing to read” (1995, 4).

Leuzzi continues suggesting that Glück’s prose is often overwhelming as it “intoxicates, much like the scent of a perfumed handkerchief pressed to the nose” noting that “lush odors are ultimately suffocating.” To that end, Leuzzi admits that “Glück’s style is not everyone’s cup of tea ... [d]epending on one’s view of love, Glück might be considered a bit too extreme if not neurotic.” In a puzzling criticism that attempts to link Glück’s use of “the third person voice” and Kempe’s illiteracy, Leuzzi finds the novel to be “at once strikingly authentic and irresponsibly inaccurate,” claiming that Glück should know better “as a self-proclaimed Medievalist” that Kempe “dictated her story to scribes

who were able to operate in the language” (11).¹⁶⁸ Leuzzi’s review provides us with a useful point of comparison when thinking about how Glück’s novel has been received in both normative and queer publishing contexts. The review’s emphasis on Glück’s ability to describe emotion—to the point, perhaps, of smothering the reader—suggests the potential for a more receptive audience whose immediate reaction is not to reject the novel because of its overwhelming affective weight, but rather to view this weight as a formal feature of the text through which Glück translates meaning and relates to Kempe.

Raphael Kadushin’s 1994 review for the *Lambda Book Report* begins with a playful warning: “Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the bookstores, Robert Glück’s latest novel has hit shelves.” Kadushin continues suggesting that *Margery Kempe* might prove difficult “for people who like their gay lit light and predictable” as the novel “is a pure challenge, bent on putting the meta back into fiction.” While the previous reviews seemed surprised by Glück’s novel, Kadushin distinguishes Glück from his contemporaries as “ha[ving] earned the right to make us think” and describes his novel as “an antidote ... a necessary relief ... a burst of unbridled energy that’s infectious.” And, unlike other review outlets, Kadushin positions Kempe as a “heroine” whose failure to achieve sainthood “seems immaterial.” This reorientation of failure within the context of

¹⁶⁸ The claim that Glück is “a self-proclaimed Medievalist” is provocative. While such a self-description would go a long way in this chapter, there appears to be no basis for this comment. More recently, Cam Scott has described Glück “[a]s an amateur Medievalist with scandalous designs upon his source text” (2020). Curious about the literalness of these claims, I asked Glück if he had ever referred to himself as a medievalist. He informed me that he “never proclaimed myself a Medievalist. And in fact I limited my historical research in this book to clothes, food, and birds, and of course the look of the era and the combination of Margery’s sentence and my own.”

his review suggests queer theory's later turn toward failure as an epistemological framework—as Jack Halberstam has suggested, “failure presents an opportunity rather than a dead end” (2012, 96). Rather than discounting Glück's interleaving narrative for its vulgarity, “this bloody picaresque,” Kadushin reviews the text in its own tonal register: “[T]he son turns out to be a tease. Abandoning his disciple, and reappearing only for brief heavy petting sessions, Jesus keeps Margery guessing.”

Elsewhere in the review, and in anticipation of Jose Esteban Muñoz's articulation of ‘disidentification,’ Kadushin's review undermines the accusation that Glück's Christ is anything more than an enthusiastic reaffirmation of the eroticism inhered in various icons and images used by certain sects of Christianity: “Glück's eroticized Jesus is nothing new (every fundamentalist hand-out features at least one pin-up of a bull-necked Jesus looking as buffed as a linebacker).”¹⁶⁹ That said, Kadushin is incredibly critical Glück's autobiographical portions of the novel, suggesting that his presence alongside Kempe “mars all this” because, ultimately, “the parallel stories never really play off each other.” The review concludes by asserting that Bob “sound[s] like a second-rate whiner squeezed

¹⁶⁹ Muñoz describes disidentification as a process which “scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications ... it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (1999, 31).

into the novel's margins."¹⁷⁰ Kadushin goes as far as to claim that the entire project itself is, perhaps, unwarranted:

The fact is, Gluck doesn't need to update the book. Buoyed by the conviction of her own cracked passion, hurling herself at ecstasy, Margery is genuine and familiar enough, the kind of diva you can't help rooting for. Maybe she doesn't make it all the way to heaven. But she does come close. And she definitely earns the stigmata that she displays with pride, like the collective battle-scars of everyone who has ever loved too much. (1994, 21)

Margery Kempe remains a diva that can stand on her own; she has earned her 'stigmata.' Glück, apparently, does not. In this sense, Kadushin's review reaffirms broader critiques of *Margery Kempe* as it concludes by highlighting the problematic place of Glück's interpolated narrative within the novel. Furthermore, it presents us with an example of how queer reading—how queers reading—is not and never will be a uniform experience.¹⁷¹ Where Leuzzi's review emphasizes the value of the Glück's paralleling of

¹⁷⁰ Kadushin seems to be borrowing the language Glück uses to describe Kempe and, by extension, himself: "[Kempe] turned her second-rate obsession into her last bid for endless response, a self asserted just as the world withdrew its support" (1994, 160). Kadushin by no means must enjoy Glück's 'whining,' but it does beg the question of whether or not Glück was consciously using these terms in pursuit of a particular narrative affect. I tend to think Kadushin's perception of Bob as 'second-rate whiner' is, perhaps, the point.

¹⁷¹ As Tyler Bradway astutely suggests, "[Q]ueer reading does not solely emerge from the academy, nor can it be encompassed by the institutional histories and disciplinary idioms of queer theory. Rather, queer reading is a social practice that unfold through para-academic, non-academic, and activist communities alike, which are no less invested than theorists and scholars in the question of what reading should look like or what its political effects might be" (2021, 1299-300).

his own romantic interests with Kempe's relationship to Christ, Kadushin finds this narrative practice particularly asinine.

If popular reviews can tell us how the general reading public—straight or queer—received *Margery Kempe*, we might then look to academic work on the novel for insight into how scholars handled the text. The reception of the novel has been sporadic with the bulk of its criticism arriving in the past few years—roughly coinciding with its reprinting in 2020—and from scholars positioned outside of medieval studies.¹⁷² Carolyn Dinshaw's now-essential work of medieval queer theory *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* provided the first substantive study of Kempe's queerness in the Middle English *Book*, Glück's postmodern narrative practice in his

¹⁷² Little has changed since Jennifer Louise Balke's 2012 dissertation described the inconsistent reception of the novel in academic contexts, "[O]nly a handful of articles or book chapters have been published to date that re-envision Kempe and her autobiography utilizing Glück's retelling as an entry point" (114).

Balke notes that, as of 2012, only Carolyn Dinshaw's 1999 book *Getting Medieval* and Anne Clarke Bartlett's 2001 article "Reading it Personally: Robert Gluck, Margery Kempe, and Language in Crisis" engaged with *Margery Kempe* as an object of study. Since 2011, the bibliography of scholarship on Glück's novel has expanded only slightly adding chapters by Diane Watt (2004) and Christine Neufeld (2013; which likewise notes the lack of scholarship on the novel) as well as, more recently, Mary Burger's article (2021) and Robin Tremblay-McGaw's chapter (2022). Indeed, some of the most recent scholarship on the novel has come from scholars of postmodernist American literature such as the essays collected in a special issue of *Textual Practices* (2021) issue on New Narrative.

Emily M. Harless's "Queer Medievalisms, Queer Utopias" (2021) and Maybelle Leung "Staging Submission in *The Book of Margery Kempe* and *Story of O: A Study in Contractual Masochism*" (2022)—both written for the research blog portion of *The Margery Kempe Society*—both suggest a similar renewal in interest from medievalists pursuing queer studies and medievalism.

novel, and the relevance of medieval studies to modern modes of queer being and knowing. Dinshaw describes the novel as “in more or less straightforward paraphrase, sometimes with fictionalized additions that do not appeal to any historical veracity, sometimes with specific changes that, while fictional, nonetheless resonate with historical conditions” (1999, 165). The novel’s selective and erratic engagement with the *Book* makes it difficult to handle—are we supposed to read the text as a retelling of Kempe’s narrative, a supplement to Kempe’s narrative, or something else entirely?¹⁷³

Dinshaw identifies the potentially disorienting form of the novel and how “Glück’s Middle Ages functions in reference to the present,” wherein “[t]he meeting of Margery and Bob consists of simultaneous movements forward and backward” (1999, 168). This back-and-forth movement through time will come to define Glück’s engagement with the medieval past—his queer medievalism—and the formal aesthetic qualities of *Margery Kempe* as a novel. Indeed, medievalism itself is a useful analytic category for considering *Margery Kempe* because it rightfully assumes the distortion—what David Matthews has described as the “unending play with the instability of temporal boundaries”—inherent in process of transmission, reception, and reproduction of a medieval past (2015, 49). As Matthews has suggested, “Medievalism is one aspect of the way in which, today, a popular turn to history affords individuals a form of self-fashioning that lies outside traditional structures of value” (2015, 113). That said, while

¹⁷³ Glück himself asks these questions in his *Long Note on New Narrative*: “how to be a theory-based writer?—one question. How to represent my experience as a gay man?—another question, just as pressing. These questions led to readers and communities almost completely ignorant of each other.” (2016, 16).

medievalism is itself a potentially marginalized and subversive practice, this does not mean that medievalism is somehow always queer. In fact, most medievalism—past and present—involves the explicit recognition by ruling institutions and classes that the past itself can be weaponized as an instrument of racist, colonialist, sexist, and queerphobic violence.¹⁷⁴

Other scholars have been more critical of Glück's *Margery Kempe*. Diane Watt has considered the contents of Glück's novel alongside what she describes as “the responsibilities of interpretation” and the importance of “what might be termed ‘compassionate’ criticism.” Watt engages with the chapter of Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval* described above and Glück's novel to provide a practical example of what, to borrow her formulation, might be deemed “uncompassionate” criticism—that is, criticism unattuned to communities “that ought to be constructed to accommodate difference.” Watt is concerned with how Dinshaw's book, described as “not always completely reader-aware,” performs a kind of feminist erasure: “I have become increasingly anxious about the way feminist interests are often overlooked within the queer interpretive community” (2004, 192). However, I am not convinced of the efficacy of a practice of ‘compassionate reading’ which seeks to minimize individual ‘preoccupations’—to

¹⁷⁴ See also, chapter three's discussion of Furnivall's nationalist and colonialist interests. See Bernard Rosenthal and Paul E. Szarmach's edited collection *Medievalism in American Culture* (1989), Kathleen Biddick's *The Shock of Medievalism* (1998), John Ganim's *Medievalism and Orientalism* (2005), Bruce Holsinger's *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror* (2007), Andrew B. R. Elliot's *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media* (2017), Daniel Wollenberg's and *Medieval Imagery in Today's Politics* (2018).

borrow Watt's later phrasing—while unnecessarily hierarchizing queer and feminist textual interests.

Watt's critique of Dinshaw seems to stem from Watt's inability to identify with the specificities of Dinshaw's scholarship. This is no doubt due in part to the idiosyncrasies Dinshaw purposefully interweaves throughout her chapter on Kempe and *Getting Medieval* more broadly. This detail is a methodological cornerstone for Dinshaw, however, and not one she is shy about expressing explicitly: "Margery and I are both queer—in different ways, in relation to our very different surroundings—and are thus queerly related to one another" (1999, 158). Not entirely convinced of Dinshaw's arguments concerning American medievalism, Watt describes this part of the chapter as "becom[ing] rather lost in Dinshaw's own preoccupations." This strikes me as a particularly condescending critique of Dinshaw's book. I would argue that *all* scholarship is a collection of idiosyncratic 'preoccupations' organized broadly—and often inadequately—by discipline or field. As Seth Lerer has argued, "scholarship itself can be a form of personal illumination" (2002, 2). Watt goes on to explain that "this section assumes an informed and exclusively North American readership, and is, inevitably, alienating for those of us who are not part of the United States university system" (2004, 205). Watt provides this critique of Dinshaw's chapter on Margery Kempe under the assumption that it represents what I previously referred to as 'uncompassionate' criticism.

