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Feeling Bureaucratic:

Political Poetry, Affective Rhetoric, and Parliamentary Process in Late Medieval England

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in English

by

Jonathan James Forbes

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September 2018

Feeling Bureaucratic:

Political Poetry, Affective Rhetoric, and Parliamentary Process in Late Medieval England

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by

Jonathan James Forbes

Dedicated to my beloved uncle, Thomas H. Forbes.

In memoriam.

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ABSTRACT

Feeling Bureaucratic:

Political Poetry, Affective Rhetoric, and Parliamentary Process in Late Medieval England

by

Jonathan James Forbes

This dissertation explores the formation of the English parliament in the fourteenth century and tracks its conceptual development via an archive of texts produced within a culture of Westminster-based, Oxford-influenced government bureaucrats. These bureaucrats worked alongside the parliament, and through their writings, intervened in the very political processes that they helped to administrate. “Parliamentary” texts include not only allegorical portrayals but also debate poems, dream visions, bureaucratic “how-to” manuals, and archival documents, which often conceptualize the institution as engaging in practices of collective care by valuing ongoing political process. Such a conceptualization was valuable within a historical context of widespread cultural trauma in the fourteenth century and offered the institutionalization of collective care practices in parliament as a response to trauma. By way of psychoanalysis, assemblage theory, and trauma theory, this study offers a new historiography of parliament, one that turns away from *longue durée* arguments about barons restraining royal power to a more synchronic approach targeting the discursive and affective origins of parliamentary practice and thinking in fourteenth-century England.

The introduction presents the formation of the parliament in fourteenth-century England alongside the century's well-known cultural traumas—plague, warfare, and a young king—to offer a new cultural historiography of parliament. Chapter 1 places examples of medieval assembly in the *Modus tenendi parliamentum*, the headlinks to the *Canterbury Tales*, and the episode of Lady Meed in *Piers Plowman* alongside contemporary assemblage theory to suggest that medieval conceptualizations of the body politic became more flexible in response to parliamentary process. Chapter 2 considers the value of ongoing, unresolved political process in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* to argue that process-oriented politics builds attachments that sustain politics and inspire a vision of common profit that is both intimate and integral to the practice of collective care. Chapter 3 turns to the petitionary language in the Prologue to William Langland's *Piers Plowman* to argue that parliamentary petitions offered affectively-charged rhetorical scripts for communicating and preserving one's lived experience in an institutional arena that often addressed trauma. The conclusion finishes with a brief analysis of political process, activism, and group care in Trump's America, insisting that process-oriented politics provides reparation even in the twenty-first century, where fascination with political outcomes shades the very human processes and affects at the core of our political practices.

Feeling Bureaucratic:

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INTRODUCTION: PARLIAMENTARY TALKING CURES

Parliament and *Parlement*

In the midst of a raucous parliamentary debate over the marriage of a noble female eagle to one of three potential suitors, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*¹ asks how we engage in conflict: through violence or speech? When the threat of violence erupts in the poem's parliament, a "terslet," or male eagle,² offers an alternative way to hold that space in conflict, namely, through the voice, or speech.

[“I can not se that argumentes avayle:
Thenne semeth it there moste be batayle.”
“Al redy!” quod these egles tercels tho.
“Nay, sires,” quod he, “if that I durste it seye,
Ye don me wrong, my tale is not ido!
For, sires—ne taketh not agref I prey—
It may not gon as ye wolde in this weye;
Oure is the voyse that han the charge in honde,
And to the juges dom ye moten stonde.[”]³

Surely, the conflict does not dissipate; in fact, speech elongates the conflict by initiating a political process concerned with judgment. However, noteworthy about this scene is that it provides an example of a motif in late fourteenth-century English literature—namely, poems

¹ For all citations from Geoffrey Chaucer, see *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

² *Middle English Dictionary (MED)*, University of Michigan, s.v. “tercelet (n.),” accessed August 17, 2018, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu>.

³ Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed., 383-94 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), lines 533-46.

written either entirely or in part about the newly forming institution of the English parliament. In these portrayals, the political processes in which their parliamentarians engage take center stage, and political speech holds these processes together in the midst of conflict. In addition to Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, poetic representations of parliament occur in the Trojan Parliament in Book IV of his *Troilus and Criseyde*,⁴ William Langland's Prologue and Passus IV in the B-text of *Piers Plowman*,⁵ and, nearly one hundred years later, in a parliament of planetary gods in fifteenth-century Scottish poet Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*.⁶ However, what I pursue in this dissertation is not a study of literary representations, but instead, what these representations are symptomatic of. That is to say, while literary representations of parliament are clearly tied to the institution's budding influence in late medieval England, particularly in the fourteenth century, I argue that the above-mentioned allegorical representations are only one part of a much larger preoccupation in late medieval literature with conceptualizing the process of engaging in political speech, and that such speech can serve as an institutionalized care practice aimed at confronting cultural traumas.

The word "parliament" in medieval poetry refers to more than the political institution. Long before parliament's institutionalization in the fourteenth century, readers encounter scenes of "*parlement*," or, gathering and counsel between king and barons, in poetry.⁷ An

⁴ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed., 471-585 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

⁵ William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt, 2nd ed. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011).

⁶ Robert Henryson, *The Testament of Cresseid*, in *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Robert L. Kindrick (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997).

⁷ *MED*, s.v. "parlement (n.)," 2.b., accessed August 19, 2018.

example is the thirteenth-century Middle English romance *Havelok the Dane*.⁸ Unlike Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, *Havelok* is certainly not a poem about parliament, but it does contain two scenes of *parlement* that momentarily pause the action of the plot, and the discussions that occur provide conclusions that are crucial to the poem's overall resolution. Here, political discourse is a means to poetical resolution. In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies the reference to the political institution as among the latest definitions of the word "parliament," the earliest referring not only to a formal council summoned by a monarch (e.g., the *curia regis* in *Havelok*), but also simply to "speech."⁹ While recognizing the distinctions among the uses and definitions of parliament/*parlement* is necessary in order to avoid ironing out historical and contextual meaning, recognizing the links among them is also essential for understanding that the institution of parliament is located within a network of cultural formulations of political speech more generally. "Parliamentary" texts are not only limited to poems that allegorize the halls of parliament, but also include debate poems, dream visions, bureaucratic "how-to" manuals, and archival documents, all of which engage with the formalization of political speech—whether those forms are aesthetic or procedural.

Critical Contexts

By and large, new historicists and historians alike have dominated recent studies on parliament and the texts that they produce. Such a focus has shaped the possible discussions on the history of parliament and studies in parliament and literature to focus on its historical significance both in institutional history and in relations between the king and his barons, and

⁸ *Havelock the Dane*, in *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelock the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, eds. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, 72-185 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, Oxford UP, s.v. "parliament (n.1)," accessed January 25, 2013, www.oed.com.

eventually, the Commons. As a result, other critical methodologies such as those that I pursue in this dissertation—namely, psychoanalysis and assemblage theory—have not intervened significantly in this institutional history, and as a result, parliamentary literature has been under-theorized relative to the corpus of late medieval work. However, visible in this historicism is a democratizing force that explores public entry into the parliamentary space, with a particular focus on the parliamentary documents that enabled this entry. Namely, four monograph-length studies have emerged in the last decade or so that have shaped the direction of the study of parliament and literature and its debt to literature and law. In what follows, I will review these studies to show the debt that my own dissertation pays to the history of this field, but also to encourage new critical methodologies to foray into the arena of literature and law and institutional history.

Matthew Giancarlo's *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England*¹⁰ is the only full-length monograph in medieval *literary* studies devoted to the topic of parliament and poetry. Giancarlo focuses his analysis primarily on three fourteenth-century London poets—Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower, and William Langland—and their connections to parliamentary politics. His analysis dissects the relationship between their life experiences in parliament and their writing, namely, Chaucer's analysis of petitioning and political mediation in *Parliament of Fowls*, Gower's reflections on property in *Mirour de l'Omme* and *Cronica Tripertita*, and Langland's conceptualization of the common voice in *Piers Plowman*. Giancarlo's work has helped to establish how intimately connected the poetic and parliamentary worlds of late medieval London are. However, in tracing the connections

¹⁰ Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007).

between the literary and parliamentary arenas, Giancarlo asserts that England's parliamentary motifs become models for late fourteenth-century literary expression, models that eventually die off with the "English Renaissance." The reason that this modeling eventually weakens, he argues, is that "literary art began to be categorized, culturally, much more *discretely*, as a realm with its own recognizable shapes and genres. No need, then, to borrow from something like a parliament or forms such as documentary petitions."¹¹ In other words, parliament as a set of motifs provides literature with a mechanism for writing the public, and as culture shifts, these motifs are replaced as literature supposedly develops more sophisticated and "homegrown" models of expression (i.e., the Italian, Latinate, and Humanist traditions, that is, hardly homegrown) in the early modern period. For Giancarlo, parliament's influence on literature is unidirectional.

My project also makes use of new historicist work in literature and law. Literary critics such as Steven Justice¹² and Emily Steiner¹³ consider political documents such as common petitions, chronicle archives, bureaucratic documents, and political pamphlets *as* literary texts. In so doing, they reveal a dialogue between the literary and legal realms, and, even more so, insist that traditionally "non-literary" texts are ripe for literary analysis and intervention precisely because the production of late medieval English literature and law are so closely tied. Giancarlo's work contributes to this discussion, and his literary analysis is shaped by the narratives that appear in the archives of parliament, which he argues correspond thematically to his chosen "literary" texts, in order to show how the very

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹² Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

¹³ Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

language and imagery used in poetry is lifted from parliamentary discourse. However, while literature and law, or “documentary culture,” has long been analyzed through the frame of new historicism, and while piecemeal attention has been paid to parliament’s interactions with literary production, what is needed is a theoretical framework for understanding the literary manifestations of parliament’s larger cultural significance, and a theoretical evaluation of late medieval political speech. Such a theoretical intervention expands the parameters of studies of literature and the law and institutional history to understand the human and behavioral processes at work in the making and unmaking of the law and politics. While new historicist studies do well to demonstrate the overall development of the parliamentary institution, my study values the affective realities that attend historical and political change.

Within the field of history, studies on parliament tend to focus on the textual apparatus that it produced, namely, pamphlets, petitions, and the parliament rolls. Gwilym Dodd’s *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages*¹⁴ offers a comprehensive analysis of the apparatus of private and common petitioning that, he argues, undergirded the political life surrounding the parliament and made parliament such an indispensable institution for both king and Commons alike. Dodd’s explanation of the process of submitting a petition to parliament to remedy a grievance reveals two key stakes. First, the growth of petitionary intake in the parliament helped to expand the king’s power in offering remedial justice throughout the realm.¹⁵ Secondly, and related to the first phenomenon, is that subjects and citizens had greater access to the king’s

¹⁴ Gwilym Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

remediation through the massive bureaucracy that was charged with routing these textual interactions to the appropriate place for justice or grace.¹⁶ Thus, a political culture formed around the parliament, and one of its platforms for expression was the written petition.

Dodd ultimately concludes that a “broader political culture [...] helped create a standardized body of language which the drafters of the petitions could readily (and perhaps unthinkingly) draw upon,”¹⁷ and thus, unlike Giancarlo, he opens the opportunity for local cultures to impact parliamentary discourse through the enumeration of local, particular grievances. Dodd’s work is valuable because it reveals that the rhetorical tradition, inflected with local culture, enabled access to the institution of parliament, demonstrating how central it was to political life throughout England. I push this analysis forward to consider how widespread access to remedial justice through documentary culture not only made parliament central to England’s political life, but also positioned petitionary process as a care practice. My study of petitions in Chapter 3 reveals a connection between affectively laden rhetoric and the practices of care that made parliament such an invaluable, potentiating institution.

A skeptical reading of the rhetorical significance of petitioning, due to its oftentimes *pathos*-driven language, might suggest that these documents are such biased constructions of events that they should be treated carefully and without too much historical authority. However, two years after Dodd’s authoritative study on the petition came an edited collection on medieval petitioning, entitled *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, a collaborative work shepherded by W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd, and Anthony Musson that explores

¹⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹⁷ Ibid., 283.

petitioning's central role in establishing political relations throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁸ In Ormrod's introduction, he dissects the relationship between reality and rhetoric and the self-fashioning that petitions enabled, concluding that "[u]nderstanding that petitions were not merely the outpouring of real-life, hard-luck stories but artful constructs designed to get something done provides a first step to distinguishing between the fictional and the factual and thus to using them as a meaningful source for the appreciation of social, cultural, legal and political norms in later medieval England."¹⁹ Ormrod's assertion that the petitionary genre blends fact and fiction underscores that more than just a statement of facts is necessary to ensure access to juridical remediation; further, that "something else" that makes petitionary discourse effective is attributed to rhetorical formulae.

I suggest that these formulae—that "something else" that offers petitions their blend of objectivity and subjective experience—offer scripts charged with communicating the affective experience that inflects these experiences of reality. As Brian Massumi points out in *Parables for the Virtual*, there is always that "something else" in communication that makes it more than just a series of words; affect makes words more shareable by expressing and impressing an embodied reality.²⁰ Bias in history, so it seems, nonetheless communicates other types of information; rather than opposing fiction to fact, I understand fiction to communicate its own type of reality, one infused with affectively charged lived experiences. Petitions as mechanisms of affect, fiction, subjective reality, lived experience go beyond the

¹⁸ W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd, and Anthony Musson, eds., *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance* (York: Boydell & Brewer, 2009).

¹⁹ Ormrod, "Introduction: Medieval Petitions in Context," *Medieval Petitions*, 1-11; 11.

²⁰ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).

facts and open the institution of parliament up to emotional business, enhancing its role in the practice of care.

However, the public's access to parliament was not limited to petitions; in fact, broadsides recounting parliamentary business began when the Good Parliament of 1376 captured the public's political imagination. Clementine Oliver in her *Parliament and Political Pamphleteering in Fourteenth-Century England*²¹ explains that texts referred to as "processes" circulated throughout London as broadsides during and in the wake of a parliament, and that the public was in fact invested in and curious about the happenings of the parliament. Oliver's work is invaluable because it demonstrates that the public had much more access to and interest in parliamentary news than was previously thought, and that the history of parliament is not only between kings and barons but includes the public's access and response to parliamentary business.²² Oliver's analysis provides evidence that this "something else" in parliamentary discourse—the affective layer of political communication—captured public attention, and that the documents produced by the parliament and in response to parliamentary business were influenced by culture and literary tropes.

These four studies lay the parameters for recent histories of parliament. They also provide opportunities for new critical approaches to expand our historical understanding of the institution's role in social and political life. Complicating Giancarlo's claim that literature borrows from parliamentary motifs, this discussion demonstrates that culture and parliament (by "culture," I mean the textual tradition emerging from the parliamentary archive) were

²¹ Clementine Oliver, *Parliament and Political Pamphleteering in Fourteenth-Century England* (York: York Medieval Press, 2010).

²² *Ibid.*, 33.

mutually constructive, not despite the bias and fictional nature of parliamentary portrayals across the archive, but because such rhetorical flourishes highlight the lived experience of interacting with the institution.

Indeed, parliament quite literally formed out of another political institution, the *curia regis* (or, the royal counsel). But the widespread appearance of the institution and its motifs across historical documents and literary texts suggests that parliament also served as a response to culture—namely, to the cultural crises of the late Middle Ages. Returning to the abovementioned scene from Chaucer’s *Parliament*, when the debate fails among the royal eagles on the floor of parliament, the bird-speaker fears that “there moste be batayle.”²³ However, political speech quickly replaces the threat of violence as one of the common birds proclaims, “Oure is the voyse that han the charge in honde,”²⁴ and speech rather than sword ensures the continuance of debate. Chaucer’s poem offers an example of how thin the line is between political speech and violence in the texts selected. The theoretical perspective that I offer in *Feeling Bureaucratic: Political Poetry, Affective Rhetoric, and Parliamentary Process in Late Medieval England* puts trauma studies and assemblage theory into contact with legal studies in order to suggest that psychoanalysis—the “talking cure”—can help to deepen our understanding of an institution that so heavily relies on speech and that comes to its full form in the midst of the traumatic political and cultural crises of the late Middle Ages in England.

Parliament, then, not only *affects* literary expression by offering a model for talking through trauma and confronting social antagonism—and in some instances, participating in

²³ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, line 539.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, line 545.

both—but is also *affected by* underlying cultural anxieties that call for and make possible the formation and foundation of such an institution in the midst of crisis. Parliament and its archives, more than offering a buffet of literary imagery, are in fact symptomatic of a need in late medieval culture for the formalization of political speech in the face of such social and political disruptions as plague, warfare, class destabilization, and a vulnerable monarchy. In my reading, archival accounts of individual petitions before parliament do not only provide a historical grounding for understanding allegorical petitioners such as those in Langland's Parliament of Rats and Mice. While in conversation with new historicist readings of legal and documentary culture, I read these histories differently, insofar as archival and poetic portrayals are *all* representations of political process, one no more privileged or authoritative than another, and all testify to the active conceptual development of an institution that reflects the needs and anxieties of the culture that produced it.

In *Feeling Bureaucratic*, I seek to identify parliament not only as a budding institution but also as a cultural-political phenomenon that left its traces across time and texts in response to cultural trauma and social antagonism. In broadening the theoretical scope of this discussion on parliament and literature, the literary and textual culture of parliament presents as a phenomenon that extends beyond its immediate context in London to become a means of conceptualizing how the multiple processes for engaging in political rhetoric are processes that are in and of themselves both productive and therapeutic. That is, these texts all build the institution from the archive up, as a means of theorizing and conceptualizing the healing potentiality of political speech.

Historical Contexts

Parliament's relationship to trauma and antagonism are undergirded by the historical circumstances in which the institution emerges in fourteenth-century England. To read this history accordingly, one of my guiding questions about this period is: why did such a politically, economically, and socially fraught historical moment create the beginnings of what is today Britain's democratic system?

Before answering this question, it must be acknowledged that the history of parliament that I offer in this dissertation is not the typical history of parliament. Authoritative studies on the history of the institution, such as Roland Butt's *A History of Parliament: The Middle Ages*, tells a story of counsel, struggle, and compromise between the king and his barons. In these histories, parliament is one step in the evolution of feudal political order in England, and the relationship between the Members of Parliament—barons—and the king who summons it results from the institutionalization of feudal political culture. Butt writes that “Norman feudal order itself was to become the source of the first challenge to the power of the post-Conquest crown and its claims were to lead to the writing of the statement of liberties in Magna Carta of which Parliament came to be the guardian.”²⁵ From the Anglo-Saxon Witan to the *curia regis* to Magna Carta to Parliament, the history of parliament and its ancestry is written along the lines of feudal order. Offered below is an alternate history of parliament that contextualizes the rise of the institution and its outpouring of texts within the crises of the fourteenth century. Certainly parliament evolves out of a feudal structure, but the widespread cultural traumas of late medieval England also contribute to its history.

²⁵ Roland Butt, *A History of Parliament: The Middle Ages* (London: Constable, 1989), 21.

As is well known, England in the fourteenth century witnessed two major waves of plague that conservative estimates say reduced its population by at least half;²⁶ a continual war with France in The Hundred Years' War that strained England economically through heavy taxation, socially through loss of life, and culturally through loss of land; and the instability of the monarchy after Richard II's ascension to the throne at the age of ten, which eventually incited both rebellion and government corruption.²⁷ Although the onslaught of plague quickly and traumatically reduced England's population, it altered the socio-political topography such that a middle class gained increasing visibility in both literary and political expression. As the story goes, with a steady demand for labor but a decrease in the labor market, working wages increased and created a class of wealthy, non-aristocratic merchants, guildsmen, and local legal authorities that wielded financial, cultural, and political power. While it is generally regarded that the fourteenth century witnessed an eventual "rise" of a middle class and its increasing cultural influence, I consider the plague as a traumatic break—an overwhelming of the feudal political organism—which instigated a cultural response. While certainly the increased power of the middle class is reflected in its increased political representation in government, more important for this dissertation is that the formation of cultural institutions and their corresponding political processes are themselves responses to widespread cultural trauma. This institutional response took the form of not only the literal body of parliament, but also (as I argue above) the surrounding literary and textual production that conceptualized political speech.

²⁶ May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century: 1307-1399* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959), 332.

²⁷ For a contemporary critique of Richard II's reign and its consequences, see the poem *Richard the Redeless*, in *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Soothsegger*, ed. James M. Dean (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000).

Certainly, the literary texts that treat parliament and political speech do criticize the institution for occasionally provoking social antagonism and do call into question its productivity. However, they also underscore that the very process of engaging in political rhetoric, and its guaranteed presence in a political body whose institutionalization ensured its regularization, is nonetheless a valuable and productive addition to England's political dynamics. Not only is antagonism harnessed to fuel a process of deliberation rather than destruction, but perhaps also antagonism and deliberation necessarily go hand-in-hand.

One question remains, however: from where did these ideas about new forms of governance emerge, and who authored these texts? First and foremost, the burgeoning institution of parliament created an expanding bureaucracy, and this clerical class is largely responsible for the textual productions of the parliament. These texts include not only the petitions, broadsides, and parliament rolls mentioned above, but also include the poetry conceptualizing and imagining the institution. The two main authors that I focus on in *Feeling Bureaucratic*, Geoffrey Chaucer and William Langland, were both tapped into parliamentary bureaucratic circles. Chaucer himself had a distinguished career as a clerical bureaucrat that put him in close contact with the business of parliament, in addition to being a Member of Parliament himself.²⁸ While we know little about Langland's life, we do know, as Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Steven Justice discuss, that Langland's readership was heavily clerical.²⁹ All this is to say that the same bureaucrats who wrote the more procedural texts that emerged from the parliament were the selfsame poets who dreamed of the institution's

²⁸ Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 96, 202.

²⁹ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Steven Justice, "Reformist Intellectual Culture in the English and Irish Civil Service: The *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum* and Its Literary Relations," *Traditio* 53 (1998): 149-202; 181.

possibilities. In this dissertation, I consider all texts emerging from the parliamentary arena as equal conceptualizations of the institution, built from the archive up.

This still does not answer how these parliamentary bureaucrats generated their conceptualizations of parliament, and what ideological tendencies inform their procedural and imagined portrayals of the institution. Kerby-Fulton argues that there emerged in London and Westminster what she calls the “clerical proletariat,” namely, over-educated, under-employed clerks who graduated from Oxford but who could not find an ecclesiastical position.³⁰ Many of these clerical proletarians found employment in the bureaucracies of London and Westminster, where their skills in rhetoric proved useful in the recording of petitions. Furthermore, Martin Carmargo shows that other opportunities for education developed in Oxford as well.³¹ That is, those not wishing to complete a bachelor’s program could take more vocationally-oriented clerical courses that would prepare students for careers in bureaucracy, letter writing, and other literate skills. Thus a highly educated and highly literate class of students emerged from Oxford, found employment in Westminster government, and employed the skills learned at Oxford in their parliamentary bureaucratic work.

Moreover, Oxford was a hotbed of progressive politics and religious dissent in the fourteenth century, and it is possible that such reformist sentiments percolated from Oxford classrooms onto the clerical offices of London and Westminster. As part of the Bachelor of Arts curriculum, students were trained in the art of rhetoric and the practice of debate and

³⁰ Kerby-Fulton, “The Clerical Proletariat: The Underemployed Scribe and Vocational Crisis,” *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 17 (2014): 1-34; Ann W. Astell, Introduction to *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996), 1-32.

³¹ Martin Camargo, *Ars Dictaminis, Ars Dictandi* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), 37, 57.

often attended debate performances as part of their graduation requirements.³² This facilitated what I am terming the Oxford-London intellectual exchange, wherein a progressive and reformist education from Oxford, and the rhetorical skills to implement it, influenced the burgeoning parliamentary bureaucracy in London. More than only a bureaucratic culture emerged in London; an intellectual culture also formed within its ranks as well, one that was involved in the intellectual conceptualization of the institution through the texts they read and wrote, both in Oxford and in London reading circles.

All this is to say that the history of parliament extends beyond feuds between kings and barons to include the immediate historical context that witnessed the institution's growth during the latter half of the fourteenth century. A series of cultural crises met with an increasing intellectualism among government workers, and a sustained curiosity from the public about the newly forming institution. A progressive political intellectual movement formed that was interested in conceptualizing the changing form of government in England and the idea of the body politic. This was primarily an intellectual movement—a sharing of ideas and writings across various genres—but one that had direct tangible consequences on the institutions that it conceptually helped to erect. As an intellectual cultural movement, it held cultural sway and, in this way, had a much more profound effect on England than being limited to these poets' and writers' readership.³³ Because these ideas had such sway in actual governance and political representation, in addition to individual petitioning, they affected those involved. And the primary institution that they affected was the budding parliament.

³² Thomas L. Reed, Jr., *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 43-65.

³³ Astell, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning*, 32-60.

In essence, the intellectual exchange between Oxford and London and into Westminster was one of the main cultural influences on this newest governing body. As such, the library of this intellectual clerical-political culture was likewise part of the parliamentary archive, expanding the parameters of the parliamentary territory to writings on governance. They thought about governance through the rhetorical processes of debate and petition, through an institution that centered itself on deliberative group process. And they did so at a time when England had experienced a history of traumas in the fourteenth century. Parliament emerges from this political desire for more healing coming out of the political process: desires to control the amount of influence on the king in the Good Parliament of 1376, and desires to bring grievances before the parliament to seek redress throughout the fourteenth century. Many of the problems—or even traumas—that needed petitions may have been caused by the socio-economic cultural shifts in the fallout of massive plague and warfare, the breaking of the feudal political organism.

On Form: Late Medieval Genres of Political Speech

In considering the formalization of political speech, I also attend to the generic forms in which the selected texts conceptualize the political process. While romances of course continued into the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries in England,³⁴ other literary genres grew in popularity, namely, the dream vision (e.g., *Piers Plowman*, *Parliament of Fowls*) and debate poetry (e.g., *Richard the Redless*, and, as I argue in Chapter 1, *The Canterbury Tales*' narrative frame). While some debate poems generate a parliament or an

³⁴ For an extended discussion of the history of romance in England, see Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

advisory council (e.g., *The Parliament of the Thre Ages* and *Wynnere and Wastoure*),³⁵ others offer a critique of contemporary social and political issues through estates satire (e.g., *Mum and the Sothsegger*).³⁶ Whether depicting a formal parliament or not, these poems stress that the performance of debate and deliberative rhetoric expose social ills by giving a voice to all those under examination. However, many of these poems are either inconclusive, unfinished, or serve to air grievances rather than offer solutions. With less emphasis placed on outcomes and more on process, these poems at once critique and reflect the difficulty of reconciling the various concerns of the body politic while also acknowledging that this very process is what enables dialogue in the first place. Although parliament met with harsh criticism for its limited results, the literary exercises in deliberative rhetoric are part of the conceptual development of parliament by re-thinking and performing what qualifies as productive speech. Namely, debate poetry offers a model for a late medieval “talking cure” by defending political process as productive in its ability to collectively expose the underlying causes of social grief.

Parliament’s connection to psychological processes is even clearer with regards to the dream vision genre. In fact, not only do many poetic representations of parliament occur in a dream vision (e.g., *Parliament of Fowls*, *Testament of Cresseid*, and *Piers Plowman*), but many of the debate poems discussed above also contain them, such as *Mum and the Sothsegger*, which includes both a dream vision and a debate on medieval dream theory. What is needed in the literary scholarship of parliament is an explanation for why

³⁵ See *Wynnere and Wastoure and The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, ed. Warren Ginsberg (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992).

³⁶ *Mum and the Sothsegger*, in *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger*, ed. James M. Dean (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000).

parliaments often occur in the dream vision genre; the frequency cannot be coincidental. By conflating the dream vision and debate poetry genres, both parliament and political speech are represented in poetry as psychological processes or states of mind. In some cases, parliament in literature is dreamed into existence. At stake in the congruence between the genres of debate poetry and dream visions is an invitation to theorize parliament's associations with psychological process and mental states in the late medieval imagination. That the dream vision takes contemporary crises as its subject calls attention to parliament's own engagement with cultural trauma in its literary history. That is, parliamentary crises are likewise imagined as mental and psychological crises, and a process of intersubjective deliberation is the cultural response imagined to be most fitting.

Transmission of Cultural Trauma

What is “curative” about the talking cure for psychoanalysts Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière is its ability to form a “social link” between the victim and an other who is not just willing to listen to the testimony, but willing to connect and incorporate it into his or her own traumas.³⁷ In order to reconnect to a larger social framework, victims of trauma need an “other” who is *not* the “totalitarian other” who forbids speech, but the “trustworthy other” who is willing to feel what others feel and accept projective identifications. On the other hand, within the field of history, Dominick LaCapra insists on the ethical problems of writing a traumatic history, acknowledging that historians and witnesses must record their empathy and admit to subjective experience, but he warns against becoming victims by proxy. He seems to suggest that while trauma is certainly shareable and

³⁷ François Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière, *History Beyond Trauma* (New York: Other Press, 2004), 6.

even foundational to group identity among its survivors, historians must acknowledge the limits of trauma's transferability from survivor to witness, and, to a larger extent, transgenerationally across an entire culture.³⁸ However, Davoine and Gaudillière challenge LaCapra's ethics of benevolent neutrality and instead argue that not only can traumatic experience affect the transference and countertransference between analyst and analysand, but that history itself is the transmission of transgenerational trauma. For them, analytic process is only effective "if the symptom finds someone to speak to,"³⁹ and therefore, it is ethical to recognize that the social link marks the impossibility of being objective and unaffected, and instead highlights that the transmission and the treatment of cultural trauma is intersubjective exchange.

If trauma can be transmitted culturally and transgenerationally, then one way in which this occurs is through the formation of cultural institutions such as parliament, whose deliberative rhetoric forms a social link similar to the analytic discourse of psychoanalysis. The dream vision genre offers an example of the late medieval equivalent of the social link in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. When the narrator awakes after his dream parliament offers no solution but instead delays its topic of discussion, he feels compelled to read: "I wok, and othere bokes tok me to, / To rede upon, and yit I rede alwey."⁴⁰ Chaucer's is one example that shows that the dream vision genre links the detached deliberation of the dream space to a surrounding cultural network. The crisis of an otherwise isolated mental space is integrated into an assemblage of texts, and intertextuality becomes a form of intersubjectivity. In

³⁸ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001), 40.

³⁹ Davoine and Gaudillière, *History Beyond Trauma*, 11.

⁴⁰ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, lines 695-96.

connection with Davoine and Gaudillière’s definition of trauma, in requiring a willing other with whom to speak, treatment is also transmission; yet, this transmission is nonetheless integrated into a cultural archive, and accordingly, is an intersubjective experience that creates a social link between trauma and history. There is an ethical imperative to recognize the traumatic foundations of cultural institutions; otherwise, the ways in which a society responds to a given widespread trauma may go unacknowledged, or even worse, erased and repeated. But more than this, it is necessary to understand how we respond to suffering and how it shapes our world.⁴¹ Moreover, the late medieval conflation in its literary genres of parliament, mental spaces, and intersubjective and intertextual deliberation is such an instance of the institutional treatment and transmission of cultural trauma—or, a parliamentary talking cure.

The larger theoretical stakes of this dissertation concern the place of political institutions in times of shared, widespread cultural trauma. An argument that has shaped thinking about post-plague England in the fourteenth century is that, because there was not a lot of literary production specifically concerning the plague, England must not have been as traumatized as countries on the continent.⁴² For example, the *Decameron* in Boccaccio’s Italy is explicitly a plague-narrative, and storytelling is understood as a way to not only pass the time, but to comfort and to strengthen group attachment in times of crisis. Despite the evidence that Boccaccio’s *Decameron* strongly influenced Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*—and

⁴¹ For an extended discussion on how suffering and pain makes the world, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 161-80.

⁴² See Siegfried Wenzel, “Pestilence and Middle English Literature: Friar John Grimestone’s Poems on Death,” in *The Black Death: The Impact of the 14th-century Plague*, ed. Daniel Williman (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982).

the plague narrative was mostly likely *not* missed by Chaucer—such equivalents do not exist as explicitly in England as they do elsewhere. However, this paradoxically assumes that any reaction to trauma must be an explicit one, although we also insist that trauma is an unincorporable and unrepresentable experience.⁴³

I have a contention with both assumptions above: that trauma is in fact unincorporable, and that England had no cultural expression or repression of its traumatic fourteenth century. First, arguing that trauma is unincorporable, unrepresentable, or unclaimed experience privileges language as the only means by which survivors can process and symbolize trauma. We know now from writing in affect theory that language is *not*, in fact, the only system through which humans express themselves.⁴⁴ Corroborating this, recent work in child adversity indicates that trauma is literally held by and incorporated into the body via a series of chemical and hormonal processes resulting in overwhelming external stress. Rather than unclaimed experience, as Nadine Burke Harris puts it, trauma is “an extreme example of the body remembering too much,”⁴⁵ and in fact “symbolizing” it through biological processes and behavioral consequences. Trauma *is* bodily, and therefore it *is* an experience claimed. Assuming an unincorporable traumatic experience falls into the trap of separating mind from body, and neuroscience has long ago dismissed the notion of a “brain-

⁴³ See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996).

⁴⁴ For general discussions about affective expression, see Theresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004); *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Clough (Durham: Duke UP, 2007); Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*; Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005).

⁴⁵ Nadine Burke Harris, *The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 47.

in-a-vat”); that is, it is much more productive to think about the embodied mind rather than mind versus body.⁴⁶ Trauma is certainly in-corpor-rated, that is, trapped in the body.

Insisting that trauma is unable to be incorporated or expressed assumes that the only ways in which we express ourselves, or experience incorporation, are through language. Or put another way, we assume that incorporating into language means the outright expression of trauma in a language-based, narrativized understanding of our traumatic experience. Medieval theories on the body politic value a bodily narrative; that is, they value in the human body a model of interaction in which society, government, and their institutions are connected through appendages.⁴⁷ These, too, are narratives: society would collapse if it had no feet to prop it up, hence the value of the Commons; the head is the seat of reason, and therefore, holds the Crown. And as I will discuss later on, what Manuel DeLanda calls the “organismic metaphor” of society assumes that each part of the body politic is defined by its specific relationship to the rest of the body.⁴⁸ All this is to say that medieval political thought imagined embodied schemas to social interaction, and I cannot help but wonder if these metaphors played out more often than not in lived experience: the Commons are not *literally* feet, but this embodied metaphor determines how we think about the Commons *as* feet. This must affect lived experience.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 147-70.

⁴⁷ For a contemporary theorization of “the King’s two bodies,” see John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: The Statesman’s Book*, ed. Murray F. Markland (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1979), Book VI, Chapter 25.

⁴⁸ Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 8.