It would seem to me, however, that Watt's notion of 'compassionate' criticism is predicated largely on her own sense of an argument's validity. It is supplemented further by Watt's own ability to identify with the idiosyncrasies of Dinshaw's identity and its

relationship to her work. And while I agree that authors should provide adequate context for their arguments, an author cannot attend to every detail of which a reader might be unaware—for example, the history of American medievalism and its relationship to its university systems. Watt’s critique is, then, that she cannot seem to locate herself in Dinshaw’s work; however, it appears to me that this was Dinshaw’s intention. While much of Dinshaw’s scholarship is widely applicable to medieval studies, there are moments of self-recognition that enplace and ground Dinshaw as a living breathing human being. Again, this is not a bug in Dinshaw’s method, but rather a vital feature.

In Dinshaw’s lecture for 2000 New Chaucer Society, she begins by describing this very method of criticism: “I have been spending a lot of time lately trying to figure out what it means to me in particular when I read medieval writers such as the *Mandeville*-author imagining the Orient. What might the medieval European past have to do with my Asian-American present” (2001, 20). The contingent of individuals at this gathering that might have identified precisely with Dinshaw, elsewhere self-described as “a queer — a dyke and only sort of white,” was likely small—if at all extant (2012, 32). I am none of things she describes here, but I do not assume that her argument is somehow less ‘compassionate’ because it discusses identities outside of and unlike my own. Indeed, as my previous chapters have shown, the assumption of a universalizing aesthetic or methodological interpretation has often been used to disqualify meaningful examinations of the individualized reception of Middle English texts.

In this sense, Watt’s chapter reproduces several the criticisms lodged against Glück’s *Margery Kempe* by reviewers. Specifically, it conjures the charge of the tedium

having to read through the author's self-reflexive method and idiosyncratic self-interpolation. Watt seems to understand the presence of Dinshaw in her own work is inherently exclusionary as it, perhaps, deliberately casts aside those normative institutional and cultural hegemonies—race, religion, class, gender, sexuality, and so on—which have come to define medieval studies. Watt is dissatisfied with Dinshaw's engagement with feminist theory, however, in *Getting Medieval*, noting that “feminism is not an indexed term, although some brief references are made to it, almost in passing” (2004, 205). It becomes clear at this point, however, that Watt's desire to center feminist theory becomes more of an issue of an attachment to her preferred form of interpretation rather than the basis for a substantial critique of Dinshaw's methodology. As Rita Felski has suggested, “Scholars feel strongly, even passionately, about their methods. Interpretation is not just a mechanism of attachment; it is an *object* of attachment” (2020, 132). Watt refers to the lack of explicitly named feminist theory as “a disappointing omission” (2004, 206).

Even a quick search of the book, however, returns several meaningful instances of Dinshaw's recognition of feminist theorists and theory. For example, Dinshaw suggests that her work “[f]ollow[s] a generation of feminist theorists such as Teresa de Lauratetis, Barbara Johnson, Audre Lorde, and Hortense Spillers” and “thus draws on feminisms that have negotiated shifting relations between sex, gender, and other cultural phenomena”

(1999, 12; 13).¹⁷⁵ This critique of an ‘underrecognized’ feminist basis is ultimately a curious one; presumably there are a number of references to feminism that would have satisfied Watt but it remains perpetually out of reach for Dinshaw. Then again, and this is ultimately my point, Dinshaw’s methodology is also radically inclusionary as it highlights how the markers by which we construct identity intersect and overlap in a contingent of readers whose experience with Middle English texts is highly particularized and often marginalized. By focusing on Dinshaw’s lack of feminist allusion, Watt avoids elides those who *are* spoken to and for in Dinshaw’s queer history.

Watt’s critique extends beyond Dinshaw, however, toward the textual material which Dinshaw has chosen as her object of study alongside the *Book of Margery Kempe*, Glück’s 1994 novel. Watt contends that Glück’s novel and Dinshaw’s scholarship are alike insofar as both express “the desire to construct and address a queer community, and the failure to assimilate feminist insights into queer writing” (2004, 206). She warns that “[t]he ending of this novel should immediately alert us to its shortcomings ... Glück’s narrator rewrites Kempe’s story in order to turn the life that she ... regards as a Christian success story into a tale of emotional failure.” Of course, as I argue, this is part-and-parcel of Glück’s queer medievalism; emotional failure is simultaneously, as Glück’s

¹⁷⁵ These quotes come from Dinshaw’s introduction to *Getting Medieval*. In her “Coda,” Dinshaw again insists that “queer politics can constantly benefit from feminist tutelage, as the connotations of the term ‘queer’ themselves suggest (still young, white, and male): who gets to act—and who gets to act up?” (1999, 204). From Watt’s analyses, however, one might be led to believe that Dinshaw’s “queer theory and criticism ... concentrates on men rather than when ... and [that] despite the inclusion of women’s texts, Dinshaw’s otherwise excellent and highly innovative study does not break the masculinist mould of queer criticism” (2004, 206).

novel seems to suggest, often a legible feature of postmodern queer being. Watt questions the efficacy of a readerly practice which attunes itself more explicitly to Kempe's sensuality:

The conclusion to Glück's retelling reveals that he has not read [the *Book*] as a spiritual (auto)biography or saint's legend ... he cannot avoid falling into another trap that has in the past netted many hostile — and misogynist — critics of Kempe: he reduces Kempe to her emotions and her sexuality. The sensual and erotic far outweigh the spiritual, mystical, and even intellectual, as Kempe's physical relationship with an all-too-human Christ is repeatedly imaginatively reconstructed and developed in graphic, or pornographic, detail. (2004, 207)

Watt is ultimately concerned with how “[Glück's] entire narrative is achieved over Kempe's spiritual and especially her *feminine* and, specifically, maternal body and experience.” For Watt, then, *Margery Kempe* represents “an act of careless and inappropriate usurpation” (2004, 208). It seems to me, however, that Watt's qualms with both Dinshaw and Glück come down to her aversion toward their chosen modes of interpretation; neither do what Watt thinks Kempe rightly deserves—their mode of interpretation, to borrow Watt's morally charged terms, “despoil[s] ... the texts it interprets” and proves “counter-productive” (2004, 210). Watt suggests that she ‘respects’ the text in a way that Dinshaw and Glück ultimately fail to emulate. However, as my dissertation has shown, while ‘despoiling’ texts might be ‘counter-productive,’ a different kind of critical and creative work is possible within this framework—productivity, as Furnivall would probably agree, is entirely relative.

Watt's method assumes a particular rectitude to her own position and reading. It excludes anything outside of a squarely pro-feminist critique. That said, Karma Lochrie has explicitly noted the issues with feminism's self-positioning as somehow always already redemptive or liberating: "It is not my purpose to rehabilitate Margery Kempe nor claim her as a feminist. My feminist project is not, finally, to legitimize or valorize Kempe ... I find Kempe's behavior undesirable as a feminist practice in the twentieth century" (1991, 9).¹⁷⁶ As Clementine Oliver has argued, there is little reason to deny the unpleasantness and social problematics of Kempe's behavior, "Margery is annoying; she does cry too much ... It is difficult to love Margery because it is far too easy to empathize with her companions" (2011, 324). Attuning ourselves to the provocativeness of Kempe's behavior—her queer social performance—is not to dismiss it. Rather, it is to recognize its importance: "[s]he successfully stretched the limits of society ... [a]nd this is the very best reason to read her" (Clementine 2011, 330).¹⁷⁷

To be clear, then, I do not object to Watt's implementation of feminist critique on the *Book* or Kempe. Rather, I find problematic Watt's insistence on the primacy of her own feminist heuristic. As Tyler Bradway has suggested of the normative mode of 'good reading,' "narratives about critical reading derive their authority, at least in part, by

¹⁷⁶ For another example of this kind of substantive critique of the 'redemptory' feminist mode, see also Sheila Delany's "'Mothers to Think Back Through': Who Are They? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers* (1987), 177–200.

¹⁷⁷ Krug suggests that "[w]e continue to read Kempe's *Book* because it is *interesting*. The story of Kempe's life is moving and sometimes surprising. Her personal struggles and social interactions are absorbing, and even when we dislike her, as most readers do at times, we are also riveted by her responses" (2017, 6).

legislating the appropriate affective relations that must inhere between texts and readers ... [y]et these methodologies tend to overlook their own implicit establishment of affective norms for reading” (2019, xxix). It seems to me that Watt’s handling of Dinshaw’s chapter and Glück’s novel reproduces the very lack of ‘compassion’ she assigns to them both. In the pursuit of a praxis of compassionate criticism, Watt cannot help but perform the exclusion she is keen for others to avoid.

Watt thus reproduces the opinion of those reviewers, particularly Kadushin of *Lambda Literary Review*, that conclude that *Margery Kempe* is nothing more than “a camp and self-indulgent postmodernist narrative” (2004, 208). And, perhaps, *Margery Kempe* is both camp and self-indulgent. However, I am not interested in disqualifying *Margery Kempe* on account of these qualities; in fact, my work is motivated by these qualities. To return to an argument found in my first chapter, the “camp” and “self-indulgent” character of *Margery Kempe*—like the “crude” and “clumsy” illuminations of MS Cotton Nero A.x.—is itself constitutive of an aesthetic practice.

My engagement with *Margery Kempe* does not represent a desire to somehow recuperate or salvage Glück’s novel. To be clear, I do not think his novel needs that. Rather, the remainder of this chapter attempts to understand how these terms are themselves indicative of meaningful aesthetic choices—the purposeful implementation of a narrative form which is both self-indulgent and preoccupied. Rather, I move forward with a reading of Glück’s novel that emphasizes the validity of what Elan Justice Pavlinich has recently described broadly as “erotic medievalisms,” or medievalisms that “creat[e] erotic connections to historical narratives” (2023, 3). What follows, then, is a

consideration of medievalism, queerness, and how these two concepts coalesce in the text of *Margery Kempe*. In doing so, the ensuing sections demonstrate how Glück's novel, rather than willfully misrepresenting Kempe's experiences, productively plays upon narrative and affective features already present within the *Book of Margery Kempe* so that Glück himself might negotiate his queer desire within the spiritual and sexual milieu of the medieval premodern.

The *Book of Margery Kempe* and Reading Backwards

As I argued in the introduction to this chapter, Kempe experiences the biblical past with an unsettling affective physicality. It is necessary, however, that I first clarify what I mean by Kempe's queer narrative-aesthetic practice. In Kempe's vision, her positionality is less a matter of voyeuristic detachment than they are dramatic and participatory vignettes. In these scenes, Kempe exercises a certain amount of physical and intellectual autonomy—what Jessica Hines has described as “multiple Passion sequences into which she imaginatively inserts herself” (2019, 281). While this practice is not unheard of, Kempe's practice is notable for its degree of autonomous—and, perhaps, autobiographical—engagement in and persistent nature of this participation.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Corrine Saunders offers an admirably straightforward account of the similarities and differences between earlier women's visionary writing, men's visionary writing, and the *Book*. For example, Saunders suggests that Bridget of Sweden's *Liber Celestis*—a text alluded to in Kempe's *Book*—positions Bridget “more often as a listener than a participant in a book most of all compromising the revelatory words she hears, though the verbs most frequently used are those of vision” (2019, 157). She continues, “[Richard] Rolle's embodied spiritual experience, along with the examples of holy women, must have offered valuable assurance that multisensory revelation could be licit” (2019, 161).

As Corrine Saunders has argued, “it is precisely physical, sensory experience that characterizes Kempe’s visions, and leads her on her spiritual journey” (2019, 161).

Furthermore, Ruth Evans has suggested that “[t]he characteristic narrative temporality of the *Book* is not linear – it does not arrive punctually – but is organized in terms of ‘episodic’ or ‘autobiographical memory’” (517). Kempe cannot change historical narratives, but she can work within and intimate herself into them. Kempe’s relationship to the past—its nonlinear and dizzying backwards glance to biblical narrative in the present—is itself queerly attached.