⁴⁹ For the argument that there is no categorical distinction between body and metaphors thereof, since metaphors are themselves based in bodily experience, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

Parliament, on the other hand, challenges the preexisting embodied political model. It is a political body that summons, that requires that its various appendages move, separate, join, change, represent. It configures, reconfigures, and dissolves the body as needed, and it certainly has much more flexible appendages than the traditional body political model. That is, as the institution of parliament was becoming more and more present on the national landscape—maintained more of a bodily presence—England was figuring out how to reconfigure its own society in the wake of plague, war, shifting monarchy, and the large-scale societal changes that it prompted. A fixed model of body politic simply is not flexible enough to accommodate expressions of trauma. For this reason, an assemblable body rather than a fully assembled one—one that is more flexible, can tolerate unorthodox and uncomfortable movement—might itself be an expression of cultural trauma. I suggest that one way in which societies respond to large-scale, shared cultural trauma is by erecting institutions to facilitate social bonds, group interactions, and political attachments that can facilitate cultural healing. Specifically for England in the fourteenth century, the intellectual, legal, and political work that was invested in developing the parliament is a symptom of cultural trauma in itself. And moreover, that this response was concerned with developing and sustaining processes of deliberation, talking, and embodied togetherness in an assemblable rather than assembled way is of particular importance.

On a much larger theoretical scale, this dissertation argues that human behavioral functioning is primarily—or at least in large part—motivated by attachments. As such, we assemble in Natal spaces that are geared to facilitate attachment in physical spaces.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ I borrow the concept of the Natal from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). In their “plateau,” or chapter, “1837: Of the Refrain,” they refer to

Assembling serves a much larger behavioral function of confronting large-scale societal issues, such as cultural traumas. Rebuilding the capacity for attachment is primary in treating trauma, and so the Natal place can serve likewise as an attachment space. Because mutual recognition of one another's trauma treats trauma by building attachments, however verbal or nonverbal, then parliament is a behavioral function on a larger scale. As systems evolve, they emerge from their original function; so, as larger scale psychologies evolve in our collective practices, these more complex collective systems build on smaller-scale human behavior.

Interventions: Why Psychoanalysis?

At the 1981 Franco-Latin American meeting of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) in Paris, Jacques Derrida criticized the IPA for lacking a formal statement on the political violence and torture in Latin America, where he argued that “psychoanalysis can be the object or the agent, directly or indirectly, of very singular violations of human rights.”⁵¹ Specifically, he wrote that

the less integration there is between the psychoanalytic and the ethico-political discourses, the easier it is for integration and appropriation to occur between the apparatuses, the easier it is for psychoanalysis to be manipulated by

the Natal as “outside” of a territory, but conceptually central to it: think of “pilgrimages to the source, as among salmon,” and other migratory journeys that both mark a shared territory (the salmon's march upstream is a march through their territory), but which have as their endpoint a space outside of that territory (326). The Natal represents a conceptual center to a place of mutual belonging, but to which center one must journey together, marking an experience of primal togetherness. The Natal roots the territory without having to be located at its center.

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, “Geopsychoanalysis,” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume 1*, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), 328. See also Laurence A. Rickels, *Nazi Psychoanalysis*, 3 vols. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) for the intersections between Nazism and psychoanalysis.

political and police authorities, for psychoanalytic power to be abused, and so forth.⁵²

Parliamentary deliberation is a fine line away from the threat of violence. While actual violence rarely broke out on the floor of parliament, mobs, armies, and the threat of individual duels were a reality waiting outside its chamber doors. Debate, rather than eliminating social antagonism, is promoted by it, and the delicate interaction among the law, deliberation, and violence is central to the talking cure. In *Feeling Bureaucratic*, I aim to politicize the discourse of psychoanalysis by arguing that deliberation within political institutions makes possible the transmission and treatment of trauma not only on an individual level (e.g., between analyst and analysand, witness and victim), but on a cultural and even transgenerational level (e.g., adjudication of reparations, war crimes, and even chivalric treatises). By politicizing the discourse of psychoanalysis, I aim to reconsider what is meant by “productive deliberation” within the field of medieval studies, and argue that late medieval literary genres highlight the connections among parliament, political speech, and mental spaces to understand the process of deliberation as productive in and of itself.

In addition to the lens that psychoanalytic theory offers, assemblage theory, as articulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, offers an obvious critical traction for thinking about parliament, assembly, emplacement, and the social link.⁵³ Assemblage theory is here understood as a sociological systems theory that analyzes the capacities of constituent parts on their own terms, rather than only in relation to the larger body or system. This usefully enables a critique of the body politic model. One particularly useful and related

⁵² Derrida, “Geopschoanalysis,” 330.

⁵³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 310-50.

critical term is Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the *Natal*, to which I return throughout the dissertation. For Deleuze and Guattari, the "Natal" is a place that is outside but simultaneously always already inside: it is the center of a territory marked by constituent bodies but is always open to deterritorialization⁵⁴ because such assembly points are formed through the holding together of heterogeneity. The *Natal*, therefore, can be thought of as a holding tank for the overlapping of multiple territories. The concept of the *Natal* helps me to take the psychoanalytic social link up in scale to deliberation in political institutions. Much like parliament, then, it is an assembly point at the center of a territory, which brings different constituencies together while at the same time articulating a new territory and new social links. "Placeness" is important here: there are places to which we congregate which provide holding spaces for the social link, which is to say, the thing that confronts trauma. *Natal* places are therefore particularly well suited to confronting trauma because of these assembly points and sociality (e.g., pilgrimages). In *Feeling Bureaucratic*, I propose an investigation into the ways in which antagonism is central to democratic discourse, providing generative possibilities for a politics of psychoanalysis.

Chapter Outline

Having laid the historical, critical, and theoretical foundations for this discussion, the ensuing chapters each explore elements of a clerical conceptual and intellectual development of the parliamentary institution, namely, the process of assembly as rethinking traditional modes of the body politics, attachment behavior as central to such political processes, and the

⁵⁴ The concept of "deterritorialization" implies that what is proper to a territory can likewise be proper to other territories, as constituent parts of a territory work both together with and apart from other elements in the territory: an element can be part of multiple territories. Thus, central to the concept of territories for Deleuze and Guattari is that they have the capacity for deterritorialization, and thus are not closed systems.

affective motivations behind political processes like petitioning, or claiming a voice, in spaces of belonging.

Chapter 1, “The Parliamentary Assemblage: Capacities of the Body Politic,” suggests that the complexity of the parliamentary assembly complicates more traditional and familiar notions of a static body politic. By analyzing examples of medieval assembly alongside contemporary assemblage theory, I argue that, at various levels of social experience, the parliamentary assembly is conceptualized as a heterogeneous one capable of holding its constituent parts together in conflict without measurable resolution. In so doing, I isolate what assemblage theory would call three “plateaus”⁵⁵ of social experience—namely, the institutional, the group, and the individual—to demonstrate that an “assembled,” parliamentary model of the body politic can complicate various elements of social experience, and likewise insist on their interrelatedness.

I begin the discussion with the institutional by considering a fourteenth-century document called the *Modus tenendi parliamentum*,⁵⁶ a “how-to manual” for holding parliament. I consider this text as a conceptual rather than literal portrayal of parliament; however, it is one that offers a dynamic vision of political assembly capable of hosting conflict and heterogeneity without political breakdown. Such an institutional space breeds a group experience that holds heterogeneity together in conflict. In moving down in scale to

⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21-22. For Deleuze and Guattari, a plateau is defined as “a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end,” and “any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities.” My plateaus are not contained units but overlap and conceptually build upon one another.

⁵⁶ *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum*, in Nicholas Pronay and John Taylor, eds., *Parliamentary Texts of the Later Middle Ages*, 67-114 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980).

the group, my discussion of the headlinks⁵⁷ to the *Canterbury Tales* suggests that group experience in institutional spaces can provide sites of collective care. That is to say, a flexible institution can impact group experience such that group care is of primary concern. In my last section concerning the individual before the law, I take seriously the impacts of representational politics on the individual. In other words, how do spaces of group-care care for the individual, and how does heterogeneity both preserve the individual and assemble it with other bodies? In answering these questions, I look at the episode of Lady Meed before the king's parliament in Passus IV of *Piers Plowman* to insist that Lady Meed is not just an allegorical figure but a character charged with the work of both individualizing and representing before the law. Lady Meed shows that the expression of affect preserves the individual in group spaces and thus plays a deep role in the holding together of heterogeneity. Together, these three plateaus engage with the notion of assembly to argue that out of late fourteenth-century parliamentary models emerge more complex conceptualizations of the body politic capable of holding conflict, and thus offering care.

Given the parliamentary assembly's role in valuing care, I then move on in chapter 2, "Political Process and Attachment in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*," to the political and behavioral processes that enable the parliament to be a site of collective care. Because the ending of the poem is inconclusive, I attend more to the political processes that the journey to Nature's Parliament hosts rather than to its "failed" outcomes, in order to stress that a fascination and fetishization of political outcomes—what I call an outcomes-

⁵⁷ The "headlinks" of the *Canterbury Tales* refer to what George Kittredge calls the "stage business" of the poem—namely, the prologues, epilogues, and bits of interaction among pilgrims between the tales themselves. For Kittredge's full discussion, see *Chaucer and His Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1946).

oriented ontology—undermines the work of the poem, which instead puts on full display the processes by which we assemble, attach, and care. A process-oriented politics, then, stresses group interaction, and therefore builds attachments that sustain political processes and inspire a vision of common profit that is intimate, continual, and without end. Read alongside Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*,⁵⁸ I show that Chaucer's narrator's vision of common profit borrows from an attachment to a clerkly archive, and therefore is itself part of a larger discursive assemblage that conceptually developed the value of political process in the parliamentary arena.

One of the most central and accessible political processes facing parliament was the practice of petitioning, and in Chapter 3, "The Affective Rhetoric of Complaint: *Piers Plowman* and Petitionary Culture," I turn to the Parliament of Rats and Mice in the Prologue to *Piers Plowman* to argue that the petitionary form evolved in England during the fourteenth century to become more affective in its presentation of complaint. What I term affective rhetoric preserves the lived reality of the petitioner while also providing affective, rhetorical scripts that record that lived reality into the archive of parliament. This section analyzes the Parliament of Rats and Mice within the context of the Good Parliament of 1376 and the scholarship thereof to suggest that an obsession with the mice's "failure" to bell the cat has drawn away from the affective work that petitioning enables in group process, namely, to be able to even understand the affective contours of a political problem. I engage with the intellectual history of *Piers* scholarship on this scene in order to argue that a fascination with political failure demonstrates more about twenty-first century obsessions with "outcomes,"

⁵⁸ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, ed. and trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia UP, 1952). All citations of the *Commentary* will include book, chapter, and section numbers hereafter.

“standards,” and “measurable goals” than it does about a period whose texts value openness and the processes it takes to maintain the simple act of continuing on.

I conclude this dissertation with a brief contemporary analysis of political process, petitioning, and group care in Trump’s America, “Feeling Bureaucratic: Activism and Political Process in the Age of Trump.” Almost immediately after the election of Donald Trump on November 8, 2016 to the United States presidency, government workers (i.e., clerks and bureaucrats) who worked for Congressional offices in the United States government collaboratively wrote a “how to” manual for civic protest entitled *Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda*.⁵⁹ Noteworthy about this manual is that protest harnesses and embraces political process for its affective project. That is, political process here is seen not as a cumbersome bureaucratic nightmare but as a way to get things done. My theory of political process offered in this dissertation is especially important in the twenty-first century, where a technocratic and administrative fascination with outcomes shades the very human processes and affects at the core of our politics.

Therefore, this dissertation experiments with methodological approaches not typically associated with either institutional history or studies in literature and the law, and as such, offers a new historiography of parliament, turning away from *longue durée* arguments about the desire and the ability of the barons to restrain royal power and prerogative to a more synchronic approach that targets the fourteenth-century discursive and affective origins of parliamentary thinking in England.

⁵⁹ *Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda* (The Indivisible Project, 2016), <https://www.indivisible.org/resource/guide-english-pdf>.

CHAPTER 1:

THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLAGE: CAPACITIES OF THE BODY POLITIC

The *Modus tenendi parliamentum*, loosely translated as “How to Hold a Parliament,” is a procedural text written for lawyers and bureaucrats outlining the various functions and processes of the parliamentary assembly. Striking, however, is that, of its twenty-six chapters, the first seven are devoted to who ought to attend, how they ought to be summoned, and how they ought to assemble. For the *Modus*, parliament is, first and foremost, an assembly—of bodies, texts, and histories—and the very act of assembling such heterogeneous elements seems to be of primary importance because it offers a reconstruction of the body politic. It should be noted that the *Modus* does not offer a strict representation of how parliament actually operated, but instead poses a conceptual portrayal of the institution’s capacities when the various elements of the body politic gather and debate. That is, how *can* parliament operate, and how does it expand the capacities of the body politic? The *Modus* is not alone in asking this question: poems like Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Langland’s *Piers Plowman* likewise conceptualize the act of gathering and assembling the various elements of the body politic, and furthermore, these poems are themselves assemblies of various individual narratives all held together in heterogeneity and conflict, and together forming something more than the sum of their parts. In this chapter, I use medieval conceptualizations of assembly alongside contemporary assemblage theory to outline how, at various levels of social experience, the parliamentary assembly is conceptualized—or, as my discussion insists, theorized—as a heterogeneous one capable of holding its constituent parts together in conflict without measurable resolution. This heterogeneity complicates the traditional metaphor of the body politic and offers instead a more flexible concept of society.

This chapter itself is an assemblage of what Deleuze and Guattari would call three “plateaus” of social experience:¹ the institutional, the group, and the individual. My analysis of the *Modus tenendi parliamentum* begins this discussion by considering the parliamentary assemblage as a more flexible model of the body politic, one capable of embracing its heterogeneity. Such a vision of society as an assembled body impacts group experience within those spaces, and my discussion of the headlinks in the *Canterbury Tales* asks how spaces of assembly can also be sites of collective care. How can group experience in institutional spaces hold rather than erase conflict? Parliament, however, is still a representation space, capable of complicating notions of the individual. Therefore, this discussion concludes by considering Lady Meed’s own subjectivity before the Law and her affective expressions in *Piers Plowman*, which cast into the parliamentary archive a recording of her lived experiences.

FIRST PLATEAU: THE INSTITUTIONAL

I. The *Modus tenendi parliamentum*: A Conceptual Document

The *Modus* was written as early as the reign of Edward II during the first half of the fourteenth century in England, at the same time as the institution of parliament was making its debut on the political stage.² The *Modus* has garnered attention mainly among historians who are concerned with the text’s political purpose in England and Ireland,³ and others have

¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21-22. See Chapter 1, footnote 55, for a definition of “plateau.”

² For more on the dating and context of the *Modus*, see Nicholas Pronay and John Taylor, eds., *Parliamentary Texts of the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) and Kerby-Fulton and Justice, “Reformist Intellectual Culture.” Pronay and Taylor date the *Modus* to the first half of the fourteenth century, possibly as early as the 1320s (22), whereas Kerby-Fulton and Justice argue for a later date, during the reign of Edward III (192).

³ See Dodd, “Changing Perspectives: Parliament, Poetry and the ‘Civil Service’ Under Richard II and Henry IV,” *Parliamentary History* 25, no. 3 (2006): 299-322; Kerby-Fulton

put the manual in conversation with literary texts to establish an intellectual culture that hosted its production.⁴ Although self-identifying as a how-to manual, the text's portrayal of parliament is largely interpretative, taking occasional liberties with the political process that it describes, and in many cases staking political claims by way of offering imagined—and politically charged—procedures. Accordingly, I argue that the *Modus* more likely offers a conceptual theorization of parliamentary procedure rather than a declarative guide for establishing a “right” way to gather and deliberate, and that such experimentations attest to the varieties of expressivity possible within institutions. With such interpretative work at its center, the *Modus* invites literary criticism, and the text's own self-awareness of its relation to other official records creates within the *Modus* an appreciation for a textual culture surrounding the formation and theorization of England's newest governing body. Particularly striking about the manual is that its genre as a how-to guide brings into plain sight the focus among parliamentary texts on the process of assembly, and that such processes constitute the body politic. In this light, we can treat the *Modus* as political writing; when positioned within a larger context of the parliamentary archive, the text so clearly appears to be directly interested in theorizing parliament as process-driven.

Although lacking an exact author or date for the *Modus* prevents us from specifying overmuch its exact historical or social context, the text's emphasis on the central role of the clerks of parliament does at least tell us something about the intellectual context out of which

and Ruth Horie, “The French Version of the *Modus tenendi parlamentum* in the Courtenay Cartulary: A Transcription and Introduction,” in *The Medieval Reader: Reception and Cultural History in the Late Medieval Manuscript*, eds. Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo, special issue of *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3rd ser., no. 1 (1998): 225-31; W.C. Weber, “The Purpose of the English *Modus Tenendi Parlamentum*,” *Parliamentary History* 17, no. 2 (1998): 149-77.

⁴ Kerby-Fulton and Justice, “Reformist Intellectual Culture.”

it emerged—namely, that the clerical class was a permanent fixture of the institutional bureaucracy surrounding parliament, which is different than the more migrant Members of Parliament whom this bureaucracy summoned and supported both during parliament-time and after. The *Modus*' opening image of parliament is an assembly, the first seven chapters describing who is obliged to assemble and how the various groups within parliament ought to be summoned. The focus of the text shifts, however, in Chapter VIII, noting that, "It having first been shown in what way, to whom and at what time the parliamentary summons ought to be made, and who ought to come by summons and who not, it must secondly be said who ought to come on account of their office, and should be present without summons throughout the whole of parliament."⁵ The chapter then goes on to explain that "two principle clerks of parliament chosen by the King and his Council [...] are bound to attend on the first day."⁶ What is important about this shift is the contrast it draws between the members and administrators of parliament: the former must travel, their journey to parliament marking an occasion, whereas the latter constitute a Westminster-based culture of clerks at the center of parliamentary activity, that is, a bureaucracy. The clerks were permanently stationed in Westminster and were, paradoxically, more consistently exposed to national as well as local political processes than the Members of Parliament. In addition to the two principal clerks, the author of the text includes "five expert and proven clerks," whom the King will assign, and who serve the five grades of peers in parliament: bishops, proctors of the clergy, earls and barons, knights of the shire, and the citizens and burgesses.⁷ Most scholars agree with Kerby-Fulton and Justice that "the literary and intellectual culture of the royal bureaucracies

⁵ *Modus*, 83.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

in England and Ireland, which had the intellectual resources and specialized knowledge needed to produce such a work,” is the most likely context for the *Modus*’ production.⁸ This clerical culture was service-based, indeed, and through its service was therefore at the center of not only documenting but also influencing the parliamentary process. It is precisely because of their access that they were in a position to further conceptualize and develop the processes that they also observed and supported in more practical ways.

Despite this amity among scholars as to the *Modus*’ context, however, there is debate surrounding the Westminster clerks’ political loyalties, and consequently, the political desires that inform the conceptualization offered in the *Modus*. Although the *Modus* is a procedural manual, Kerby-Fulton and Justice argue that its “closest literary cousin is not something like the so-called ‘Lancastrian’ treatise on the steward or the minor procedural treatises from which it takes its genre, but *Piers Plowman*.”⁹ They locate such literary reformist sentiments within the *Modus*, pointing specifically to Chapter XXIII, which claims that “[i]t must be understood that two knights who come to parliament for the shire, have a greater voice in granting and denying than the greatest earl of England, [...] and this in everything that ought to be granted, denied, or done by parliament.”¹⁰ Conversely, Dodd refuses a reformist reading and argues instead that any political leanings in clerical culture, however deeply rooted, were largely practical: “They owed their living and their position to their political masters and were expected to act loyally and obediently in return. Arguably, few needed to be persuaded that a conservative political outlook, closely aligned with the king and the

⁸ Kerby-Fulton and Justice, “Reformist Intellectual Culture,” 152.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Modus*, 89.

court, was in their best interests.”¹¹ Both arguments are correct to insist upon strong political involvement of the Westminster clerks and the influence of the texts that they produced. But both are also limited by their insistence on the homogeneity of a given political or ideological outlook. Within the limits of what’s imaginable in a given culture, ideology never forecloses difference altogether. My interest is not in specifying an identifiable political position for this group—though I do agree with Kerby-Fulton and Justice’s assessment of the reformist currents within this culture; many were educated at Oxford, which during this period, as noted, was a hotbed of progressive politics—but I am more interested in disclosing this group’s enabling of disagreement and possibility, a skill perhaps more suited to those inclined toward reform. Throughout the parliamentary archive, in what seems to be a corpus of practical how-to manuals and procedural documents, we find a textual assemblage that conceptualizes and theorizes an institution that is in a perpetual process of self-formation. The Westminster clerks are first and foremost concerned with the stakes of thinking about political process as a means toward potentiality rather than oppressiveness; that is, how to make things happen.

The *Modus*’ presentation as a how-to manual is itself a performative gesture within the archives. The manual certainly circulated both among lawyers petitioning before parliament and government bureaucrats directly involved with the institution’s administration,¹² and the two copies of the vernacular French *Modus* were “owned by politicians active in Irish parliamentary affairs.”¹³ However, the manual takes several liberties in its representation of parliamentary procedure: the number of two principle clerks

¹¹ Dodd, “Changing Perspectives,” 312.

¹² Kerby-Fulton and Justice, “Reformist Intellectual Culture,” 158, 162.

¹³ Kerby-Fulton and Horie, “The French Version of the *Modus*,” 226.

and five under-clerks mentioned above was most likely exaggerated,¹⁴ and although many of the *Modus*' extant manuscripts come from lawyers' libraries, very little of the text describes processes that would actually aid petitioning, the majority of a lawyer's work in parliament.¹⁵ Therefore, this how-to manual was in many cases not entirely "useful," occasionally antiquated, and at times inaccurate, suggesting that the line between governing and imagining is permeable, since both practices are mutually constitutive here.

This was the case with many other documents coming out of Westminster, including petitions and, in many cases, the parliament rolls themselves. Scholars seem to have a hard time analyzing the *Modus* because it is such a biased and imaginary portrayal; but my point is: so are *many* of the other documents in the Westminster archive. For example, W.M. Ormrod explains that "on many occasions, the chancery clerks could make a major contribution to the articulation of the political agenda of parliament by assisting in the formulation, presentation and recording of the common petitions,"¹⁶ and therefore, supposedly neutral government bureaucrats could infuse bias and opinion into the archive that they helped to construct. More conservative readings, such as that of Nicholas Taylor and John Pronay, do acknowledge that the treatise circulated mainly among lawyers, but insist that the document's manuscript history denies any political impulses behind it.¹⁷ However, more recent scholarship, such as that of Kerby-Fulton, Justice, and Oliver, reveals that this professional legal class who would have read the *Modus* in fact produced, circulated, and consumed politically-driven narratives of parliamentary proceedings, or what Oliver

¹⁴ Weber, "The Purpose of the English *Modus*," 158.

¹⁵ Kerby-Fulton and Justice, "Reformist Intellectual Culture," 160.

¹⁶ W.M. Ormrod, "On—and Off—the Record: The Rolls of Parliament, 1337-1377," *Parliamentary History* 23, no.1 (2008): 1-56; 51.

¹⁷ Taylor and Pronay, Introduction to the *Modus tenendi parliamentum*, 13-14.

calls a “Process,” which occasionally made their way into chronicle accounts, but sometimes circulated on their own.¹⁸ An example more or less contemporaneous to Kerby-Fulton and Justice’s dating of the *Modus* is the Good Parliament’s attack on the royal government in 1376; despite the clerks’ employment by the crown, they saw themselves, as the *Modus* corroborates, as “immediately subject to the King and his parliament *jointly*.”¹⁹ The clerks were concerned with creating an archive of parliamentary texts that infused that culture’s intellectual project into the political process in order to theorize parliament not as an institution dictated by a set of fixed rules, but as a political assemblage whose procedures emphasize a perpetual becoming for the sake of maintaining group experience. While it might not be a surprise that bureaucrats focus on elaborating process, the theoretical stakes of such practices are worth considering. The use of a how-to manual to deliver a conceptual overview of parliament’s formation and continual becoming is itself a performative gesture toward the value of *process*—that is, the how-to manual is a genre that values potential at least as much as precept.

II. The Assembled Body Politic

By approaching the *Modus*’ insistence on perpetuating a textual culture partly via assemblage theory, my aim is to further show how parliament is in a continual state of self-generation rather than entrenchment. The *Modus* begins with a call for assembly among the Members of Parliament, and responding to that call requires a contribution to the parliamentary archive. Each group of peers²⁰ is summoned through similar means, and a

¹⁸ Oliver, *Parliament and Political Pamphleteering*, 54.

¹⁹ *Modus*, 86.

²⁰ By “peers,” I refer to the five grades of peers beneath the King as outlined in the final chapter (XXVI) of the *Modus*: archbishops, bishops, abbots, and priors; proctors of the

passage from the chapter “Concerning the Barons of the Ports” applies equally to the other members, all of whom are required to “come with their warrants in duplicate, sealed with the common seal of the Ports, that they have been duly elected attorneys and sent on behalf of those baronies, one of which [letters] shall be delivered to the clerks of parliament, and the other remain with the barons themselves.”²¹ The archive is *formed* by the assembly of bodies bearing texts that identify and credential their bearers. The summons is a documented act of participation in social exchange. The archive, so to speak, creates and recognizes a territory, and as Deleuze and Guattari explain:

The first question to be asked is what holds these territorializing marks, territorial motifs, and territorialized functions together in the same intra-*assemblage*. This is a question of *consistency*: the “holding together” of heterogeneous elements. At first, they constitute no more than a fuzzy set, a discrete set that later takes on consistency.²²

The idea that consistency “holds together”—we might say, links—heterogeneity illuminates the real work of the summons: it is a call for the assembly of various grades, each grade consisting of various members, and each member—as a representative of his or her constituency—also a multiplicity; that is, representational capacities in politics means that bodies stand for other bodies. Although the summons is an authoritative demand, each individual response to it documents multiplicity into the archive and is, using Deleuze and Guattari’s term, a deterritorializing impulse:

clergy; earls, barons, and other magnates and nobility; knights of the shires; and citizens and burgesses (91).

²¹ *Modus*, 81.

²² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 323.

The territory itself is a place of passage. The territory is the first assemblage, the first thing to constitute an assemblage; the assemblage is fundamentally territorial. But how could it not already be in the process of passing into something else, into other assemblages?²³

We will recall that the summons itself is a duplicate—one that summons, one that demands a response—which means that the *Modus* writes territorializing procedural texts as likewise acts of deterritorialization. Manuel DeLanda expands upon the deterritorializing impulse when he explains that the component parts of assemblages at different scales exchange bodies among themselves; that is, that small-scale organismic concerns are the constituent parts of larger-scale assemblages, but institutional assemblages are likewise more than the sum of their parts, since they also include component parts that pertain to more than simply their institutional assemblages.²⁴ Understanding the summoning and recording of the parliamentary assembly as both territorializing and deterritorializing helps make more visible the heterogeneity implicit in the formation of a parliament, and, likewise, the heterogeneity implicit to parliamentary process itself. A heterogeneity is “held together” by linkage and letting go.

It is striking how much of the *Modus* is devoted to marking the occasion of assembly. In addition to the first nine chapters outlining in detail who is obliged to attend, Chapters X-XII describe the opening speeches, which extend the liminal space of the assembly and focus attention on the process of opening parliament. As the members of parliament are arriving, forming the parliamentary territory over a six-day period, its boundaries are likewise

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 9-11.

opened—we might say, its heterogeneities are re-linked—to the surrounding kingdom through a proclamation:

On the first day a proclamation ought to [be] made, first in the hall or in the monastery or in some public place where parliament is being held, and afterwards publicly in the city or town that all who wish to present petitions and complaints to parliament should deliver them during the five days following the first day of parliament.²⁵

Over this same period, “when parliament for the greater part is assembled and congregated,”²⁶ the three opening speeches—the sermon, the formal declaration on the causes of parliament, and the King’s speech—anticipate that the political process will create an archive of expressions that will enlarge the parliamentary assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari aptly point out the stakes of expression, stating that “[t]he expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities, or matters of expression, are necessarily appropriative and constitute a *having* more profound than *being*. Not in the sense that these qualities belong to a subject, but in the sense that they delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries or produces them.”²⁷ The opening expressions of parliament make it a space of belonging. Belonging both in the sense that the assembly is a space of intersubjectivity, and also in Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of possession—the opening proclamations invite expressions into the archive that mark the parliamentary territory, but which also open up that territory. In fact, as Chapter XXV states, “[t]he clerks of parliament will not refuse anyone a transcript of his process,” and those who cannot pay

²⁵ *Modus*, 84.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 316, emphasis mine.

will receive it free of charge.²⁸ The archive, that is, is a process of expression that does not limit parliament to a static “being,” because that process is an archive of shared experience and continual assembly. In this sense, the opening territorialization and deterritorialization of the *Modus* stress that the act of assembly is an act of becoming-parliament.

The *Modus*’ opening focus on assembly calls attention to formation—itsself a process—as becoming, and the social bonds that such assemblages produce within parliament suggests that the entire political process is likewise a becoming-parliament. Becoming is a term from Deleuze and Guattari, and as Cliff Stagoll notes, it implies “the pure movement evident in changes *between* particular events [...] Rather than a product, final or interim, becoming is the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous terms toward no particular goal or end-state,”²⁹ or, as LaCapra might argue, historical becoming is “repetition with change.”³⁰ Of course, political process has goals, motives, and—as the entire parliamentary archive shows—political drives. The effectiveness of parliament is not in its final products but in its processes and movements; parliament works to continue debate and makes debate *parliament’s* “goal”—if we can expand our understanding of a “goal” to be the continuation of a process. The *Modus*’ example of the committee of twenty-five³¹ in its chapter “Concerning Difficult Cases and Decisions” offers an example of this work. In instances where a difficult case refuses consensus and threatens

²⁸ *Modus*, 91.

²⁹ Cliff Stagoll, “Becoming,” in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr, 21-23 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005), 21.

³⁰ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, xvi.

³¹ The committee of twenty-five never appears in the parliamentary rolls, and therefore most likely never occurred. See Weber, “The Purpose of the English *Modus*,” 158; Kerby-Fulton and Justice, “Reformist Intellectual Culture,” 161-62; and Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, 87. However, considering the *Modus* as a theoretical text enables a discussion of the conceptual work that this committee adds to parliament’s clerical intellectual culture.

to terminate discussion, “the earl steward, the earl constable, and the earl marshal, or two of them shall elect twenty-five persons from all the peers of the kingdom” to resolve the matter.³² However, what is rather striking about this committee is its process of reduction: if the initial twenty-five cannot come to agree, they may elect and reduce into twelve members, twelve to six, and so forth, until one person remains, “and in that case only his ruling will stand above the whole parliament.”³³ Matthew Giancarlo describes the committee of twenty-five as a “fantasy of univocal voice combined with the idea of a personified and individualized collective,” one which attempts to iron out difference in parliamentary process.³⁴ However, given the *Modus*’ overall insistence on the *continuation* of process, we could better understand the type of theoretical work proper to the committee of twenty-five as a dynamic group experience that changes the landscape of debate, and/or preserves debate to the end.

Although the committee is “self-abolishing,” as Kerby-Fulton and Justice argue,³⁵ and therefore seems to seek resolution, I think any critique requires a full appreciation of how its procedural complexity precisely continues the parliamentary process and thus is a continuation of group experience, including what doubtlessly would have been the difficult task of repeated reduction, voting, election, and negotiation. Each iteration of the committee requires, so it seems, further debate, and therefore, in a moment wherein parliament threatens to stalemate, the committee of twenty-five harnesses a debate *about* debate. But more important to recognize, the committee of twenty-five does not stop debate, hoping to arrive at

³² *Modus*, 87.

³³ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁴ Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, 86.

³⁵ Kerby-Fulton and Justice, “Reformist Intellectual Culture,” 162.

some fantasy of univocality. The *Modus* continues: “[T]his one person [...], who cannot disagree with himself, shall decide for all;” but, the *Modus* adds yet another contingency for expression: “[R]eserving only to our Lord the King and his Council the power to *examine and amend* these ordinances after they have been written, if they know how and so wish, so that is shall be done in full parliament, and with the consent of parliament and not behind the back of parliament.”³⁶ The committee of twenty-five *prolongs* indecision for as long as possible. The *Modus* adds an element of vitality to the work of decision-making and to the traces it leaves in the archive, and these theorizations privilege the importance of the in-between, or modes of group expression that enable a becoming-parliament, textually and otherwise. Although this committee is most likely a fiction, its highlighting of process resonates throughout the parliamentary archive; as Benjamin Thompson keenly points out, “[t]he process of governance is as important in the parliament rolls as its products, especially with respect to the community’s contribution to that process.”³⁷ This places at the center of becoming-parliament a group process, and one that creates an archive for the sake of expression and sharing, and most importantly—as evidenced by the committee of twenty-five’s investment in becoming—the institution’s survival. In the parliamentary space, political *process* prevents the representative work of the committee of twenty-five from being a closed system or promoting univocality. Political representation adds to the process of becoming-parliament: becoming is a social bond, an attempt to make our expressions shareable, and a process that constructs an archive that testifies to our survival.

³⁶ *Modus*, 88, emphasis mine.

³⁷ Benjamin Thompson, “Performing Parliament in the *Rotuli Parliamentorum*,” in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, eds. Manuele Gragnolati and Almut Suerbaum, 61-97 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 67.

III. Parliamentary Natality: Confronting Cultural Trauma through the Social Bond

At stake in becoming-parliament is that *process* creates an archive, and an archive is an expression of history. Deleuze and Guattari are useful for thinking through the political process as a value in and of itself, and how the deterritorialization of that process constructs an archive through multiplicity and plasticity rather than stasis and entrenchment. But where their understanding of becoming begins to limit thinking is in terms of the archive's historical importance. That is, what makes the archive shareable, a "*having* more profound than *being*," in my view, is its symbolic importance. For Deleuze and Guattari, however, the dangers behind symbols of identity are tied to "re-presentation," or, "presenting the same world once again," which they understand as static and as deviating from the in-between, as opposed to becoming, which "defines a world of presentation anew" and enables the multiplicity that, I have argued, is fundamental to the archive.³⁸ However, eliminating re-presentation comes dangerously close to eliminating symbols of history and the processes that make that history shareable and intersubjective; when presenting the same world anew, the history of the signifier cannot be ignored. History, re-presentation, and the archive are all concerned with the survival of expression that is ideologically driven, but in the parliamentary space, political *process* prevents "symbolism" from being a closed system.

Individuated participation in symbolic forms of communication can be part of the process of becoming that is so central to the parliamentary assembly. In mapping out the various types of semiotic expression in nature, Jesper Hoffmeyer stresses that the human ability to create symbolic associations was in fact central to our survival. He writes that,

Whether it was just for fun or because it was, in fact, advantageous to the

³⁸ Stagoll, "Becoming," 21.

population, the habit of symbolic referencing must at some point have persisted long enough to be incorporated into the social network in a way that eventually stabilized it. If so, then hominids that exhibited the most talent in this regard may have also managed to thrive above average in the social game.³⁹

Key here is that advanced social cooperation relies on symbolic referencing. For example, the human ability to relate to one another through symbols helped to create social institutions such as marriage, which, given the relative helplessness of the human infant, enabled more effective forms of group care.⁴⁰ While I do not want to push Hoffmeyer toward an essentialist reading of language (and thus validate Deleuze and Guattari's concerns about the symbolic), Hoffmeyer's treatment of the symbolic is useful for thinking about how repeated forms of expression (i.e., re-presentation) build social institutions around a shareable history.

Hoffmeyer writes that “[t]he discourse of human rights—and by extension, of the constitutional state—is, in a deep sense, the consequence of a dawning self-recognition of the human being *as* a historical being.”⁴¹ Tied into our own individuated experience of belonging to the process of history-making is a use of symbolism that is at once shareable, intersubjective, and central to our survival. Symbolism helps evince the “social link,” as verbal language works with other kinds of expression and symbolism to treat trauma. Symbolic associations do not take away from the process of becoming-parliament, but in fact add to it: becoming is a social bond, an attempt to make our expressions shareable, and a

³⁹ Jesper Hoffmeyer, *Biosemiotics: An Examination into the Signs of Life and the Life of Signs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 293.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 292-93.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

process that constructs an archive that testifies to our survival.

The institution's impulse toward survival is what makes it a site for working through and even avoiding collective trauma. The opening lines of the *Modus* serve as a memorial to parliament's historical becoming, admitting its traumatic associations:

Here is described the manner in which the parliament of the King of England and his Englishmen was held in the time of King Edward, the son of Ethelred. Which manner was related by the more distinguished men of the kingdom in the presence of William, Duke of Normandy, Conqueror and King of England: by the Conqueror's own command, and through his approval it was used in his times and in the times of his successors, the Kings of England.⁴²

At each assembly, the Members of Parliament gather to a historical-political space that in the process of assembling serves as a memorial to that very process. Placing the history of assembly in conjunction with its process makes apparent the symbolic weight of parliament. That symbolic weight is nonetheless a becoming-parliament because its meaning, once again, depends on assembly—or, on deterritorialization. Symbols from the nation's entire history, from Anglo-Saxon kings to the trauma of the Norman Invasion and beyond, are located at the center of the parliamentary assembly. But, it is a history that is constructed only by its members' migration outside of their respective territories and into a space that constructs an archive of collective experience that nourishes a social bond even in the face of traumatic cultural shifts. This is a sentiment especially poignant in fourteenth-century England when this manual was produced.

Furthermore, parliament carries such symbolic weight because it continually

⁴² *Modus*, 80.

reconstitutes itself as an example of the “Natal.” For Deleuze and Guattari, the “ambiguity between the territory and deterritorialization is the ambiguity of the Natal [...]. [T]he territory has an intense center at its profoundest depths; but as we have seen, this intense center can be located outside the territory, at the point of convergence of very different and very distant territories. The Natal is outside,” but strangely attractive and familiar because it is re-imaginable.⁴³ Although the *Modus*’ historiographical introduction seems to imbue the parliamentary process with a fantasy of linearity across time, colonization, and space, parliament’s Natalivity makes clear that this history only results from an ongoing process of changes in group experience. Attachment depends on a connection with an outside—an other—and the outside is what enables social experience. Parliament is at the center of the nation and bears symbolic importance, but it is at the same time a space outside and into which members bring their summons, contribute petitions, and leave with a copy of the archive that continually adds to parliamentary history. Political process enlivens the archive—itself a memorial—by bringing into it the nation’s difficult decisions. By housing the symbolic, the Natal becomes a space of intersubjectivity and makes the political process into a social bond.

The *Modus*’ opening historiography also stresses that intersubjective social exchange enables survival. Written into the center of parliament’s founding narrative is the Norman Invasion, which creates a curious link between political process and cultural trauma. The parliamentary petition provides a textual medium for bringing issues, problems, and traumas into the place of assembly and integrating them into the archive. However, the Natal helps us to understand that the symbolic center is nonetheless a space of deterritorialization,

⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 325-26.

multiplicity, and plasticity. As Jeremy Gilbert points out, “there is no social practice that is not caught up in a network of unpredictable relations which destabilizes its effects and significance,”⁴⁴ and it is the Natal that puts into contact the unpredictability of the social bond with what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the Cosmos, which is witness to the continual flow of individuated change.⁴⁵ That is to say, communication in the parliamentary space connects individual utterances to a larger flow of meaning. The process by which this occurs enables the parliamentary discourse to be one of survival, potentiality, and creativity—a parliamentary talking cure.

Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière’s discussion of the treatment of trauma in psychoanalysis insists upon what my discussion would call the intersubjectivity of the assemblage: “Without time, without place, a piece of history that had escaped History now arrives, at the intersection of the singular and the plural, in the form of ‘a social link in the making’ [...] but only if the symptom finds someone to speak to. For, in seeming to refer only to itself, it is simply showing that it is alone in trying to be understood.”⁴⁶ Clerical culture’s focus on *process* is crucial for understanding that the parliamentary talking cure depends on continuing the flow of change *because* this flow constitutes the social link. The Natal is ultimately a space of care—of common profit—that does its work by expanding the archive, because, as the *Modus* states, “if no one speaks up, it must be supposed that everyone has his remedy, or at least been replied to as far as is possible by the law, and then and only then that is to say when no one who has presented a petition on that occasion

⁴⁴ Jeremy Gilbert, “Deleuzian Politics? A Survey and Some Suggestions,” *New Formations* 68 (2010): 10-33; 14.

⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 337.

⁴⁶ Davoine and Gaudillière, *History Beyond Trauma*, 11-12.

objects, will we release our parliament.”⁴⁷ Wounds, so it seems, are treatable when allowed into the archive, and for this reason, parliament cannot end until everyone has spoken and contributed to it. The talking cure might not lead us anywhere immediately, but in so doing it likewise avoids trauma.

We can best understand the *Modus* as a politically charged conceptualization of the budding parliament that uses the language of assembly and process to suggest that sites of political migration, or Natal spaces, are particularly useful for working through collective trauma by offering the experience of transformation irrespective of closure. L.O. Aranye Fradenburg describes the Natal as “the home that is elsewhere, that must always be ‘found’ again, *as must the new home also be found again*, and again.” It is precisely the Natal’s continual repurposing of re-presentation (i.e., its deterritorialization) that “has the potential to invite or counter trauma.”⁴⁸ Institutional spaces have the potential to house the social link, which invites its participants ultimately to engage in practices of care within institutional sites. How can spaces of assembly be likewise sites of collective care, and how does institutionalization assist in rather than detract from this process? In turning next to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, we see that institutionalized legal rhetoric borrowed from parliamentary discourse facilitates the practice of group care throughout the General Prologue and continuing into the assemblage of headlinks that follow between individual tales.

⁴⁷ *Modus*, 91.

⁴⁸ L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Staying Alive: A Survival Manual for the Liberal Arts*, ed. Eileen A. Joy (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013), 229.

SECOND PLATEAU: GROUP EXPERIENCE

Between the cracks of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*—in the various prologues, introductions, epilogues, and envoys that form what we call the “headlinks”⁴⁹—there hides a fragmented, interrupted debate poem working to sustain the fellowship's group experience, rather than resolve its numerous conflicts. In fact, the sustaining of the fellowship's group experience at times relies on conflict, which reconfigures the role that conflict and *dissensus*, to use Jacques Rancière's term, play in group attachments.⁵⁰ Scholarship of the *Canterbury Tales* typically focuses on the individual tales or groups of tales within definable fragments, and discussions of the headlinks often put the tales into conversation with one another rather than considering the possibility that the headlinks form an ongoing narrative—or narratives—in and of themselves. As a result, the headlinks are used as mechanisms that comment on other aspects of Chaucer's tales proper, as opposed to valuing the bits of narrative that each headlink presents. That is, the “story” of the *Canterbury Tales* lies between the tales. Of course, a more traditional approach happens because the unknowable order of the *Canterbury Tales*' various fragments resists traditional narrative linearity, and as such, a discussion of the headlinks' “narrative” likewise has to resist typical notions of narrative's teleological and chronological impulses.

I argue that the headlinks, read within the Middle English debate tradition—which includes not only debate poetry, but other institutions of debate, such as the law courts, inns

⁴⁹ For some early critical discussions of the headlinks, see Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry*, 146-218, and R.M. Lumiansky, *Of Sondry Folk: The Dramatic Principle in the Canterbury Tales* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955).

⁵⁰ See Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010). As opposed to consensus in group experience, Rancière argues that “[t]he essence of politics is *dissensus*,” or, the ability to present multiple worldviews together in conflict (38).

of court, university classrooms, and parliament itself—attest to debate’s potential as a care practice, one that sustains group experience and intersubjective bonds rather than dissipating their inherent conflicts. As a poetic genre, debate poetry’s narrative reflects intersubjective and at times free-associative movement that resists linearity and resolution in debate, and in group experience alike. In the *Canterbury Tales* specifically, allusions to legal, political, and rhetorical processes that, in legal contexts, facilitate political debate act as poetic mechanisms for holding the fellowship together in conflict. For fourteenth-century English pilgrims traveling from the localities to London (assembling, in fact), interactions with debate structures would have been contextualized alongside the formation of a nascent parliament and its ancillary local legal institutions, and parliament, too, catalyzed a larger consideration of the value of its debate within an oscillating series of both parliamentary failures and victories, such as the Good and Bad Parliaments of 1376 and 1377 respectively. Institutions of debate, and the traditions of debate poetry, inspire the language and form of the Prologue and headlinks. Together, the Prologue and headlinks form a frame narrative, and the aesthetic function of frame narratives is to hold other heterogeneous narratives together often in conflict and contradiction, but also in mutuality and intertextuality.

I. Nonlinear Debate and Spontaneous Attachments

The unknowable order of the *Canterbury Tales*, in resisting traditional narrative linearity and an overall teleological organization, resembles what J. Jack Halberstam calls “forgetting.”⁵¹ Simply put, forgetting is a way of conceptualizing a queered temporality, in which typical teleological and Oedipal drives that bond heteronormative notions of time and futurity, but also family, and thus genealogical alliance, are replaced by attachments and

⁵¹ Judith (Jack) Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011), 15.

bonds in time. Whereas heteronormative conceptualizations of time are genealogical, privileging generational and familial attachments, and therefore, making the family unit the preferred mode of attachment, forgetting “forgets family and tradition and lineage and biological relation and *lives to create relationality anew in each moment and for each context* and without a teleology and on behalf of the chaotic potentiality of the random action.”⁵² The unknowable order of the various fragments that make up the headlink narrative requires readers to forget past and present interactions and instead to remain in the present as they read. This is not to say, however, that we literally forget the Miller and the Reeve’s argument in Fragment I when we revisit “quitting” between the Friar and the Summoner in Fragment III.⁵³ Rather, because the unknowable order of the headlinks makes it impossible to delineate an absolute chronological “narrative” of the headlinks, readers must instead rely on fragmented interactions that summon one another, but not in any kind of temporalizing or ordering way. Halberstam’s “forgetting” allows readers to more comfortably resist a linear impulse in reading the fragmented headlinks’ narratives and instead, to allow the various pilgrims to “create relationality anew in each moment and for each context and without a teleology” as we work through the narrative. In this way, the fragmentation and the non-teleological patterning of the headlinks exposes the capacity for debate to create relations anew moment by moment, as new information is presented that reshapes the contours of social relations.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 80, emphasis mine.

⁵³ For an extensive discussion on the theme of “quitting” throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, see Lee Patterson, “The ‘Parson’s Tale’ and the Quitting of the ‘Canterbury Tales,’” *Traditio* 34 (1978): 331-80.

In resisting narrative linearity and resolution of debate or of narrative, Chaucer instead focuses on the formation and evolution of attachments, thereby presenting a theory of debate that, rooted in group experience, attests to debate's potential healing function as an ongoing intersubjective experience that admits and sustains conflict without the dissolution of its parties. Of course, attachments necessarily include conflict and difference, but continual debate serves to hold conflict together, resisting resolution and thus valuing messy attachments in group process—an ethics that resonates with group experience in parliament's own political messiness. If we embrace the headlinks' fragmentation, we see that Chaucer forms a debate assemblage that translates the debate poetry tradition into the messiness of daily life, portraying debate ultimately as an agent for group care and for sustained—even if ugly—attachments. Likewise, the ability to translate the parliamentary experience into daily life attests to parliament's own widened influence not only on citizens' day-to-day legal and political life, but also on day-to-day conflicted attachments, wielding a much larger parliamentary phenomenon, the epicenter of which is in London, but which certainly was conceptualized at a much larger scale. That is to say, theories of group experience, conflict, debate, and deliberation both influenced the formation of the parliament, and parliamentary practice provided a space for a culture of debate to emerge and formalize in fourteenth-century England.

II. Talking Cures: The Legal Rhetoric of Relief in the General Prologue

The formation of the General Prologue's "felaweshipe"⁵⁴ is propelled by discussion, maintained by legal language, and seeks the overall aim of relief.⁵⁵ Although the sundry pilgrims come to Southwark on their own terms either independently or in smaller groups, the Prologue implies a larger mutual purpose among the assembly, rooted in the discourse of sickness and cure. As the narrator's discussion of pilgrimage narrows from an international to a specifically English perspective—beginning with "palmeres" who "seken straunge strondes [...] / in sondry londes,"⁵⁶ and zooming in rapidly to England's landscape, so too does the Prologue move from a general portrait of vitality and movement to a specific type of liveliness: the healing of sickness:

And *specially* from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blissful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.⁵⁷

As Matthew Giancarlo notes, describing the pilgrims as traveling "from every shires end" is a parliamentary allusion, explaining that "[t]he shires [...] were the original and durable units of constituency that defined the representative practice of national assembly in England,"

⁵⁴ Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, I.26. All quotations of the *Canterbury Tales* will be cited by fragment and line number hereafter. Also, see the discussion on petitions in Chapter 3.

⁵⁵ It is important to note that the language of "relief" is also the discourse central to the private petition, wherein petitioners prayed to the King to grant relief of grievances by enacting God's justice on earth. See Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 283-86.

⁵⁶ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I.13-14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I.15-18, emphasis mine.

which “gathered only at parliament-time.”⁵⁸ Allusions are always recontextualizations, however, and this one suggests that national assembly-points such as Canterbury or parliament create spaces of relief from collective sickness—we can even say from cultural traumas—partly *because* of the salutary potential of the processes of seeking and assembling and the discursive practices that maintain them. That is, *English* pilgrims assemble in Canterbury because it is a site of healing: “The hooly blisful martir [...] / hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.” Chaucer configures assembly as collective care, holding individual and collective sickness in parliament. Chaucer further underscores the conceptual association among assembly, debate, and healing by referring to the pilgrims not as an assembly but as a “felaweshipe,” a term whose multiple valences likewise draw a connection between associational identity (guilds, monasteries, parliaments, pilgrims)⁵⁹ and the intersubjective qualities that maintain them (friendship, companionship, bonds). Moreover, our narrator explains that all that is required to join this assembled fellowship is speech: “So hadde I spoken with hem *everichon* / That I was of hir felaweshipe anon”⁶⁰—speech, however, that engages with the totality of the group’s constituency.

The Host’s proposal at the end of the General Prologue “to talen and to pleye”⁶¹ along the way to Canterbury likewise alludes to parliamentary debate’s ability to transform conflict

⁵⁸ Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, 171. Giancarlo’s overall argument is that parliamentary discourse and forms offered an emerging and still-maturing Middle English literature an aesthetic form in the supposed absence of its own distinctly English literary forms. I, however, am interested in how Middle English poetry engaged with parliamentary form in order to participate in conceptualizing the institution as the institution *itself* forms alongside Middle English poetry.

⁵⁹ For a rigorous discussion of associational identity in the fourteenth century, see David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997).

⁶⁰ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I.31-32, emphasis mine.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, I.772.

into contest. The *Riverside Chaucer* glosses “talen” as “to tell tales,”⁶² but “talen” also means to cry out, to converse, and, most telling here, to debate.⁶³ To “talen” along the way to Canterbury does more than simply pass the time, because the very process of telling and debating promises to “doon [the felaweshipe] som confort.”⁶⁴ With an eye toward group process, the Host questions why the pilgrims should have to wait until arriving at Canterbury before “[t]he blisful martir quite yow youre mede;”⁶⁵ they have already begun to engage in care practices. The Host summons the discourse of political processes—debate and petition—as relief in themselves, refusing to see comfort as only at a narrative end point, but also as the effect of the network of nonlinear and spontaneous reactions and expressions that continue group experience along the way, enabling practices of reparation. The fellowship’s debate and contest will provide relief by continuing comfort rather than by resolving conflict.

III. An Assemblage of Headlinks: Holding Fragmented Bonds

The General Prologue’s conceptualization of assembly returns us again to assemblage theory in a methodological consideration of the story that continues in the headlinks. Assemblage theory refuses teleology and linearity, and instead values capacity and spontaneity, which enables a reading of narrative independent of traditional linearity. Unresolved debate is a common feature of many Middle English debate poems, and Thomas L. Reed traces this feature to ludic and recreational debate performances at medieval universities, the enjoyment of which was produced by the artful rhetoric of response rather

⁶² Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Canterbury Tales*, gloss line 772, “talen.”

⁶³ *OED*, s.v. “talen (v.),” accessed August 1, 2016.

⁶⁴ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I.776.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I.770.

than a clear winner.⁶⁶ In questioning why the forms and processes of unresolved debate are so enjoyable, I suggest that participation in debate frames enjoyment in a collective practice of care that aims to sustain group experience and at times even heal political sickness.⁶⁷

The non-linear, fragmented combustions of debate that the Host's proposal incites throughout the headlinks invite a narrative theory of debate poetry akin to assemblage theory. For assemblage theorist Manuel DeLanda, the sociological importance of assemblages is that they focus our eye on the bonds and interactions between the constituent parts of a political landscape rather than forcing constituent parts to form a corporate totality—or, in the language of the Middle Ages, a body politic. Rather than carving out definite places for each part of a political landscape, reading the bonds and interactions between parts opens up otherwise fixed social and political relationships to processes of interaction, or what DeLanda calls "*capacities to interact with other entities.*"⁶⁸ We can think about the oftentimes-formulaic features of rhetoric, debate poetry, and parliamentary deliberation as processes that expand the individual's capacities to interact with other elements of the body politic because the ongoing exercise of such processes connect the individual to a social frame—to a fellowship. The Host's tale-telling proposal, laden with the legalistic processes of "juggement," election, "conseil," and "voirdit,"⁶⁹ hardly restricts the ensuing debates in the headlinks; they prompt the fellowship's capacities for interaction. Assemblage theory allows us to see that the headlinks summon one another when assembled together as a story

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the institutional contexts of debate in the Middle Ages, see Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution*, 41-96.

⁶⁷ For a discussion on enjoyment in the Middle Ages, see Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982).

⁶⁸ DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 10, emphasis original.

⁶⁹ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I.777-87.

on their own without a concern for proper order, and it allow us to embrace fragmented bonds, to hold together *in* conflict and in fragmentation as a group care practice. The unfinished *Canterbury Tales* and its fragmented narrative enable endless capacities for interaction among the various fragments, in essence producing a tale that never ends, arranged and re-arranged to exercise the headlinks' capacities for continual "pleye" and "comfort." I do not mean to suggest that we endlessly rearrange the headlinks in order to construct different narratives; since that, too, would satisfy our impulses toward different varieties of linearity. Instead, assemblage theory enables us to take comfort in resisting linearity altogether and simply talk about how these headlinks *play together*—how they summon one another—when read together as a story on their own without a concern for proper order, in order to embrace fragmented bonds.

Although the fellowship unanimously approves of the Host's tale-telling "petition," which they grant "by oon assent,"⁷⁰ the pilgrims repeatedly discover that the fantasy of a unanimous voice limits the capacities for interaction and reparation, especially in such a mixed crowd. The fellowship's heterogeneity underscores that one's language does not belong to oneself; as Elizabeth Scala notes, communication, especially in this "companyne," is a matter of extimacy.⁷¹ "Extimacy," Lacan explains, is the "intimately exterior" quality of the ego; self-formation and self-expression necessarily incorporate the desires of the Other.⁷² Dialogue and debate demand that the subject confront the Other in the subject's self-expression, but such confrontations form attachments *in time* that resist the subject's

⁷⁰ Ibid., I.817.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Scala, *Desire in the Canterbury Tales* (Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2015), 30.

⁷² For a discussion of "extimacy," see Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-60*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 139-54.

isolation. For example, the Host calls on the “Clerk of Oxenford” in Fragment IV, who has heretofore remained isolated, to tell a “myrie tale.”⁷³ However, the Host worries that the Clerk’s language will be inaccessible to the group given his learning, asking that he “[t]ell us som murie thyng of aventures. / Youre terms, youre colours, and youre figures, / Keepe hem in stoor [...], / Speketh so pleyn at this tyme.”⁷⁴ The Host demands that the Clerk’s language be intersubjective, and the Clerk meets the challenge. He plans to “telle a tale which that I / Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,”⁷⁵ and continues by summarizing the prologue of Petrarch’s tale, the origins of which are testimony to the Clerk’s own clerkly worldview, in accessible language. The Clerk need not abandon his own experiences entirely, but only “vernacularize” them so as to allow the others to experience them *in time* and in the language of *their* experiences.

This interaction between the Host and the Clerk summons into focus a similar scene in the Host’s interruption of Chaucer’s Tale of Sir Thopas in Fragment VII, and this time the demands of extimate speech are more contentious, albeit comedic. The Host just cannot take anymore of Chaucer’s “verray lewednesse,” and his “eres aken of thy [Chaucer’s] drasty speche,”⁷⁶ or, speech that is trashy and inartistic,⁷⁷ abandoning the requisite “sentence” and “solas” that produces these tales. Chaucer the pilgrim retorts, asking, “why withow lette me / Moore of my tale than another man, / Syn that is the beste rym I kan?”⁷⁸ Although Chaucer has done his best to meet the demands of the fellowship, group experience always leaves

⁷³ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, IV.9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, IV.15-19.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.25-27.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, VII.921-23.

⁷⁷ *MED*, s.v. “drasti (adj.)” c, accessed on August 20, 2018.

⁷⁸ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, VII.926-28.

room for misinterpreting the Other's desires. But the debate that follows is not a crisis of misinterpretation, though the tale does end. To continue the fellowship, Chaucer must amend his speech, and the debate between him and the Host over the proper way to tell tales culminates with Chaucer insisting that there is no one right way to tell a tale, that narrative difference does not mean narrative incomprehension:

And though I nat the same wordes seye
As ye han herd, yet to yow alle I preye
Blameth me nat; for, as in my sentence,
Shul ye nowher fynden difference
Fro the sentence of this tretys lyte
After the which this murye tale I write.⁷⁹

Chaucer's narrator insists that, although his speech is "drasty" and differs in form from more artful constructions of the same story, his speech is still comprehensible and shareable. He calls on the Host and the fellowship to meet him on his own terms, to find their voice in his. Although the debate temporarily halts the tale-telling contest, it also shows debate's capacities to say the same thing in many different ways, that there are many ways to find *relief* rather than *threat* in difference. As Chaucer the Pilgrim finds, debate requires that group experience be dynamic, that debate allows for the terms of signification to shift—and that, as Fradenburg says of the always-extimate signifier, speech in groups "persists not timelessly but in time."⁸⁰ The debate does not create a crisis of misinterpretation or

⁷⁹ Ibid., VII.959-64.

⁸⁰ Fradenburg, "Making, Mourning, and the Love of Idols," in *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image*, eds. Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson, and Nicolette Zeeman, 25-42 (New York: Oxford UP, 2002).

signification; a new tale emerges from its collective conflict, with the understanding that any new tale will require its listeners to accompany that shift.

As Lee Patterson has pointed out, often in the headlinks, timely subjectivity (or put another way, the continual dynamism of the subject and its expressions in the course of her or his daily life) takes the form of “quite-ing”—repayment or matching—and admits aggression into the fellowship’s experience.⁸¹ The most famous example is the Miller’s promise “to quite with the Knyghtes tale” in Fragment I,⁸² but an even more sour “quite-ing” sequence occurs in Fragment III between the Friar and the Summoner. This sequence in the headlinks is perhaps most traditionally like a debate poem, with the Friar and Summoner constructing and confronting one another to allegorical proportions. The aggressiveness of these allegories, however, emerges from their rootedness in each pilgrim’s intimately lived perception of the other, from their “neighborliness”:⁸³ Friars, like flies, “wol falle in every dyssh and eek mateere,”⁸⁴ and Summoners all run around “[w]ith mandementz for fornicacioun.”⁸⁵ The debate turns nasty, and the Host intervenes and tries to censor the two pilgrims, crying “[i]n compaignye we wol have no debaat.”⁸⁶ The Host, in his role as the “speaker” of the pilgrimage, fears that this particular debate will threaten to overtake tale telling, dissolve the fellowship, and halt the processes that have sustained their collective

⁸¹ Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 244-79.

⁸² Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I.3119.

⁸³ For an analysis of neighbor theory in the context of medieval studies, see George Edmondson, *The Neighboring Text: Chaucer, Boccaccio, Henryson* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011). For an overview of neighbor theory, see Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁸⁴ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, III.835-36.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, III.1283-84.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, III.1288.

relief. But the antagonism between the two pilgrims whets their appetite for tale telling even more: both promise to “quite” the other with several tales over the course of the pilgrimage, which means that they will, willy-nilly, spark each other’s creativity, each pilgrim escalating their “debaat” even more and upping the ante in each tale’s portrayal of the other. In retrospect, the Host’s censorship threatens the group’s continuation more than the pilgrims’ debate; in fact, the entire course of the fragments’ escalating and dynamic quarreling enlivens the static General Prologue portraits by revealing ever more about these pilgrims through group process rather than singular observation, which in turn produces more tales. Far from dissolving the fellowship, the Friar and Summoner promise to maintain it so that they can seek narrative revenge, sustaining the contest in the process. The Friar and the Summoner form each other’s characters, revealing that an element of debate is listening to perceptions that are contrary to one’s own perceptions of the world, incorporating them, and responding from one’s subject position. Despite the conflict, the Friar and the Summoner agree to be one another’s audience.

Although it may sound strange to place this testy debate within a sociological vision of collective care practices, the willingness to be one another’s audience is at the heart of the headlinks’ narrative and group process. As the pilgrimage finishes its journey in Fragment X, culminating with the Parson’s Prologue and Tale, the Host pronounces that “[n]ow lakketh us no tales mo than oon. / Fulfilled is my sentence and my decree,”⁸⁷ awaiting only the Parson’s final tale. Although the Host tries to end on a light note, encouraging the Parson to “[t]elle us a fable anon,”⁸⁸ he also asks him to “[u]nbokele and shewe us what is in thy male,”⁸⁹ to open

⁸⁷ Ibid., X.16-17.

⁸⁸ Ibid., X.29.

⁸⁹ Ibid., X.26.

up and show what he has to say. The Host's instructions allow room for surprise. Answering on his own terms, the Parson agrees to "unbokele," but refuses the fable, offering instead a "meditacioun,"⁹⁰ which our narrator tells us that the fellowship "[u]pon this word we han assented soone."⁹¹ Even the Host instructs the Parson to "[s]ey what yow list, and we wol gladly heere."⁹² This disagreement ends with a willingness to hear what the other has to say, without necessarily having to agree with it.⁹³ The Parson's persona exercises the fellowship's capacities to listen, to be an audience. In the *Canterbury Tale's* unfinished quality, we see that, despite narrative irresolution, there is nonetheless a kind of resolution in group experience that occurs from exercising capacities *in time*, at any moment in the group's collective experience. As a debate poem, the *Canterbury Tales* embraces irresolution, fragmentation, and conflict to show that willingness to engage in these processes and to witness one another in time is what allows debate to sustain collective care practices. While the risking, and indeed the outbreak, of conflict is in the nature of social process, it can have harsh effects. But, the *Canterbury Tales's* headlinks echo that the important work in group process is in the experience of division, and in the repair thereof.

Group experience calls upon the individual to be extimate, to account for the Other in the formation and expression of one's identity. Such a phenomenon is compounded in legal spaces, especially because of the representational capacities of the subject before the law. That is, the individual in institutional spaces and in the process of group experience stands

⁹⁰ Ibid., X.55.

⁹¹ Ibid., X.61.

⁹² Ibid., X.73.

⁹³ See Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, eds. Christine McDonald, Peggy Kamuf, and Avital Ronell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

for more than just herself. In turning to the episode of Lady Meed before parliament in Passus IV of Langland's *Piers Plowman*, we see both the capacities of the individual before the law, but also its potential erasure. Lady Meed is initially caught between two abstract allegorical identities—reward and/or bribery—and such a representation limits her capacities for interaction and representation in the poem. However, central to group process, especially in institutional spaces, is the capacity to preserve the individual's lived experience in group experience. Lady Meed as an individual before the law—her “being on behalf” of others, so to speak—demonstrates that central to confronting collective trauma is preserving its embodied iterations into the archive, thus constituting the social link.

THIRD PLATEAU: THE INDIVIDUAL

I. The Embodied Politic

The institutional assemblage complicates classic models of the body politic and of the individual body before the law, which are models based on the human body.⁹⁴ What happens, then, when the subject whose body stands for other bodies needs to communicate a specific embodied reality, or when the body is traumatized? How does the social link preserve rather than envelop the individual? Manuel DeLanda offers a critique of what he terms the “*organismic metaphor*”⁹⁵ within sociological models of the body politic. He argues that using the human body as a model for understanding society has led to a sociological habit of defining society by “relations of interiority,” meaning that “the component parts [of the organism] are constituted by the very relations they have to other parts in the whole. A part detached from such a whole ceases to be what it is, since being this particular part is one of

⁹⁴ For a full and classic discussion of the body politic, see Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957).

⁹⁵ DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 8, emphasis original.

its constitutive properties.”⁹⁶ The classic body politic metaphor, therefore, defines the individual based on her or his relation to other individuals. Surely, the healing capacities of the social bond aid in processing large-scale group trauma, and such relations are essential to the parliamentary space.

However, the individual before the law or the individual within an institutional setting is not *only* important insofar as she or he contributes to institutional processes. Particularly, for example, while Members of Parliament represent the “fair feeld ful of folk”⁹⁷ that elected and sent them to Westminster, their own desires cannot be limited to the desires of the community—they, too, are *both* representative *and* individual, collective *and* singular. Or, as DeLanda writes, “a whole may be both analyzable into separate parts and at the same time have irreducible properties, properties that emerge from the *interactions* between parts.”⁹⁸ At stake in focusing on interactions is that individual parts are not trapped in a closed system that permits no new opportunities for interactions to emerge. Instead, as DeLanda continues, if we are to think about bonds between parts, we ought to understand these bonds as “*capacities to interact* with other entities,” because the individual’s “capacities are not given—they may go unexercised if no entity suitable for interaction is around—and form a potentially open list, since there is no way to tell in advance in what way a given entity may affect or be affected by innumerable other entities.”⁹⁹ The social link is a type of bond that likewise incites capacity, and the capacity to exercise various forms of expression is crucial in the treatment of trauma. Thinking about the psychoanalytic social link as exercising the

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁷ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.17. All citations from *Piers Plowman* will indicate version, Passus, and line numbers hereafter.

⁹⁸ DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 10, emphasis original.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, emphasis original.

individual's capacities rather than restricting them enables the bond to heal because it connects the individual to a social frame of interaction, but in so doing it can resist erasure of the individual.

II. Allegory or Individual? The Case of Lady Meed

Through the framework of society outlined above, I read allegorical figures as functioning in similar ways as political representatives and as individuals before the law, whose institutional interactions must both acknowledge their individuality and also consider their actions as precedent for other actions—that is, as allegorical legal interactions. Such a reading will re-think allegorical figures as capacities for interpretation. For example, the figure-character of “Mede the mayde” in the first dream vision of *Piers Plowman* is typically regarded as an allegorical figure representing the ambiguity of meed, either reward or bribery.¹⁰⁰ Her individual character is initially caught between two abstract models propounded by Holy Church and Theology, one an institution and the other a body of theoretical, clerical texts. Will the dreamer first sees Meed from a distance after he asks Holy Church to help him with his faith and to “[k]enne me by som craft to knowe the false,”¹⁰¹ and in response, Holy Church points him to the figure Fals arranging a marriage between Meed and “Fals Fikel-tongue, a fendes biyete,”¹⁰² his offspring. Until the end of Passus II, all we know of Meed is what others say and observe about her, and Holy Church introduces her as a corruptor of the Church institution, her corruption climbing up as far as the Vatican itself:

“That is Mede þe mayde,” quod she, “haþ noyed me ful ofte,

And ylakked my lemman þat Leautee is hoten,

¹⁰⁰ *MED*, s.v. “mede (n.),” 1a-1b.

¹⁰¹ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.II.4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, B.II.41.

And bilowen h[ym] to lords þat lawes han to kepe.
In þe Popes paleis she is pryvee as myselve,
But Sooþnesse wold noȝt so—for she is a bastard,
For Fals was hire fader þat haþ a fikel tonge,
And nevere sooþ seide sithen he com to erþe;
And Mede is mannered after hym, riȝt as [kynde askep]:

Qualis pater, talis filius. Bona arbor bonum fructum facit.[¹⁰³]

For the institution of Holy Church, Meed is by “kynde” mannered after falseness and is heir to his “fikel tonge.” The ambiguity of her meaning is instead fixed, which betrays more about the allegorical institution of Holy Church than it does about Meed’s character; that is, Holy Church is portrayed as an inflexible institution, offering inflexible interpretations. Its capacities for interaction are thus limited. Throughout Passus I, Holy Church is incredibly skeptical of speech, supposedly because people *can* abuse it, and with their fickle tongues can bribe rather than practice charity. Speech, here, is for corruption rather than expression. Her insistence that *all* of Meed’s speech is of false “kynde” erases the ambiguity of the figuration and quality of Meed, erecting allegorical borders and shrinking her capacities. Here, Meed encounters the previously mentioned “totalitarian other” who forbids speech, and who limits speech’s capacity to engage the social link.

Theology’s treatment of Meed is certainly more favorable, since he values her capacities especially for compensation and even charity. He justifies his favorable interpretation by appealing to the Law. In fact, Meed’s character is even more explicitly

¹⁰³ Ibid., B.II.20-27a. The Latin reads “[l]ike father, like son. A good tree brings forth good fruit,” Matthew 7:17. Latin translation from Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H.A. Shepherd, eds., *Piers Plowman* (New York: Norton, 2006), 25, fn. 7.

subjected to, and her actions interpreted through, the Law once Theology confronts the marriage “feffement¹⁰⁴ þat Fals hath ymaked,”¹⁰⁵ which both Symonye and Cyvyllle “vnfoldeþ,” with a text of his own: the Bible. Whereas Fals’ charter echoes Holy Church’s criticism of Meed, stating, “[t]hat Mede is ymarried more for hire goodes / Than for any virtue of fairnesse or any free kynde,”¹⁰⁶ Theology “tened hym,” or grew angry, and rejects this, interpreting Meed’s character instead by her capacity for reward or just compensation, and supports his interpretation with Biblical verse:

For Mede is muliere, of Amendes engendred;
And God graunted to gyue Mede to truþe,
And þow hast gyuen hire to a gilour—now God gyue þee sorwe!
The text telleþ thee noȝt so, Truþe woot þe soþe,
For *Dignus est operarius*¹⁰⁷ his hire to haue—
And þow hast fest hire to Fals; fy on þi lawe!¹⁰⁸

Unlike the institution of Holy Church, clerkly Theology sees Meed as heir to “Amendes,” a word that in the theological tradition refers to penance or atonement.¹⁰⁹ Holy Church might have little patience for the imperfection of human will, but Theology praises Meed for her capacity to repent, and reminds Fals that the compensation for “everyone who has faith in [God’s son]” is not death but “eternal life.”¹¹⁰ God, too, practices meed through Christ’s

¹⁰⁴ *MED*, s.v. “feffement (n.),” 2: “The written instrument by which [the] conveyance of estates and settlements in marriage were recorded,” accessed August 21, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.II.73.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, B.II.76-77.