Dinshaw has convincingly argued that Kempe’s decision to don the white garments of a virgin is itself part-and-parcel of Kempe’s queerness. Before Kempe begins her pilgrimage, Jesus provides a precondition by which Margery must abide: “þu were clothys of whyte & non oþer colowr, for þu xal ben arayd aftyr my wil” (32.17-8). Kempe’s immediate reaction provides us with a sense of the seeming vulgarity of the command. Kempe is concerned that she “go arayd on oþer maner þan oþer chast women don,” she will come under public scrutiny, “þei wyl sey I am an ypocryt & wondryn vp-on me” (32.20; 21). However, Kempe is reassured by God that her white clothing is ultimately sanctioned: “þe state of maydenhode be mor parfyte & mor holy þan þe state of wedewhode, & þe state of wedwhode mor parfyte þan þe state of wedlake, 3et dowtyr I lofe þe as wel as any mayden in þe world” (49.4-8). This choice of clothing, Dinshaw has suggested, “signals a disjunction between her multiparous body and her virgin desire, her desire, that is, to remake her body so that she is not merely *like* a virgin” (1999, 146).

Michael Van Dussen has suggested that “when the earthly category of widow could not apply to her marital condition ... she did not relinquish her desire for this unbefitting clothing, but rather allegorised the clothing to represent her spiritual state” (283). In what is but one of Kempe’s clashes with clerical authority over her clothing, Kempe’s preaching attracts the attention of a priest who, “taking hir be the coler of the gowne,” challenges Kempe’s decision to wear white (120.18-9). The priest confronts Kempe asking, “Thu wolf, what is this cloth that thu hast on?” only for Kempe to silently stand “style” (120.19-20). While Kempe refuses to engage with the priest, a group of “[c]hilder of the monastery goyng beside” answer for her suggesting that, perhaps, “Ser, it is wulle” (120.22).¹⁷⁹ As Dinshaw concludes of this phenomenon more broadly, Kempe’s insistence on wearing white presented her contemporaries with “a creature whose body does not fit her desires ... that is, a queer” (1999, 149). In *Margery Kempe*, Glück aptly describes Kempe’s clothing as “a sexual crime, a revolution, a collapse of meaning” (120). Thus, in addition to her non-normative expressions of sexuality, I argue that her conception and manipulation of time similarly marks her as queer.

One of the more vivid examples of this unsettling physicality is Kempe’s experiences of Christ’s crucifixion. This experience follows her physical pilgrimage to Jerusalem. At the behest of Christ, Kempe spends her time “wyth many swet thowtys &

¹⁷⁹ The answer given by the children might simply be an instance of youthful naïveté—taking the question too literally—and so their response becomes a joke at the expense of the priest. However, I am also inclined to read this as a moment wherein Kempe’s *Book* recognizes the difficulty of interpretation and illegibility of the garments present as each party involved understands them to represent something distinct. For the priest, it symbolizes Kempe’s spiritual folly. For Kempe, it is a divinely ordained prescription. And for the children, it simply is what it is—wool.

hy medytacyons & also hy contemplacyons, sumtyme during in wepyng ij owyres & oftyn lengar in þe mend of owyr Lordys Passyon” (19.37-9). These thoughts move Kempe to travel to Jerusalem on pilgrimage. Her voyage, however, is filled with “euyr mech tribulacyon” at the hands of her wayfaring companions (67.9). Nevertheless, Kempe arrives at Jerusalem “rydyng on an asse,” no doubt because of the precedent set by Christ himself, only to “fallyn of hir asse, for sche myth not beryn þe sweetness & grace þat God wrowt in hir sowle” (67.17; 25-6).¹⁸⁰ Led by friars, the group moves “a-bowte fro [on] place to an-oþer wher owyr Lord had sufferyd hys [peynys] and hys passyons” which compels Kempe to weep “so plentyvowsly as þow sche had seyn owyr Lord wyth hir bodily ey suffering hys Passyon at þat tyme” (68.3-4, 8-10).

While visiting Calvary, Kempe falls to the ground (again) as she is overcome by the violence of the Passion; she details how she is made to perform Christ’s crucifixion. “[S]predyng hir armys a-brode,” Kempe presents her traveling companions with the sight of the physical act of crucifixion “for in þe cite of hir sowle sche sawveryly & freschly how owyr Lord was crucifyed” (68.14; 16-7). Kempe’s emphasis on her perception of the crucifixion’s physical and temporal nearness suggests that she experiences both her present and the past simultaneously while on Calvary.¹⁸¹ The text marks this important

¹⁸⁰ See Mark 11.7-11

¹⁸¹ Brenna Duperron has explored the potential efficacy of the *Book*’s transmission and temporality vis-à-vis ‘red reading,’ a practice “wherein a canonical text is read through an Indigenous perspective” (2020, 122). Duperron “demonstrates the productive outcomes of employing red reading methodologies to precontact texts ... suggest[ing] that we again expand past any narrow definitions of what constitutes scholarly practice and consider the possibility of disrupting and complicating *while* illuminating and complementing. It is only by seeing with both eyes that we can understand the whole picture” (2020, 122).

moment by noting that this outburst is “þe first cry þat euyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon” (68.23-4). Kempe provides an incredibly sensual description of Christ’s body on the cross:

[I]t was grawntd þis creatur to beholdyn so verily hys precyows tendyr body, alto-rent & toryn wyth scorgys, mor ful of wowndys þan eury was deffehows of holys, hang vp-on þe cros wyth þe crown of thorn up-on hys heuyd, hys blysfyl handys, hys tendyr fete nayled to þe hard tre, þe reuerys of blood flowyng owt plentevowsly of euery member, þe gresly & grevows wownde in hys precyows syde schedyng owt blood & watyr for hir lofe & hir saluacyon (70.9-17).

Kempe’s itemizing of Christ’s wounds provides a graphic account of the crucifixion as though it were contemporary with her own fifteenth century present. And while visitations to other holy sites trigger her weeping, Kempe’s vision of Christ on the cross contains a notable degree of detail. Kempe’s ability to ‘see’ the suffering of Christ as though it were in front of her suggests a collapsing of historical narrative and personal present. These initial visions of the crucifixion likewise provide a meaningful point of comparison by which to compare the different temporal logics at work in Kempe’s various visions.

These more orthodox kinds of visions give way to Kempe’s interpolating herself within the narrative of the crucifixion itself. On Good Friday, Kempe begins to consider “owr Ladijs sorwys which sche suffryd whan sche beheld hys precyows body hangyng on þe Crosse” (140.4-6). During the vision of Christ that follows, Kempe emphasizes that this is not simply a vision of past events presented to her present spirit, but rather an

event she herself witnesses in real time and *in media res*: “sche beheld wyth hir gostly eye in þe sight of hir sowle as verily as þei sche had seyn hys precyows body betyn, scorgyd, & crucified wyth hir bodily eye” (140.9-11). Kempe again sees, both spiritually and physically, during a service wherein “hir mende al holy taky nowt of al erdly thyngys & set al in gostly thyngys” (187.15-6). And, despite her focus on ‘gostly thyngys,’ Kempe cannot avoid seeing the crucifixion as an embodied event—“hir thowt þat sche saw owr Lord Crist Ihesu as verily in hir sowle wyth hir gostly eye as sche had seyn be-forn þe Crucifixe wyth hir bodily eye” (187.21-4). From this vision, Kempe shifts to the events which proceeded the crucifixion as “[t]han sche beheld in þe sight of hir sowle owr blissful Lord Crist Ihesu coming to-hy-Passyon-ward” (187.25-6).

Kempe describes how she observed an exchange between Christ and Mary before his death in which Mary begs to take Christ’s place. Despite Christ’s assurance to Mary that is his “Fadrys wille,” Mary is left “lyng stille as sche had ben ded” (188.34; 189.2). Though up until this point, Kempe has only described how she watched this exchange take place, she quickly undoes any pretense of simply watching mere vision as Kempe grabs Christ by his clothing: “þan þe creatur thowt sche toke owr Lord Ihesu Crist be þe clothys & fel down at hys feet, preyng hym to blissyn hir” (189.3-5). Kempe juxtaposes her own overwhelming heartache with Mary’s grief and, like Christ does with Mary, he attempts to console Kempe—“Be stille, dowtyr, & rest wyth my Modyr her & comfort þe in her ... I xal come a-geyn, dowtyr, to my Modyr & comfortyn hir & þe bothyn & turnyn al 3owr sorwe in-to joye” (189.10-4). Christ leaves and Kempe hurries to Mary’s side; Kempe, nevertheless, has questions for the grieving mother of Christ.

Kempe asks Mary about how she intends to deal with her immense grief, as she “may not dur it, & 3yt I am not hys Modyr” (189.20). Mary responds that she must for “it wil non oþerwise be, & þerfor I must nedys suffyr it for my Sonys lofe” (189.21-3). Following this, “þe sayd creatur beheld wyth hir gostly eye þe Iewys puttyng a cloth be-forn owr Lodys eyne, betynd hym & bofetyng hym inheuyd & bobyng hym be-forn hys swete mowth” (190.6-9). Again, however, we find Kempe within the narrative—not simply observing it. Kempe stands by Mary, “owr Lady & sche hyr vnworthy handmaydyn fo þe tyme,” weeping as Christ is stripped naked and “beetyn hym on hys fayr white body wyth baleys, wyth whippis, & wyth scorgys” (190.12-3, 23-5). As Hines has argued, these episodes do “not ... suggest that Kempe’s compassion is random or unstructured; rather, the effect of her nonlinear narration is to render her compassion as something that does not need continuous guidance” (2019, 282). As with the crucifixion, Kempe suggests that “sche sey wech gostly sy3tys in hir sowle as freschly & as verily as 3yf it had ben don in dede in hir bodily syght” and uses this to identify with Mary, “hir thowt þat owr Lady & sch ewer al-wey togedyr to se owr Lordys peynys” (190.27-9, 29-30).

Unlike Kempe’s initial vision of the crucifixion, she maintains her active place alongside Mary in the narrative of Christ’s death. After Mary accosts Christ’s assailants, Kempe follows suit and, in imitation of Mary’s request to take Christ’s place, suggests that they take her instead: “3e cursyd Iewys, why sle 3e my Lord Ihesu Crist? Sle me rapar & late hym gone” (192.29-31). Tellingly, Kempe suggests that the vision she inhabits is itself contained within her present contemplation at church. Kempe thus

experiences time unlike her peers—“myche of þe pepil in þe chirche wondryd on hir body” (192.31). Kempe then returns to the graphic aesthetic mode of her first vision of Christ’s crucifixion:

& a-non sche sey hem taky vp þe Crosse wyth owr Lordys body hangyng þer-on & madyn gret noyse & gret crye & lyftyd it vp fro þe erthe a certeyn distawnce & sithyn letyn þe Crosse fallyn down in-to þe morteys. & þan owr Lordys body schakyd & schoderyde, & alle þe joyntys of þat blissful body brostyn & wentyn a-sundyr, & hys precyows wowndys ronnyng down wyth reuerys of blood on euery syde. (192.33-40)

As Bartlett has argued, it is through these self-interpolative meditative practices that Kempe “identifies synchronically with its chronologically distant characters” (2004, 104). Kempe’s weeping is diegetic within the text of the *Book* as well occurring within the *mis en scène* of her vision. After Christ “comendyd hys spiryt in-to hys Fadrys handys,” Margery describes how “sche ran al a-bowte þe place as it had ben a mad woman, crying & roryng. & sithyn sche cam to owr Lady & fel down on hir kneys be-fore hir” (193.16, 20-2). Indeed, after Christ’s body is removed from the crucifix, while Mary and others tend to Christ’s corpse, Kempe can still only manage a dramatic

response to the events: “sche ran euyr to & fro as it had be a woman wyth-owtyn reson, greatly desyryng to an had þe precyows body be hir-self a-lone” (194.6-7).¹⁸²

Once Christ is entombed, Kempe describes how “sche wold nevyr a partyd thens” except that Mary makes her exit “gon homeward ageyn” (II.4264, 4626). And, while it might simply be an idiomatic expression, Kempe articulates her perception of time as incredibly malleable and almost entirely relative as she explains how, while waiting with Mary, she “thowt a thowsand yer tyl the thryd day cam” (II.4662). Following a vision of Christ’s interaction with Mary Magdalene at his grave, Kempe details how she witnessed “owr Lady offering hyr blissful sone ... to the preyst Semeon in the tempyl” (II.4699). Kempe qualifies this vision suggesting that it was not simply a spiritual exercise, but a bodily and sensorial one as well. She explains that the vision “as verily to hir gostly undirstondyng as yyf sche had be ther in hir bodily presens for to an offeryd wyth owr Ladys owyn persone” (II.4700-1).