¹⁰⁷ “Worthy is the laborer,” Luke 10:7. Latin translation from Robertson and Shepherd, eds., *Piers Plowman*, 31, fn. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.II.119-24.

¹⁰⁹ *MED*, s.v. “amende(s) (n.),” 3a-b, accessed August 21, 2018.

¹¹⁰ John 3:16 (New English Bible).

salvation, and those who labor for Christ's mission deserve "his hire to have." While this is certainly good news for Meed, and while Theology's defense is more flexible in accommodating human lived experience, his interpretation of Meed is likewise bounded within a closed textual framework, and therefore does not accommodate *her particular* lived experiences.

Of course, Theology *can* refute Fals' legal charter because Theology, too, has texts at his disposal. Much like in the Wife of Bath's Prologue, the entrance fee into these debates is access to a clerkly archive, despite the Wife's assertion that, "[e]xperience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me / To speke."¹¹¹ Steven Justice argues that this archive was often barred behind library walls and inaccessible to the *comune*, and the 1381 Peasants' Rebellion—a traumatic event in English history with intimate ties to *Piers Plowman*—in part sought to free these texts from their chained bookshelves and grant wider access to textual and documentary culture, or to widen the social bond.¹¹² Thus, the rebels sought to *incorporate* their lived experience—put their bodies into—the archival tradition in an attempt to widen the subjective field of textual interpretation, and in so doing, reflect themselves in the institutions they had to navigate. Once again, trauma changes the landscape of debate, and the rebels seek an iteration of the social link that accounts for their bodies. It is Theology's idea to "ledeþ [Mede] to Londoun, þere lawe is yshewed"¹¹³ in order to determine whom Meed can marry, further placing Meed's individual character between institution and law, her capacities for action and identity bounded to a textual culture that at times struggles to amend itself to individual circumstance. It is with institutional and

¹¹¹ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, III.1-3.

¹¹² Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 69.

¹¹³ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.II.135.

theological abstractions heaved upon her that she enters the poem, so far speechless, despite our skepticism of her purportedly “fikel tonge.”

However, Meed *does* have an individual, human reaction to being subjected to the law, and one that is not necessarily determined by any particular allegorical trait associated with “Meed.” When Drede (Judgment) discovers that the King intends to capture Meed and her retinue and try them at Westminster, Drede quickly warns Fals and “bad hym fle for fere.”¹¹⁴ In fact, Meed is the only one to remain, and the poem offers no hindrances to explain her staying; doing so is her choice:

All fledden for fere and flowen into hernes;
Save Mede þe mayde na mo dorste abide.
Ac trewely to telle, she trembled for fere,
And ek wepte and wrong whan she was attached.¹¹⁵

From the time that Meed was introduced in the first dream vision, these lines are the very first instance where she acts on her own accord rather than through the description or interpretation of others, and her actions indeed portray a very human response: fear, weeping, and embodied anxiety.¹¹⁶ The poem also describes the others who accompany Meed, including Falsness, Gyle, and Lyere, as fearful; however, among the retinue, the most detailed description is of Meed’s actions, and despite the fear that she and the others feel, *she* stays. Therefore, the poem singles her out through the difference in her *actions*—that is, her

¹¹⁴ Ibid., B.II.210.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., B.II.234-37.

¹¹⁶ The amount of description devoted to anxiety in the texts in this dissertation shows traces of a larger cultural trauma, as well. That is, locating the response to wide-scale trauma in literature might also require attending to descriptions of anxious narrators, or anxious allegorical characters.

Will, her human function given by God. In this instance, arguing that Meed is merely an allegorical figure becomes difficult because the poem, however subtly, distinguishes her from the other figures through an affective and anxious response to the law, and one that is not exclusively linked to her allegorical qualities as “Meed,” but instead presents her humanity.

The poem’s treatment of Meed shifts with her arrival at the King’s court at the beginning of Passus III, her own affective expression pointing to her individual agency. The only other characters that thus far attend to Meed’s desires rather than to her existence in abstraction are the King and his clerk. The King, of course, is likely also an allegorical figure of kingship, but he must also be *the* individual king because the King always has two bodies, and therefore is always allegorical to an extent.¹¹⁷ But his allegorical status does not preclude his individual will; the King, so it seems, faces similar issues as a subject before the law. The beginning of Passus III contextualizes Meed within a much more human, rather than strictly allegorical, setting, reminding us that the institution can house the Natal space and host the social link. They calm her, recognize her fear, and comfort her, and the King’s first command is to “[call] a clerk—I kan noȝt his name— / To take Mede þe maide and maken hire at ese.”¹¹⁸ The justices enter her room and “[c]onforted hyre kyndely by Clergies leve, / And seiden, ‘Mourne noȝt, Mede, ne make þow no sorwe.[.]’”¹¹⁹ Most important, however, is that they comfort her by promising to consider her own desires in the legislative process, thereby granting her individuated access to institutional process. The King proposes that

I shal assayen hire myself and soopliche appose

¹¹⁷ See Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*.

¹¹⁸ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.III.3-4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, B.III.15-16.

What man of þis world þat hire were leuest.
And if she werche bi wit and my wil folowe
I wol forgyuen hire þis[e] giltes, so me God helpe!¹²⁰

As we know, the Commons in fact refuses Meed's desires and instead, condemns her in parliament, as I discuss later. However, the King's offer to extend mercy to Meed is conditional, and, arguably, the Commons work to prevent the corrupt potential of meed in politics; that is, Meed's marriage arrangements could easily become a back-room deal between her and the King instead of being subjected to the legislative process. Regardless, the King's court comforts Meed by attending to her will; the social link as an intersubjective exchange prevents the individual from being swallowed up by her social context. The Law—the symbolic order—while totalizing, is also a flexible, open system insofar as its signifiers share meaning among the bodies that inhabit it.¹²¹ Having one's will acknowledged, especially before the law, is itself comforting and extends the capacities of the law to encounter one's lived experience.

Returning to DeLanda's "capacities for interaction" causes me to question why Meed's interactions with other characters are rarely read as unfolding within an open system. To put it another way, if Meed's entire allegorical identity lies in the ambiguity of meed (i.e., either reward or bribe), why does the narrator interpret her interactions as allegorically contained solely within corruption and bribery? In fact, Meed's character, when read as an individual, helps to complicate Holy Church's simple, straightforward sermon in Passus I by

¹²⁰ Ibid., B.III.5-8.

¹²¹ For a full discussion of the symbolic order, especially in relation to intersubjectivity, see Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, 197-268 (New York: Norton, 2002).

confronting generalized edict with the ambiguities of lived experience.¹²² Holy Church ends her sermon by distinguishing “charite” from “coveitise,” arguing that “chastite wiþouten charite worþ cheyned in helle. / Manye curatours kepen hem clene of hire bodies; / Thei ben acombred wiþ coveitise, þei konne noȝt out crepe.”¹²³ As the friar reminds Meed before her confession, many “men hath leyen by thee bothe,” and Meed’s character is repeatedly portrayed as unchaste—even the parliament calls her “an hore.”¹²⁴ However, her unchasteness is a metaphor for the amount of meed she doles out to “lewed men and lered men” both, and throughout Passus III, once she arrives at the King’s court, she often freely gives. Given Holy Church’s sermon in Passus I, why is Meed’s giving not considered charity, especially her financing the expensive window that also finances sinners’ salvation? Holy Church’s own discussion of chastity and charity implies that Christians ought to give freely not with their bodies but with their goods, but Meed’s giving is nonetheless continually described as unchaste, even when “[t]he leeste man of hire meynee a moton of golde” receives.¹²⁵ Meed’s excessive giving, in addition to participating at times in institutional corruption or sway, *also* at times creates bonds of community with those who are otherwise outside of community, namely the poor and the sinful. Her giving has the

¹²² In discussing “lived experience,” I refer to Reed’s discussion of “experiential realism,” which he defines as often in tension with conclusive and rigorous processes for arriving at matters of “Truth” in debates and debate poetry (13). While the particulars of a given case were certainly regarded as less important than absolute Truths, debate poems show the limit of man’s ability to judge such truths when our own reasoning is impacted by sensuous world experience. I argue here one step further, that not only is this what Reed would consider to be part of the “ludic function” of the debate poem, but that in the space of the law and of parliament in particular, lived experience is indeed part of the way we understand abstract ideas. See Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry*.

¹²³ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.I.194-96.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, B.IV.166.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, B.III.24.

capacity for incorporation, and charity can lead to salvation. Even if in bastardized form, Meed exercises an anxiety about community-making and group salvation within a corrupt institutional setting: how do we know if we can give our way to heaven when institutional edicts rarely reflect our living institutions, or the way we live *with* our institutions? The law is dangerous when it denies her subjectivity and legislates subjective reality without taking account of lived experience.

Meed, by contrast, showcases the capacity for debate to sustain the individual before the law and uses deliberation to incorporate actual lived, bodily experience into the court archive. Meed reminds her rival Conscious—with whom she debates before the king—of his *own* bodily failure, compared with her loyalty, in working with the King of Normandy, insisting that, “In Normandie was he noȝt noyed for my sake— / Ac þow þiself, soþly, shamedest hym ofte: Croke into a cabane for cold of þi nayles, / [...] Ther I lafte wiþ my lord his lif for to saue.”¹²⁶ True, Meed concludes her defense by listing the various social benefits to meed, including its ability for kings to “make pees in londe,” and therefore, that “[n]o wigt, as I wene, wiþouten Mede may libbe!”¹²⁷ However, she frames her own abstractions in embodied, lived experience, enabling her to conclude that meed in fact is a mechanism for survival. While Meed’s offenses are many, deliberative process helps to complicate abstraction and to incorporate lived experience into the implementation of the Law. Contrasting sermon with debate, edict with deliberation, highlights that legal spaces preserve the individual—as opposed to the allegorical subject—by housing political processes that enable living process to emerge. In a legal space, the testimony and the

¹²⁶ Ibid., B.III.189-97.

¹²⁷ Ibid., B.III.221, 227.

petition preserve lived experience alongside requisite legal process. Testimony and petition preserve the desire for the subject to survive and grant entry into the social link.

III. Being on Behalf: The Subject before the Law

By granting Lady Meed a subjective reality, I have attempted to show how we can use assemblage theory, enhanced by an embrace of deliberation, to complicate allegory and allegorical figures, and to show the potential difficulties of the representative subject in legal spaces. In moving onto the explicitly parliamentary arena in Passus IV, the individual petition presents in similar terms as the allegorical subject: at once a representation but also a document that records living processes and desires for survival into the archive. To maintain the Natal function of the archive, parliamentary process must preserve individual complaint rather than wholly incorporate it. This plateau has added a conceptual layer to the social link, namely, that incorporation does not imply the erasure of the subject but, instead, its in-corporeal-ation:¹²⁸ encountering the individual body rather than swallowing it up into an appendaged model of the body politic. I suggest a model of representation that preserves the individual subject at the same time as that individual body likewise represents, but does not erase, other bodies. This is about preserving the body so that trauma and individual complaint can become in-corporeal-ated into lived experience and social life.

¹²⁸ I am trying to distinguish “incorporation,” which I see as placing the subject into the body politic, from “incorporealation,” which I understand as preserving the individual body within a larger socially-embodied context. I likewise see a possible and problematically double meaning with the concept of “incorporation.” “To put into body,” yes, but when our models of body are likewise imagined in increased scale to models of body politic, in-corpor-ation likewise means “to put into a hierarchized body.” Incorporealation, I hope, preserves a model of body that celebrates the capacities for interaction of the body rather than the fixed bodily political model.

Peace's petition grants him access to the King's Parliament, and similar to Lady Meed, testifies to the individual's (here traumatic) lived experience before the law in order to find resolution through group process and debate. The allegorical layer of Peace's petition against Wrong generalizes the function of the petition, as petitions generally attempt to address an individual or collective wrong for the sake of restoring individual or collective peace. Likewise, Peace's petition testifies to a traumatic upheaval of his intimate social bonds, and he undergoes the parliamentary process as a means of restoring them:

And þanne com Pees into parlement and putte vp a bille—
How Wrong ayeins his wille hadde his wif taken,
And how he rauysshede Rose, Reignaldes loue,
And Margrete of hir maydenhede maugree hire chekes.¹²⁹

He continues to describe the property loss and damage that Wrong has caused, in addition to the violation of these intimate bonds. Peace's attachments and means of survival have been shaken, and the parliament is charged with at once categorizing these offenses as "Wrong" so that the proper legal processes can restore them, and also executing the law in a way that preserves the intimacy of the wrong—or, its real, lived consequences.

The problem, however, is that Meed sidesteps the deliberative, social, political process and over-values the individual's ability to right Wrong. Rather than allowing the petition to summon the law's capacities for restoring intimate attachments, Meed proposes mercy, replacing the bond with payment:

Thanne gan Mede to maken hire, and mercy bisou3te,
And profrede Pees a present al of pure golde.

¹²⁹ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.IV.47-50.

“Haue þis, man, of me,” quod she, “to amenden þi scape,
For I wol wage for Wrong, he wol do so na moore.”

Pitously Pees preyed to the Kyng

To haue mercy on þat man þat mysdide hym so ofte.¹³⁰

True, Meed again advocates for mercy, and she attempts to “amenden [...] scathe.” She illustrates another way of easing suffering, she being the daughter of Amendes, as Theology tells us. In so doing, however, Meed participates in the erasure of the individual that she herself struggles against throughout the first dream vision: that is, Peace is encouraged to accept a treaty—to make peace—instead of restoring his lost bond and recuperating *his* means of survival. Gold offers general security, but it does not resuscitate his lost life to which he is attached and of which he was “Wrong-ed.” A back-room compromise overvalues the capacity of the individual in group process and denies the individual petition into the Natal archive. The very process that sustained Meed’s subjectivity is denied to Peace by Meed’s plea for mercy and payment.

The full impact of overvaluing the individual in group process is made manifestly clear when closed-door arrangements are contrasted with the full force of parliamentary process. The shift in my argument here reflects what I see as a shift in the poem: Meed *can* at once represent a struggle for individual identity in legal-representational spaces while *also* underscoring the need for those spaces because of the group processes that they preserve. That is, we need *both* the individual *and* a process that preserves capacities for interaction. Meed, too, does have the capacity for corruption as part of her allegorical and human

¹³⁰ Ibid., B.IV.94-99.

ambiguity—that is also part of her “kynde.” Reason rejects mercy, and in response, Meed begins to execute justice as she sees it on an individualized level:

Clerkes þat were confessours coupled hem togideres
Al to construe þis clause, and for þe Kynges profit,
Ac noȝt for confort of þe commune, ne for the Kynges soule,
For I seiȝ Mede in the moot-hall on men of lawe wynke.¹³¹

Just as Holy Church’s sermon shows the potential for erasing the subject for the sake of the institution, so too do Meed’s actions distinguish the King’s profit from common profit to attend to the risks of privileging the individual. Trauma can result from a crisis of over-individualization that lacks attachment to social context, just as the institutionalized erasure of the subject can be traumatic.

But the duty of parliament here is to offer processes of incorporealization, even if that means halting action. Meed’s work aims to seek resolution, but in so doing values conclusiveness over continual process. In response to Meed’s actions, parliament chooses to reform itself, calling Meed “an hore,” a response echoed by the King who realized that “Mede almost hadde shent it [the law]”¹³² and consequently allows Reason to rule the realm instead of Meed. Despite the ostensible conclusiveness of these actions and the containment of Meed’s identity once again within the allegorical confines of bribery, these rulings are conditional: “But the commune wole assent.”¹³³ That is to say, before action may be finalized, the commons must consent to the King’s shift in power, and Passus IV ends before the Commons grants this consent; the implied action happens off-stage. If Meed is to be

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, B.IV.149-52.

¹³² *Ibid.*, B.IV.174.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, B.IV.182.

found guilty in Parliament, it must be through a process of debate that encounters Meed's individual actions rather than simply acquiesces to the negative capacities of Meed's abstractions. Like the petition, Meed's actions record the individual into the archive. As Levinas might say, parliament must preserve the face,¹³⁴ must incorporealate rather than incorporate. The individual petition from Peace before the parliament is what enabled this process to begin and to work, and parliament attends to the lived experiences that both Holy Church and Reason deny through over-abstraction. The Commons must assent so that abstract reasoning is not the law's only course of action.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has stretched across texts in the parliamentary archive, has blended poetry with procedure, in order to argue that the parliament and its archive form an assemblage particularly suited to house group experience and to preserve embodied experience in institutional settings. The capacities of the institution affect the kind of group processes that can take place within institutional settings, and group process can preserve lived experiences before the law rather than abstract them into wholly allegorical affects. The clerical authors of these texts—the anonymous author of the *Modus*, Chaucer, and Langland—all explore the capacities of parliament's institutional and cultural milieu and complicate traditional notions of the body politic in order to offer a more flexible, fragmented, and capacious parliamentary body. The three plateaus that I offer—the institutional, the group, and the individual—demonstrate that an engagement with contemporary assemblage theory helps us to understand that parliament through its archive

¹³⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne, 1969).

was conceptualized as expanding the capacities of the body politic at multiple levels of social experience.

CHAPTER 2:

POLITICAL PROCESS AND ATTACHMENT IN GEOFFREY CHAUCER'S *PARLIAMENT OF FOWLS*

There is a critical consensus surrounding Geoffrey Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* that considers the poem's ending to be "inconclusive." As a result, the scholarship tends to fixate on what specifically is left unresolved, and what the consequences of irresolution are for both the poem and for Chaucer's milieu. Thomas L. Reed places the *Parliament* within the tradition of debate poetry, a genre that he argues owes its debt to more institutionalized practices of debate at universities, in the legal profession, and in parliament.¹ When translated into a poetic context, Chaucer's debate poem becomes one example among many of a cultural "aesthetics of irresolution," not singular to debate poetry itself, but which infuses other contexts for debate into its poetic structure. Rosemarie P. McGerr expands on this idea and points out that the *Parliament's* inconclusive ending highlights a larger cultural "resistance to closure in medieval discourse" more generally, arguing that poetic irresolution specifically across Chaucer's *oeuvre* is tied to a much larger valuing of open-endedness in matters of "truth" within medieval discourse.²

The cultural comfort with, and the value placed on, open-endedness reveals a kinship with the intellectual clerical culture forming between Oxford and Westminster. This culture, however, was not bound exclusively within the limits of the institutions, but instead contributed to what Ann Astell calls the "clericalization" of the Three Estates (i.e., the clergy, the nobility, and the commons) in the fourteenth century. Astell writes that, "[a]s the

¹ See Reed's chapter on "Institutional Context and Poetic Content" in *Middle English Debate Poetry*, 41-96.

² Rosemarie P. McGerr, *Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

universities struggled for independence from municipal and ecclesiastical control, they became a direct and indirect force for a complex clericalization of the previously existing estates.”³ Common among the studies cited above is a general conclusion that the *Parliament*’s inconclusive ending is another example of the trope of irresolution that is inarguably found in many instances in late medieval literature and medieval discourse. These readings underscore that late medieval intellectual culture in England was invested less in settling matters of “truth” and defined “knowledge,” and more in developing the *processes* of learning, debating, and speaking with each other.

Yet, citing Chaucer’s poem as one example among many does not attend enough to the fact that the particular process at the center of this particular poem is a debate in parliament, and in the space of parliament. In fact, very few critics have read the poem within a specifically parliamentary context, and those who have, such as Matthew Giancarlo, similarly conclude that the parliament was yet another institution that lent formal characteristics and tropes to a developing vernacular poetry that was in search of its own formal traits. Others, such as Gwilym Dodd, see the inconclusive ending to Chaucer’s poem as a sign of his disappointment in parliament’s political chaos: “The bird parliament is incapable of overcoming the disparate interests of its members. It cannot unite and agree on a single common strategy and is therefore unable to act for the common good.”⁴ This assumes that a “single common strategy” is the only way to act for the common good. However, commonality is not the same thing as homogeneity, and depends on the recognition of

³ Astell, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning*, 21.

⁴ Dodd, “Changing Perspectives,” 307. However, this claim is curious, as Chaucer served in the so-called Wonderful Parliament of 1388, several years after having written the *Parliament of Fowls*, c. 1380. Why he would actively serve as a Member of Parliament for Kent after losing faith in the institution is worth questioning.

difference, not its erasure. Instead, the rise of the institution and its increasing power (especially when contrasted with its waning influence in Elizabethan England) offered a context through which pre-existing literary forms, such as debate poetry, could encounter contemporary developments in political process.

While Chaucer's poem is certainly part of the debate poetry tradition, and while inconclusiveness or irresolution is certainly a trope of that tradition, readings that fixate on the "inconclusive" ending of Chaucer's debate poem do more to identify features of the poem that place it within a larger literary tradition than they do to think about why inconclusiveness might be an aesthetic fitting to the parliamentary process. More important than locating Chaucer's poem within the tradition of debate poetry, Chaucer places the institution of parliament within that selfsame tradition—alongside the dream vision genre—in order to conceptualize how we might value, through its very aestheticization, parliament's own processes of deliberation. Rather than fixating on *what* is left unresolved in parliament, examining parliamentary process through the aesthetics of debate poetry and dream vision allows us to see that Chaucer uses specific literary forms to value and to further conceptualize the benefits of a model of governance that foreground continual deliberation (and the joy we glean from it) rather than a model geared toward outcomes and resolution. In fact, it is a fantasy that parliament had conclusive endings, as "a supplicant rarely got an answer while Parliament was in full session, and often remained unsatisfied [...] Regardless of how these 'unheeded' disputants felt about their lots, the analogy between such parliamentary open-endedness and the irresolution of certain Middle English debate poems [...] is immediate and compelling."⁵ The parliament rolls, too, corroborate that parliamentary

⁵ Reed, *Aesthetics of Irresolution*, 93.

business was often inclusive and ongoing and not resolved while its body was formally assembled. The inconclusive ending of Chaucer's *Parliament* does not signal the institution's failure but rather makes a bold statement about its entire purpose: parliament concerns itself with ensuring a site for ongoing processes of assembly and deliberation. Since the poem's content largely concerns the processes of journeying, assembling, and debating, and exercises methods of prolonging resolution, rushing through the majority of the poem to label it as inconclusive betrays an allegiance to a more outcomes-driven paradigm of governance that is absent in the poem. Instead, Chaucer and his archive ask us to consider processes as ends in and of themselves.

I. Intimacy and Common Profit in the Narrative Frame

The *Parliament of Fowls* opens with a narrative frame that features Chaucer's narrator, clerkly in his reading practices, tirelessly in search of knowledge on the topic of love. While the frame—which consists of the first 105 and the final seven lines of the 699-line edited version of the poem⁶—references several classical texts bearing *auctoritas*, the main text at the center of the Narrator's reading is Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. Cicero's *Dream* and Macrobius' *Commentary* on it might seem strange choices, considering that the Narrator's quandary is love. However, Macrobius' encyclopedic text was among the most important throughout the Middle Ages in its effort to preserve and compile classical thought on a wide range of issues, including dream theory, and certainly would have been within the archive of clerkly reading.⁷ By opening the *Parliament* with a text in this

⁶ Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson. All citations hereafter will refer to line number.

⁷ William Harris Stahl, "Introduction" to Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, ed. and trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia UP, 1952), 1-65; 9-10.

archive and with an archive more generally (and a text that itself *is* an archive), Chaucer is placing his parliament's work—and I argue, the work of the *Parliament* itself—within a framework of texts that concern common profit and an intellectual culture of learning, and that think about ways of successfully living together and loving in political spaces. Moreover, reading through this archive is a process that requires time and arguably, is a process less fixated on finding immediate and definite solutions.⁸

The focus in the poem's narrative frame on learning, contemplation, and consultation offers a way of reading the *Parliament* that moves away from a teleologically-insistent, outcomes oriented, anti-parliamentary model fixating on the poem's inconclusiveness (as if the easing of conflict and the leisure to take time were of no use *prima facie*). Instead, the frame presents the contemplative process as both collaborative and soothing. As mentioned above, the first stanza witnesses the narrator grappling with the problem of love, a problem that later becomes the topic of debate in the dream vision's parliament. The poem opens by citing and translating the opening lines of another text in Chaucer's clerkly archive:

Hippocrates' *Aphorisms* (i.e., "*Ars longa, vita brevis*").⁹ The medical text written c. 400BCE begins by advising the physician to "not only be prepared to do what is right himself, but also to make the patient, the attendants, and externals cooperate."¹⁰ Chaucer immediately situates his poem in the context of the philosophy of care and prepares the reader to interpret learning and problem solving as lengthy and difficult processes that require individual attention to

⁸ This is perhaps an example of how love poetry changes when political contexts change. No longer is it the process of aristocratic exchange focused on houses and hospitality, but now also on parliament and the political processes central to it.

⁹ Hippocrates, *Aphorisms*, ed. and trans. Francis Adams (Boston: The Internet Classics Archive, 1994-2000), <http://classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/aphorisms.html>. See Section 1.1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

“good”—to do what is right—and also the cooperation of various elements toward that good. However, as Chaucer’s and Hippocrates’ aphorism both suggest, these processes take so long, in fact, that they might not even be accomplished in a single lifetime—or, given the inconclusiveness of the *Parliament*, in a single poem: “The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne, / Th’assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge / The dredful joye alwey that slit so yerne.”¹¹ As the narrator soon reveals, “Al this mene I by Love,”¹² not medical care, but already Chaucer draws an association between Love and healing, a trope also common to the *amor hereos*, or love-sickness, tradition.¹³ However, although one layer of the ensuing parliamentary debate at the center of the dream vision is about marital and amorous love, the way in which Chaucer frames the idea of “love” through an allusion to medical care broadens the definition of “Love” (capital “L”) for the entire poem. By Love, we do not only mean amorous love, but a larger idea about care of the Other, reflected in the imagery of the intersubjective relationship between doctor and patient. Such an expansion of terms broadens the significance of Love’s association with healing to think about care practices more generally as healing agents. When considered in these terms, it is no wonder that care of the Other is a “craft so long to lerne,” a lifelong process that refuses easy closure: it is a “dreadful joye” that “slit so yerne,” that is, not only rewarding, but also at times a seemingly insurmountable task, and for that reason necessarily continuous.

Part of the narrator’s anxiety about Love stems from his own inexperience with it. However, he reveals that his inexperience lies in the actual practice or execution of Love, but

¹¹ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 1-3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³ For a full discussion and references to the tradition of *amor hereos*, see Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The “Viaticum” and Its Commentaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

he seems to have no trouble learning about it. He explains that:

Ful al be that I knowe nat Love in dede,
Ne wot how that he quiteth folk here hyre,
Yit happeth me ful ofte in bokes reede
Of his myrakles and his crewel yre.¹⁴

While it might seem that reading *replaces* actual knowable experience, the narrator's frequent scholarly visitations to Love's archive is itself an experience of creating a bond with the ideas of others that enables him to focus more on learning than on achieving a definite knowing. The regularity of the narrator's reading practices suggests a close attachment to his archive, and that attachment is transformative not because he "knowe[s]" the content of these texts "in dede," but because his continual visitations focus his efforts on creating a bond rather than on mastering the material. When contrasted to the anxiety described above, clerkly reading practices provide a pleasurable antidote to not knowing: "Of usage—what for lust and what for lore— / On bokes rede I ofte, as I yow tolde."¹⁵ That is to say, his "usage," or his "habitual activity" of reading,¹⁶ equates pleasure and learning; moreover, in a performative move, Chaucer's narrator extends this pleasure to his own reader, reminding them that they have in fact read about his reading habits themselves just a few lines prior. When coupled with the opening allusion to Hippocrates' philosophy of medical care, the narrative frame presents the archive as transformative because it requires a constant attention that in turn bonds reader to text. Reading has transformed the "craft so long to lerne" from an overwhelming task to one of "lust" and "lore."

¹⁴ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 8-11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

¹⁶ *MED*, s.v. "usage (n.)," 3a, accessed on August 21, 2018.

The drive to learn rather than to know is what reinforces the attachment with the archive. In search of comfort, the narrator picks up a book, which “was write with lettres olde, / And thereupon, a certeyn thing to lerne, / The longe day ful faste I redde and yerne.”¹⁷ The assumption that an old book would *of course* impart knowledge seems to at first reflect a commitment to *auctoritas* and established knowledge (and Macrobius certainly qualifies), and this is only underscored by the narrator’s expectation of a “certeyn thing to lerne,” namely that he yearns after a definite solution to his problem. If only scholarship and parliamentary process were so easy. Instead, upon engaging in his reading practices, the narrator’s attitude morphs into what McGerr terms a “resistance to closure,” and he finds relief in the openness of the archive:

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.¹⁸

The harvesting metaphor celebrates that the value of the archive is not that it stores fixed knowledge, but that it is home to a vast amount of old knowledge that, through continual re-encounters, provides an endless source of relief in the form of nourishment. Chaucer presents the yearly encounter with the archive—and later, the yearly assembly of the bird parliament—as continually creating new knowledge through the repetition of this process. The archive creates a bond to a social framework, and this social bond relieves helplessness and forecloses isolation. Lack of closure enables continual relief. Our narrator claims so

¹⁷ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 19-21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-25.

himself when, immediately after his knowledge-harvesting metaphor, he claims that “[t]o rede forth hit gan me so *delite* / That al the day me thoughte but a lyte.”¹⁹ The process of reading forth is so pleasurable that the day passes without much notice; the process is delightful and enriches living.

Key to the narrator’s experience with the archive is that it transforms him. His description of his own emotional state changes from not knowing “wher that I flete or synke” before reading to “rede forth hit gan me so *delite*” afterward. What relieves his anxieties is that the process of bonding resists closure. The narrative frame decodes the poem’s inconclusiveness because its focus on clerkly scholarly practices—of reading and re-reading, visiting and re-visiting, dream vision and re-vision—as healing practices complicates any critique of the dream vision parliament’s circular debate as simply fool’s speech because of its circularity. In fact, the cycle of returning-to in order to learn rather than to know, and the relief that this process of returning-to provides, is the framework for attachment in psychoanalysis, as well; the attachment between analyst and analysand, and the necessary inconclusiveness that it entails, suggests that inconclusiveness can facilitate healing. Later in the poem in Nature’s bird parliament, inconclusiveness allows the parliament to continue its work annually and offers a defense of its regular recurrence. Though it might not arrive at a resolution each time it assembles, what LaCapra terms “repetition with change” still offers another type of progression; after all, something changes, and it will change again.

The narrator’s reflection on the bond created by continual re-visitation that opens the poem also scaffolds his exposé on common profit, which ought to affect how we in turn read the work of common profit. The book that has given the narrator such “*delite*” is “Tullyus of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-28, emphasis mine.

the *Dream of Scipioun*,²⁰ and, as Stahl notes, because Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* was passed down to the Middle Ages through Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, Chaucer's narrator most likely spent his day reading both the *Dream* and Macrobius' *Commentary* together. Chaucer was proficient enough in Latin that the short *Dream of Scipio* on its own most likely would not have taken him "al that day" to read, suggesting that his day-long pursuit included both Cicero's brief *Dream* and Macrobius' lengthy *Commentary*.²¹ While this text might seem an unusual choice given his preoccupation with "Love," the narrator's choice further suggests that his preoccupation with Love has much larger implications beyond romantic encounters, as stated above. In the narrator's brief summary of the *Dream*, he focuses on the ghost of Affricanus' visitation to Scipio, and in transitioning from a general anxiety about Love to a treatise on common profit, our definition of common profit should be read through the narrator's previous ruminations on love. That is, although the poem moves onto a much larger social idea such as common profit, the narrator does not let us readers forget about the experience of attachment that begins the poem and carries it through his exposé on common profit. There is no discontinuity between the narrator's opening anxieties and his subsequent reading practices; instead, they are adjacent because we should read them together, a practice in holding together and reading heterogeneity.

Love in the narrative frame attunes the reader to intimacy, fondness, and attachment, and so as the topic shifts to common profit, the reader must not leave these terms behind. Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* thinks similarly, but augments the scale of attachment from the individual to the commonwealth. The *Dream*, told through the perspective of Scipio, opens

²⁰ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 31.

²¹ Stahl, "Introduction," *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, 53.

by describing the intimate kinship between him and King Masinissa, whom he visits.

Chaucer's narrator begins his summary of the *Dream* with their initial embrace, preserving the fondness between them:

Fyrst telleth it, whan Scipio was come
In Affricke, how he meteth Massynisse,
That hym for joie in armes hath inome;
Thenne telleth [it] here speche and al the blysse
That was betwix hem til the day gan mysse.²²

The fondness that Chaucer's narrator identifies between Scipio and Masinissa transitions readers from the discussion of love and attachment in the first part of the frame to the narrator's ruminations on common profit. However, their love suggests that—rather than distracting Chaucer's narrator from his current problems with lovesickness—we ought to undertake the work of common profit with the same tenderness and intimacy. Through the relationship between Scipio and Masinissa, Chaucer offers us a vision of common profit that foregrounds the social bond as central to this work and the affect that attends it. Furthermore, Chaucer draws a subtle parallel between his own narrator's reading practices and Scipio's encounter with Masinissa: both are so engulfed in, renewed by, and take such pleasure in their encounters that time seems to slip away; both are absorbed, a characteristic of attachment behaviors.

Chaucer's source for the dream vision, the version passed down through Macrobius, offers an even fuller description of their embrace, and emphasizes even more so the consuming nature and healing powers of intimate attachments and social bonds:

²² Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 36-40.

[T]he old man [Masinissa] embraced me with tears in his eyes, and after a pause, gazing heavenward, said: “To you, O Sun on high, and to you other celestial beings, my thanks are due for the privilege, before I pass from this life, of seeing in my kingdom and beneath this very roof Publius Cornelius Scipio, at the mere mention of whose name I am refreshed [*recreor*]; for the memory of that excellent and invincible leader never leaves my mind.”²³

The original Latin indeed uses the word “*recreor*”—I am refreshed, renewed, revived²⁴—to describe Masinissa’s reaction to Scipio. In his old age, Masinissa’s attachment to Scipio revives and overwhelms him; on the one hand, this affective reaction demonstrates the healing powers of attachment, but on the other hand, it shows the emotional effort that such healing requires: with tears in his eyes, for a moment he is speechless and can only hold. I belabor the point about their embrace because holding offers a social analogy for the archive. Here, Masinissa’s attachment is held as a memory in the archive of his mind that never leaves him. Particularly in Macrobius’ version, the mind is an archive holding memories that upon revisiting can refresh and rejuvenate; old fields do indeed yield new crops that sustain. What if the image of an embrace serves as a model for common profit, preserving bonds in order to be refreshed by them? The archive, too, holds onto our attachments as an assemblage of salient signifiers.

Once Scipio’s conversation with Masinissa ends, he falls asleep, and his grandfather “Affrycan,” Scipio the Elder, greets him in his dream, whom the narrator describes as “his

²³ Marcus Tullius Cicero, “Scipio’s Dream,” in Macrobius, *The Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, 67-77, Chapter I.i.2.

²⁴ *Latin Dictionary*, s.v. “recreo (v.),” accessed August 21, 2018, <http://www.latin-dictionary.net>.

auncestre, Affrycan *so dere*.”²⁵ Scipio likewise has a strong attachment and fondness for his grandfather, who acts as his celestial tour guide through the dream vision that follows. Because Scipio is asleep, he, like Masinissa, stores an attachment in the archive of his mind, the recollection of which is expressed with fondness. According to Macrobius, who passed down dream theories from antiquity to the Middle Ages in the *Commentary*, and who was considered to be the leading authority on dreams throughout the Middle Ages,²⁶ only some dreams are valuable in “foretelling the future” and in gifting dreamers with “the powers of divination.”²⁷ For Macrobius, “The dream which Scipio reports that he saw embraces the three reliable types [of dreams] mentioned above [i.e., enigmatic, prophetic, and oracular], and also has to do with all five varieties of the enigmatic dream [i.e., personal, alien, social, public, and universal].”²⁸ Some dreams are able to use their content to permit “the attentive soul to perceive the truth,”²⁹ and thus in this case, the attachment with Affrycan archived in Scipio’s memory also connects him with truth at the universal scale. These attachments lead us to more universal, celestial revelations, and they help develop more intimate connections with abstract ideas like “truth” or “common profit.” Our intimate social attachments act as guides for developing more abstract social bonds that motivate our working toward the common good.

Chaucer’s narrator goes on to tell of the lessons that Scipio learned from Affrycan, which turn out to be about the everlasting and eternal work of common profit. Of course, Chaucer distills Macrobius’ fuller version and commentary on the dream, in which

²⁵ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 41, emphasis mine.

²⁶ Stahl, “Introduction,” *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, 13.

²⁷ Macrobius, *Commentary*, I.III.8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I.III.12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I.III.20.

Macrobius tells us that he believes that pursuing common profit in political life is one of the pathways leading to eternal life, writing that “the purpose of the dream is to teach us that the souls of those who serve the state well are returned to the heavens after death and there enjoy everlasting blessedness.”³⁰ Chaucer, however, more explicitly involves all estates and levels of society in working for the state and universalizes the attachments that we can develop to common profit, writing:

Thanne telleth it that, from a sterry place,
How Affrycan hath hym [Scipio] Cartage shewed,
And warnede hym befor of al his grace,
And seyde hym what man, *lered or lewed*,
That lovede commune profyt, wel ithewed,
He shulde into a blysfyl place wende
There as joye is that last withouten ende.³¹

The close attachment that Scipio has with his tour guide guides him not only to a higher calling, but also to an attachment with that higher calling. The narrative frame teaches us that the various deep, intimate attachments that we have in our daily lives also help us to develop more intimate and tender attachments to the public good, or “common profit,” as Chaucer would say. Attachments are of a celestial importance because they lead us to the heavens, but we should not forget that what leads to thinking about and valuing common profit and the state are a series of initial intimate attachments, and that we ought to pursue common profit with this same tenderness. Macrobius essentially says so himself when he writes that, “[m]an

³⁰ Ibid., I.IV.1.

³¹ Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, 43-49, emphasis mine.

has political virtues because he is a social animal. By these virtues upright men devote themselves to their commonwealths, protect cities, revere parents, love their children, and cherish relatives; by these they direct the welfare of the citizens.”³² Political virtues guide all levels of social experience, and accordingly, Macrobius’ definition of “the political” here seems more aligned with our notion of the social bond—that is, politics is social experience at any level. Perhaps talking about one’s attachment to the state, or developing a tenderness for common profit, sounds strange when in our contemporary political discourse, those like Michel Foucault have offered a vocabulary for thinking about the individual’s connection to the state along the lines of self-policing;³³ however, I offer another set of terms for thinking about the individual’s role in public life. Why must the rhetoric of “love of country” belong only to conservatives? Instead, political attachments can be cast in the language of the social bond, the social link, the embrace.

Associating common profit with eternal life underscores that the work of common profit is likewise eternal, offering another way to understand the poem’s and the parliament’s inconclusiveness. To return to Chaucer’s inclusion of those who are “lered or lewed,” he predicts the division between the “noyse”³⁴ of the common birds and the eloquent “ple”³⁵ of the three eagle suitors that continue Nature’s parliament’s work but also seem to lead nowhere in terms of resolution. Furthermore, we can read that both “noyse” and “ple”—whether it be “lered or lewed”—work toward common profit. Despite their class differences,

³² Macrobius, *Commentary*, I.VIII.6.

³³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). See especially his discussion of the “panopticon,” 195-230.

³⁴ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 312.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 485.

neither kind of speech immediately solves the problem at the center of the debate; no matter who works toward common profit, the work seems unending and inconclusive.

Macrobius offers a larger perspective for understanding the never-ending nature of common profit's work. In his *Commentary*, he discusses how, although perusing divine matters is a higher calling than pursuing a political life, devoting one's life to earthly governance nonetheless also offers a pathway to eternal life:

Cicero is right in claiming for the rulers of commonwealths a place *where they may enjoy a blessed existence forever*. In order to show that some men become blessed by the exercise of virtues at leisure and others by virtues exercised in active careers, he did not say with finality that nothing is more gratifying to that supreme God than commonwealths, but added a qualification, *nothing that occurs on earth is more gratifying*. His purpose was to distinguish those who are primarily concerned with divine matters from the rulers of commonwealths, whose earthly achievements prepare their way to the sky.³⁶

Macrobius limits his thinking about working for the commonwealth to rulers, but Chaucer very clearly develops this idea to account for the political changes of the fourteenth century. The institutionalization of parliament, that is, extends the active life in Chaucer to all three estates, those who are “lered and lewed.” With a more egalitarian vision of political virtues, we can read the “noyse” of the lower birds in Nature’s parliament not in a way that condemns them, but as their participation in earthly pursuits that lead to eternal life. Although the term “noyse” has been used to suggest the unproductivity and circularity of

³⁶ Macrobius, *Commentary*, I.VIII.12, emphasis original.

common speech,³⁷ Macrobius clarifies the eternality of the task at hand, and therefore, that all speech will be circular to some extent, because working for the commonwealth as a way to heaven ends only upon earthly death. Furthermore, the signifier always circulates; this is why it is so helpful, but also why it is so frustrating to fantasies of control. We are not frustrated that we have accomplished nothing, but instead, the thing that we are accomplishing is an eternal task that will eventually lead to eternal life.³⁸

The adjacency of love to common profit in the frame, then, makes visible the naïveté of expecting clean answers to emerge from a necessarily messy political process. While this messiness can be anxiety-producing, frustrating, and irresolvable, it provides a path to eternal life because the alternate is far worse: death, violence, and perpetual conflict. The narrator

³⁷ Steven Justice in *Writing and Rebellion* discusses Walsingham's use of the term "noise" to describe the sounds of the Peasant's Rebellion. He argues that by reducing their language to "noise," Walsingham denies their participation in civil discourse (207). However, Chaucer equates the effectiveness of "noyse" with "pleyting" to both elevate the status of noise, and to show that both modes of language participate in civil discourse to the same effect: no one mode comes any closer to resolution than another.

³⁸ I have always had a hard time taking seriously Troilus' "epiphany" upon his death at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* once he ascends into heaven and sees how small the problems of the earth seem in comparison to the largeness of the heavens: "And down from thennes faste he gan avyse / This litel spot of erthe [...] / And dampned aloure werk that foloweth so / The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste, / And sholden aloure herte on heven caste" (Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 471-585, V.1814-25). After five books containing almost entirely scenes of dialogue and extimate reflection, the earth's unimportance seems unlikely. Of course, Macrobius falls in this same tradition, and Chaucer uses the term "lytel" to describe the earth in the *Parliament of Fowls*, as well: "Thanne shewede he [Affrican] hym [Scipio] the lytel erthe that here is, / At regard of the hevenes quantite" (57-58). But, we get *there* by taking seriously our attachments *here*: common profit and devotion to our social bonds in both instances leads to the heavens and to eternal life. The *MED* notes that while "lytel" can denote a lack of importance and size (1a-b), it also serves, as it does today, as a term of affection (2); the earth's littleness is the very thing which minimizes its stature next to the heavens and thereby solidifies our attachment to it—it's *our* little earth. Fradenburg argues in *Staying Alive* that cuteness serves an evolutionary role to facilitate bonds between infants and caregivers, or between helpless creatures and their caretakers (179). Little things deserve our care. I read Macrobius and Chaucer's little earth along these terms.

initially describes his reading experience, we will recall, with “delite,” and as stated above, this delight results from the archive’s ability to connect the narrator with a larger, endless social framework that relieves his initial isolation. After his summary of Scipio’s dream, the narrator reflects this time on his feelings *after* he has finished reading (rather than on the reading process itself), admitting the anxiety that accompanies putting down the book: “[T]o my bed I gan me for to dresse, / Fulfyld of thought and busy hevynesse; / For both I hadde thyng which that I nolde, / And ek I ne hadde that thyng that I wolde.”³⁹ The narrator discovers that to find answers does not mean finding all the answers—any more than it means finding only one—and that making progress does not mean finding resolution. True, there is a healing potential to irresolvable political processes, but there is also an anxiety over irresolution. The narrator is “Fulfyld of thought and busy hevynesse”—filled full, but also satisfied by this “hevynesse,” or uneasiness and anxiety⁴⁰—as a result of his reading. Especially noteworthy is that, although the narrator seems at least partially dissatisfied with his reading, the dream that he has of Affrican after he falls asleep continues his contemplative process: “Can I not seyn if that the cause were / For I hadde red of Affrican byforn / That made me to mete that he stod there.”⁴¹ The process is certainly messy: anxiety about love turns into reading about common profit, which then develops into new anxieties that form the basis of a dream vision. However, this emergence makes clear that contemplative processes benefit from (because they continue) changes in perspective. The pursuit of knowledge yields more crops when the harvest includes diverse voices, even though the process might take longer. The archive is endless not only because it is vast, but

³⁹ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 88-91.

⁴⁰ *MED*, s.v. “hevines(se) (n.),” 5b, accessed August 30, 2018.

⁴¹ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 106-08.

also because it is multivocal. The archive's multivocality creates anxiety but also sustains attachment.

Turning for a moment to the end of the poem, and thus the other end of the narrative frame, the narrator's dream and the parliament both end inconclusively, and parliament does seem out of reach. Stunned and awake, the narrator hits the books and digs even deeper into the network of texts available to a clerical intellectual culture that have heretofore appeared throughout the narrative frame, or the archive that frames Nature's Parliament and continues the work of debate:

I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,
To rede upon, and yit I rede alwey.
I hope, ywis, to rede so som day
That I shal mete som thyng for to fare
The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare.⁴²

The crisis of an otherwise detached mental landscape is integrated into an archival assemblage, and, moreover, his experience in that potentiating dream changes how he reads. The archive does not interpret the work of parliament but extends it. Likewise, the extensive archive devoted to common profit and parliamentary procedure suggests that parliament's formality is meant to make us aware that no amount of writing, narrative structure, or political process will make the necessarily complex process less complex or more definitive: the social is undecidable. Similarly, Rosemarie McGerr argues that "the poem suggests that reading in search of education and improvement does not necessarily end at the conclusion of

⁴² Ibid., 695-99.

a particular text but is an ongoing process for seeking a greater end,”⁴³ though I would quibble with “a greater end,” since the end is not in sight or even in mind. The archive preserves voices over time and in time—whatever the specific intentions of its contributors, the archive “rehearses” a vast array of experiences until it can eventually provide relief from current and future problems—until “som day / That I shal mete som thyng for to fare / The bet.” Perhaps next year, or perhaps never; but, to echo Fradenburg, “the Natal is the home that is elsewhere, that must always be ‘found’ again.”⁴⁴ The archive, too, serves a Natal function as a place to which we return, and return again; the process of digging, searching, deliberating is what heals. As a site of Natality, the archive holds together, embraces, and rehearses heterogeneity. It, too, is a site of assembly.

II. Political and Psychological Process in the Dream Vision

Chaucer’s *Parliament* connects political deliberation to mental processes by housing its Natal parliament in the dream vision genre. By placing a debate poem within the dream vision genre, Chaucer locates the psychological ramifications of deliberative processes and adds a psychological layer to parliament’s conceptual development. As noted, psychological healing frames the debate, but the inclusion of the dream vision genre expands the debate’s healing capacities into the mentally constructed parliamentary space, suggesting that Chaucer plays with equating parliamentary process with mental process. That is, Chaucer suggests that parliamentary process *is* psychological. Especially given the role that attachment behavior plays in the exercise of common profit in this poem, and in the motivations behind political process, perhaps it is not particularly surprising that the narrator’s attachment to

⁴³ McGerr, *Chaucer’s Open Books*, 85.

⁴⁴ Fradenburg, *Staying Alive*, 228.

Affrican guides him through the gates and into the space of the parliamentary dream world. Chaucer explores the psychological roots and ramifications of political process through a figuration of otherness, however, that both continues and complicates attachment. Based on Macrobius' dream theory that the day's occupations can spark our dreams,⁴⁵ or what Freud will later refer to as "day residue,"⁴⁶ the narrator postulates that, just as "The wery huntere, slepyng in his bed, / to wode ayeyn his mind goth anon,"⁴⁷ so too do his own reading practices affect his dreams:

Can I not seyn if that the cause were
For I hadde red of Affrican byforn
That made me to mete that he stod there;
But thus seyde he: "Thow hast the so wel born
In lokyng of myn olde bok to torn,

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Macrobius' explanation that our day's occupations can reappear in our dreams only occurs in his discussion of the two dream types to be ignored, namely, the nightmare and the apparition. He writes that "[n]ightmares may be caused by mental or physical distress, or anxiety about the future: the patient experiences in dreams vexations similar to those that disturb him during the day" (I.III.4), and that "[t]he apparition (*phantasma* or *visum*) comes upon one in the moment between wakefulness and slumber, in the so-called 'first cloud of sleep'" (I.III.7). Although the apparition seems similar to the oracular dream, which likewise includes apparitions, apparitions in the oracular dream reveal the future to the dreamer rather than stir confusion, and Macrobius classifies the figurations of Africanus and Aemilius Paulus in Scipio's dream as oracular because "the two men who appeared before him revealed his future" (I.III.12). Important to note is that the difference between apparitions and oracles is their orientation toward the future: apparitions express anxiety about the future, while oracles foretell it. It appears that Chaucer plays with these classifications in his description of "day residue": while the figuration that appears is the oracular Affrican who for Chaucer does indeed produce anxiety throughout his journey in his dream, the narrator's justification for why Affrican might have appeared shares language similar to Macrobius' description of nightmares. Anxiety and attachment here overlap.

⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1955), 560.

⁴⁷ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 99-100.

Of which Macrobye roughte nat a lyte,
That sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte.”⁴⁸

Affrican continues the concentration on attachment that the narrative frame begins: not only does he foreground Macrobius’ own relationship to his text as one of care—he “*roughte nat a lyte*”—but he also promises to “quyte” the narrator’s devoted contemplation of Macrobius’s text. Of course, this word has a double valence in Middle English, as we know from the Prologue to the Miller’s Tale: to “quyte” is either to reward or to seek revenge.⁴⁹ Therefore, Chaucer explores the psychological ramifications of process by including in the dream vision a figuration of otherness and attachment, but as indicated above, one that admits conflict.

“Qyutting” reframes attachment, and the narrator and Affrican’s relationship will further develop throughout the dream journey to suggest that attachments, too, create conflict. The narrator does not develop an intense attachment with his guide, since Affrican eventually leaves him. However, his initial attachment with his guide, an attachment that breeds conflict in the text, eventually leads him to the larger parliamentary space, further acknowledging that individual attachments lead into, prompt, or melt into political attachments, however aggressively. Love of the Other, then, can and must include conflict. A politics of psychoanalysis understands the intimate connection between attachment and conflict; in fact, Lacan writes that transference *depends on* aggression between analyst and analysand because such aggression allows the subject to explore her or his own boundaries with regard to the Other.⁵⁰ Cooperation and cure leave space for conflict. In the remainder of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 106-12.

⁴⁹ *MED*, s.v. “quiten (v.),” 2-3, accessed August 21, 2018.

⁵⁰ Jacques Lacan, “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Finke, 82-101 (New York: Norton, 1996).

this chapter, I will explore the connection between aggression or conflict and political attachments to argue that that parliamentary process is conceptualized in Chaucer as a space that holds heterogeneity together in conflict.

III. Holding Together in Conflict

Affrican's reward to the dreaming narrator pointedly creates a permeable membrane between healing and conflict. The dream begins with Affrican leading the narrator to a bifurcated gate with two contrary pieces of verse written above either of the gate's halves, which offer two models or modes of experiencing difference. On one side, the gate tells that "[t]horgh me men gon into that blyful place / Of hertes hele and dedly wounded cure,"⁵¹ while the other half warns that "[t]horgh me men gon [...] / Unto the mortal strokes of the spere / Of which Disdayn and Daunger is the gyde, / [...] Th'eschewing is the only remedye!"⁵² The language of sickness and cure frames the entrance into the garden and the journey that the narrator takes through it to the eventual parliament. In fact, entering the same gate promises to "cure" the heart's deadly wounds *and* to cause more of (presumably) these same wounds or "strokes." Even more curious than the polarity between these two verses is that they frame the same entrance: since there is no fork in the road, the gate is a both-and. The plush garden on the other side resembles the "grene and lusty May"⁵³ that the healing half of the gate foretells, but the wounding side is also true: the only "remedye" to the "mortal strokes" is to avoid or to "eschew" them, both of which are true in parliament, and both of which describe its processes. The legal, spiritual, and medical converge in seeking "remedye" to wounds insofar as relief is similarly figured in all three. Entering the gate is

⁵¹ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 127-28.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 134-40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 130.

entering a parliamentary space, and the gate makes clear what *could happen* if such a space did not exist: no cure for deadly wounds. Avoiding wounds (and we will recall that the original meaning of “trauma” in Greek is “wound”) leads down the same path as getting them, which presents the double potential of group process. The very processes through which we cure or avoid our traumas have the potential to erupt into violence: assembly can become swarming or rebellion, deliberation can become dueling. However, in this figuration of the parliamentary space, both of the gate’s verses are accomplished simultaneously. Entering the gate promises “deadly wounds cure,” so long as we avoid violence, or the “mortal strokes of the sphere.”

Psychoanalysis offers another way to understand the gate’s bifurcated promise, namely, that the overlap between wound and cure suggests that successful group experience does not reject conflict but incorporates it into a social framework as a means of acknowledging and thus treating it. Davoine and Gaudillière are concerned mainly with the role that trauma can play in the psychoanalytic practice, and they argue that the “social link” functions by providing a social context to which a traumatized patient may connect in order to incorporate trauma into an intersubjective framework, thus refusing its isolating capacities.⁵⁴ Accordingly, they argue that analysts should open their own traumas up to their analysands, and vice versa, as a way of using the attachment between analyst and analysand as a site for experimenting with incorporating traumatic experiences, in whatever form of expression they take. For them, the transmission of trauma is its very treatment, and I understand this to mean that the shareability of trauma—that is, refusing trauma’s unincorporability—is the work of the social link. Transmission becomes treatment, the

⁵⁴ Davoine and Gaudillière, *History Beyond Trauma*, 11-12.

unincorporable becomes social. Translated up in scale to the parliamentary process, the treatment of social wounds does not reject conflict but holds together *in* conflict.

The gate that Chaucer's narrator encounters holds conflicting meanings together and admits that such an embrace also stirs anxieties. Chaucer's narrator "gan astoned"⁵⁵ at the sight of the gate, and in perhaps one of the most vivid and imagistic pieces of Chaucerian poetry, the narrator describes the paralysis of his indecision over whether to enter as akin to a piece of iron fixed between opposite magnetic pulls: "Right as betwixen adamauntes two / Of evene myght, a pece of yren set / Ne hath no myght to meve to ne fro—."⁵⁶ What's more, "myght" describes not only the even strength of each pulling force, but also the narrator's (here portrayed as the iron's) own lack of ability to withstand either pull, implying that his paralysis is not a lack of movement but a struggle *for* or *against* movement, and that his paralysis comes at a great strain. The narrator's daytime anxiety over his inability to know "wher that I flete or synke"⁵⁷ reappears as conflicting magnetic pulls. Holding together in conflict can cause a paralysis that appears immobile and frustrating. But although progress moves no closer to resolution, the apparent lack of movement is the result of conflicting forces gaining expression; terming this "paralysis" takes no account of vibrations of difference that nonetheless move in place, which is a metaphor, too, for parliament's contemplative work and ability to sit with conflict.

The strongest moment of attachment between Affrican and the narrator is also the one with the most conflict: in response to the narrator's paralysis, he tells us that, "Affrycan, my gide, / Me hente and shof at the gates wide," and then tells him that he need not be afraid to

⁵⁵ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 142.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 148-50.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

enter, “For this writing nys nothing ment bei the, / Ne by non but he Loves servaunt be.”⁵⁸ Though ultimately playful and helpful, Affrican’s shove is also aggressive, compounded by his teasing afterward about the narrator’s dullness.⁵⁹ For group experience to provide “remedye” does not necessitate an absence of conflict; in fact, conflict can generate movement, so long as we attune ourselves to movement as such rather than toward a defined outcome. After some more instructive teasing, the narrator concludes his description of the encounter with Affrican’s embrace, writing, “With that myn hand in his he tok anon, / Of which I confort caught, and wente in faste.”⁶⁰ Affrican and our narrator holding hands perhaps provides the best imagery of holding together in conflict because the embrace here betrays vulnerability *and* comfort. Affrican’s (playful) aggression is what heals; conflict indeed remedies the wound. Much as the readerly narrative frame contextualizes the entire poem’s clerkly regard for processes of healing, so too does the gate frame the dream vision’s anxiety about the conflict central to this healing.

IV. Parliamentary Ecology

Thus far, the *Parliament of Fowls* has located its vision of common profit primarily in a series of individual attachments: the clerk with his archive, Scipio with the king and with his dream guide, and now, the narrator with his dreamed apparition. However, the imagery of the poem shifts from a series of intimate attachments to an ecological representation of parliamentary multiplicity, Nature’s Parliament, of course, being the central “place” of the dream vision. The dream vision works to imagine both the Natal and a political migration toward the Natal space, facilitated by a series of attachments. Affrican’s embrace carries the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 153-59.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 169-70.

narrator into a landscape that itself holds difference together, forming a diverse ecological assemblage that imagines the kind of place that such sustained and multiple attachments can construct:

But, Lord, so I was glad and wel begoon!
For overal were that I myne eyen caste
Were treës clad with leves that ay shal laste,
Each in his kynde, of color fresh and green
As emeraude, *that joye was to sene*.⁶¹

This is the first explicit use of “kynde” in the poem, a term that in this instance weds the diversity of the natural landscape with the political diversity of the Three Estates, the word “kynde” of course rooted in these two discourses.⁶² Chaucer constructs a Natal space by re-imagining intimate attachments as ecological heterogeneity, and the logic of the dream world allows these ideas to merge into each other to suggest their mutual dependence. The diversity of “kynde” re-focuses our attention on Parliament’s “place-ness.”⁶³ The landscape celebrates the parliamentary environment by imagining the garden as a place of ecological multiplicity and diversity that is vivacious and thrives, constructing a place in which the narrator sees “nothyng dede.”⁶⁴ As Chaucer’s narrator migrates ever closer to Nature’s Parliament, he witnesses parliament’s own multiplicity of “kynde” radiating outward in influence over the landscape to create an allegorical vision of a parliamentary ecology. Put another way, the

⁶¹ Ibid., 171-75, emphasis mine.

⁶² *MED*, s.v. “kinde (n.),” 9a-b, accessed August 21, 2018.

⁶³ This “place-ness,” of course, is heavily influenced by Allain de Lille’s *De planctu naturae*. See Alan of Lille, *The Plaint of Nature*, ed. and trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980).

⁶⁴ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 187.

narrator need not even arrive at Nature's Parliament in order to witness the effects of its multiplicity, and the dream vision uses place-ness to imagine parliament's capacity to expand its conceptual influence beyond its chambers, thus making a case for its cultural significance. Multiplicity territorializes by including the garden into the parliamentary assemblage, and parliament's own aesthetics of thriving multiplicity also deterritorializes Nature's Parliament so as to avoid limiting its capacities for influence to any specific place or territory. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, the Natal is both at the center *and* outside.⁶⁵

The path our narrator takes is indeed a political migration toward the Natal bird parliament, and the catalogues of "kynde" throughout his journey through the parliamentary ecology reflect the eventual catalogue of birds that marks the assembly point of Nature's Parliament.⁶⁶ We can most compellingly read the narrator's description of the trees that compose the garden's landscape as an allegorical narrative of political process—from conflict to peace—and how such processes provide structures (or guides) through which we arrive at political and spiritual healing, despite both antagonism and deliberation:

⁶⁵ For readings that link naturalism to political identity, see Fradenburg, "Among All Beasts: Affective Naturalism in Late Medieval England," in *Rethinking Chaucerian Beasts*, ed. Carolyn Van Dyke, 13-31 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Randy P. Schiff and Joseph Taylor, eds., *The Politics of Ecology: Land, Life, and Law in Medieval Britain* (Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2016).

⁶⁶ Parliament as a Natal palace is even more pronounced when we consider that the birds of every "kynde" migrate to Nature's Parliament: "Ye knowe wel how, Seynte Valentynes day, / By my statut and thorgh my governaunce, / Ye come for to chese—and fle youre wey— / Your makes" (386-89). The *Parliament of Fowls* combines annual bird migration and mating rituals with governmental assembly as a way to conceptualize the significance of the very processes of assembly that make up the first quarter of the *Modus* (Chapters I-VIII). Much like Chaucer's later Canterbury pilgrimage that spans from the seat of government to the seat of religion (see Chapter 1), the journeys to parliament upon which each Member embarks bear symbolic importance: the journey marks the simultaneous territorialization and deterritorialization of the parliamentary space. Like an archive, the Natal parliament is a space both outside of and also at the center of holding together.

The byldere ok, and ek the hardy asshe;
The piler elm, the cofre unto carayne;
The boxtre pipere, holm to whippes lashe;
The saylynge fyr; the cipresse, deth to playne;
The shetere ew; the asp for shaftes pleyne;
The olive of pes, and eke the dronke vyne;
The victor palm, the laurer to devyne.⁶⁷

Certainly, catalogues of “kynde” are a common trope in classical and medieval poetry, and this one reflects a similar catalogue of birds at the beginning of Nature’s Parliament. Chaucer employs this trope here in the garden in order to offer a roll call reminiscent of the summoning of the parliamentary assembly seen in the *Modus tenendi parliamentum*, a roll call that foregrounds that the multiplicity of the eventual assembly indeed promotes ecological and political vitality (i.e., this is a space in which there is “nothyng dede”). Moreover, the allegorical narrative within this roll call admits the various possibilities of multiplicity, but one that ultimately upholds difference as productive of political life.

Recalling the narrator’s previous assertion that anybody, whether of a “kynde” “lered or lewed,” can work toward common profit, he describes the trees in terms of their contributions to political life. That is to say, how does each species contribute to the natural beauty and vitality of the ecology? The strength and hardiness of the oak and ash trees build and create. But such edification is not always joyful: creation is shortly followed by the elm’s own use to build “cofre,” or coffins. The cypress is used “deth to playne,” arguably necessary after the warlike imagery of the “shetere ew” and the asp that makes “shafters pleyne.”

⁶⁷ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 176-82.

Despite such conflicts, however, the “olyve of pes” and the “dronke vyne” mark a shift in the catalog of trees, switching the narrative from war to the capacity for peace and celebration, completed at the end of the stanza with the “victor palm” and the “laurer to devyne.” Built into the ecology of the garden is the full range of political experience: war and peace, mourning and celebration, humanity and divinity. And most importantly, while this landscape admits both love and strife, the catalogue’s allegory (itself an archive of various experiences) ends the political process with the “devyne”:⁶⁸ common profit indeed leads to eternal life. Although Affrican disappears, this is nonetheless the world of Macrobius’ *Commentary*, reimagined as a threshold to the Natal Parliament.

Both Scipio’s and our narrator’s dreams allow readers to imagine political process through several overlapping episodes and at various scales of experience in order to admit its many possibilities. Much like an actual dream, the episodic structure of the narrator’s own dream vision transitions rather seamlessly from the garden to the Temple of Venus. The structure of the poem, however, plays with the separation between the Temple and the garden in order to at once mark them as different spaces, but also to admit their mutual integration. After the narrator finishes his description of the garden, a new stanza marks another aspect of the environment that the narrator notices. Tucked under one of the allegorical trees is the first of many allegorical figures that belong to the adjacent Temple of Venus: “Under a tre, besyde a welle, I say / Cupide, oure lord, and his arwes forge and file.”⁶⁹ Although marked by a separate stanza, the vision of Cupid is incorporated into the narrative of the tree-lined landscape, and as the narrator continues, we realize that these allegorical figures have been

⁶⁸ *MED*, s.v. “divin(e) (n.),” 3a, accessed August 21, 2018.

⁶⁹ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 211-13.

there all along—“Tho was I war of Plesaunce anon-ryght,”⁷⁰ our narrator just had not yet noticed them. The structure of the dream vision, then, creates a permeable membrane⁷¹ between the space of vitality and the space of “sikes” and “swoghes”⁷² to which it leads, refusing an easy separation between vitality and anxiety, or between the multiple ways of imaging political process. Indeed, they often overlap.

The dream vision genre upholds a membranous relationship among the multiple places of the dream—the Edenic garden, the Temple of Venus, and Nature’s Parliament—in order to imagine the multiple places, institutions, and structures through which political process can occur. While the Edenic, idealistic garden imagines diversity as central to a thriving ecology, the Temple of Venus is also located in the Edenic garden, but offers a simultaneous and overlapping vision of the capacity for political entrenchment in institutions. Contrary to the raucous debate in Nature’s Parliament and the thriving ecological diversity of the parliamentary garden, the Temple of Venus imagines the parliamentary “plaint” not as a continuation of deliberation but as an expression of continual suffering. The concept of the “plaint” in Middle English includes both petitions before the law and lament,⁷³ and despite the Temple’s beauty and its continuation of the Love theme at the center of the poem, “plaints” to its many sovereign figures stymie deliberation between sovereign and commons. The parliamentary “plaint” is here re-imagined as an unanswered lament, certainly another

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁷¹ “Permeable membrane” is really a redundancy; all membranes are permeable and porous and are contact zones that recognize distinctions between entities, but which contact admits change, transformation, or mutation.

⁷² Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 246-48.

⁷³ *MED*, s.v. “pleinen (v.),” 2 and 1 respectively, accessed August 21, 2018.

possibility in the conceptualization of the fate of the petition, and one that is nonetheless transformative regardless of its outcome.

With unanswered “plaint” comes an inability to distinguish “kynde,” or the embodied reality of the individual complainant, instead reimagining a landscape of thriving as one of univocal suffering. Within the Temple, the “noyse” of Nature’s Parliament is figured as “sykes hoote as fyr / I herde a swogh that gan aboute renne, / Which sikkes were engendered with desyr,”⁷⁴ and the narrator discovers “[t]hat al cause of sorwes that they drye / Cam of the bittere goddess Jelosye.”⁷⁵ Unlike Nature’s Parliament, in which the “noyse” of the birds eventually reveals distinct voices, the “sykes” and “swoghes” within the Temple erase difference and maintain only a uniform suffering that envisions parliamentary complaint as lament. This depiction of common complaint culminates with a scene of actual “pleinyng” to sovereign Venus, “To whom on knees two yonge folk ther cryde / To ben here helpe”;⁷⁶ instead of leading to deliberation, the scene shifts to murals on the wall surrounding Venus that feature lovers whose pursuit of love (or whose pursuit of “plaint”) leads to their eventual death. The gate predicts the multiple and simultaneous ways in which we can imagine the parliamentary institution’s capacities for the exercise of its political processes. The narrator’s dream journey likewise admits that, given these starkly different visions of parliament’s conceptual influence, the institutional spaces that we construct and the processes by which we live together-in-difference do indeed matter. The *outcomes* of each space in the dream vision matter less than the processes by which the various elements within heterogeneous spaces communicate.

⁷⁴ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 245-48.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 251-53.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 278-79.

V. The Parliamentary Sovereign

Despite another seamless transition between the Temple of Venus and Nature's Parliament, the starkest contrast between the two places is the representation of the sovereign, specifically its mode of relating to the commons. The first thing that the narrator notices after leaving the Temple and entering "ayeyn into the place / That I of spak, that was so sote and grene,"⁷⁷ is Nature herself. Whereas only the sovereigns in the Temple of Venus are individualized through their descriptions, the assembly of birds that Nature has summoned to her Parliament actually form part of her description:

And in a launde, upon an hil of floures,
Was set this noble goddess Nature.
[...]
Ne there nas foul that cometh of engendrure
That they ne were prest in here presence
To take hire dom and yeve hire audyence.⁷⁸

The Middle English "audience" has three appropriate connotations in this context: the "capacity for hearing or listening," a "council," and the "opportunity to be heard."⁷⁹ Nature's place as the sovereign relies on her capacity to listen, sculpting a much more intersubjective relationship between the assembly of birds and the sovereign that such an assembly legitimizes. The *Modus*' chapter "Concerning the King's Speech" instructs the sovereign "to ask the clergy and laity naming all their grades [...] that they should all diligently, seriously

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 295-96.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 302-08.

⁷⁹ *MED*, s.v. "audience (n.)," 1a, 2b, and 3 respectively, accessed August 21, 2018.

and heartily labour to consider and deliberate on the business of parliament”;⁸⁰ thus, in both conceptualizations of the parliament, a key feature of sovereignty is deliberation rather than the closed-eared portrayal in Venus’ Temple. Nature is there to listen, and her identity as sovereign is constructed by the presence of birds “[o]f every kynde that men thynke may.”⁸¹ That is to say, the multiplicity of the bird parliament reflects a much more fluid identity for the sovereign; she gives her “dom,” but in return, the birds are guaranteed a voice in that very process.

As previously stated, Nature’s “dom” is far from conclusive at the end of her parliament. Her first “statut,” in fact, incorporates deliberation into the very act of giving a “statut,” so that petition and decision are both invitations for intersubjective engagement. She opens parliament by telling the bird assembly, “Ye knowe wel how, Seynt Valentynes day, / By my statut and thorgh my governaunce, / Ye come for to cheese—and fle your wey— / Youre makes.”⁸² The business at hand, of course, is the same business that has occupied the poem heretofore: love, and specifically here, a marriage agreement. But Nature’s very process of governing through her “statut” is a demand to choose. Furthermore, Nature continues her “statut” by clarifying that with each individual bird’s “choice” is also a process of consent, insisting that “in this condicioun / Mot be the choys of everich that is heere, / That she agre to this eleccioun, / Whoso he be that shulde be hire feere.”⁸³ That is, each male bird’s choice requires the female bird’s agreement; the business of parliament is less a matter of easy decision-making and more a matter of the right way to deliberate *en route* to any

⁸⁰ *Modus*, 84-85.