Kempe describes how the crying and fits of her ‘present’ body—that is, her fifteenth century body—became the subject of irritation for her peers during these

¹⁸² Kempe’s habit of competitive piety is well documented by scholars. At one point, Christ tells Kempe that “[m]y dowtyr, Bryde [St. Bridget of Sweden], say me neuyr in þis wyse” (47.26-7). Dinshaw has noted how this moment “shifts immediately from the eucharistic miracle Margery has just witnessed toward her one-upping the Swedish mystic.” Dinshaw elaborates, “Margery weeps and agonizes *more* than the apostles, *more* than the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Christ final tells her himself to chill out” (1999, 159). However, Kempe is not *always* in competition with others. Discussing Kempe’s desire to make contact with the leprous, Jonathan Hsy has likewise argued that “[t]he transference of desire through female-female contact (with or without the intermediary of Christ or Mary) takes complex forms throughout the text, and modern scholars are not the first readers to recognize the potentially transgressive aspects of this episode” (2010, 12).

moments: “therfor suffyrd sche ful mech wondering, many a jape and many a scorne” (II.4718-9). On a different occasion, Kempe’s meditation induces “a maner of slep” wherein she witnesses Christ’s crucifixion and emphasizes his corporeality (II.4951). She suggests that Christ was close enough to touch: “owr Lord standing right up ovyr hir so ner that hir thowt sche toke hys toos in hir hand and felt them, and to hir felyng it weryn as it had ben very flesch and bon” (II.4952-3). As Saunders has argued, when compared with her visionary contemporaries, “[t]he multisensory quality of [Kempe’s] revelations, however, is more prominent ... Seeing with the ‘gostli’ eye means entering into a three-dimensional spiritual world, where Kempe participates in central episodes related to Christ’s life” (2019, 162).¹⁸³ Claire Sponsler has likened this space to the dramatic stage describing Kempe as “an obvious expert in the arts of the theatre ... [e]ven her private contemplations take a theatrical form ... or as visions in which key scenes from biblical history are re-enacted right before her eyes, in vivid detail, and with Margery’s

¹⁸³ Carol M. Meale argues that Kempe’s practice is necessarily gendered, “Margery goes far beyond the contemplative bounds advocated by contemporary, or near-contemporary, male spiritual advisors” (2000, 59). Comparing Kempe’s *Book* to contemporaries’ works like Nicholas Love’s *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* and Richard Rolle’s *The Prickyng of Love*, Saunders has suggested, “Autobiography replaces instruction: Kempe ... does not set out the path to God or offer theological analysis. Most strikingly different are the *Book*’s spontaneity and its intense focus on lived spiritual experience” (2019, 156).

participation” (2004, 130).¹⁸⁴ Rather than finding history to be a static and immovable afterimage, Kempe imagines the past as a ‘three-dimensional spiritual world’ in which historical narrative invites, to some extent, a surprisingly participatory form of meditation.

This participatory mode is—as I argue—a queer one.¹⁸⁵ Kempe’s looking back and repeated practice of self-interpolative practice represents a queer attachment to the past vis-à-vis the formation of what Saunders has described as a “structural model of deeply personal conversation” which is “strikingly dialogic ... [wherein] Kempe plays a more active role” in the vision itself (2019, 163; 164). Thus, Kempe’s desire to experience the past vis-à-vis one of the most—if not, the most—central of pieces of Christian narrative imaginatively available, Christ’s crucifixion, distinguishes her meditation as a practice unlike her contemporaries. As Dinshaw has suggested, Kempe “replays Christ’s life in hers; she replays the Virgin Mary’s, too, and Mary Magdalene’s and Saint Bridget’s” (Dinshaw 1999, 157-8).

It is this desire to ‘replay’ the past that I identify as queer insofar as it explicitly rejects the fixity and linear construction of time assumed by Kempe’s contemporaries.

¹⁸⁴ Carol M. Meale has described how “the techniques of dramatic production whereby ordinary citizens of towns or inhabitants of particular villages adopted the roles of biblical ‘characters’ may be paralleled stylistically within the *Book* by Margery’s envisioning of herself as an active participant within biblical history, both by engaging in dialogue—in a manner which may, with no distortion, be described as dramatic—with the principal protagonists of the Christian story; and by direct impersonation” (2000, 58).

¹⁸⁵ While certainly unmatched in its participatory mode, the queerness of female medieval mysticism is explored more broadly by Karma Lochrie who argues that “queer mystical rapture seems to offer a cultural site of resistance, opposition, or transgression for medieval women mystics” (1997, 194).

Dinshaw has elaborated elsewhere, queerness is a matter of “desirous, embodied being that are out of sync with the ordinarily linear measurements of everyday life” (2012, 4). In experiencing the Passion as she does, Kempe places herself within rather than placing herself as a peripheral observer to Christian narrative. Hines has explicitly identified this narrative practice of self-interpolation as a kind of attachment, “To have compassion for Christ, to suffer with him, is to occupy a position of close proximity. It is to be near, alongside, attached to Jesus” (2019, 284).

My point here, then, is that this attachment exceeds the circumscribed normative notions of the possibilities of one’s relationship to the past. Kempe’s visions constitute a kind of text; her participation in them a histrionic practice of reading. The disordered oscillatory motion of Kempe’s movement from past to present and back again marks her relationship to history as queer. Dinshaw has argued that “[i]n Margery’s narrative world, past-present-future times are all collapsed into a capacious *now* constituted of multiple times and attachments” (2012, 107). As Tremblay-McGaw has suggested, “[Kempe]

undid linear time (what we might think of as ‘straight time’ á la José Esteban Muñoz) as she found herself at Christ’s birth and at his crucifixion” (2022, 21).¹⁸⁶

Discussing queer temporality elsewhere, Dinshaw has suggested that such a notion of history is “not regulated by ‘clock’ time or by a conceptualization of the present as singular and fleeting; experiences not narrowed by the idea that time moves steadily

¹⁸⁶ In an introduction to a special issue of *GLQ* on queer temporalities, Elizabeth Freeman suggests, “[S]ex meets temporality ... in the persistent description of queers as temporally backward, though paradoxically dislocated from any specific historical moment” (2007, 162). In *Time Binds*, Freeman describes chrononormativity as “a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts ... [m]anipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time” (2010, 3).

Within premodern literary studies, queer time has been the subject of some debate as it directly confronts the tension between presentist criticism and the possibilities—and strictures—of historicism. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger have argued that “the logic of the queer also effects a disturbance of temporality that is precisely ‘preposterous’ ...” (2001, xii). Stephen Guy-Bray, Vin Nardizzi, and Will Stockton are quite direct in their “aim ... to free queer scholarship from the tyranny of historicism and to do so from both ends” (2009, 1).

Tison Pugh has likewise suggested that “Medievalism flows with and against the currents of time ... and its potential queerness arises when acts of the present redefine the cultural meaning of genders and sexualities in the past, through a transtemporal and oscillating vision between yesterday and today” (2016, 210). See also Jeffrey J. Cohen’s “Time Machines in *Medieval Identity Machines* (2003), Jonathan Hsy’s “Co-disciplinarity” in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms* (2014). David Hadbawnik’s edited collection *Postmodern Poetry and Queer Medievalisms: Time Mechanics* (2021).

That said, this is not a method without its detractors. Valerie Traub has argued for a frank discussion of the terms of queer temporality’s discourse its ‘unhistoricism,’ “seems interested more in refiguring abstract temporality than engaging with history or historiography ... unhistoricism’s hostility to empiricism adorns itself with the resurgent prestige of ‘theory’” (2013, 34). Furthermore, she suggests that “[d]emeaning the disciplinary methods employed to investigate historical continuity and change does not advance the cause of queerness; nor does the charge of normalization” (2013, 35).

forward, that it is scarce, that we live only one temporal plane” by which one might meaningfully develop “a critique of teleological linearity” (2007, 185; 186). Furthermore, Heather Love has identified the ‘backward turn’ as a particularly queer gesture and useful analytic for “reading figures of backwardness as allegories of queer historical experience” (2007, 5).¹⁸⁷ Attending to these moments of physical and temporal queerness—characterized by a disconcerting closeness in time and space—within the context of the *Book of Margery Kempe*, we might better attend to queerness at it is represented in Glück’s *Margery Kempe*. Likewise, it makes all the clearer how Glück’s *Margery Kempe* and the New Narrative movement—postmodern and queer as it is—is itself a meaningful aesthetic extension of the *Book* rather than a willful misreading.

Margery Kempe’s Queer Postmodern Medievalism

While every medievalism involves the reception of the Middle Ages marked by the post-medieval historical and cultural context in which it was produced, David Hadbawnik has distinguished queer medievalism from its normative iteration by emphasizing the unsettling qualities of these engagements with the past: “a queer medievalism might be one that deviates from the expected and linear in terms of its relationship to its source material, with a foregrounded awareness of the performative in terms of how it adapts, translates and appropriates” (2022, 6). Tison Pugh has likewise

¹⁸⁷ In fact, Love directly credits Dinshaw and *Getting Medieval* as providing key language for the methods by which Love articulates the relationship between queerness and the backward glance vis-avis “the metaphors of touch in relation to contemporary critics to the medieval past ... Through such connections, queer subjects build an imagined community of the marginal and the excluded” (2007, 37).

defined queer medievalism as that which “imaginatively captures ... displacements of the self in and through the past, often for pleasurable purposes but with other, unforetold repercussions” (2016, 210).

Beyond simply reproducing the past, *Margery Kempe* couches issues of modern non-normative being and knowing within premodern contexts. Bob—Glück’s narrative self-representation in *Margery Kempe*—rearticulates the performativity inherent to the novel’s form. Glück undoubtedly recognizes the potential creative and critical efficacy of synthesizing postmodern aesthetics within a medieval narrative context. In his 1996 interview with Kasia Boddy, Glück argues that one “could make the case for pre-modern and postmodern writing as having some things in common” (2021, 1264). Glück thus consciously combines the postmodernist drive toward self-reflexive metanarrative forms with an explicit engagement with the medieval past which does not necessarily reinforce the specific heteronormative structures under which Glück himself existed as a gay writer in the 1990s.

The reemergence of Glück’s novel as a topic of scholarly interest suggests that it is a critically productive text—but that productivity is seemingly qualified. I would argue that the treatment of *Margery Kempe* reflects the workings of medieval studies as a broader disciplinary structure. As Pavlinich has argued, “Many of our ‘traditional’ histories are validated by academic institutions, including the field of medieval studies, which are still largely informed by heteronormative fantasies” (2023, 2). Glück’s novel, both queer and a medievalism, represents the confluence of two critical discourses which have struggled to take root in medieval studies—not to mention, the modern university

writ large. Discussing the marginality of medieval studies as a discipline, Lee Patterson has argued that “the Middle Ages is not a subject for discussion but the rejected object ... that modernity must reject in order to be itself” (1990, 99). If this is true, then, medievalism studies in the 1990s represents the ‘rejected objects’ of an already rejected object—a twice-rejected thing. David Matthews has suggested of the discipline’s initial valuation of medievalism studies in the 1980s, “For many traditional medievalists, in short, medievalism studies was a secondary or meta-discipline which came with too strong a whiff of postmodernism about it” (2015, 8). Matthews has likewise suggested that what medieval studies disowns as objects of legitimate study become medievalisms: “as it ceaselessly updates itself, medieval studies expels what it no longer wishes to recognize as part of itself” (2015, 176).¹⁸⁸

Much like medievalism, ‘queer studies,’ which is most often interested in those objects ‘expelled’ or loosed from heteronormative study, has found relatively little influence within the institutional structures of the university. Departments abound with those who ‘do’ queer theory or study queer subjects, but, as Neville Hoad suggested in 2011, “Queer theory’s stubborn persistence in resisting the production of narratives of development can partially account for its failure to secure a toehold in the disciplinary and even interdisciplinary structures ... of the U.S. academy.” Hoad goes on to describe

¹⁸⁸ Richard A. Marsden has argued, “[T]here is still a tendency, amongst medieval historians in particular, to scorn Medievalism Studies. Its lack of a unified approach and its interest in de-historicised and scholarly depictions of the Middle Ages have contributed to its dismissal as anachronistic and whimsical next to the serious study of the ‘real’ medieval past.” Marsden contends that “modern scholarly interpretations of the Middle Ages were not the product of Olympian detachment but were instead moulded by the times and places in which they were produced” (2011, 7).

queer theory—what he dubs “the imagined subfield”—as existing “only ... in the past tense as something that institutionally has yet to happen” (2011, 139). Noting the classed and racialized dynamics at play in the institutionalization of queer theory, Matt Brim has more recently likewise argued that “[i]f queer theory happened, it happened at the places that are most notable for having the resources to hyperinject intellectual vitality into faculty labor ... Queer or not, you’d never know it happened” (2020, 10-1).¹⁸⁹ Likewise, Michael O’Rourke has suggested, the apparent methodological incongruity of medieval studies and queer theory generates a kind of disciplinary tension: “[t]he synthesizing of two radically opposed disciplines, one marked by (seemingly) staunch traditionalism, the other by anti-normativizing discourses, is bound to be ungainly” (2003, 10). Within the context of medieval studies, then, this apprehension of the aesthetically and formally ‘ungainly’ is only intensified.¹⁹⁰

Glück’s *Margery Kempe* thus found itself at the peripheralized intersection where queer theory and medievalism studies met in the 1990s. And, in some ways, the novel remains unceremoniously wedged between these two academic discourses with neither

¹⁸⁹ Lee Edelman has recently described this phenomenon in similar terms: “Yet even as deconstructive, feminist, psychoanalytic, queer, and race-centered theories have entered the university, they’ve engendered violently negative reactions to their institutionalization ... these discourses refuse the normative paradigm of education as world transmission—as the preservation, *mutatis mutandis*, of reality as it ‘is.’ They focus, instead on what thought and education register as the unthinkable, as foreign to logic or sense” (2022, 3-4).

¹⁹⁰ As mentioned in my third chapter on Furnivall, Lee Patterson has suggested that “medieval studies has ... developed to sometimes massive dimensions the armature of scholarly techniques and abilities required of the aspiring medievalist ... medieval studies requires a dauntingly long apprenticeship, with all the implications of servitude within a patriarchal system that term implies.” (1990, 102).

taking it up as a legitimate object of study.¹⁹¹ Indeed, like the illustrations of the MS Cotton Nero A.x., the negative affective responses elicited by Glück's novel stem from a recognition of Glück's queer attachment to Kempe—or, as Bartlett has described it, how Glück's "bold and yet deeply reflective personal engagement with a text reanimates its distant eloquence" (2004, 440). Such responses circumscribe a larger concern with Glück's handling—or, as Watt would suggest, mishandling—of Kempe as a literary-historical figure. That is, 'professional' readers question the authority with which Glück writes the character of Kempe. These 'ungainly' features, to borrow O'Rourke's earlier descriptor, are a result of the queer attachments between Kempe's *Book* and Glück's *Margery Kempe*, Glück and Kempe. Glück ultimately formalizes this attachment by way of appropriating Kempe's queer narrative-aesthetic practice.

If Kempe's visions of the Passion serve as the medium through which she cultivates a self-interpolative narrative practice, Glück's rewriting of these visions help us better understand how such textual aesthetics are appropriated for use in the queer postmodern imagination. As Robin Tremblay-McGaw has recently suggested:

Glück's prose has scandalously united Margery and Bob ... in pursuit of the beloved. Bob has inserted himself, as did Margery Kempe before him, in the story of Christ's Passion ... Formally, Glück's text reflects and refracts the content—her "manner of living"—described in the historical

¹⁹¹ This is not, of course, to say that queer studies and medievalism studies are somehow intellectually futile. The study of medievalisms and queer theory are as popular a subject of publication as ever; indeed, queer medieval and medievalism studies have remained a constant staple of the larger field since the 1980s. However, as Matthews suggested of medievalism and I argue is applicable to queer theory in the academy, these discourses lack—and have been purposefully denied—the critical credentials to be anything more than "upstart," "secondary," or "meta-discipline."

Kempe's narrative while it also draws attention to Bob's everyday life and the text's self-reflexive coming-into-being (2022, 38)

In Kempe's *Book*, Glück finds meaningful precedent for a queer notion of temporality that reflects his lived experience and provocatively engages with the narrative past, present, and future simultaneously. Glück has suggested of New Narrative, "transgressive writing shocks by articulating the present, the one thing impossible to put into words because a language does not yet exist to describe the present" (2016, 21). If the present is reflexively illegible, Glück's turn to a medieval past suggests that Kempe might have the language by which to describe the current moment.

Glück has suggested that self-interestedness in the medieval past, the selfsame stuff of Dinshaw's 'preoccupations,' is an integral part of his narrative practice. Kasia Boddy's recently published 1996 interview with Glück largely affirms what medievalists and postmodernists have argued of Glück's use of the past. When questioned about the efficacy of reading modernity through fifteenth-century texts, Glück has explicitly described how "using Margery's incredible inner life for myself, for my own purposes, was a big help" (Boddy 2021, 1269). Glück thus openly acknowledges his engagement with and appropriation of medieval literary traditions—his queer medievalism. That said, I want to likewise address what I argue are the other meaningful features of Glück's queer medievalism present in *Margery Kempe* and elsewhere.

In the same interview, Glück likewise pointed to Geoffrey Chaucer as one of the influences on his early narrative poetry, "I always did have the impulse to bring narrative back, to reintroduce the option of character and plot into poetry, like pre-modern poets

such as Chaucer” (Boddy 2021, 1260). Glück conjures a discourse of affinity akin to ‘congenial souls’ of Dryden—to borrow Stephanie Trigg’s framework—as he describes Chaucer’s place “in [his] bones.” Indeed, Chaucer makes an oblique appearance in Glück’s novel as Bob aligns his relationship to Kempe within a wider tradition “of farce and uncertainty” that includes “‘The Pardoner’s Tale,’ the *Talmud*, *The Ship of Fools*, Kafka’s slapstick” (82). As Robert S. Sturges has argued, “Glück is obviously working in a medieval tradition ... *The Pardoner’s Tale*, then, is given special prominence at the heart of Glück’s own text” (2000, 165). Beyond allusion, however, Glück’s embrace of Chaucer extends into his creative practice and compositional theory.

Glück is particularly interested in what he describes as “the elbow room it allows him to do discursive things, and the use of texts – dumping other texts into your own – provides endless ... I see Chaucer doing and I see that originality is something completely different” (2021, 1264). Here Glück explicitly likens his appropriation of other texts to Chaucer’s notion of translation as poetic production which he metaphorizes in his

Parliament of Fowls:

For out of olde felde, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere. (22-5)¹⁹²

Glück’s return to ‘olde bokes’ for insight into postmodern narrative practice is both an appeal to the importance of the *auctor*, “someone who was at once a writer and an

¹⁹² Line numbers and quotation of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Parliament of Fowls* are from edition found in *The Riverside Chaucer* (2008).

authority ... to be respected and believed,” and to the potentialities inhered in modern creative reproduction (Minnis 2010, 10). Glück elaborates on this notion, arguing that “[i]t doesn’t mean you need to use your own text, it doesn’t mean that you have to keep to a storyline. It has something to do with manipulation of a surface” (Boddy 2021, 1264). Furthermore, Glück has argued for his own role “as a collagist ... [f]ound materials have a kind of radiance, the truth of the already-known” (2016, 23). Chaucer thus lends Glück a kind of textual license—perhaps, permission—to appropriate texts to potentially “question the place of the writer ... turn[ing] the writer into a reader” (2016, 21).

Matthew Fisher’s reassessment of scribal agency in the construction of manuscripts provides a surprisingly apropos framework for understanding the queer medievalism of Glück’s New Narrative practice. In addition to importance of appeal to an *auctor*, Glück likewise participates in what Fisher has deemed ‘derivative textuality’ or a form of “composition [which] cannot be neatly or trivially divided from quotation and translations” (2012, 7). Fisher has suggested, “Derivative texts are the sites of extensive textual transformation. The authors of derivative texts use the words of others in order to create a new textual whole, using old sources in service of a new textual agenda” (2012, 7). Of course, Fisher’s use of ‘derivative textuality’ in medieval contexts has specificities which do not necessarily apply to Glück’s text. For Fisher, an important feature of these ‘derivative texts’ is a kind of narrative or historiographical stability which “unlike compilations or *florilegia*, are narratively continuous. Derivative textuality obscures the underlying *bricolage* and presents to the reader a largely seamless surface” (2012, 60).

Of course, *Margery Kempe* is anything but seamless. In fact, it revels in exposing its seams to an unsettling degree. For Glück, one of the hallmarks of New Narrative textuality is an attention to fragmentation or, as he referred to them earlier, ‘constituencies’: [T]he more you fragment a story, the more it becomes an example of narration itself—narration displaying its devices” (2016, 17). Glück’s postmodern aesthetic of fragmentation thus meets Fisher’s notion of a medieval ‘derivative textuality’ across time to create a text which is about a premodern Kempe, a postmodern Glück, and the negotiation of these identities. As Kathleen Biddick has suggested, “As both nonorigin and origin, the Middle Ages can be everywhere, both medieval and postmodern, and nowhere, sublime and redemptive” (1998, 84).

Glück attempts to give form to the novel: “How can the two halves of this novel ever be closed or complete?” He reimagines *Margery Kempe* vis-à-vis ekphrasis: “Or the book is a triptych: I follow L. on the left, Margery follows Jesus on the right, and in the center my fear hollows out ‘an empty space that I can’t fill.’ (That’s how Ed describes his death)” (41). What I am suggesting here is not that fifteenth-century scribes are somehow postmodern or that postmodern authors are somehow medieval, but that Glück’s aesthetics of fragmentation and compilation—when considered against the backdrop of his medievalism—might best be understood as a kind of medievalism or modern ‘scribal’ practice.