⁸¹ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 311.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 386-89.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 407-10.

decision, whether that decision is of sovereign or common origin. Just as the multiplicity of the commons constructs the very identity of the sovereign, Nature's Parliament conceptualizes sovereignty as itself constructed through deliberative processes rather than uniform decree.

VI. Conflict in Parliamentary Process

The interlocution among the garden, the Temple of Venus, and Nature's Parliament in the dream vision is a performative move that holds together the many possible modes of becoming together in political life. I say "performative" because the dream vision refuses a uniform conceptualization of the parliamentary space and the processes therein, but infuses conflicting conceptualizations into worlds that themselves conflict. Put another way, the slippery boundaries between each space in the dream vision suggests that a crucial part of parliament's work is to create a space that hosts an audience for conflicting worldviews. Jacques Rancière makes a case for the "configuration of [politics'] own space," arguing that the function of politics "is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one."⁸⁴ Politics is the process by which we imagine new modes of living, but these imagined, not-yet-existing modes indeed conflict with the other worlds in which we live. He continues by expanding the importance of overlapping worlds:

Political argumentation is at one and the same time the demonstration of a possible world in which the argument could count as an argument, one that is addressed by a subject qualified to argue, over an identified object, to an addressee who is required to see the object and hear the argument that he

⁸⁴ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 37.

“normally” has no reason to either see or hear. It is the construction of a paradoxical world that puts together two separate worlds.⁸⁵

Consequently, “[c]onsensus is the ‘end of politics’: in other words, not the accomplishment of the ends of politics but simply a return to the normal state of things—a non-existence of politics.”⁸⁶ As previously stated, the Natal space is an ideal conceptual site for working through both individual and larger-scale cultural traumas precisely because the simultaneous “no-where” but also “every-where” of the Natal (i.e., its deterritorializing capacities) put unincorporable worlds into contact with one another. As Rancière argues, political argumentation is not meant to be a battle for political supremacy, but rather a conceptualization or theorization of new capacities for politics in the world. Political argumentation shares a common purpose with the *Modus tenendi parliamentum* and the *Parliament of Fowls* insofar as they all root these conceptualizations in the world. The site of politics—which I have been referring to here as a parliamentary Natality—demands an audience for politically conceptualized worlds so that they do not remain unincorporable but instead are made real through social links, however amicable or antagonistic those links might be. The *Modus* and Chaucer’s *Parliament* need not raze the political landscape in order to assert the supremacy of one political worldview; they create spaces for argumentation as a substitute for violence and destruction, rhetorical or real.

Indeed, both the tercel eagles’ monologues and the Commons’ debate both seem circular in their lack of resolution; however, speech that preserves difference nonetheless mitigates the capacity for difference to erupt into violence. Readings of the poem that

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

condemn the parliamentary debate as fool's speech ignore that the ongoing, even if at times tedious, "noyse"⁸⁷ squashes the threat of violence that nearly erupts in the middle of parliament. Once Nature sees that the debate is headed nowhere, she requests that each class of birds elect a representative to speak on their behalf. What pushes the parliament along is a parliamentary process of sorts reminiscent of the committee of twenty-five discussed in the *Modus* in Chapter 1, and it does so by simultaneously redirecting the circuitous debate while also avoiding the violence that can erupt when debate breaks down. This section is worth quoting in full:

The terslet seyde thane in this manere:

“Ful hard were it to preve by resoun

Who loveth best this gentil formel heere;

For everych hath swich replicacioun

That non by skilles may be brought adoun.

I can not se that argumentes avayle:

Thenne semeth it there moste be batayle.”

“Al redy!” quod these egles tercelles tho.

“Nay, sires,” quod he, “if that I durste it seye,

Ye don me wrong, my tale is not ido!

For, sires—ne taketh not agref I prey—

It may not gon as ye wolde in this weye;

Oure is the voyse that han the charge in honde,

⁸⁷ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 500.

And to the juges dom ye moten stonde.”⁸⁸

The threat of parliamentary violence certainly has its historical counterparts, and as the Parliament of 1381⁸⁹ demonstrated, migration can all too easily morph into swarming. The November 1381 parliament was delayed from November 4th to November 9th because of a threatening display of assembly. According to the *Rolls* for that parliament:

[A] great dispute had broken out between my lords the duke of Lancaster [John of Gaunt] and the earl of Northumberland [Henry Percy], which had caused complaint to be made to the king and alarming rumours to circulate amongst the people, because of the great force of men-at-arms and archers, arrayed in warlike manner, who had come to parliament for one or other of the parties. And as our lord the king, his council, and the lords of the realm had been fully occupied in arranging a peaceable and effective settlement, our said lord the king caused the same parliament to be adjourned for once more until the following Saturday [...] so that in the meantime he could hear the said duke and earl and, with the help of our Lord, put an end to their dispute.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 533-46.

⁸⁹ Scholars generally date Chaucer’s poem sometime around 1380, arguing that “the poem concerns the negotiations in 1380 for the betrothal of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia” (Benson, Introduction to *The Parliament of Fowls*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 384). I turn to the November 1381 parliament as a historical counterpart for two reasons. First, it is the only parliament that mentions Richard and Anne’s marriage arrangements, and in fact temporarily adjourns in part because of Richard’s wedding. Second, the main topic of debate in this parliament was the Peasants’ Rebellion, which wracked London and southern England from June to July 1381. Therefore, up for debate was how parliament (especially the Commons) ought to use its procedural and authoritative capacities to quell and prevent uprisings among the *comune* for the sake of common profit—and, of course, to ensure governmental authority.

⁹⁰ *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England (PROME)*, ed. Chris Given-Wilson (Scholarly Digital Editions), parliament of 1381, C 65/37, item 1, www.sd-editions.com/PROME/home.html.

Of course, the difference between these threats of violence is that the *Rolls* (at least temporarily) suspend the work of parliament, whereas the *Parliament* summons its deliberative capacities to avoid conflict. However, both the *Parliament*'s election and Richard's role in mediating Lancaster and Northumberland's skirmish use deliberation to stop parliament's work, redirect it, and start it anew. These movements are in and of themselves marked accomplishments: speech might not lead to full resolution, but it does move away from violence because it can be refigured without wounding the body and hence without, or with less, trauma—again, the Greek meaning of “trauma” being, of course, “wound,” “rupture.”

Worth mentioning is the obvious point that debate does not always work. However, parliamentary processes nurture speech's full potential rather than eliding it altogether: deliberation leads to election, and then to representation: “*Oure* is the voys.” For Fradenburg, “representation does not obscure existence, but magnifies and re-stylizes it on another level.”⁹¹ In both instances above, speaking on behalf of (or mediating) enables re-figurations of conflict, and the work of governing makes representation an act of sharing, especially of the Natal, which is admittedly both fraught and intimate. Giancarlo argues that the falcon's rhetorical move in speaking on behalf of the assembly “collapses the plural into the singular” and “opens up a space that would otherwise be occupied by physical conflict and, presumably, it will enable the assembly to find the one voice needed for resolution.”⁹² The Natal's deterritorializing impulse is, on the one hand, what enables its intersubjective qualities: the center of the territory is outside, which is what connects it to other territories,

⁹¹ Fradenburg, *Staying Alive*, 230.

⁹² Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, 160.

depending on one another, in an array of intersubjective assemblages. But on the other hand, the shareable quality of the Natal, in fostering the social link, also poses the threat of violence or conflict. But here, language facilitates becoming and group experience, and this movement avoids traumatic upheaval. Too often, too, the failure of the 1381 rebellion, like Lollard dissent and its brutal suppression, have been taken precisely as failures, rather than as archival achievements “holding together” certain heterogeneous demands than can be read again in the future.

Despite what seems like each parliament’s desire to settle these problems permanently, the *Rolls* testify that this process is endless, and in this way arguably necessary. Questions of parliamentary representation evolve into questions on political counsel. If it were possible to claim an overall narrative for the *Rolls*, it is a story about the constant determination to define just counsel, to weed out negative or excessive influence over the king, and to remain a regularly present source of monarchical accountability as an assembled (hence heterogeneous) and elected body. In January 1327, during parliament’s deposition of Edward II, the Commons worked to ensure that bad counselors like the Despensers would never again gain such unchecked influence.⁹³ Likewise, in the Good Parliament of 1376 under Edward III, what Ormrod describes as the “procedural novelty” of impeachment was developed, because it seemed to the Commons “that if their said liege lord had always had

⁹³ *PROME*, parliament of 1327, C 65/1, item 33: “Also, the community prays: that suitable and wise men be placed around the king, who will give him good counsel, and that they be chosen by the great men, and that none of them, or any other great man of the realm, or anyone from the king’s household, neither great nor small, or any official who shall be under the authority of the king or supported by him or by another person, or by the mandate of letters, parties or quarrels by which the common law is disturbed. And if it is found that anyone has done this, let it be explained at the next parliament and let him be removed from the king’s council. And that the injured party shall recover his damages against him.”

loyal counselors around him, and good officers, our same lord king would have been well enriched with treasure, and therefore would not have much need to charge his commonality by means of a subsidy.”⁹⁴ And in Richard II’s 1381 parliament, the Commons attempted to create an archive of counsel, requesting that “the said degrees and estates should take it upon themselves severally to write down the faults found in governance, together with advice on the corrective remedies to be applied, so that the lords and commons, [...] may with reason the better proceed to an effective decision to amend that which is to be amended in the said governance.”⁹⁵ Hence, during a period of more than fifty years, from 1327 to 1381, parliament’s work is never completely conclusive: counsel is ongoing, and it requires and benefits from periodic revision. To say that parliament is unsuccessful because its work cannot be accomplished in a single session is simply false, since the 1327 and 1376 parliaments were contemporarily celebrated victories in parliamentary history. Parliament’s own narrative through the *Rolls* presents its work as continuously developing methods of counsel, quite simply because some problems take time.

VII. “Inconclusiveness” as Continuation

A concern over time is the case in Chaucer’s parliament, as well. The common and noble birds offer extensive amounts of advice to Nature and the formel alike, and as Nature notes, “I have herd al youre opynyoun, / And in effect yit be we never the neer.”⁹⁶ As a result, Nature’s solution is to begin processing this parliament’s counsel by allowing the formel eagle to make her own decision as to whom she wishes to marry: “But finally, this is

⁹⁴ *PROME*, parliament of 1376, C 65/30, item 15.

⁹⁵ *PROME*, parliament of 1381, C 65/37, item 28.

⁹⁶ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 618-19.

my conclusioun, / That she hireself shal han hir eleccioun / Of whom hire lest.”⁹⁷ The formel’s decision, however, is to deliberate with or counsel herself, to contemplate: “Almyghty queen, unto this yer be don, / I axe respit for to avise me, / And after that to have my choys al fre.”⁹⁸ If we can alter our framework for evaluating political success away from fantasies of accountability and outcomes, we can more productively read her decision as successfully acknowledging the power of possibility and reinvention. The formel eagle’s delay ensures that this assembly will meet again in a year’s time; in fact, because the parliament of birds meets annually on Saint Valentine’s Day, this poem offers a model of governance that values contemplation and careful decision-making through the use of constant counsel in order to ensure common profit. Also, the annual bird migration to the Natal parliament structurally resembles the psychoanalytic process in the time it grants and in the space it constructs to repeatedly revisit problems through intersubjective experience. Furthermore, it is difficult to overlook the similarities between our narrator’s own contemplative reading “for to fare / the bet,” and the formel eagle’s request “for to avise me”: both reveal the importance of the poem’s narrative frame for interpreting the dreamwork. That is, we read the formel’s decision to consider her counsel to be as productive as we read the narrator’s desire to extend his dream by digging through the archive. Also, again, contemplation is a springboard for attachment: the formel will ruminate on her suitors’ speech, and such rumination will “end” with yet another assembly. By encasing the parliamentary process in a dream vision that also parallels its own frame’s endless pursuit of

⁹⁷ Ibid., 620-22.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 647-49.

knowledge, Chaucer's parliament offers a vision of governing that draws a parallel between recurring (and psychoanalytic) mental processes and parliamentary deliberation.

Such a model is not entirely without precedent, and Chaucer celebrates in his own poem moments in parliament that did not avoid adjournment simply for the sake of rushing a decision. As stated above, Richard II postponed the assembly of the 1381 parliament in order to resolve the conflict between Lancaster and Northumberland. But that parliament witnessed another temporary adjournment. As Christmas was approaching, parliament had stagnated in its discussions with Richard on whether the Commons would extend the wool subsidy to fund Richard's government. As quoted above, the Commons made clear that if the king maintained proper counsel, his government would have the necessary finances to support itself and would not be required to tax an already impoverished, and already discontent, *comune*, which discontent was one very important motivation behind the recent summer rebellion. Also, the king's wedding was approaching. As a result, the king temporarily adjourned parliament, and requested that the Commons consider his requests, to which they replied that "before their return they should go back to their own communities, and that each in his own country should make such explanation that the same commons would be more willing to aid and grant money to our lord the king than they were at present."⁹⁹ Parliament is adjourned to satisfy the needs of both king and Commons, with the explicit charge of further contemplation and deliberation. That is to say, although parliament is adjourned, its work extends back out to its multiple territories and continues the work of counsel. The work of the Natal is both composed of and composes its surrounding territories. When parliament

⁹⁹ *PROME*, parliament of 1381, C 65/37, item 37.

reassembled in January 1382, the Commons temporarily granted the wool subsidy both to satisfy present need and ensure another parliamentary migration.

As in the 1381(-2) parliament(s), there is a conclusion to the *Parliament of Fowls*, so long as we are attuned to common profit. Before Nature adjourns parliament until the following year—“A yer is nat so longe to endure”¹⁰⁰—the common birds are finally able to choose their mates:

And when this werk al brought was to an ende,
To every foul Nature yaf his make
By evene accord, and on here way they wende.
And, Lord, the blisse and joye that they make!¹⁰¹

Dodd’s argument that because the birds cannot arrive at a single solution they are “therefore unable to act for the common good” misinterprets what is good for the *comune*. Even though the eagles are unable to reach a decision, the lower birds nonetheless leave with their mates—in this sense, the work of the parliament has absolutely been accomplished. In fact, arguing that this parliament is “inconclusive” reveals a kinship with the royalist agenda more so than with common profit; that is to say, this parliament is only inconclusive if its only business were the singular marriage agreement between the formel eagle and her potential suitor. Our narrator has already taught us that there is no single way to work for common profit, and in this case waiting privileges taking seriously, contemplating, and revisiting counsel. The *Parliament of Fowls*, rather than registering its discontent or hopelessness with the nascent parliament, is gently reframing what we understand as political progress. If we

¹⁰⁰ Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 661.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 666-69.

were to move away from a teleological political narrative in which each parliamentary assembly left its mark of accomplishment in the archive, and instead embrace the work of recurrence, we might arrive at a politics of psychoanalysis.

All this is to say that we need to broaden how we measure political progress. I end by suggesting that parliament was more than an institution: it was an intellectual and expressive movement that captured the public imagination. When viewed in this light, the work of governance becomes less concerned with outcome and more with process—not only in the sense of bureaucracy, though that certainly had its place in both dysfunction and in ensuring the institution’s rootedness in the political landscape—but more importantly, as an intellectual and expressive movement that valued a long-term narrative of recurrent thinking and of emergence. And moreover, it was a conceptual movement committed to the implementation of ideas in the real political process. Focusing so much on processes that hold together attachments ensures that conceptual ideas like those in the *Modus* do not just remain there: the archives themselves participate in the theorization of an institution in the making. The *Modus tenendi parliamentum* and the *Parliament of Fowls* both share a commitment to becoming that extends their work through an archive: they value an archeology versus a teleology.¹⁰² In Chaucer’s *Parliament* specifically, there are ample opportunities for wounds and death: our narrator is in limbo between floating and sinking; the gated entrance to the garden leads to either life or death; the suffering in the Temple of Venus sits adjacent to Nature’s vital parliament; violence is always on the cusp of speech, but never quite surfaces in the debate. The *Parliament of Fowls* is not a poem about trauma, but

¹⁰² See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970), 459-93.

this is precisely the point: it is a poem about processes for avoiding wounds, and this is done through the continuation of group experience. Parliament is a site concerned with forging attachments, and this is what makes parliament and its archive places for survival.

CHAPTER 3:

AFFECTIVE RHETORIC OF COMPLAINT: *PIERS PLOWMAN* AND PETITIONARY CULTURE

The enduring image that opens the first dream vision in *Piers Plowman* is the Prologue's "fair feeld ful of folk," which captures the individual's and the *comune*'s struggles navigating a socio-political landscape marked by institutional abstractions and estates satire.¹ How does an individual or a community express particular affects in a world marked by institutions? As seen with Lady Meed in Chapter 1, institutions can foist upon the individual abstract, representational identities, which risk erasing the lived experience of the subject before the law. Langland's narrator must also endure this struggle by learning to navigate the abstractions that he encounters in his dream world. Will almost immediately falls asleep at the beginning of the B-Prologue, and he finds his dream world to be a confusing and unknown "wildernesse, wiste I neuere where."² Will's first reaction is fear, due to a lack of understanding about how to navigate his environment. However, as Will looks toward the east, he sees two allegorical structures that situate him by guiding his affective response to his landscape:

As I biheeld *into þe eest* an heiz to þe sonne,

I seiþ *a tour on a toft trieliche ymaked*,

A deep dale byneþe, a dungeon þerinne,

¹ Evidence for the importance of the image of the "fair feeld ful of folk" lies in *Piers Plowman*'s revision history: the three lines that describe the "folk" are consistent across the A, B, C, and Z texts with only orthographic differences distinguishing them. Clearly, this image was important enough to be the poem's stable opening across Langland's (and clerical) revision process.

² Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.12. All citations from *Piers Plowman* will include version letter, Passus, and line numbers.

Wiþ *depe* diches and *derke* and *dredfulle* of siȝte.³

While the abstractions that Will observes are not immediately clear, they do orient his affective responses, initiating his own journey and wandering through the various institutions that Will encounters. Will's descriptions of the "tour" as "trieliche ymaked" (i.e., excellently made)⁴ and the "dungeon" as "dredfulle of siȝt" (i.e., a fearful sight)⁵ are affective descriptions, or at least trigger affective reactions in Will, and Will's affective responses orient him within an otherwise alien socio-political milieu.

Navigating abstracted, institutional landscapes not only produces affects in the wanderer, but also requires affective responses for successful navigation. Later in Passus I, after Will asks the Boethian figure Holy Church what these places are,⁶ he discovers that the tower and the dungeon are allegorical representations of heaven and hell respectively. In the tower lives Truthe, "fader of feiþ,"⁷ and in the dungeon, "Therinne wonyeþ a wiȝt þat Wrong is yhote, / Fader of falshede."⁸ While Will's dream wilderness is at first glance a landscape unknown, and despite his confusion about what he sees, from Malvern Hills, where Will stands, a glance eastward would position Will toward London; that is, he nonetheless orients himself by looking, however loosely, toward England's institutional center—toward a site of institutional Natality, a communal place of origin that is always outside of one's immediate context, and to which one must always journey. This journey and his wanderings are fueled by his affective reactions to what he sees. Institutions and their abstract representations are

³ Ibid., B.Prol.13-16, emphasis mine.

⁴ *OED*, s.v. "tried (adj.)," 2a., accessed October 19 2016.

⁵ Ibid., "dreadfully (adv.)," 1, accessed October 19 2016.

⁶ Emily Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013); 21-27.

⁷ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.I.14.

⁸ Ibid., B.I.63-64.

not bereft of affect, but depend upon it for successful navigation. And navigating institutions produces affect.

The poem's description of the "fair field ful of folk" uses the rhetoric of common petitions to enable individual or collective wanderings through institutional landscapes. The abstractions of Truth and Wrong and the affects that they produce lead Will next to living mankind. The two allegorical "faders"⁹ are bookends to something not abstracted but living, to a dynamic society, a "fair feeld ful of folk," where people live and perform the actions of their daily lives, and where "folk" negotiate their ways through a world that, as for Will, both situates them and troubles them. Noteworthy, however, is that the language of the parliamentary petition forges the interactions among the folk. Will sees "[a] fair feeld ful of folk fond I þer bitwene— / Of alle manere of men, þe meene and þe riche, / Werchyng and wandryng as þe world askep."¹⁰ "Askep" is a term in Middle English that corresponds with the Law French terms "prier" and "supplier," which populate the opening lines of a common petition, or its *salutatio*. The standard formulas for the beginning of a common petition's *salutatio* are "Item, prie la commune," or "Item, supplient les communes." The verb *prier* translates as both "to pray" (i.e., "Also, the commons pray...," a typical translation) and also

⁹ Noteworthy, too, is that folk exist between two Fathers; they are bounded by two types of Law, in the Lacanian understanding of the Law of the Father—the very things which admit entrance into the symbolic order and open systems of language, but which also *can* threaten oppression by that very same integration into language. The Lacanian role of the Father as the entryway into the symbolic order likewise speaks to the fourteenth-century individual's lived experience navigating and living with and within their various institutions. Specifically, the individual or Everyman's access to parliament was both textual and oral through petitions, which were written and read before parliament. Entry into language is itself an intersubjective relationship, with all its freedoms of individual utterance and possible oppression by prescribed linguistic formulations. In this way, I read "abstractions" here along these same lines to mean the abstracted ideas upheld and executed by institutions, cultural or more literal.

¹⁰ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.17-19.

as “to ask for,” and thus the *Piers B-Prologue* borrows from petitionary rhetoric and translates it into the Middle English vernacular, accessible to “alle manere of men.”¹¹ Furthermore, “supplier” translates as “to *petition*,” but the more literal “supplicate” likewise summons the rhetoric of the “ask.” The Middle English “askep” thus summons the language of petitionary complaint. Here, the rhetoric of the petition introduces the reader to the full range of “folk” that form society and to the bonds that hold together “all manere of men, þe meene and þe riche,” along with its problems and pleasures. Petitionary language is binding: it places demands on the folks’ working and wandering, but it also binds disparate people in an imperfect community. The ask, and also the rhetoric of the petition, is intersubjective, community forming, and affective.

The opening stanzas of the *Piers B-Prologue* thus begin the first dream vision and the entire poem by describing complaint—the petition, the ask—and its corresponding documents as affective expressions. This is not to understate, however, petitions’ standardized and carefully crafted rhetorical form. Dodd documents the parliamentary petition’s routine five-part structure, but concludes that such standardization implies that “administrative and legal convention was actually more important in determining the form taken by the petition than any consideration to have the petition ‘speak the language’ of those in whose name it was written.”¹² However, as we shall see, these forms did not erase the language of the particular individual or community in favor of standardized institutional forms, as though rote bureaucratic form were the key mechanism for navigating institutions of complaint. *All* existing signifiers have been used before, and in combinations similar to

¹¹ J.H. Baker, ed., *A Manual of Law French* (New York: Routledge, 2016), s.v. “prier (v).”

¹² Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 294.

new ones, which has never exhausted our creativity. Accordingly, there is no hard-and-fast distinction between formulae and “original” speech. In introducing the folk, the petitionary language of the “ask” is joined to the folks’ “wandrynge,” which suggests that while petitionary (read, institutional) forms can be binding, they also enable folk “of alle manner of men” to wander and navigate the world and its institutions that mark its landscape.

Standardized form provides “scripts” for expressing affect in parliamentary contexts, and these formal qualities open the way for wild affects to enter into bureaucratic spaces.

“Affective scripts” preserve the individual within institutional contexts, and access to standardized, bureaucratic forms enables the expression of individuated affect. The Prologue bookends human lived experience between two abstracted “realities” because, like the language, style, rhetoric, and formulae of the petition, which we can abstract into a genre with common qualities, such formulae nonetheless leave room for both individuation and intersubjectivity.

I. *Ars dictaminis* and the Parliamentary Petition: Increased Capacities for Governance and Intersubjectivity

Describing the field of folk’s wanderings through the petitionary language of the “ask” summons the rhetoric of the common petition, a type of petition submitted before parliament to the king on behalf of groups of individuals, towns, or on behalf of the entire Commons. Most critics agree that the parliamentary context for Langland’s B-text revisions was the Good Parliament of 1376, and the hallmark of this parliament from a bureaucratic standpoint is the deluge of common petitions entered on the parliament rolls—126 in total. Although the history of the parliamentary petition begins some one hundred years prior during King Edward I’s Parliament of 1275, these were private petitions that individuals

submitted to the king; not until Edward III's parliaments do we see Common petitions entered into the parliament rolls. However, the distinctions between private and common petitions in terms of style and arrangement reveal that during the one hundred year history of the parliamentary petition, from 1275 to 1376, the language of the petition becomes more affective, the structure of the petition becomes simplified in order to highlight the portions of the petition that are affectively laden, and the success of a common petition often depends on the clerk's ability to offer affective narratives that contextualize the ask within a *pathos*-driven framework. These affective narratives sought to create a relationship between the petitioning parties and the king in which the language of the petition is allegorized as an affective bond between the king and the *comune*. Finally, although the history of the parliamentary petition does not begin until King Edward I's parliament of 1275, and the common petition does not appear until Edward III's parliaments, the petitionary form already had a longstanding ancestor in the art of letter writing, or the rhetorical tradition of the *ars dictaminis*.

Despite the petitionary form's long history within the genre of prose discourse dating back to classical antiquity, the use of the parliamentary petition for seeking redress was not a gradual procedural development over time, but rather resulted from a deliberate and sudden shift in government policy initiated by Edward I's law reforms in the 1270s.¹³ Prior to Edward I's reforms, the individual's only option for seeking remedy was through common

¹³ See Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 189; John Maddicott, "Parliament and the Constituencies, 1272-1377," in *The English Parliament in the Middle Ages*, eds. R.G. Davies and J.H. Denton, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1981), 63, quoted in Guilhem Pépin, "Petitions from Gascony: Testimonies of a Special Relationship," in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, eds. W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd, and Anthony Musson (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), 122.

law, which was often under the jurisdiction of local legal institutions, such as local courts of assizes, and, many times, conflicts of interest at the local level precluded remedy. For example, redress sought against an offence by a local official or lord had no other avenue than through local institutions, which often resulted in a lack of remedy for many petitioners, the stagnation or manipulation of political process, and resulting toxicity in political attachments and trust of justice due to the corruption of local legal institutions.¹⁴ In an example from a parliament in the sixth year of Edward I's reign, the Hereverton family petitioned parliament because they were ejected from their tenements by their neighbors "without judgment of court." Worth noting is that through the parliamentary petition below, the Herevertons have a second chance at remedying their situation, and as they do so, they conceptualize the petition and parliament as offering a more reliable care practice than is available through common law:

[T]hey appeared at the court of Bromsgrove immediately after this ejectment and *complained to the bailiff of Bromsgrove immediately of this ejectment and made a fine to the bailiff for him to make an enquiry into this and do them justice in the matter, as by his office he ought to do*; the bailiff granted them the enquiry and fixed a certain day for them and had summoned the neighbours. On which day the bailiff, the plaintiffs and the neighbours who had been summoned appeared. *Then the bailiff answered the plaintiffs aforesaid that their adversaries were powerful and had a great heart and so he would take no enquiry.* And so William of Hereverton, Emma of Hereverton and Maud de Hereverton seek remedy of this of the king's court,

¹⁴ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 11, 29.

as the land belongs to the ancient demesne of the king and *none dare get remedy at common law*.¹⁵

In trying to resolve their legal matters, the Herevertons first complained to the local bailiff for remedy and justice, “as by his office he ought to do.” That is, the background narrative in the petition is careful to explain that the bailiff has an obligation to provide remedy and to bring the case back into the purview of the law. However, on the day of the trial, the bailiff decided that because the Herevertons’ neighbors were “powerful and had a great heart,” the case was dismissed and justice was not served. As the Herevertons’ case shows, corruption in common law due to class difference often precluded remedy, and thus petitioners conceptualized parliamentary petitions as providing an alternative route for receiving justice. In fact, the Herevertons go so far as to say that “none dare get remedy at common law,” presumably because the lands in question belong to the king. But this brief rhetorical flourish at the end of the petition does more than establish jurisdiction: it villainizes the corruption of common law procedures and provides early signs of the kind of affective language that populates common petitions roughly a century later.

Despite the Crown’s increasing reach into the legal business of localities, Edward I’s reforms provided a “supplement” rather than an alternative to common law procedures. In offering a supplemental path to remedy, not only did parliamentary petitions allow citizens to seek remedy directly from the king and his parliament in written form, but the process also held local officials accountable and extended royal authority to the localities, since redress for local grievances was no longer only under the purview of local legal institutions.¹⁶

¹⁵ *PROME*, parliament of 1278, item 51, emphasis mine.

¹⁶ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 33.

Edward I conceptualized his parliament as expanding opportunities for peaceful legal remedy via petitionary—textual—interactions.¹⁷ Prior to 1275, redress from the Crown was only available through oral supplication; transforming the process of supplication from only oral to both oral and written—that is, petitions were read aloud before the king and his council—encouraged an opportunity for justice by formally enrolling the petitioner’s complaint into the official parliament roll and her or his body into the parliamentary space.¹⁸ Put another way, parliament itself provided a centralized space, both physical and archival, and a centralized process (itself a care practice) for expanding the citizens’ capacities for interacting with the law, with legal institutions, and with the Crown in an embodied way that itself was driven by textual access. The petitionary process prompted these shifting capacities for attachment to the King through remedial justice, and gave petitioners agency in their own contributions to the parliamentary archive by recording grievance into the archive.

The image of the fair field of folk wandering through the various institutional abstractions in the *Piers Plowman* Prologue can likewise be considered “petitionary” because it allegorizes the petitioner’s day-to-day experience navigating the increasing bureaucracy that supported the increased intake of parliamentary “asks,” which bureaucracy I will spend time briefly describing. Given the increased opportunity for citizens to enroll their grievances, traumas, and complaints into the parliament rolls, the petitionary process in particular made the parliament essential for the running of ordinary, day-to-day medieval life. Petitions required inventing bureaucratic processes and expanding state departments to be

¹⁷ Ormrod, “Introduction: Medieval Petitions in Context,” in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, 1-11; 9.

¹⁸ Paul Brand, “Understanding Early Petitions: An Analysis of the Content of Petitions to Parliament in the Reign of Edward I,” in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, 99-119; 117.

able to receive, process, and respond to them, and the individual petitioner would have had to navigate these various processes, but not on their own. The parliament was a central, regularly-meeting intake point for a variety of petitions, which facilitated the petitioner's "wandrynges" by gathering petitions before sending them off to the appropriate councils and state departments.¹⁹ Likewise, it was parliament that provided the most transparent process for the trial and resolution of complaints, in direct contrast to local legal processes.²⁰ In these ways, the increase in government bureaucracy was not simply a royal power grab, but served as a care practice—supplementing current common law by filling in its gaps in justice—that recognized the individuality of each complaint, and the receivers of petitions in parliament routed them to the sites where they would have the best chance of meeting redress, if redress were deemed appropriate—for example, to the Chancery or the Exchequer. For example, the Herevertons' petition received the following answer: "Let suit be made in the court of chancery," which, rather than deflecting remedy onto yet another bureaucratic office or process, extends the complaint by routing it to its appropriate site, thus ensuring its survival. In contrast to the bailiff's answer that "he would take no enquiry," petitionary practices elongate complaint; elongation here is not simply a frustrating bureaucratic process, but also a care practice. The expansion of bureaucracy around the petition increased the involvement of key state departments in confronting and processing the affective experiences of the individual and the *comune*, and this recognition of individual complaint is reflected in the petition's simultaneous fixed form and wide range of affective content included across parliamentary petitions.

¹⁹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 52.

²⁰ Ormrod, "Medieval Petitions," 7.

The origins of the parliamentary petition date back to the classical rhetorical tradition of prose composition, which already asserts the centrality of communicating and creating affect as a means toward successful persuasion in prose composition. The most widely circulated prose rhetorical manual of the Middle Ages was the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, formerly attributed to Cicero, which lays the foundations for not only the petition's eventual form, but also for stirring the emotions of the reader-audience as a way of receiving a favorable outcome for one's request.²¹ Towards the beginning of the *Rhetorica*, the author asserts the importance of securing the goodwill of one's audience by appealing to the affective bonds that exist between the petitioner and the audience. This is accomplished in part by describing one's own affective state, because this will appeal to the bond between the parties involved in the discourse. It states that "[f]rom the discussion of our own person we shall secure goodwill by [...] setting forth our disabilities, need, loneliness, and misfortune, and pleading for our hearers' aid, and at the same time showing that we have been unwilling to place our hope in anyone else."²² These *pathos*-driven descriptions of one's emotional state not only segue into an appeal for aid, but also highlight the bond that is already there between the two parties. Furthermore, the appeal to aid establishes the art of discourse as fundamentally petitionary in nature, suggesting that this text is an ancestor to the more immediate ancestor of the petition: the *ars dictaminis* tradition.

²¹ During the Middle Ages, the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* was attributed to Cicero, but it later was discovered that he did not in fact write the *Rhetorica*; the author remains unknown. See Harry Caplan, "Introduction," to [Cicero], *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, ed. and trans. by Harry Caplan (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1954); vii-xl.

²² [Cicero], *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, ed. and trans. by Harry Caplan (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1954), I.V.8. All citations of the *Rhetorica* will include book, section, and line numbers hereafter.

Petitionary form was modeled on a widespread, recognizable rhetorical genre: the *ars dictaminis*, or the art of letter writing. The use of this familiar rhetorical form made the petition less alien to petitioners, who would have already been familiar with letter writing. In fact, because the petition was modeled on another widely familiar genre, and because the petition made the *ars dictaminis* form even more widespread, petitionary form eventually “represented a legitimate and readily understood method of approaching the king with a grievance; it was therefore, potentially, a very useful mechanism for the politically disenfranchised to legitimize their more revolutionary demands for reform.”²³ In accordance with the *ars dictaminis*, Dodd documents that private petitions were initially structured in five parts: the *salutatio*, or formal greeting to the addressee; the *exordium*, or the introduction to the complaint; the *narratio*, or the narration of circumstances leading to the complaint; the *petitio*, or the text of the actual request; and finally, the *conclusio*, or the ending salutation.²⁴ Dodd explains that petitioning was such a “ubiquitous activity in late medieval England that we should not assume that formal training at Westminster was necessarily needed for a capable clerk to become proficient in writing out such documents.”²⁵ While literacy was certainly required to execute such form, access to scribes familiar with petitionary form was widespread, and a number of professional document writers both within and outside of

²³ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 295.

²⁴ For an extended discussion of petitionary form and its connection to the *ars dictaminis* tradition, see Dodd, “Writing Wrongs: The Drafting of Supplications to the Crown in Later Fourteenth-Century England,” *Medium Ævum* 80, no. 2 (2011): 217-46; and Camargo, *Medieval Rhetorics of Prose Composition: Five English Artes Dictandi and Their Tradition* (Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995).