Glück extends his medievalism further as he conceives of his audience in terms of medieval coterie and the interpersonal relationships which define them. While suggesting that medieval culture, what Boddy only refers to as “that world,” is somehow “different”

and “irretrievable,” Glück compares Chaucer’s courtly audience to his own—“at least in my imagination ... I was thinking of gay men as a court.” Glück suggests that insofar as the deliberate fragmentation of audience represents “the postmodern breakdown into a politics of constituencies and a literature of constituencies, you could perhaps stretch it and say here’s the model of Chaucer writing for his little constituency” (2021, 1265). As with my discussion of Furnivall’s understanding of the Middle Ages, the legitimacy or veracity of Glück’s assertion of Chaucer’s audience is not necessarily my concern. Rather, I am more interested with how this belief ultimately shapes Glück’s medievalism. Queerness and medievalism converge as Glück positions gay men as his literary coterie, and thus imagines an audience like himself via the structure of the medieval court.¹⁹³

I want to elaborate further on Glück’s readerly contingent as his comparison to a court coterie is not the ‘stretch’ he seems to suggest. Importantly, Glück draws attention to not simply the *reception* of his work, but the *performance* of textuality required of court poets which reading aloud. Beryl Rowland has suggested that Chaucer’s physical and oratory presence should be considered meaningful—if ephemeral—features of his texts: “Chaucer must have remained deeply conscious of the popular indigenous world of oral culture, rendered more sophisticated, to be sure, but still retaining *an emotional communal reliance* on the spoken word” (1982, 44; emphasis my own). This ‘emotional communal reliance’ is one with which Glück is intimately familiar. Within the context of *Margery Kempe*, Glück describes the events of his life as having been performed prior to

¹⁹³ Glück’s motivation for writing stems from a lack: “[T]here was certainly no literary culture that was producing books that were recognizable to me in terms of being a gay man, that I recognized myself in” (Boddy 2021, 1260).

their textual recording and eventual reception. Nevertheless, Glück stresses the inherent performativity of speaking to a particularized audience:

I need L. to be only mine; for that to happen I must
exhibit him and my desire; I call Tom, I call Kathy, I call
my old friend Ed. In the theaters of their consciousness I
stage my drama. That my love for L. is possible, actual.
That my joy exists. Interaction shifts the ground of the
finite. They create belief by responding to my story when
I meet them in cafés, on street corners, on the phone;
Margery turns the cosmos into a witness of her love. (12)

I stress the language of narrative performance —‘exhibit,’ ‘theaters,’ ‘stage,’ ‘drama’— used in the section above to demonstrate that Glück’s analogy is not as far-fetched as it might first appear. As Glück himself has explained, “In writing about sex, desire, and the body, New Narrative approached performance art, where self is put at risk by naming names, becoming naked, making the irreversible happen—the book becomes social practice that is lived” (2016, 20). While the contingent audience is an important feature of this queer ‘court,’ Glück likewise recognizes what Rowland described as the “emotional communal reliance placed on the spoken word” by those who hear it.

Glück’s queer narrative practice simultaneously appropriates his interactions with friends—as he suggests, ‘[i]nteraction [which] shifts the grounds of the finite,’ the possible—in the generation of the text as it likewise, as Rowland has suggested of Chaucer’s verse, “acknowledges a listening audience as a primary condition of his writing” (1982, 44). To that end, Glück’s queer court reinscribe what Dries Raeymaekers and Sebastiaan Derks have described as “the *politics of intimacy*” associated with the

exclusive access and privileges afforded to those of the courtly retinue (2019, 88). We might even consider Glück's conjuring of the courtly milieu as a means to better understand how Glück develops, as Maybelle Leung has described, "a postmodern idea of 'courtly love.'"¹⁹⁴ In this sense, both Chaucer and Glück write and perform for queens—though, certainly of different kinds.

Glück has emphasized elsewhere the role of his community as not only his readerly audience for, but as active co-authors of *Margery Kempe*. The portion quoted above describes the very process by which Glück appropriates the words and feelings of his friends. This gesture toward the communal composition of *Margery Kempe* persists throughout the novel, "I am no more the solitary author of this book than I alone invent the fiction of my life. As I write, I read my experience as well as Margery's. Is that appropriation?—that I am also the reader, oscillating in a nowhere between what I event and what changes me?" (80-1).¹⁹⁵ Glück 'dresses' the novel's characters in manner of his friends:

I asked my friends for notes about their bodies to
dress these fifteenth-century paper dolls. I clothe the maid,
Willyam Wever, the Archbishop of Lincoln in Camille's eruption
of physicality, Ed's weekend of tears, Dodie's tangled

¹⁹⁴ I would like to thank Maybelle Leung who graciously shared her forthcoming article, "Intimate Estrangements: 'Talking' About Love in Robert Glück's *Margery Kempe*," in volume 36 of *Palimpsestes: Revue de tradition* and I am excited to see her work on Glück published in the near future.

¹⁹⁵ Even though the quote here is taken from *Margery Kempe*, it very much reflects the kind of colloquial theorizing Glück adopts in his interviews. *Margery Kempe* does the work of considering its own creation—anything that followed is simply a rearticulation of that language.

nerve endings, Steve's afternoon nap. My story proceeds by interaction. My friends become the author of my misfortune and the ground of authority in this book. We are a village common producing images. (91)

The named introduction of Glück's friends—identifiable individuals—is jarring insofar as we learn very little of Camille, Dodie, or Steve. Ed's character receives the most description: "Ed is breathless; he will die before long and I feel ruthless using up his strength, but he listens to my boastful grievances and amazement" (12). As readers situated outside of Glück's specific queer writerly milieu, these names hold no meaning besides the little he has just described. That said, by refusing to elaborate on these figures, Glück emphasizes our position outside this community; those within this group of friends will more than likely recognize these names. Glück is content with the exclusivity of this contingent knowledge—perhaps, to the frustration of the reader left out.

The New Narrative movement uses relationships of every kind as the potential basis for its aesthetic. Bradway has described how New Narrative emerged from "a community of writers ... that read, wrote, fucked, critiqued, gossiped about, hated, loved, and passionately cared for one another. These affective relations are not ancillary to New Narrative; they are its organizing principle" (2021, 1300-1). By recomposing an earlier moment in the novel, "My story proceeds by interaction," Glück reemphasizes the pivotal

role of his specific community in both the production and reception of his work.¹⁹⁶ His novel would not exist without the words of his friends; likewise, the novel would mean little if his friends were not there to read it. Glück's medievalism thus facilitates contact with a queer community and history that highlights, as Dinshaw has argued, "the desires that propel such engagements, the affects that drive relationality even across time" (1999, 35).

This emphasis on practices of communal composition suggests another form of medievalism; one which the *Book* itself bears out in lucid detail. In the *Book*, Kempe details the composition of the text vis-à-vis a narrative proem at the beginning of the text. Kempe notes how "ower Lord ... comawnded hyr & chargyd hir þat sche xuld don wryten hyr felyngys & reuelacyons" and how she was compelled to find a capable scribe to record these 'felyngys' (3.31-2). She describes how her first scribe, "a man dwelling in Dewch-lond which was an Englyschman in hys byrth," moved his family back to England to "wretyn as mech as sche wold tellyn hym" (4.4-5, 4.10). This first scribe dies, however, and Kempe takes her book to a priest with the desire that he would continue the text; the priest, however, is shocked by the former scribe's handwriting. The *Book*, "so eucl wretyn," was nearly illegible: "it was neipyr good Englysch ne Dewch, ne þe lettyr was not schapyn ne formyd as oper letters ben" (4.14-5, 15-7). This priest was unsettled by the contents Kempe's *Book*, though, that he avoided working on it at all and is only

¹⁹⁶ See also the beginning of Glück's *Margery Kempe*: "Interaction shifts the ground of the finite. They create belief by responding to my story when I meet them in cafés, on street corners, on the phone" (12).

plied by Kempe's of "a grett summe of good for hys labour" (4.36-7). Kempe's *Book* thus begins a text which is, quite literally, poorly written.

The promise of generous payment motivates the priest to begin working on the *Book* but only momentarily. "þis good man wrot a-bowt a leef" before the difficulty of reading the script forces him to stop (4.37-8). As we soon learn, the priest returns the *Book* only for Kempe to bring it back—this time also bringing her prayers, "sche shuld prey to God for hym" (5.6-7). The prayers work as the priest finds the script "mych mor esy ... þan it was be-forn-tym" (5.9-10). The priest explains the seemingly disorganized structure of and potential errors in the *Book*:

Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, euery thyng aftyr oþer as it wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wryten þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme & þe ordyr whan thyngys befellyn. And þerfor sche dede no þing wryten but þat sche knew rygth wel for very trewth. What þe prest began first to wryten on þis booke, hys eyn myssyd so þat he myghth not se to make hys lettyr ne myghth not se to mend hys penne. All oþer thyng he myghth se wel a-now. (5.12-21)

The *Book* thus provides a logic for its achronological order. Kempe is human and is thus subject to lapses of her very human memory. However, rather than attempting to compose a continuous narrative of events, Kempe's seemingly disordered chronology is a deliberate aesthetic and formal choice. The priest notes that Kempe's work on the text is not simply narrative but editorial—"so he red it ouyr be-forn þis creatur euery word, sche sum-tym helping where ony difficulte was" (5.11-2). As Krug has suggested, "there is no reason to believe the clerics wrote Kempe's *Book* without her input ... the *Book* is replete

with personal detail and personal anecdotes of a disturbing nature that seem unlikely to have been known by anyone but the author herself” (2017, 15). Likewise, the priest is explicit in his meaningful contributions to the composition and construction of the manuscript object, “whan he had wretyn a qwayr, he addyd a leef þerto, and þan wrot he þis proym” (5.29-31).

As I demonstrated before, Glück’s novel received its share of criticism from both the broader public readership as well as his queer readers. Though Glück writes for a specific contingent, his novel nevertheless imagines the risks associated with the public reception of texts meant for a particular audience. Glück considers, then, the potential for textual misreading and failure vis-à-vis Kempe’s visions in the *Book*. In attempting to appropriate these visions, Glück assigns affects to figures where they otherwise do not appear in Kempe’s *Book*. This is, in fact, a specific criticism lodged against Glück’s novel; Kempe and the biblical figures Glück describes are upsetting precisely because of the excessiveness of their humanity. I argue that this is not simply a willful misreading of the *Book*, but rather a reconsideration of the underlying affects found in the *Book* and their relationship to postmodernity.

Specifically, Glück attends to negative affect in a manner consistent with New Narrative’s intellectual and creative aims as well as postmodernism more broadly. Within the *Book*, and within the framework of the visions themselves, Kempe’s interpolative practice goes relatively unchallenged. This is not to say that she is not the subject of derision and scorn for other reasons. As Anthony Bale has suggested, Kempe “claims to have freed herself from caring about worldly opening, and yet, in having the *Book*

written, she paradoxically presents herself and her life back to a public that repeatedly and painfully shamed her” (2021, 181). A significant contingent of Kempe’s contemporary religious authority and the lay public find her constant loud weeping and outspoken preaching to be socially untenable.

Kempe details how her weeping often attracts negative attention from her peers and church authorities. During a visit to Canterbury cathedral, Kempe became “gretly despised & repreuyd for cause sche wept so fast bothyn of þe monkys & prestys & of seculer men ner al a day” (27.19-22).¹⁹⁷ Elsewhere, Kempe appears aware of how distracting her crying is and attempts to stifle her tears, “sche wold kepyn it in as mech as sche myth þat þe pepyl xulde not an herd it for noyng of hem” (69.21-3). Later, a parish priest of Lynn warns a visiting friar, “an holy man & a good prechowr,” of Kempe’s habit of weeping but asks that “zyf sche make any noyse at 3owr sermown, suffyr it paciently & beth not a-baschyd þerof” (148.29; 149.9-11). The friar can ‘suffyr’ the first bout of Kempe’s crying; he is less patient with the second demanding that “I wolde þis woman were owte of þe chirche; sche noyith þe pepil” (149.32-3). And while the response to Kempe’s weeping is not entirely negative, these feelings of distraction, irritation, and annoyance persist throughout the *Book*.

These negative affects—a manifestation of which I considered in the first chapter and what Sianne Ngai has dubbed ‘ugly feelings’—are thus commensurate with the text’s exploration of unease, annoyance, and disappointment already expressed in the

¹⁹⁷ Kempe’s weeping is so disruptive that she claims that John, her husband, left her side and acted as if he didn’t know her—“hyr husband went a-way fro hir as he had not a knowyn hir & left hir a-loon a-mong hem” (27.22-4).

Book. That said, in the fifteenth century *Book*, Kempe's participatory visions tend to legitimize themselves as well as the extremity of Kempe's behavior; she is not the subject of reprimand within her visions. Glück's vision of Margery's vision, however, ascribes and accentuates the presence of 'ugly feelings' in figures who would otherwise represent orthodox manifestations of grace, charity, and love.

Glück asks us to consider what it might mean for even Kempe's visions to become a site of hostility toward her style of piety. For example, in Glück's rewriting of Christ's torture before the crucifixion there is a sense of mounting agitation as the scene progresses. Kempe is slowly rejected from and by Christ. Whereas Christ calmly reassures Kempe that 'he will return' following his torture in the *Book*, Kempe's actions in the novel *Margery Kempe* are clearly disruptive to the immediate *mise en scène* of the crucifixion. Noting that "Mary could not speak another word" after witnessing Christ's torture, "Margery claimed the emotion; she collapsed to them and caught his ankle, crying" (141). In response, Jesus "hisse[s]" at Kempe to "[b]e still, Margery" (142). And while Kempe desires Christ's attention in the *Book*, Kempe here is overwhelming and possessive. Glück's Christ—who simply told her to 'be still' and tend to Mary in the *Book*—hisses, a tag suggestive of agitation, at Margery and uses her name in a kind of paternal condescension and reprimand.