²⁵ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 306-7.

parliament, and even within and outside of London, were capable of assisting petitioners.²⁶ Because of the close alliance between the *ars dictaminis* and the parliamentary petition, the petition was a common rhetorical form that was recognizable among the middle class (both literate and illiterate, as letters could be read aloud), university students trained in the rhetorical arts, and courtly audiences accustomed to using the *ars dictaminis* for government correspondence alike. Such recognition opened up legal process to a wide range of people and reinforces that petitionary and letter-writing rhetoric, form, and language was ubiquitous, and even household knowledge. Letter writing was already conceptualized as a means by which one person requested something from another by appealing to favor and grace—that is, to attachments and emotions—thus making this form the proper way to appeal to an authority through affective rhetoric in daily life.²⁷ Such a common form allowed room for individuation, however, which was accomplished through the affective rhetoric used in crafting the particular language of the supplication.

The parliamentary petition adopted this consistent rhetorical form, but the wide range of content possible for a petition and the rhetoric that supplemented the “facts” of the complaint make the petitionary form a highly affective genre. As opposed to emotion—the socially constructed descriptors of feelings—affect is the embodied and bodily expression of feeling. This distinction is significant because one aspect of petitionary form was its embodied oral and aural performance, and such embodiment is consistent with the rhetorical art of delivery, which often takes advantage of the human body’s role in rhetorical

²⁶ Dodd, “Writing Wrongs,” 238. However, it should also be noted that the *ars dictaminis* was widely taught, both in official and unofficial capacities, at Oxford, both for students and in vocationally-based courses (223).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 223.

performance through paralanguage (i.e., gesture, vocal rhythm, intonation—that is, affect or the embodied display of emotions, which enhances the intersubjectivity of rhetorical effect). Although petitions were certainly textual creations, Ormrod explains that petitions were also written for embodied practice, describing the performance of petitioning before parliament as “‘live’ performance, being read out, summarised or indeed embellished by royal clerks and legal attorneys before the king and council”;²⁸ indeed, display behavior. In fact, the *Rhetorica* spends considerable time describing one’s tone of voice in the delivery of prose texts. For example, when describing the rhetorical technique of amplification—the elongation of a *narratio*—the *Rhetorica* author states that “[t]he tone of Amplification either rouses the hearer to wrath or moves him to pity.”²⁹ Although petitioners were not required to appear before parliament in person, individual petitioners often met with greater favor if they did, which makes the petition a supplement to the petitioning body,³⁰ while the body bolsters the affective appeal of the petition. Therefore, the appeal to *pathos* in language of petitions scripts the embodied delivery of complaint, while the textual body of the petition supplements the individual body in the parliamentary archive and in parliamentary proceedings proper. That is, petitionary *pathos* stylizes the embodied delivery of complaint in order to bolster the sense of attachment between petitioner and audience, making the performance of petitionary form an intersubjective experience before the law.³¹

²⁸ Ormrod, “Medieval Petitions,” 9.

²⁹ *Rhetorica*, III.XIII.23.

³⁰ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 292.

³¹ It is noteworthy that stylized complaint is also part of the long rhetorical tradition of the petition specifically. In the Byzantine Empire, for instance, some petitioners wrote in verse to impress the emperor with their literary skills, while, as Serena Connolly notes, “others presented themselves as stock characters: ‘the hen-pecked husband, the poor father of a large family’” (60), which again combines stock generic form with individuated stylized

This intersubjective quality of the petition is further emphasized by what will be the focus of what remains of this chapter, namely, the common petition, which emerged out of the private petition in the reign of Edward III. The Commons adopted a number of private petitions as part of the Commons' larger agenda and presented them to the king and council as "common" complaints, that is, as petitions submitted on behalf of the entire *comune* to the king. The emergence of the common petition not only changed the diplomatic of petitionary rhetoric to emphasize the collective nature of a complaint, but also developed the intersubjective processes of debate and deliberation that were necessary in forming the Commons' complaint agenda, as we will see in the collectively crafted common petitions in the Parliament of Rats and Mice below. During Edward III's reign, the increased need for parliamentary business to resolve issues related to the wars with France diminished the importance and time granted to private petitions; whereas attending to the demands of the Commons was crucial owing to the Commons' control over taxation needed to fund war, private petitions did not have such leverage.³² As a result of Edward III's decreased interest in resolving private petitions, the Commons as a body took up the petitionary mantle and adopted private petitions whose resolution seemed to have a widespread consequence for the larger commonweal. As a result, Dodd suggests that "the skills of articulation and persuasion, as well as knowledge of legal and administrative matters [...] gained added value as constituencies contemplated the diminished chances of having their grievances properly addressed *unless* the Commons were persuaded that their case was worth taking up and

expression. For further discussion of ancient petitionary practice, see Connolly, "Petitioning in the Ancient World," in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, 47-63.

³² Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 116.

sponsoring as a common petition.”³³ As a result, the rhetoric of private petitions seeking the endorsement of the Commons developed to include assertions of common profit³⁴ and elaborated *narratios* that provided more background for a complaint.³⁵ Likewise, I propose that the *salutatio* and *exordium* decreased in importance in common petitions because the *narratio* and *petitio* portion of the petition began to carry the affective weight of the overall petition. In other words, during the reigns of Edward III and Richard II, private petitions made more of a concerted effort to connect individuated complaints to larger concerns of the realm, and the rhetoric of community and affective descriptions of grievances contributed to the petition’s increased awareness of collectivity. This, too, is an example of the social link; after all, petitions were inspired by real traumatic experiences, and contextualizing one’s trauma within a larger concern for the Commons forecloses isolation.

An example of the rhetoric of common profit can be seen in Item 186 among the common petitions submitted before the Good Parliament, which called for an assurance that parliament meet annually to address the realm’s grievances with reduced potential for government corruption in administering justice. Part of the persuasiveness of this particular petition is its *pathos*-driven description of past procedure and of future resolution, and this *pathos* enhances the collectivity of the petition by likewise enhancing the attachment to its rhetoric. That is to say, affective rhetoric bolsters the audience’s attachment to the particular complaint. The petition reads:

³³ Ibid., 147, emphasis original.

³⁴ Ormrod, “Murmur, Clamour and Noise: Voicing Complaint and Remedy in Petitions to the English Crown, c. 1300-1460,” in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, 135-55; 137.

³⁵ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 149.

Also, the commons pray: that it might please him to establish by statute in this present parliament that a parliament should be held each year, *to correct errors and deceits in the realm*, if any are found. And the knights of the shires for these parliaments should be chosen by common election from the best men of the said counties, and not certified by the sheriff alone without due election, on a certain penalty. And the sheriffs of the counties of the realm should be chosen in the same manner from year to year, *and not appointed by bribery in the king's court, as they used to do, for their own profit and by procurement of the maintainers of the region, to sustain their deceits and evils and their false quarrels, as they have commonly done before this time, in destruction of the people.*³⁶

At its core, this is a request that attempts to diminish corruption in the election of the Members of Parliament in the localities (or, perhaps originally, in *a* shire, later extended to all shires to meet the purposes of the common petition), and that such procedures should be maintained from year to year. However, the stylization of the complaint both emphasizes its common nature and employs affective rhetoric to cast this as an issue of public morality. The statute—itsself a public genre—is meant to correct “errors” and “deceits” done to the *comune*. The petition goes on to imply that such “deceits” in this case are done by sheriffs, a favorite target of common petitions, at which point the petition’s language becomes more legalistic, being sure to outline the desired outcome amidst the overall *pathos* of the petition. The petition ends by amplifying the moral tenor of the complaint through affective rhetoric, casting common profit against the sheriff’s “own profit” to “sustain their deceits and evils

³⁶ *PROME*, parliament of 1376, item 186, emphasis mine.

and their false quarrels.” Noteworthy is that affective language is employed here to emphasize the contrast between common profit and individual profit, the overall conclusion to which is the avoidance of the “destruction of the people.” Although the common petition uses affective rhetoric to enhance the stakes of the grievance, just as important is the clear delineation of legal statute and legal process in which such a rousing of affects must result. Here, both the means by which the petition persuades and the overall legal effects are emphasized; outcomes were important, but without the rhetoric to rouse support for such outcomes, the king’s compliance might not be as easily met. In this case, the king assented to all aspects of the request.

In addition to the changes from private justice to common profit in petitionary diplomatic, the overall arrangement of common petitions shifted to amplify the *narratio* and *petitio* portions of a petition, which is where the affective labor of complaint takes place. As seen in the example above regarding the election of Members of Parliament, the *salutatio* and *exordium* are abbreviated, whereas the narrative and petition proper are elongated via the rhetorical technique of amplification. In Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi*, the most widely circulating *ars dictaminis* manual of the Middle Ages, the author spends a considerable amount of time discussing the importance of amplifying material so that “a simple statement may be developed with a few simple ornaments and that a facile meaning may be enlarged by more ornate language.”³⁷ However, such elongation and amplification of the complaint is not for the sake of mere ornamentation, but instead for expressivity—to amplify the affective tenor of the complaint. For example,

³⁷ Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi*, ed. Roger P. Parr (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1968), 3.70. All citations will include chapter and line number.

among the common petitions enrolled in the Good Parliament was one “Concerning justices of assizes,” which met a sympathetic response from Edward III and his council:

[*salutatio*] Also, the commons pray: [*narratio*] that whereas various justices are assigned to be justices of assizes in the regions where they live and where they have their lords, masters, kinsmen and allies, none of the poor can have recovery because of the favour which is shown to the aforesaid. [*petitio*] Wherefore may it please the said council, in way of charity, to ordain that no-one should be a justice of assizes in the region where he is resident and might side with the people of the region without other justices from outside the region being associated with them. But may it please him to ordain justices from distant places, who will do justice to the small as well as the great, and to the poor as well as the rich.³⁸

In addition to circumventing corruption in local politics by including non-local justices in local disputes, the Commons petitioned to resuscitate their political attachments by praying to the king and council in the *petitio* that, “en oeuvre de charite” [“in way of charity”], they provide remedy. “Charite” can be translated simply as “charity,” but it also carries connotations of “love” or “affection,”³⁹ thus using the language of attachment to the king to prompt reform of local governance. The king’s answer was favorable (“It pleases the king”), and, in fact, he instructs in the *Parliament Rolls* that “he who feels himself aggrieved should complain, and justice will be done to him,”⁴⁰ not only remedying past and current grievance, but also inviting complaint from those in the future, thus maintaining juridical “affection” by

³⁸ *PROME*, parliament of 1376, item 75.

³⁹ Baker, *Manual of Law French*, s.v. “chierte (n.),” 1.

⁴⁰ *PROME*, parliament of 1376, item 75.

way of promised legal redress by combining both forensic and deliberative rhetorical genres. Furthermore, in a small but effective rhetorical appeal in the *petitio*, employing the discourse of care allowed the Commons to affirm a primary attachment to the Crown over local institutions, thus summoning the king's obligation to provide justice via discourses of proper lordship, which includes the dispensation of charity, here reframed in terms of juridical *caritas*.

Petitionary form and rhetoric becomes increasingly ubiquitous throughout the one-hundred-year history of formal written complaint leading to the Good Parliament. In fact, the embodied stylization of petitionary rhetoric added to the widespread familiarity of petitionary form, as writs with decisions over parliamentary petitions were dispatched to sheriffs “ordering the *viva voce* proclamation, in county courts, markets and other public places, of statutes arising from the responses to the common petitions.”⁴¹ That is, even the illiterate had access to these legal formulae by hearing the results of petitions proclaimed publicly, through a live performance by a legal professional who read writs aloud. What drew the public's attachment to these forms are the expansions of affective rhetoric occasioned by the rise of the common petition, developing a language and form that enabled access rather than restricted it. The dual oral-textual nature of petitions preserves the rhetorical tradition's emphasis on invention, arrangement, and delivery, making the petition a highly affective, embodied, and performative genre.

II. Affective Rhetoric: Debating Petitions in the Parliament of Rats and Mice

How did the culture of complaint, and the construction of affective bonds upon which petitionary rhetoric depended, affect contemporary understandings both of parliament and of

⁴¹ Ormrod, “Murmur, Clamour and Noise,” 143-44.

the affective experiences that its political processes produced? Frustration was an affect that attended many bureaucratic processes, including petitioning and debate, especially in the aftermath of the Bad Parliament of 1377's reversal of the Good Parliament's political accomplishments. Reading the Parliament of Rats and Mice alongside the Good Parliament of 1376 and the subsequent Bad Parliament of 1377 need not be restricted to topical allegory, for both parliamentary portrayals actively participate in understanding the affects and attachments that motivated the majority of parliament's work, namely, the petition.⁴² We can read the Rat Parliament and the Good Parliament together in a way that highlights the complexity of the political processes, and the frustration and disappointment that can attend slow political processes, that had been forming throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The Parliament of Rats and Mice explores the connection between the joint processes of debating and petitioning: petitions brought before parliament sparked other bureaucratic and political processes, among them debates over the final decision to be made among the Commons. The Parliament of Rats and Mice uses petitions as the impetus for debate in order to display the messiness of political process and examine the conflicting attachments that petitions can conjure. In fact, the form of the debate in the Rat Parliament is structured as a common petition under revision, constructing competing *narratios* and *petitios* that the

⁴² As Nicole Lassahn demonstrates, Langland's was only one of many narratives of the Good Parliament to coexist, and therefore, the impact of the Good Parliament was as much political as it was artistic, given the number of narratives, songs, chronicles, and poems produced in its aftermath. All accounts, like Langland's, are conceptual rather than definitive and authoritative records. For more, see Lassahn, "Langland's Rats Revisited: Conservatism, Commune, and Political Unanimity," *Viator* 39, no. 1 (2008): 127-56. On the production of political pamphlets and broadsides produced in the wake of the Good Parliament, see Oliver, *Parliament and Political Pamphleteering*, 29-55.

assembly of rats and mice debate. The debate in Langland's Rat Parliament, as will be shown below, is structured as a collectively-composed common petition, being revised in the process of slow debate. Noteworthy is that the debate is not a haphazard or chaotic polyphony of voices, but rather that the petitionary form offers a structure that enables the process of debate to unfold.

The opening lines of the Parliament of Rats and Mice introduce the problem at hand by affectively describing the relationship between the rats and mice and the cat of the court. This introduction to the problem uses affective scripts to enhance the appeal to common profit that the assembly seeks to resolve. The cause of this parliament is that a cat of the court antagonizes the rats and mice, and the assembly seeks a solution to a problem that heretofore has been left unresolved:

Wip þat ran þer a route of ratons at ones
And smale mees wip hem: mo þan a þousand
Comen to a counseil for þe comune profit;
For a cat of a court cam whan hym liked
And ouerleep hem *liztliche* and lau3te hem at his wille
And pleid wip hem *perillousli* and *possed* hem aboute.⁴³

Common complaint is the topic of the debate, and the particular site for complaint is none other than the parliament, a site of expressive political affect. This initial *narratio* begins with the rhetoric of common profit, but a declaration of common profit is then strengthened by a *narratio* that briefly describes the perils of the situation; that is, in order to be rhetorically successful, common profit must be cast in an affective narrative. The

⁴³ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.146-51, emphasis mine.

descriptions of the cat's action are terrifying and frustrating: the "cat of a court cam whan hym liked / And ouerleep hem [the mice and rats] listliche and lauzte hem at his wille," implying, much like the Herevertons, that this high-ranking cat faces no accountability in his office or actions. The *narratio* continues this fear as the reader discovers that the cat "pleid wiþ hem perillousli and possed hem aboute." That is, lack of accountability leads to peril and political disruption. Therefore, the debate that follows is framed using the rhetoric of common profit and affective descriptors to enhance claims to common profit, two key features of a common petition before parliament. By attending to the petitionary structure of the introduction and the ensuing debate, the *Piers Plowman* B-Prologue casts petitionary form as dynamic as it structures the complexity of the debate that follows.

With the petitionary language and purpose of complaint in the Rat Parliament established, the ensuing debate forms over not only the specific remedy to be proposed, but also over what the problem even is to begin with, and of the competing attachments that such conflicts produce. The first words of dialogue in the Rat Parliament debate are unattributed, but they offer a continuation of the introductory *narratio*, namely that "if we grucche of his gamen he wol greuen vs all, / Cracchen vs or clawen vs and in hise clouches hold."⁴⁴ Not only does the second part of the *narratio* explain that the cat's behavior is cause for complaint, but also that until now there has been no recourse, for if they "grucche," or complain, then the cat will "greuen" the commonweal. The rhetorical effectiveness of this line casts the topic of common profit, a key component of any petition's argument, in an affective lens, for in the current situation, complaint leads to collective grief outside of parliament. Without the petitionary capacity of parliament, there exist no socio-political

⁴⁴ Ibid., B.Prol.153-54.

processes for resolving this complaint. Despite the petition's lack of success in ultimately being approved by the assembly, parliament nonetheless maintains its place as an arena for otherwise unvoiced complaints. As the unnamed speaker concludes, he offers a brief *petitio* that reveals the capacities of petitionary process: "Migt we wiþ any wit his will wiþstonde, / We myzte be lords olofte and lyuen at oure ese."⁴⁵ Rather than toppling social order by becoming lords themselves, the rats and mice seek to live in ease *as* lords do. That is, petitionary process allows those with complaints the potential to live in ease—the unnamed speaker conceptualizes petitionary process as a collective care practice. The initial *petitio* seeks not to redefine the socio-political landscape by disrupting class hierarchy, but instead to use wit—formed through a process of collective debate—to produce a more favorable affective position and to re-craft the narrative that they currently face. The *petitio* seeks to craft the potential for a new story about the bonds that exist between rats and cats.

The "raton of renoun" that speaks next attempts to revise the unnamed speaker's *narratio* and *petitio* and cast it within the petitionary rhetoric of reason, the next step in the collectively-revised common petition under dynamic review. At first glance, especially to our modern eyes, accountability for high-ranking governmental officials sounds reasonable. In fact, even medieval readers are led to sympathize with the rat because he is renowned⁴⁶ and he claims that his ideas are motivated by reason: "reson me sheweþ."⁴⁷ Claims to reason certainly bolstered the rhetorical appeal of common petitions. However, "renoun" not only implies fame—the primary reason why critics have associated the rat with Peter de la Mare, first-ever speaker of the Commons in the Good Parliament—but it also refers to rumor or

⁴⁵ Ibid., B.Prol.156-57.

⁴⁶ Ibid., B.Prol.158.

⁴⁷ Ibid., B.Prol.167.

report, or unsubstantiated claim. That is, the rat is a storyteller, and when applying the rhetorical form of the petition to his speech, we see not only that narrative is crucial to the success of a petition,⁴⁸ but also that the narrative he presents misses the affective reality of the mice and rats. Ormrod explains that “petitions were not merely the outpouring of real-life, hard-luck stories but artful constructions designed to get something done.”⁴⁹ However, this need not be a firm distinction, since expressivity, too, is an accomplishment in itself, especially for the *polis*, as it is anti-totalitarian. In line with generic expectations, the rat offers a stylized and leading *narratio*, but one stylized by reason rather than affect:

“I have yseyen segges,” quod he, “in þe Cite of Londoun
Beren beȝes ful briȝte abouten hire nekkes,
And somme colers of crafty work; vncoupled þey wenden
Boþe in wareyne and in waast where hem leue likeþ,
And ouþer while þei arn elliswhere, as I here telle.
Were þer a belle on hir beȝe, by Iesus, as me þynkeþ,
Men myȝte witen wher þei wente and away renne.[”]⁵⁰

The *narratio* that the rat tells is meant to re-craft the relationship that exists between the cat and the rats and mice. The situation that the rat describes is that in the city of London, men wear collars, associated with liveries marking attachment and affiliation to a lord, and that

⁴⁸ Despite the consistency in form and structure across the petitions, the *narratio* and *petitio* parts of the petition highlight the “individuality and the scope that existed [...] to make the complaint ‘stand out’” (Dodd, “Writing Wrongs,” 238). Narrative thus was of extreme importance to maintaining the particularity of the individual complaint once placed into a common form and to craft a particular attachment between the king and petitioner that would lead to a favorable outcome.

⁴⁹ Ormrod, “Medieval Petitions,” 11.

⁵⁰ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.160-66.

such liveries enable these men to freely move around the city. However, the proposal to bell the cat is not vindictive or aggressive but instead can be seen as a care practice: the proposal is for the good of all, including the cat. That is, with the bell and collar around his neck, the cat can move freely as he pleases, but the rats and mice will also be able to move freely in response. While claims to reason certainly bolstered the effectiveness of petitions, here the raton of renoun misses the affective reality of the situation: nobody is willing to bell the cat, because doing so might induce trauma.

In the *petitio* that follows, the rat offers a two-part proposal that seeks to modify the behaviors of how each class interacts. However, the affective tenor of the debate over the petition that ensues proves that reason alone is not enough to make a petition successful. The rhetoric of reason in first part of the *petitio*, however, disguises the affective response: “reson me shewep / To bugge a belle of bras or of britzt siluer / And knydden it on a coler for oure commune profit / And hangen it vpon þe cattes hals[’].”⁵¹ Of course, the rhetoric of “reason” would most likely bolster claims to common profit, stressing that the action against them is “against law and reason” and to appeal to the Crown’s “right and reason” in providing remedy.⁵² Here, the affective rhetoric of the *petitio* is elided, and as such, the proposed attachment lacks an affective basis, or lacks a rooting in the affective reality and the emotional states of the parliament. That is, the *petitio* does not recognize vulnerability. Despite the lack of affective scripts to carry the discourse on common profit, however, the rat’s idea of common profit is still rooted in carving out more productive attachments among social groups. The second part of the rat’s *petitio* stresses reading the other through

⁵¹ Ibid., B.Prol.167-70.

⁵² For a fuller discussion of the rhetoric of reason, see Dodd, “Writing Wrongs,” 221.

intersubjective means, namely, how to read the cues of the cat's proposed bell (i.e, the first part of the petition): "And if hym list for to laike, þanne loke we mowen / And peeren in his presence þe while hym pleye likeþ, / And if hym wraþeþ, be war and his wey shonye."⁵³

Rather than a vindictive or vengeful move, the belling proposal gives each party the ability to read the other through paralanguage, stressing that the desire for intersubjectivity motivates the reasoned belling proposal.

The parliament refuses to adopt this petition because the new political process that it proposes (namely, to bell a cat) is not rooted in the affective reality of the rats and mice in parliament, nor does it attempt its argumentation through *pathos*-based description. That is, the proposal does not account for their fear, and thus, judging the proposal as a failure of *action* misses its misrepresentation of *affect*. Although the rats as a deliberative body "assented"⁵⁴ to the rat of renown's petition, we learn that

Ther ne was raton in al þe route, for al þe reaume of Fraunce,
That dorst haue bounden þe belle aboute þe cattes nekke,
Ne hangen it aboute his hals al Engelond to winne
And helden hem vnhardy and hir counseil feble,
And leten hire laboure lost and al hire longe studie.⁵⁵

The grandiose logical style of the rat's *narratio* and *petitio* contrasts with the emotional tone of the rat assembly's deliberation afterward, as seen in the lines above. The full affective response that arises in the debate corrects this petition's appeal to reason, which reads abstractly when compared to the lived affective experiences of the rat parliament. Although

⁵³ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.172-74.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, B.Prol.175.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, B.Prol.177-81.

abstract reason suggests a particular action, that action ignores the rats' self-assessed unhardiness and feebleness to take not *all* action but *this* particular action. That is, the assembly is not unwilling to act in general, but to go along with this one action due to the rat's misreading of parliament's current affective state. Here, allegory makes use of affective response to insert a lived contour into the petitionary process.

Once the rat parliament is unable to rally behind the raton of renoun's petition, the petitionary process begins again. It becomes difficult to assert that either of these petitions "fail" simply because their proposals are not acted upon immediately; instead, one process conjures another, and in each iteration, the petitionary process becomes more attuned to affect. That is, in the Parliament of Rats and Mice, debate enlivens petitionary rhetoric, and group process assists in revising the final rhetoric used by the assembly to effectively communicate its affective reality. The rats realize that the action in the petition just offered neglects their fear, and so the petition proposed by "a mous þat much good kouþe"⁵⁶ reflects the fear of belling the cat, translating the debate over the previous petition into a new petition. Like the rat's original proposal, the mouse's petition is composed in two parts: the *narratio* and the *petitio*. The mouse's *narratio* re-contextualizes the problem not as a desire to bell a cat so as to become "lordes olofte," but to deal with the cat as a matter of survival. That is, this third version of the *narratio* attempts to offer a new narrative that draws out the desire for survival:

"Thou3 we hadde ykilled þe cat, yet sholde þer come anoþer
To cracchen vs and al oure kynde, þou3 we copen vnder benches.
Forþi I counseille al þe commune to late þe cat worþe,

⁵⁶ Ibid., B.Prol.182.

And be we neuere so bolde þe belle hym to shewe.[’]’⁵⁷

The mouse’s response is not so much a counterproposal as it is a revised version of the *narratio* given by the rat above: belling the cat will not work simply *because* there are so many other cats in court—that is, the very reason why the belling proposal was initiated (because nobility wear liveries on their necks, so bell them) is also the reason why it will fail—because all nobility wear collars, the rats and mice would have to bell them all. The new *narratio* reframes the belling incident as a threat to social order, not because it would reform relationships anew, but because the commons of rats and mice are afraid to approach the cats; there is no social or political process that is safe that would enable a re-forming of such relationships. The mouse proposes safety, not *status quo*. The petition does not fail, but through petitionary process, the mice and rats have a better understanding of *why* they are acting as they are, and why their relationships are the way they are: there is no safe socio-political process for approach outside of the parliament to help them achieve their goals. Rather than the failure of parliament, this reifies parliament as a space for safe political debate and for imagining new ways of social organization. Parliament is concerned here with matters of survival, and in the parliamentary archive, there is space for ensuring survival through a connection with the affective reality that motivates petitions to begin with. While critics have declared that the assembly is once again inconclusive (a similar complaint lodged against Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*, as we recall), what has been accomplished is a sharper definition of the assembly’s affective topography, and this is accomplished through petitionary form. Ignoring the process by which this debate is both constructed and by which

⁵⁷ Ibid., B.Prol.185-88.

it evolves likewise ignores the growth of affect throughout the debate, which is enabled by petitionary process rather than an endorsed outcome.

Frustration is the one final affect to consider in this B-Prologue episode because it accounts not only for the ambiguous tone of the Rat Parliament, but also for the dismal portrayal that it has received in *Piers Plowman* scholarship—namely, frustration with bureaucracy. The attachment that actors in a political system develop toward political narratives is why narrative or *narratio* is so central to the petitionary ask—it does more than contextualize the petition, but rather shares the political narratives that motivate our individual and collective action. The scholarship on the revisions in the B-text has focused more on abstracting political action rather than on helping to embody the affective realities of the Good Parliament. Most likely written after the Good Parliament of 1376, during which the lead reformer, the Black Prince, died, and the Bad Parliament of 1377, in which all the reforms of the Good Parliament were reversed by John of Gaunt, coming to grips with the suddenness with which the narrative of the political landscape shifted, and the political advances made and now reversed, must have been devastating. Whereas critics use the Parliament of Rats and Mice to decode Langland’s shifting political leanings over the course of the A-, B-, and C-text revisions, we instead see that petitionary rhetoric and the attachments that it intentionally creates are at the foundation of sovereign power and of a parliamentary model of governance.⁵⁸ Petitionary rhetoric includes an attachment to political narrative through which the ask is registered. Attending to petitionary form and rhetoric rescues the narratives of history from an abstract past and enlivens them through the affectively-constructed narratives and demands that they produce. As in the Rat Parliament’s

⁵⁸ See section “V: Critical History” below.

debate, rhetorical formulae provide a structure to the debate, not to rob it of vitality, but to create a space for affective expression not through chaos but through formal aesthetic elements that always shape our expressions to one another.

III. ESTATES SATIRE AND LIVING POLITICS: REVISIONS TO THE A-TEXT

Langland used the events of the Good Parliament as a catalyst for a larger conceptualization of petitionary process and rhetoric, and this becomes evident when comparing the A-text Prologue to the B-text revisions. The A-Text of the *Piers Plowman* Prologue begins as an allegory of the corruption of society and an estates satire, underscoring that society is corrupt because each of its constituent parts is corrupt. For this reason, Helen Cooper argues that the A-text is the most political of the poem's three versions, claiming that the chronology of the three poems and the evidence of their circulation suggests that the A-text was the inspiration for John Ball's insurgent letters in the Peasants' Revolt, an alternate reading to the dominant narrative that supposes that the B-text played this role.⁵⁹ Perhaps, also, the A-text is less meandering and more focused on the estates satire of the "fair feeld," given the absence of the parliament fable and the allegory of the commonweal. The "political" as conceptualized in the A-text is much more wedded to estates satire, whereas the B-Texts revisions add the lived drama of the body politic to the otherwise allegorical catalogue of actions. Put another way, the B-text develops the lived experience of the individual and of groups in political-legal spaces out of the abstracted allegorical frame, pushing contemporary scholarly understandings of what is meant by the "political" in fourteenth-century England outside of the rigid representations of estates satire and into a

⁵⁹ Helen Cooper, "Langland's and Chaucer's Prologues," *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 1 (1987): 71-81; 74.

more flexible portrayal of the body politic assemblage. The expansion of the B-Prologue dramatizes petitionary rhetoric in order to ask what affects also attend political, bureaucratic, and legal processes. Considering the A-text to be more political denies notions of lived experience from the definition of politics, forcing our conceptualizations of the political to remain in the abstract and within the boundaries of catalogues of estates satire. Instead, the addition of the fable grounds the A-text's political abstraction in a political scene with all of the complexity of group experience, exemplifying the overall foci of the B-Text revisions.

These B-text additions to the Prologue are inserted near the end of the A-text, amidst a moment that condemns priests who wish to abandon their parishes during pestilence time and relocate to London for easier, safer, and more lucrative jobs. Specifically, the B-text additions of the political scenes are inserted after what in the A-text is the penultimate stanza, a stanza which turns the critique of the clergy's relocation to London to a more pointed critique of the clergy's role in state government and in political life; this stanza, quoted below, is missing from (and perhaps replaced by) the B-text revisions. While petitionary rhetoric and allusions to petitionary process are present in the A-text, such representations are within the confines of estates satire:

I sau3 bisshopis bolde and bacheleris of deuyn
Become clerkis of accountis þe King for to serue;
Archideknes and denis þat dignites hauen
To preche þe peple and pore men to fede
Ben ylope to Lundoun be leue of hire bissop,
And ben clerkis of þe Kinges bench þe cuntre to shende.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, A.Prol.90-95.

This stanza reformulates the clergy's movement as a symptom of larger-spread corruption caused by competing valuations of attachment: the clergy's detachment from the *comune* and its opportunistic attachment to the king versus its pastoral obligation to care. The A-text mourns the abandonment of the poor in favor of obtaining posts at treasury or at the king's bench, and this widespread detachment is not only desired by the lower clergy, but is also facilitated by bishops and archbishops higher up the ecclesiastical ladder who *also* shared these desires to flee.

Although this stanza does not survive the B- or C-text revisions, it begins to develop some of the affective responses in the *Piers Plowman* textual tradition that legal and political systems evoke in their participants. This stanza treats the petitionary process as participating in the crisis of competing attachments and politicizes its effects. Both archdeacons and deans have official positions—which the A-text Prologue calls “dignites”—that oblige them “[t]o preche þe peple and pore men to fede.”⁶¹ Although “dignites” are specifically high-ranking positions that confer *authority* on their occupants, this passage reframes what is central to clerkly positions by instead aligning “dignites” not with authority but with *obligation*. For the A-text Prologue, having a high-ranking ecclesiastical position brings obligations, and abandoning these obligations is not an exercise of authority but a source of shame for their failure to participate in the bonds that form the body politic assemblage, “þe cuntre to shende.” In fact, Dodd explains that the discourse of feudalism informed contemporaries' expectations of good lordship, explaining that “lordship cut two ways and the petitioner's affirmation of the feudal relationship could also be construed as a reminder that the king had

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, A.Prol.93.

an obligation to provide justice and grace, for the sake of good lordship.”⁶² Moreover, the crisis of attachment between the clergy and the poor nonetheless testifies to the petition’s power to sustain—or degrade—attachments. Among the first taxonomies of emotion that entered England, roughly around the thirteenth century, was in Book II of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*,⁶³ and his definition of shame is highly social, being defined as “a sort of pain and agitation concerning the class of evils [...] that seem to bring a person into disrespect.”⁶⁴ For Langland, the very political processes that ought to maintain attachments between clergy and *comune* are here put into disrespect, shaming not only the clergy but also the country. As a result, the affects in Langland’s poem are allegorical, conceptualizing the clergy’s shame on a larger national scale to show that petitionary rhetoric makes affects shareable.

The rhetoric of shame that Langland uses to describe the clergy’s misplaced attachments likewise frames the petitionary language in this passage as affective. In plague time, these same clerics who are obliged to preach to the people and feed the poor “[b]en ylope to Lundoun be leue of hire bisshop / And ben clerkis of þe Kinges bench,” that is, they run to London by their bishop’s permission.⁶⁵ Permission, or “leue,”⁶⁶ summons the vocabulary of petitionary rhetoric, which here has been co-opted for the sake of corruption. Langland here shows that the petitionary process is one of affective production, as well, that

⁶² Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 285-86.

⁶³ For a rigorous and extended discussion of how Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* offered new taxonomies of emotion or *pathos* in medieval England that were socially (rather than physiologically) based, see Rita Copeland, “*Pathos* and Pastoralism: Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in Medieval England,” *Speculum* 89, no. 1 (2014): 96-127. On dating, see specifically the section on “The *Rhetoric* in Latin Scholastic Culture and Receptions of Its Teaching on the Emotions.” See also Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans George A. Kennedy, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 2.2-11.

⁶⁴ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 2.6.2.

⁶⁵ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, A.Prol.94-95.

⁶⁶ *MED*, s.v. “leue (n.2),” 1a, accessed August 25, 2018.

petitioners not only convey affect, but produce it on larger scales. The individual petitions are allegorized precisely by way of the large-scale affects they produce—here, the consequences are allegorized as the country’s shame—which reminds readers that the subject before the law is not wholly contained but rather, as a result of entering private complaints into the archive, produces affects that are then shared through the results of petitions. In short, these petitions are shareable in part because of the affect that they produce. Thus as early as the A-text—written before the Good Parliament’s deluge of petitions—Langland was experimenting in his poetry with the allegorical consequences of private petitions, and those consequences for him are the affects that such petitions produce both privately and on a larger social scale. These twinned effects make petitions allegorical.

The B-text’s additions transform the Prologue into a theoretical or conceptual text about the evolution of governance, and the various benefits and failures that attend it. Langland does not rescue or condemn the petitionary process, but instead plays with its evolution. The B-text’s overall allegory is more productive if read as a conceptual exploration of the ever-evolving legal-political landscape of fourteenth-century England, that evolution here represented as a *series* of three political scenes that I read as connected, while nonetheless consisting of separate but interrelated processes that all evolve the role of the petition or petitionary rhetoric. Namely, the papal election underscores the value of accessibility in the petitionary process; the commonweal episode values complexity in political process; and the Parliament of Rats uses petitionary rhetoric to launch a debate about collective care practices. Together, these three episodes likewise present the affects that attend political process, such as fear and frustration. The added political scene, itself

episodic, uses the dream vision structure of episodic narrative to detail the psychological messiness—the apparent incongruity, despite their narrative succession—of political process.