Glück reemphasizes the space of queer time Kempe inhabits dramatically as she again recognizes that she has knowledge of the entirety of the narrative playing out before her. In a moment not unlike Kempe's crying over the infant Christ and "expect[ing] his death," for Kempe "it was still a shock" (145). As Joseph lowers Christ's

body from the crucifix, Mary, his mother, and Mary Magdalene begin to kiss his body. Kempe, however, appears to be at a loss for how to respond: “Margery ran back and forth; she wanted Jesus for herself; she screamed with awareness till her voice was a pale whistle” (145). And while this moment is similar to its antecedent in the *Book*—“sche ran euyr to & fro as it had be a woman wyth-owtyn reson, gretly desyryng to an had þe precyows body be hers-self a-lone”—Glück’s added characterization of Margery suggests a less generous reading of her desire to be alone with Christ’s body (194.6-8). Likewise, Glück lends an air of annoyance to Kempe’s care for Mary.

After Mary turns away the food Kempe has prepared, Kempe understands “that Mary’s tender smile and courtesy were forms of condescension; Mary’s kindness meant to exclude. She comforted Margery but would not allow Margery to comfort her” (148). Kempe then witnesses Christ’s visit with Mary Magdalene as a ‘gardener’ following his resurrection. Echoing John 20:17, Magdalene goes to kiss Christ’s feet, but the newly resurrected Christ, “voice ... full of dirt, gritty,” manages only a hoarse ““Don’t touch me”” (149). Having realized that this narrative beat “means the story is over,” Kempe begins to understand that her place in the past is nearing its end (148). She considers how Christ’s response to Magdalene would have affected her, “Margery thought if Jesus cried *Touch me not* to her, she would crumble along with the rest of her meager story” (149). As Audrey Walton has suggested, “Even at its most literal, then, the late medieval *noli me tangere* had paradoxically become a reminder of the Magdalene’s unique privilege with respect to touch—of touch as a privilege of the penitent” (2009, 7). Centering her

own feelings, Glück's Margery turns inward only to find that she does not truly belong amongst the privileged company of Mary Magdalene.¹⁹⁸

After Christ's post-resurrection visitation of his mother and followers, Christ enacts a familiar scene, "grabb[ing] Thomas's fingers and jamm[ing] into the wound in his chest with a look of rapture." It is worth mentioning here that the mostly absent Bob returns momentarily as he compares Jesus to L.: "Jesus gritted his teeth like L. does during orgasm, desiring sensation but unwilling to be moved by it." Glück returns to Kempe suggesting that "her cries were drowned by organ music" (150). The text suggests, however, that those in attendance remember her actions somewhat differently—"Others remember Margery as a frenetic dog"—with Christ asking in irritation, "Will someone put her out?" (150). Glück alludes to and collapses the social response to

¹⁹⁸ The bible describes how Mary Magdalene visited Christ's tomb only to find its stone moved and found "duos angelos" [two angels] there instead of Christ's body (John 20:12; LV). Though Christ makes himself known to Mary, in her grief she remains unaware of who Christ really was—"non sciebat quia Iesus est" [she did not know that it was Jesus] (John 20:14; LV). Begging Christ to explain where the body went, Christ finally calls her by name at which point Mary realizes that the figure behind her was Christ resurrected. Presumably moving to touch Christ in some manner, Christ refuses this gesture telling her "noli me tangere nondum enim ascendi ad Patrem" [Do not touch me as I have not yet ascended to my Father] (John 20:17; LV). In the *Book*, Kempe witnesses this scene as Mary, "al inflawmyd / with the fyre of lofe," recognizes Christ (197.15-6). Mary gestures toward Christ—"And with that word sche, knowing owr Lord, fel down at hys feet / and wolde a kyssyd hys feet" (197.20).

Jessica Hines has argued that "Kempe implies that her compassion is unique ... she details her response as going beyond the parameters of Christian cognitive and affective response to the Passion as it had previously existed" (2019, 283). See also Suzanne L. Craymer's "Margery Kempe's Imitation of Mary Magdalene and the Digby Plays" (1993) and Tara Williams' "Manipulating Mary: Maternal, Sexual, and Textual Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*" (2010).

Kempe's actions from the *Book*—"sum scornyd hir and seyde that sche howlyd as it had ben a dogge"—with the words of an annoyed Christ in his own *Margery Kempe* (105.22).

As she watches on, Kempe further realizes that she has no real place in these visions of the past. As Mary and Christ speak, Kempe "became aware that she was stranded in a remote desert in a stifling concrete bunker ... [s]he felt the weight of the arbitrary setting" (150). The finality of this realization is further impressed as Kempe's attempts to touch Christ are met with his cold rejection, "Jesus ... raised his arm against her, his palm flat as a door." This response caused her to realize that she "had not understood the stakes in the first place—she would rot in the dirt." Kempe thus slowly loses her place within a vision of her own creation as Christ initiates what can only be described as an incredibly awkward breakup. Christ "remind[s] her of adventures they'd had together in Italy, as though looking through photos and inviting her to share a tremulous nostalgia ... Jesus reduced Margery's bid for transcendence to a scrapbook of *experiences*." Kempe realizes then that this marked the moment when "Jesus discarded her dumb love and abandoned her" (152). From this point forward, Kempe begins to think of herself as a "disease, a noxious failure she wanted to hide" (153).

Kempe's sadness turns to a hostile anger, however, "so furious that Jesus is a bitter taste in her mouth." She begins to mentally berate Christ, "She tries to protect herself by attacking him. She abandons Jesus." Her clothing and somatic visionary practice, once points of pride, becomes nothing but "her crude white gown, her clumsy gestures" (157). Glück begins to consider his interest in Margery's despair and failure with a nod toward her conception of visionary time—"I describe Margery's suffering as

though it lasted a few days instead of years” (158). In characteristic New Narrative fashion, then, Glück begins reflexively to critique the very book being read: “I respond to the failure that permeates ... I have less faith in existence than Margery so I describe it more thoroughly.” Glück goes on, “[Kempe] turned her second-rate obsession into her last bid for endless response” (160). He makes sense of his own failure through Kempe, “I leave Margery in a suspended moment as the inevitability of L. subsides along with my fear of dying.” Bob continues, “I dreamt that Margery wants to see me. Who would know to pass himself as her? Only L., I surmise, because I asked him not to contact me. Now *I* am the god of nonrelation” (161). He concludes with question about the instability of his and L.’s identity, “If he takes my place as Margery, do I take his place as Jesus? At last my position is not so fixed” (161-2).

In focusing so pointedly on Kempe’s failures, Glück rearticulates his own queerness in the language of premodernity. As I have argued in other chapters, failure is not itself an end. Glück suggests that he was drawn to what “could only be known by us in the present: the difference between her high aspiration and her failure” (2016, 166). Failure allows us to productively interrogate the normative aesthetics that structure our experience with works of literature or visual art. In Kempe’s fifteenth-century failure, Glück saw plotted the very failure that characterizes queerness and the (mis)reception of *Margery Kempe*. The novel thus not only details Bob’s loss of L., but the inevitable reaction to a text which was, in Glück’s words, “written in the first place for a small group of friends.” As Mitchell has suggested of the novel, “For readers of this paperback,

a specifically target audience of gay readers, Kempe becomes part of the exploration of homosexual desire, and she is dressed accordingly” (2005, 111).

In the medieval, Glück finds a prosaic model for his text: “I married my prose to Margery’s, confecting a sentence halfway between us ... I suppose I have staged Margery’s story in the theater of autobiography, building aesthetics out of the interpenetration of fact and fiction” (167). Glück’s writing of Kempe is, perhaps, more ‘compassionate’ than it might first appear, as it attends to the less inspiring features of Kempe’s narrative—“her vulgarity, self-aggrandizement, and the faults in her piety” (168).¹⁹⁹ By centering Kempe, Glück’s approach to New Narrative’s insistence on fragmentation is itself a medievalism; he explains that “*Margery* is a queer version of disintegration that includes (takes with it a central myth of our culture)” (169). Discussing Kempe’s desire to kiss lepers, Jonathan Hsy has suggested, “Ultimately, the *Book* denies modern (and premodern) readers any claim to empirical or transcendent truth regarding this episode” (2010, 193). *Margery Kempe* highlights issues of rejection and

¹⁹⁹ During our email exchange, Glück explained, “Christopher, you can’t write the kind of books I write and expect everyone to love them. If they did, I would wonder what I was doing wrong.” *Margery Kempe*’s primary audience consisted of “a group of women friends doing experimental work. And they did love and support the book. They wrote about it, taught it, and their affection for it is a great satisfaction” (2022). I cannot help but notice how Glück’s comments resonate with Frederick J. Furnivall’s expectations of a specific readership and his problematizing of the necessity of ‘popular’ acceptance in his 1867 edition of *The Stations of Roman and the Pilgrims Sea-Voyage*, which I discussed in chapter three. In a pointed footnote to the edition’s preface, Furnivall argues that a reviewer for *The Saturday Review* “does not understand in what sense we publish our Texts” (1867, vii). He continues, “I conceive myself entitled to write Prefaces as to a circle of friends; for such I look on Subscribers as being. Did I consider a Saturday Review and the public as part of my audience, I should certainly write in a different one to them” (1867, viii).

denial in its premodern and postmodern contexts through its unsettling use of ‘ugly feelings’—what Ngai describes as affects which are “explicitly *amoral* and *noncathartic*”—to similarly undermine any possibility of any such claim in the present (2005, 6). As a queer medievalism, then, *Margery Kempe* toys with medieval notions of temporality and pushes on the boundaries of identity to what are—perhaps inevitably so—seemingly ambivalent ends.

Conclusion: Talking About Myself

John Ganim has suggested that the study of medieval romance has, at times, come to take the form of the romance genre itself. He argues for the “peculiar circularity in which the study ... takes the form of its object of study” (1996, 149). I find Ganim’s words particularly helpful within the context of the history of reception and scholarship of the *Book of Margery Kempe*—and, to a lesser extent, the novel *Margery Kempe*. There is a distinct and persistent strain of criticism that engages with ‘the first autobiography in English’ vis-à-vis the production of autobiographical critique.²⁰⁰ When discussing Kempe and the *Book*, many scholars are compelled to elaborate on their own lived relationship to the text. And while this phenomenon is like the relationship between Furnivall and

²⁰⁰ I am not quite as invested in the semantics surrounding whether Kempe’s *Book* constitutes ‘autobiography’ as others might be. As a scholar who engages with theories of queerness, itself seen by some to be anachronistic, I have no qualms with referring to Kempe’s writing as autobiography with the knowledge that this category is only an approximation of the text’s genre rather than a totalizing designation. As with Hoccleve’s self-description, there is little reason to delineate between the formalized rhetoric of Christian mysticism and the details of Kempe’s own life so strictly. As far as I am concerned, these things are mutually constitutive.

Hoccleve discussed in chapter three, there is a distinctively gendered valence to these autobiographical discussions of the *Book*. Since the *Book*'s rediscovery in the early twentieth century amongst the general bric-a-brac of Lt.-Col. Butler Bowden's family home and the exhaustive research by Hope Emily Allen for the Early English Text Society's edition, Kempe has seemingly always been able to goad her readers into a kind of reflexive and responsive autobiographical practice.²⁰¹ Perhaps, then, this is a consequence of Kempe's 'queer touch'—a point of contact across time that binds a community of readers to one another through the desire to situate themselves within the context of their own work. In this sense, I want to conclude by extending Ganim's assertion regarding the place of autobiography within the context of medieval scholarship on autobiography, how criticism mimics the form of its object of study.

Perhaps in the spirit of this, I will be frank with you, my reader. This chapter began as an examination of conflict, 'affecyone,' and the history of the *Book*'s reception via Hope Emily Allen. As my work progressed, however, I began to realize that my subject had to change, as Hope Emily Allen had not resonated quite as productively with

²⁰¹ According to Hilton Kelliher, Maurice Butler-Bowden, William Butler-Bowden's eldest son, recalls that the *Book of Margery Kempe* was found in the Bowden home during a search for spare ping-pong balls. Looking among "an entirely undisciplined clutter of smallish leather bound books," it appeared that they would not find a replacement; William Butler-Bowden suggests he will burn the books "on the bonfire tomorrow and then we may be able to find Ping Pong balls & bats when we want them." A friend present suggested instead that Butler-Bowden instead turn to an "acquaintance of mine who knows about these things ... after all there may be something of real interest there which you may not at the moment realize." An acquaintance takes the then unidentified *Book* to London where it was identified as "the autobiography of Margery Kempe which the experts had been hoping for years would come to the surface somewhere" (qtd. in Kelliher 1997, 260).

me as she had with Dinshaw and others. While still engaging with the *Book*, I sought another example of a reader's attachment to Kempe—and, as I hope I have aptly demonstrated here, found one in Robert Glück's *Margery Kempe*. Glück's attachment to Kempe is, like MS Christ Church 152 in chapter two, physically bound in his novel— affective attachment gives way to a formal aesthetic which positions text near, on top of, and inside one another.

And while Glück's creative engagement with Kempe is a formal far cry from Allen's meticulous research for the Early English Text Society's 1940 edition of the *Book*, Glück and Allen share a fundamentally similar bond with Kempe; in Kempe, they see pieces of themselves. Marea Mitchell has noted the passion with which Allen approached "her role as guardian of early English manuscripts and her sense of herself, with some others, as a watchdog patrolling the boundaries of scholarship, maintaining scholarly standards" (2005, 25). More specifically, Allen gestures toward her participation in an intellectual collective that "testifies to her own accretive and collaborative work process. Allen's collected letters bear witness to the existence of "a group of independent woman scholars who debated and shared information through lengthy letters" (Mitchell 2005, 37).

And, though the difficulties of Allen's editorial work with Meech is decidedly less theatrical than Kempe's accounts of her confrontation of religious and intellectual figureheads, it is important to note that Allen's, as Mitchell has suggested, "refusal to compartmentalize or adhere to boundaries" parallels Kempe's conflicts and meant that such refusal "was also part of the foundation of Kempe studies" (2005, 37). In a

celebratory letter from Joan Wake and Dorothy Ellis, two of Allen's closest English collaborators, on the recent arrival of a physical copy of the EETS edition of *The Book*, the two scholars playfully conflate Allen, Kempe, and the edition itself during their praise. Wake and Ellis give "[a] thousand thanks for Margery—I had bought three more of her She—that means you—is (which should be 'are') even more wonderful and thrilling than I expected ... Margery has come!!!!!!!!!! Complete in her brown habit with gold facings" (qtd. in Mitchell 2005, 41-2).²⁰²

Alternatively, Deanne Williams approaches Allen's work as signifying between medievalism and occult practice, not unlike the 'discourses of affinity' which structure Trigg's notion of 'congenial souls'—articulating, then, a "desire to speak with the dead [that] prompted [Allen] to recreate the past in her own image and to use the past, consciously or unconsciously, to explore and comment upon issues in the present" (2004, 138). Like Glück, then, Allen's "work on Margery Kempe opened the door (albeit unwittingly) to the forms of religious, social and sexual disobedience that inspire literary study today" (Williams 2004, 155). Allen's work, though not explicitly autobiographical, considers Kempe and other mystics with respect to her own social attachments, religious upbringing, and place as an academic outsider.

This practice of self-reflexive scholarship persists to this day in more explicit forms. Within Kempe studies, there is a desire to describe one's relationship to the text and with Kempe. Wallace Cleaves has observed this potential cause of the interactive

²⁰² Exclamation points as they appear in Mitchell's text. I find a certain humor knowing that this habit of gratuitously overemphasizing one's excitement has remained relatively unchanged over the last one hundred years.

style seemingly encouraged by the *Book*, “Kempe’s desire to be understood, authorized (pun intended) and even canonized by and through her readers imparts on her text an extraordinary capacity to reach across temporal distance and engender identification and support” (2017, 43). To wit, Carolyn Dinshaw’s work with both Hope Emily Allen and Margery Kempe stands as the critical model for medievalists hoping to better understand how their own positionality actively affects their engagement with Kempe.

As Dinshaw notes, “The web of association between and among late medieval mystical and other historical figures, places, and ideas was very intimate, and Allen felt deeply, personally implicated in it” (2012, 120). Having seen herself in Allen, Dinshaw has likewise described how viewing Allen’s correspondences generated “a shock of recognition—and, more intensely, the shock of *being recognized* ... in reading her act of recognition I recognized myself” (2012, 126). Though certainly not the predominant mode of criticism for Kempe studies, Kempe’s provocative voice does provide a textual site conducive to thinking about oneself as a scholar. Importantly, this practice of autobiographical criticism is often employed in service of a simultaneous analysis of Glück’s novel and the *Book*.

In one of the few critical responses to follow Dinshaw’s 1999 work on Glück’s novel, Anne Clark Bartlett’s 2004 article uses the *Book* as the platform by which to assemble a critical methodology which is predicated on ‘reading it personally.’ Her article begins with an admission, “When I began mapping out this essay, I found myself facing a difficulty that offered a curious parallel with my topic” (2004, 437). She details how a ‘hyperfamiliarity’ with the *Book* ultimately rendered it silent, “Either the most

talkative mystic in the Middle English tradition no longer spoke to me or I had grown so accustomed to her voice that I could no longer clearly make it out.”

Robert Glück’s *Margery Kempe*, Bartlett suggests, helped her rediscover Kempe by “offer[ing] a postmodern ‘defamiliarization’ of a medieval text that has ... become, for many scholars and teachers, a bit routine, perhaps even mundane” (2004, 438).

Ultimately, she contends that our individual positionalities “render us dynamic and idiosyncratic interpreter, our reading of medieval texts becomes simultaneously—sublimely—less and more familiar as we acknowledge the ways in which the [*sic*] our lives and texts mingle and intersect” (2004, 456). Beginning with a personal anecdote, Bartlett engages with her own place as a scholar as a means of interrogating how medieval texts might be made new again—perhaps, renewed.

Though not explicitly autobiographical, Yea Jung Park’s 2020 article considers how scholarship handles the genre of ‘confession’ and its tenuous place in critical discourse. She positions the *Book* to be “an exemplar of the ‘embarrassing’ confession,” the site of “Kempe-induced embarrassment” in her readers. Park has taken embarrassment to be a productive affect and the result of “a complex readerly phenomenon” (2020, 255). She has argued that “[w]hen we succumb to the temptation to imagine the unspoken but likely ... rationales behind Kempe’s (over-) eager (over-) exposure of the self, we can choose to be either uncharitable or charitable, but both gestures are inescapably condescending” (2020, 258).

Turning to the issue of institutional imbalances that facilitate critical ‘confession,’ Park suggested that “[c]onfession happens in different registers for different groups of

academics, and speaker position dictates whether the locution of ‘I confess’ will sound blithely rhetorical or conspicuously revelatory” and asks, “What happens when we imagine academics[?] confessions like Kempe, put under the very gaze that we have used to read our literary and historical subjects? (2020, 259-60; 260). Park contends that “one can truly empathize with Kempe only when one has also experience being as sorely out of place ... we are embarrassed not only *by* others’ self-presentations but also *for* them, because we too worry about our own.” Park ultimately finds that “Kempe’s text models the process for anyone who has tried to build a convincing self-presentation on unauthorized, unstable ground, and found the work endlessly awkward” (2020, 260). Park’s consideration of Kempe’s confessional mode, its ability to induce embarrassment, and the potential role of the *Book* as a model for those ‘sorely out of place’ provides a meaningful meta-critique of autobiographical criticism—and, perhaps, Glück’s queer medievalism.

Mary Burger’s 2021 article takes up Dinshaw and Bartlett’s example and uses her own reading of Glück’s *Margery Kempe* as basis for a reconsideration of the novel’s narrative practice. Like Bartlett, Burger begins with an anecdote about first encountering the *Book* in the 1990s. ‘Captivated’ by Kempe’s language, Burger describes how she “began collaging her lines into poems, alongside other overwrought declarations.” Burger reproduces Kempe’s language of religious sensation— “I didn’t distinguish between the exquisite and the grotesque—it was the pitch of obsession that compelled me.” She is not afraid of what the language of this admission might mean for her critical work; namely,

delegitimize her work as somehow too affected, too personally involved. She refers to the initial publication of Glück's novel as "a vision" which she could not "divine."

Burger takes the 2020 rerelease of the novel, "this new manifestation," as a sign to continue her work with *Margery Kempe*—"my divination was rekindled" (2021, 387). Throughout the article, Burger quotes Glück's novel only using italicized typeface; the effect is a smoothing over of the punctuation that might better delineate where Burger's thoughts end and Glück's begin. As Glück interweaves his own narrative into Kempe's, Burger imbues her critique with portions directly appropriated from Glück's narrative. Burger determines that the narrative interleaving of the *Book in Margery Kempe* grants a kind of "access to the fold of interiority" present in each text (2021, 392).

As these four examples demonstrate, writing about Kempe is often an exercise in writing about oneself. And, perhaps, that is true of every piece of scholarship. Using Dinshaw's *How Soon Is Now?* as a kind of exemplar, Richard Utz has argued that Dinshaw provides an "effective rhetorical, structural, and methodological integration of the personal and the professional, the confessional and critical, and the self-reflexive and the 'seriously' academic" and, in doing so, "demonstrates that scholarship is always deeply autobiographical" (2017, 9). In this sense, Utz has suggested, the role of the personal is deeply implicated in the success of future scholarship: "I am convinced that the best medieval scholarship of the future will be similarly conscious of its own investigating subjects' role in the long history of the reception of the medieval artefact or practice under investigation" (2017, 82). Stephanie Trigg and Thomas Prendergast have likewise questioned "how emotional responses to medieval things are very difficult to

disentangle from the medievalist emotions that drive the invention and recreation of the post-medieval” (2018, 45).²⁰³ Work on the *Book* and *Margery Kempe* thus represents a potential model for how such ‘emotional responses’ and their articulation in scholarship—as well as the critique of those articulations—might in fact be necessary for a wider disciplinary and methodological shift.

Robert Glück’s *Margery Kempe* represents an integral example of the queer medievalism that will necessarily be an important feature in such a shift. As Trigg and Prendergast have argued, “Labour, mastery, and professionalism displaced uncritical amateurism in an effort to legitimate the emergence of medieval studies” (2007, 220). By default, then, amateur engagements with medieval materials are never a feature of medieval studies proper. These engagements, Trigg and Prendergast describe in no uncertain terms, “necessarily became misunderstandings — a kind of afterbirth which maintained only an attenuated relationship to the real work of medieval studies” (2007, 221). Glück’s *Margery Kempe* demonstrates that this ‘afterbirth’—or in Glück’s idiom, “our own shit, piss, tears, sweat, spit, snot, come, pus, babies, and sometimes blood”—is itself a medium through which to filter the Middle Ages (137). Glück provocatively stages his autobiography as a kind of appropriative palimpsest atop Kempe’s *Book* in service of a queer postmodernist critique of the coherence of queer identity and the furthering of an aesthetic of fragmentation. Glück’s formal practice—his visceral becoming and unbecoming of Kempe throughout the novel—demonstrates a meaningful attachment to Kempe as well as his immediate community of readers. Beyond simply

²⁰³ Utz highlights the “unapologetically political objective” of the *Manifesto* (2017, ix).

being incendiary or vulgar, Glück's postmodern narrative aesthetic participates in the longer history of idiosyncratic attachments outlined throughout this dissertation.

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