After a lengthy A-text description of the corruption of the clergy and their use of petitions to abandon their ecclesiastical obligations, it is not surprising that the narrator questions the Church's overall processes of governance and problematizes their impact on England's own political process. Langland reminds readers that English politics do not occur in a vacuum, but that political processes are permeable, and, as a result, subject to the influence and invasion of other social practices. In the B-Prologue, the A-text's original scene described above is replaced by a scene in which the cardinals of the Church elect the next Pope, and Langland describes these processes as closed-door and inaccessible—that is, not a political environment that invites expression from the “outside” through petitionary process. In fact, Langland offers a pun on the etymology of the word “cardinal” that critiques the church's closed-door political processes, explaining that those to whom Peter left the church “cardinals ben called and closynge yates / There Crist is in kiyngdom, to close and to shette, / And to opene it to hem and heuene blisse shewe.”⁶⁷ The word “cardinal” is derived from the Latin *cardo*, meaning both “principal” and “hinge,” as in, something so principal that the rest hinges on it.⁶⁸ Here, Langland transforms the hinge metaphor into the “closynge yates” of heaven, implying that access to cardinals is closed-door, and that access to “hevene blisse” is not granted through the cardinals through complaint or petition (i.e., through church bureaucracy), but rather through supplication and petition to Christ. Langland is not alone in his distrust of cardinals; in fact, among the record number of common petitions submitted to

⁶⁷ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.104-06.

⁶⁸ *OED*, s.v. “cardinal (adj.),” accessed October 27, 2016.

the Good Parliament was a hefty stack of anticlerical grievances that claimed not only interference by the clergy into the affairs of England, but also the interference of the Church Institution (the Vatican and its proxies) into English politics. In a request to renew the Statutes of Provisors, Common Petition Item 110 in the parliament rolls describes the cardinals, “except two or three, [to be] enemies of the king and of the realm.”⁶⁹ The very word used to describe the principle actors of the Church likewise casts them as outsiders to the realm of England, as gatekeepers that remain inside while excluding those outside, making England alien to itself.⁷⁰ In alignment with petitionary rhetoric, the effective appeal of which allegorizes the harms described in a private complaint as harms committed against the realm, Langland allegorizes the hinge metaphor and thus transforms it into a threat against the commonweal.

The papal election offers a vision of governance that is anti-petitionary, one that closes down the political processes that petitions open up:

Ac of þe Cardinals at court þat kauȝte of þat name
 And power presumed in hem a Pope to make
 To han þe power þat Peter hadde, impugned I nelle—
 For in loue and lettrure þe eleccion bilongeþ;
 Forþi I kan and kan nauȝt of court speke moore.⁷¹

⁶⁹ *PROME*, parliament of 1376, item 110.

⁷⁰ Patrick Zutshi explains that often groups of petitioners together would submit petitions to the Pope in groups of petitions called *rotuli*, which were of one kind, namely, “those for provisions to ecclesiastical benefices. They reflect the vast increase in papal control over ecclesiastical appointments that took place in the fourteenth century.” For more, see Zutshi, “Petitions to the Pope in the Fourteenth Century,” *Medieval Petitions*, 82-98; 90-91.

⁷¹ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.107-11.

Again, Langland's B-Prologue is attuned to the anticlerical agenda of the Good Parliament, which likewise critiqued the election process for Church benefices. In the "Bill against the pope and the cardinals," the parliament rolls claim that when the church had "free election of their prelates, according to the law of God and of holy Church, [...] for as long as these good customs were followed the realm was full of all prosperity."⁷² However, the petition continues: "[S]ince the good customs were corrupted and obstructed by covetousness and simony, the realm has been full of various adversities, such as wars and pestilences, hunger, cattle murrains and other grievances."⁷³ Many of the widespread cultural traumas that plagued the fourteenth century (see my "Introduction" above) are here attributed to a corruption of political process, suggesting that improper political functioning leads to the sickness and traumatization of the commonweal. Conversely, processes that are open and uncorrupted by meedful gain contribute to the prosperity of the realm. Although love and learning should be critical to the Church's election of a new Pope (as they are for Chaucer's narrator in the *Parliament of Fowls*), Langland sees the univocality of the papal election process, and the presumption of power to engage in that process in an exclusive way, as a corruption that forecloses speech. The narrator "kan...of court speke moore," that is, he could indeed offer a complaint of Holy Church. However, Langland's narrator quite literally and politically "kan nau3t of court speke moore" because there are no processes to accommodate an outside perspective, or a petition—the papal court is not open to complaint and does not facilitate attachment by enabling affective expression into political process. In

⁷² *PROME*, parliament of 1376, item 94.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Langland's political world, we find the Papal court to be another Temple of Venus akin to the *Parliament of Fowls*—the totalitarian other who refuses to listen or respond.

IV. ATTACHMENT AND CARE IN PETITIONARY RHETORIC: THE ALLEGORY OF THE COMMONWEAL

At the root of the Good Parliament's complaints about Church processes, and Will the narrator's frustration at having something to say but finding himself operating within a closed political system, is a critique about the Church's failure as an institution of care. That is, Langland portrays the Church and its attendant political processes as abandoning its care practices, seen most readily in the A-text's complaint that the clergy abandons its parishioners in plague time, discussed above. In fact, practices such as the petition that should facilitate care practices are actually taken advantage of: supplications to bishops become accomplices in abandoning collective care. The language of abandonment summons the language of attachment, as well, and perhaps most frustrating for Langland's narrator is that the very processes that ought to facilitate care by evoking affects are manipulated to abandon attachments and promote frustration.

Child psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott teaches us that during the critical period in child development when the child begins to explore the world outside of his primary attachment with his mother/caregiver, the young child attaches himself to what he terms "transitional objects," which "stand[] for the breast (or mother)," but which are *not* the mother, as a "defense against anxiety" resulting from a reformulation of the attachment that necessarily accompanies the child's desire for partial separation but also his or her need for continued attachment.⁷⁴ The transitional object is a self-soothing supplement to the child's primary

⁷⁴ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1971), 8.

attachment. Moreover, Winnicott argues that during the course of adult life, the transitional object “is not forgotten and is not mourned” because “the transitional phenomena have become diffused [...] over the whole cultural field.”⁷⁵ That culture itself is a transitional object implies that even as adults, we continue to seek out (and thus, never need to forget) our reliance on attachments because we are never without them, seeking the cultural artifacts that we construct as a species to sustain, repurpose, reformulate, and reinvent our primary attachments. Cultural artifacts, too, have a collective self-soothing function that sustains and reinvents attachments. Winnicott’s transitional object speaks to the soothing function of the attachment and its future reformulations because its primary function is to manage the anxiety of navigating the world, as petitionary practices try to do. It follows that institutions, too, are under the umbrella of Winnicott’s extension of the transitional object to “culture,” and thus, because institutions can play a role in the managing of anxiety by providing avenues for attachment, institutions function on a biopolitical level and accommodate a species demand for an attachment intended on soothing our interactions with the world, which in *Piers* is imagined as access to petitionary practices.

Attachment is so crucial for human survival because of the infant’s dependency on the caregiver at birth; forms of attachment are species functions that, for Winnicott, then become re-formulated on a larger cultural scale. For example, we create institutions whose processes reimagine the image of our attachments, this time on a political level, because the need for care and the intersubjective quality of the ask are evolutionarily engrained. Because infants are so underdeveloped in terms of self-care at birth (at least in comparison to nearly all other mammals), the function of the ask and the demand is one of survival, and survival

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

depends upon attachment to a willing caregiver. When these phenomena are “diffused [...] over the whole cultural field,” we can understand institutionalized forms of the demand and of the ask to likewise serve a biopolitical function engrained in evolutionarily-driven species needs.⁷⁶

However, it is important to emphasize the role of *process* in facilitating attachment behavior. According to attachment theorist John Bowlby, behavioral systems develop evolutionarily to meet certain set-goals in the environment, and he explains that, “[a]ttachment behavior [...] is the result of the activity of behavioral systems that have a continuing set-goal, the specification of which is a certain sort of relationship to another specified individual.”⁷⁷ Put another way, the behavioral systems associated with attachment do not function by arriving at a fixed and accomplishable end-goal, but rather achieving the set-goal of attachment requires a continual maintenance of a kind of relationship. Furthermore, Fradenburg explains that central to the maintenance of that relationship are affective forms of expression that, due to the vulnerability of living creatures, require attention and interpretation in order to ensure individual and collective survival. An example is paralanguage, which stylizes communication through gesture, tone and melody of voice, and facial expression.⁷⁸ In fact, the field of rhetoric since Aristotle is invested in processes of persuasions; in Book 1 of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines rhetoric as “an ability, in each

⁷⁶ Some discontinuist historicists may feel temporarily dismayed by this argument, but some histories are longer than others, and the focus on plasticity in contemporary biology now makes it possible for us to explain *why* historical experience is so important—something about which historicist arguments have never been able to do more than postulate.

⁷⁷ John Bowlby, *Attachment*, Vol. 1 of *Attachment and Loss*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 140.

⁷⁸ Fradenburg, *Staying Alive*, 92.

[particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion.”⁷⁹ While rhetoric does have an end-goal in sight, the art of rhetoric is in the means by which—i.e., the processes by which—one persuades, and this includes many of the paralinguistic expressions that stylistically sustain attachments between infants and caregivers.

In the instance of the parliamentary petition, an attachment that relies on a stylized ask or demand has morphed into a political process that negotiates the individual’s demand or request with the sovereign’s response and grace. Thus the rhetoric of the petitionary ask is infused by, though it cannot be reduced to, the infant-caregiver attachment in the attachment between citizen and sovereign. Attachment is foundational to the institution of the petition and to the culture of complaint, the rhetoric of which enacts attachment behavior. As Ormrod explains, “The idea that a problem might be solved if only one could gain the king’s attention was deeply rooted in the political culture of the later Middle Ages.”⁸⁰ Part of enacting attachment behavior is that the request requires attention, and the more stylized the request, the more likely the petitioner was to receive the Crown’s attention and to begin the process of attachment, which required maintenance through petitionary narrative and rhetoric. The ask is a species function insofar as it is linked to care practices required for survival, and we can extrapolate to consider the petition to likewise be a type of species function.⁸¹

The second stage of the political episode added to the *Piers Plowman* B-text—namely, the allegory of the commonweal—uses petitionary rhetoric to show a flexible vision of the body politic assemblage. This episode, of course, is in direct contrast to the gate-

⁷⁹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1.2.1.

⁸⁰ Ormrod, “Murmor, Clamour and Noise,” 141.

⁸¹ For a discussion on the language of love and its attending affects in charters in the Scottish context, see Fradenburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 39-45.

keeping of the papal court. The episode begins with an idealized vision of governance in the body politic, but what makes this vision ideal is the flexibility of law, alluding to the petitionary process's capacities to open up the letter of the law to individual circumstances. The prologue states, "The Kyng and þe Commune and Kynd Wit þe þridde / Shopen lawe and leaute—ech lif to knowe his owene";⁸² that is, the idealized vision of society is one in which law does not apply blankly to each estate, but rather that each estate interacts with the law differently, and that such an arrangement shapes laws and justice (i.e., "lawe and leaute"). This idealized vision implies that the political process is flexible, that there is not one measuring stick against which the actions of a group are judged. In fact, there are hints in this initial description that indicate Langland's insistence on complicating the body politic model of governance away from a strict hierarchical model and instead toward one that is more flexible, and he uses petitionary rhetoric to incorporate this flexibility: the king and commons together shape law, much as they do in petitionary process. The episode's opening lines introduce the king and his retinue, but understand the foundations of the law to be in the presence of the Commons: "Thanne kam þer a Kyng: Knyȝthod hym ladde; / Might of þe communes mad hym to regne."⁸³ While "might" certainly alludes to the Commons' increasing strength in the late fourteenth century, the word summons petitionary discourse as well, signaling that not just the strength, but the authority and permission of the Commons grants to the king his "regne."⁸⁴ Furthermore, the "might" of the Commons also can refer to the capacities of the Commons,⁸⁵ which were increasing in petitionary process, as well:

⁸² Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.121-22.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, B.Prol.112-13.

⁸⁴ *MED*, s.v. "might (n.)" 1d, accessed August 25, 2018.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3a.

toward the end of the fourteenth century, petitions were not only submitted to the king, but to and in the name of the Commons.⁸⁶ The permission and the capacity of the Commons provide the foundations for sovereign rule, which uses petitionary rhetoric to carve out an attachment between Commons and king that is more flexible and multivocal, in opposition to the gate-keeping processes of the papal court.

The metaphor of the body politic upholds a fixed relationship between king and Commons—between head and body—but parliament complicated this relationship by disrupting the rigid tripartite estates model of society. As discussed in Chapter 1 above, DeLanda argues that the hazards of the body politic metaphor in the history of political philosophy have to do with the limited role of the individual in larger systems—i.e., “assemblages”—in an attempt to escape the hierarchical foundations of the body politic model. Again, the body politic is an “*organismic metaphor*” because it uses the human body as a model for understanding society, and this has led to a habit within sociological discourse of defining society by “relations of interiority,” meaning that “the component parts [of the organism] are constituted by the very relations they have to other parts in the whole. A part detached from such a whole ceases to be what it is, since being this particular part is one of its constitutive properties.”⁸⁷ DeLanda refuses the idea that constituent parts of the body politic are only functional within relations to other parts of the body. While attributing the legitimacy of the king’s rule to the “might of þe communes” might summon the organismic metaphor, it is a reversal of this metaphor because “might” underscores capacities of action.

⁸⁶ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 166.

⁸⁷ DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 8-9.

In fact, we summon the organismic metaphor only if we read “might” as strength and force, understanding the word in a hierarchical context.

Instead, DeLanda provides an alternative functional model based not on relations of interiority but on *capacities to interact*, reminding us that “a whole may be both analyzable into separate parts and at the same time have irreducible properties, properties that emerge from the *interactions* between parts.” Interactions between parts opens the system’s “*capacities to interact*” since the “capacities [of a system’s individual parts] are not given—they may go unexercised if no entity suitable for interaction is around—and form a potentially open list, since there is no way to tell in advance in what way a given entity may affect or be affected by innumerable other entities.”⁸⁸ Reading the Commons’ might as wedding their authority to their potential legitimizes their increasing capacities to interact with the sovereign, which they accomplished through the use of petitionary process. The idealized body politic that begins the commonweal episode becomes complicated by allusions to living processes—or capacities of interaction—that the petition affords in legal process: the petition directly to the king opens up common law to those who otherwise have no solution through normal local, legal procedures.⁸⁹

In the commonweal episode, what follows the idealized body politic is a debate over the king’s relationship to the law, the law serving a mediating function in the king and Commons’ attachment. Using petitionary rhetoric to offer a more flexible vision of the

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁹ For a discussion of how the petition provided a supplement to common law procedures, see Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 285, where he argues that “a petition provided the king’s subjects with the opportunity to access a ‘purer’ form of justice far more closely aligned to a moral imperative than the ‘ordinary’ justice offered in the king’s lower courts, which appeared to be governed more by earthly processes and which (at least in the minds of contemporaries) were often sullied by the flawed and corrupt judgments of the king’s justices.”

commonweal, the episode first summons a “lunatik” who nonetheless speaks “clergially”—learnedly and skillfully,⁹⁰ skillful speech invoking the rhetorical tradition—to reinforce that the king’s authority is not absolute but rather contingent upon his own petitionary relationship to Christ the King. The lunatik lays the foundations for the culture of complaint that are then debated throughout the rest of the episode, beginning the debate by addressing the king through the rhetoric and ceremony of petitionary procedure, “knelynge to þe Kyng”⁹¹ and offering the following: “Crist kepe þee, sir Kyng, and þi kyngryche, / And lene þee lede þi lond so leaute þee louye, / And for þi riȝtful rulyng be rewarded in heuene!”⁹² The lunatik requests that Christ not only defend, protect, and care for the king,⁹³ but that he also “lene [the King] lede [his] lond so leaute [he] louye.” “Lenen” in Middle English explicitly means to give permission or to grant something to someone,⁹⁴ and here, Christ is envisioned as granting to the king the ability to lead his land so that he loves justice; the king’s abilities to execute justice in response to complaints is itself conceptually wrapped up in the petitionary relationship between king and Christ. Langland’s depiction accords with fourteenth-century petitionary rhetoric, as well, as Dodd explains that religious discourse was central to the formulation of petitions,⁹⁵ and that “[a] petition to the king was an appeal to the king’s sense of equity and fairness—to his conscience—and this, more than any formalized legal doctrine, was intrinsically linked to the sovereign’s personal role as the vessel of God’s grace.”⁹⁶ Therefore, the king’s justice is an extension of Christ’s justice on earth, which, once

⁹⁰ *MED*, s.v. “clergial (adj.)” a-b, accessed August 25, 2018.

⁹¹ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.124.

⁹² *Ibid.*, B.Prol.125-27.

⁹³ *MED*, s.v. “kepen (v.)” 1a, accessed August 25, 2018.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, s.v. “lenen (v.3)” 1a, accessed August 25, 2018.

⁹⁵ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 283-85.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

again, Dodd extrapolates as a reminder that “the king had an *obligation* to provide justice and grace, for the sake of good lordship.”⁹⁷ Due to the petitionary relationship between the king and Christ, which is a foundational element in the culture of complaint, justice is conceptualized as an obligation rather than a request, and the petition is a stylized demand for the promise of Christ’s justice on earth.

Understanding the petitionary foundations to sovereign rule leads next to a debate over how the king ought to enact sovereignty in the execution of the law. An angel of heaven speaks in Latin⁹⁸ to the king on behalf of “lewed men,”⁹⁹ and while the language of the petition was Law French, the mediatory function of the angel recalls the mediatory function of the Westminster clerks who translated complaint into the petitionary rhetoric and religious discourse that triggered the enactment of justice. The performativity of the angel as a petitionary mediator, then, frames the words he speaks:

[“]Nudum ius a te estiri vult pietate.

Qualia vis metere, talia grana sere:

Si ius nudator, nudo de iure metatur;

Si seritur pietas, de pietate metas.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid., 286.

⁹⁸ See G.R. Owst, “The ‘Angel’ and the ‘Goliardeys’ of Langland’s Prologue,” *The Modern Language Review* 20, no. 3, (1925): 270-79. Latin speech implies for Owst a parliamentary context for the commonweal episode: “[I]f the angel be really the saintly but very human orator of the church [Brinton], Latin, it is to be noted, as opposed to the vernacular used for regular preaching *ad populum*, would be the appropriate language of his address alike for sermons before ‘parliaments’ of clergy, or for sermons, ‘in presence of lords,’ at the opening of Parliaments of the realm” (273). While I am not invested in the angel representing Brinton, the linguistic markers help to flesh out the context of the debate and relationship formed among the various speakers.

⁹⁹ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.129.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., B.Prol.135-38.

[“Naked law wants to be clothed by you and by your sense of duty. Whatever you sow, of that kind of grain will you reap: If the law is made naked, then let naked law measure you. If justice is sown, you may reap justice.”]¹⁰¹

Whatever relationship the king crafts with the law will then dictate how the law measures the king. Naked law (*nudum ius*), or the letter of the law, must be supplemented or clothed by the king’s duty, which are his interpretations of individual circumstances within the context of the law. As both the A- and B-text have made clear, duty enables the legal process to function properly. In placing the angel’s speech alongside the lunatik, we see that king’s engagement with the petitionary process in turn affects how the law will treat his own rule; as the Commons and the lunatik make clear, the king is below the law, and his authority rests both with a supplicatory relationship with Christ and by the permission granted by the Commons. If the king grants justice through petitionary process, the very same petitionary processes that enable his kingship will likewise maintain his authority. The petitionary relationship is inscribed in a hierarchy, but the biopolitical foundations of the ask in attachment behavior creates an intersubjective vision of the commonweal that resists the strictly hierarchical model of the body politic. Capacity for justice breeds capacities for sovereignty. And lastly, the need to clothe naked law and to interpret the law in individual contexts describes the function of the petition and is itself a care practice, clothing being among “needful things.”¹⁰²

However, Langland refuses an easy and consistent portrayal of the law, understanding the petitionary process and the attachments that it facilitates to include

¹⁰¹ English translation is mine.

¹⁰² See Fradenburg, “Needful Things,” in *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, eds. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 49-69.

frustration. While the religious and feudal discourses that inform petitionary rhetoric seek to maintain an ideal vision of the attachment between citizen and sovereign, petitions were denied, which was also part of interpreting naked law. Attachments have the capacity for frustration, but if they last, also the capacity for reparation. After the angel speaks for the commons, “Thanne greued hym a goliardeis, a gloton of wordes, / And to þe aungel an heij answeres after.”¹⁰³ The narrator implies that the Goliard’s speech will challenge the angel, and the Goliard’s own gluttony of words admits that some political positions are excessive, and that affect and emotion are infused into language. Likewise in Latin, the Goliard offers an etymological argument for the king’s relation to the law, arguing that, “[*d]um ‘rex’ a ‘regere’ dicatur nomen habere, / Nomen habet since re nisi iura tenere”*] [“While ‘king’ from ‘to rule’ is said to have its name, / He has the name without the substance unless he is zealous to maintain the law”].¹⁰⁴ The ambiguity of the Goliard’s speech combats the angel’s petitionary agenda but refuses to settle on a clear role between the king and the law. Refusing a clear answer, Langland demonstrates the active nature of this debate in the fourteenth century, between oscillating positions and realities of limited and absolute monarchy with relation to the law.

While granting petitions, for the angel at least, is maintenance of the law, the combative nature of the Goliard’s words brings us back to “naked law” without the possibility of the king’s mercy or grace, as dispensed in response to petitionary requests. The Commons, who speak next, indeed are frustrated by the unresolved Latin debate, and communicate their frustration by shouting in unison, “*Precepta Regis sunt nobis vincula*

¹⁰³ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B.Prol.139-40.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, B.Prol.141-42; English translation is mine.

legis!” [“The commands of the King are for us the chains of law!"].¹⁰⁵ Langland leaves the interpretation of this entire debate ambiguous, asking us to “construe whoso wolde,”¹⁰⁶ perhaps preparing us for the inconclusive debate in the Parliament of Rats and Mice that soon follows. Most important, however, is the affect of frustration that attends the debate: without a clear vision of king and law, the law can seem to chain the commons. While certainly carrying a negative connotation, chains do bind, and the Commons are so invested in this debate because they recognize that the law has a mediatory role in their attachment to the king: the king’s speech binds *us*. The chains of law hold together in conflict, but the imagery of the bond here (i.e., “chains”) negatively portrays the embrace as imprisonment. The law, so long as everyone is under it, means that no one can claim totality or totalitarian power or is entitled to the unbridled pursuit of their *jouissance*. Because of the question of the king’s relationship to the law drastically affects the Commons, the B-Prologue makes clear that a space is needed for the continual evolution of this debate. Immediately following, we witness a parliament that continues debating this same issue, shifting its focus to royal prerogative and its effect on those individuals who attempt to navigate the ambiguous, unresolvable abstractions that legal institutions produce.

V. CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE FIRST VISION IN *PIERS PLOWMAN*: THE GOOD PARLIAMENT OF 1376

Unlike much of the scholarship on *Piers Plowman*, my reading above does not claim to track any changes in Langland’s political leanings over the course of the A- and B-text revisions. Instead, I account for these revisions within the context of Langland’s culture’s

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, B.Prol.145; English translation is mine.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, B.Prol.144.

changing perspectives on governance, common profit, sovereignty, and political process due to the newly forming and ever-evolving parliament. However, readings that situate *Piers* alongside the parliament retreat to topical allegory, attempting to once again decode Langland's specific thoughts on particular parliamentary events. In what follows, I discuss why typical allegorical readings limit the perspective and context for the poem, and I also contextualize the stakes of my own argument within the dominant *Piers* criticism. Having discussed the historical context for Langland's revision, I conclude this chapter's discussion by pointing to limitations of topical allegory and instead suggesting a broader theoretical framework for discussing these A- to B-text revisions.

The critical history of the first dream vision in *Piers Plowman* overwhelmingly situates it within the context of the Good Parliament of 1376, among the chief accomplishments of which was the overwhelming number of petitions submitted to this parliament. The actions and consequences of the Good Parliament are traditionally taken as Langland's impetus for transforming the A-text into the B-text in *Piers Plowman* criticism.¹⁰⁷ The reason is fairly obvious: the main addition to the B-text Prologue is the Parliament of Rats and Mice, which Langland likely adapted from Bishop Thomas Brinton's Sermon 69—in which a parliament of rats and mice likewise fail to bell a cat—a sermon which Brinton gave to the Good Parliament on May 18, 1376, as a warning against political inaction.¹⁰⁸ As

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of the Good Parliament's influence on the B-text revisions, see Bernard F. Huppé, "The Authorship of the A and B Texts of *Piers Plowman*," *Speculum* 22, no. 4 (1947): 578-620.

¹⁰⁸ For a discussion of the connection between Bishop Brinton, the Good Parliament, and *Piers Plowman*, see G.R. Owst, "The 'Angel' and the 'Goliardeys' of Langland's Prologue"; Eleanor H. Kellogg, "Bishop Brunton and the Fable of the Rats," *PMLA* 50, no. 1 (1935): 57-68; Elisabeth H. Orsten, "The Ambiguities in Langland's Rat Parliament," *Mediaeval Studies* 23 (1961): 216-39; Anthony Gross, "Langland's Rats: A Moralists' Vision of Parliament," *Parliamentary History* 9, no. 2 (1990): 286-301; John Taylor, "The Good Parliament and Its

John Taylor notes, Brinton delivered the sermon at a “critical juncture in the affairs of the Good Parliament” because it was given “after the king’s grant of an intercommoning committee to advise the Commons (13 May), and before the first meeting of the Commons with the committee,”¹⁰⁹ a point at which the Commons were about to draft and act on their agenda of complaint. As noted, in Langland’s poem, the Parliament of Rats and Mice in the Prologue frames the ensuing drama (a drama made up of competing political processes) of Lady Meed in a subsequent scene of parliament in Passus IV. In fact, the trial of Lady Meed before the king’s parliament in both A- and B-Passus II-IV is typically read as an allegory for Alice Perrers, mistress to Edward III, who was likewise tried in the Good Parliament having “pursued various business and disputes in the king’s court by way of maintenance, bribing and influencing the parities.”¹¹⁰ This led to the passing of “an Ordinance against women pursuing business in the king’s courts by way of maintenance, singling [Perrers] out by name,”¹¹¹ a reading that “the king should forbid any woman to do it, and especially Alice Perrers.”¹¹² Among the many innovations of the Good Parliament was the sheer number of petitions submitted or co-opted by the Commons, and in the case of Perrers, the Ordinance specifically prevents her from seeking “disputes,” which in the original French—“quereles”—refers in the legal context to legal complaints.¹¹³ That is, Lady Meed’s

Sources,” in *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth-Century England*, eds., John Taylor and Wendy Childs, 81-96 (Stroud: Sutton, 1990), 81-96; Gwilym Dodd, “A parliament full of rats? *Piers Plowman* and the Good Parliament of 1376,” *Historical Research* 79, no. 203 (2006): 21-49; and Lassahn, “Langland’s Rats Revisited.”

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, “The Good Parliament and Its Sources,” 91.

¹¹⁰ *PROME*, parliament of 1376, item 45.

¹¹¹ Helen Jewell, “*Piers Plowman*—a Poem of Crisis: An Analysis of Political Instability in Langland’s England,” in *Politics and Crisis in 14th-century England*, 59-80; 68.

¹¹² *PROME*, parliament of 1376, item 45.

¹¹³ Baker, *A Manual of Law French*, s.v. “querele (n).”

interference in Peace's petition in Passus IV likely resonated with readers who witnessed not only an onslaught of petitions in the Good Parliament, but also a petition that attempted to block the real life Lady Meed from interfering in petitionary business. Therefore, the topical nature of most studies of the first dream vision is justified and in fact testifies to the Good Parliament's capturing of the public's (here poetic) imagination.

However, topical allegory has been used in *Piers Plowman* criticism in an attempt to untangle Langland's politics and to make claims that the poem's revision history reflects Langland's political leanings, conservative or otherwise. As a result, the analysis of the B-text Prologue has been largely limited to topical allegory rather than considering Langland and his poem as part of a larger conceptual development of the parliamentary institution and its extended processes—namely the petition—despite the first vision's abundant petitionary processes and rhetoric. Instead, critics take the petitionary presence in the B-Prologue and historicize it within the context of the Good Parliament. Critics have used topical allegory to establish many political positions that they then attribute to Langland, and in what follows I will outline these main positions in order to show that the critical conversation has limited the impact of the poem, and then offer a broader claim concerned less with Langland's topicality and more with his role in the conceptual development of the parliamentary institution and its processes.

The first and most enduring category of interpretation is that the revisions to the Prologue in the B-text, particularly the Parliament of Rats and Mice, betray Langland's political conservatism and discomfort with parliament's increasing power, often placing Langland in the school of political absolutism or anti-parliamentarianism. Unsurprisingly, this position mobilizes the Rat Parliament's "inconclusiveness" as its prime example, reading

such inconclusiveness as its ultimate “failure,” as it has been termed, despite its desire to bell the sovereign cat. Anna Baldwin and Taylor both agree that the display of potential but ultimately failed power to limit monarchy is in fact a critique of parliament’s own increasing but inappropriate power, arguing that Langland’s portrayal of the Rat Parliament “may well indicate Langland’s opinion of Parliament,”¹¹⁴ namely that Langland’s own “conservative instincts” would likely not have welcomed a parliament meddling in sovereign authority.¹¹⁵ Anthony Gross develops the argument even further with the bold claim that “[t]he poem reviled the processes which would in time provide the institutional framework of English democracy,”¹¹⁶ casting Langland not only as a critic of parliament but as actively writing against its developing role in governance over the projected *longue durée*.

Along the same lines that Langland’s Rat Parliament reflects his views on the actual parliament is that the inconclusiveness of the allegorical parliament is a comment on parliament’s own failure to accomplish anything. Bernard Huppé was the first to offer this argument, though he sees Langland as sympathizing with parliament’s reform efforts, claiming that the rats and mice meet to “restore the bridle of the law that the commons meet in parliament.” However, he continues: “[A]s that [1376] Parliament failed, so precisely does the Rat Parliament fail for lack of effective executive power.”¹¹⁷ Huppé’s analysis likewise portrays parliament’s work as a power grab, albeit here one for the betterment of the *comune*, and so necessarily anything short of absolute success (read, absolute parliamentary power, an opposite extreme from the absolutist argument outlined above with regard to the sovereign)

¹¹⁴ Anna P. Baldwin, *The Theme of Government in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981), 17.

¹¹⁵ Taylor, “The Good Parliament and Its Sources,” 92.

¹¹⁶ Gross, “Langland’s Rats,” 300.

¹¹⁷ Huppé, “The Authorship of the A and B Texts,” 588.

reads as a failure in these terms. Therefore, the origins of the failure argument adopt an absolutist position that is then used as the measuring stick of success or failure, a self-imposed projection in the scholarship that is then mobilized to attribute a political position to Langland that might in fact belong more to the critic's own historical context. That is to say, Huppé, writing only two years after the end of World War II, unsurprisingly saw political absolutism even in a proto-democratic body.

Like Gross' argument above, Dodd argues that *Piers Plowman* is Langland's attempt to actively participate in the evolution of the parliament by using the poem to remedy parliament's failures, arguing that "it was parliament's failure to gain adequate redress for its petitions that prompted Langland, in the late thirteen-seventies, to take up the reforming mantle himself and air these same grievances in his poetry."¹¹⁸ True, Langland envisions a parliament with the power to remedy political sickness, and many writers, including Langland, continued the work that the Good Parliament began in a variety of literary and documentary forms. However, the continuance of the Good Parliament's reform agenda through Langland's poetry does not depend upon any notion of parliament's failure. In fact, the presence of the Good Parliament's agenda in poetry over the next decade and continuing with the Peasants' Revolt testifies to a different type of success, one less rooted in outcome and more in the processes of intellectual and affective production that an "event" like the Good Parliament can catalyze. Furthermore, Dodd's own captivation with parliamentary failure calls forth a neoliberal fantasy of "outcomes" and "measurable success" that, through

¹¹⁸ Dodd, "A parliament full of rats?" 36.

the twenty-first century's own fixation on outcomes and standards, infuses the way he reads the poem.¹¹⁹

Dodd's suggestion that the B-Prologue displays the Good Parliament's supposed failures is a prime example of how the fetishization of success and failure for evaluating parliamentary process has led to the dominance of topical allegory in the critical tradition of *Piers Plowman* as the impetus for the poem's revision history. Dodd tempers his claim about parliamentary failure by suggesting that "the fable is not a political treatise on the viability of the parliamentary system, but rather a satirized commentary on events that had recently taken place in specific parliaments."¹²⁰ For scholars who do not want to attribute a conservative, absolutist politics to Langland, the parliamentary failure argument must then rely on topical allegory; otherwise, if the Rat Parliament's "failure" is not topical to the Good Parliament, we might then understand not only *this* parliament but rather *all* parliaments as failures. Further, as previously noted, not knowing how to treat the ending of the Rat Parliament other than through a narrative of topical failure has prevented some critics from examining the B-Prologue as commentary on the larger issue of an evolving parliament. That is to say, what if the revision history of *Piers Plowman* is motivated less by topicality and more by Langland's involvement in the conceptual development of the institution?¹²¹ The attachment to ideas of

¹¹⁹ We are reminded here of Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure*, which argues against such heteronormative categories such as success, linearity, and genealogy, in favor of "failure," in-time living, and experimentation.

¹²⁰ Dodd, "A parliament full of rats?" 31.

¹²¹ My reading also challenges arguments like that of Justice in *Writing and Rebellion*, which claim that the C-text revisions especially to the Prologue and the pardon scene in B.V were motivated by Langland's fear over the use of his poem in the rhetoric of the Peasant's Revolt, and therefore that Langland was a not-so-closeted political conservative. While I think the evidence is undeniable that *Piers Plowman's* allegory played a major role in insurgent rhetoric, what if we entertain the possibility that Langland viewed the Revolt as continuing

parliamentary failure, topical allegory, and representations of parliament that reflect a concrete political *ethos* betray as much about the critical tradition's own influence by and investment in contemporary neoliberal discourses over success and failure in contemporary politics as they do about Langland's own era.

However, within the *Piers Plowman* critical history (and, in fact, even within Dodd's own argument) is a cluster of scholars who read the poem not as a *reflection* of popular ideas or even of Langland's own politics, but rather as *commentary* or *analysis* on the Good Parliament, which enables the poem to participate in a larger-scale vision of parliament's influence. Lassahn reminds us that no one narrative of the Good Parliament is authoritative, and that Langland might not even have agreed with competing accounts, and therefore understanding the poem as a reflection of popular attitudes undermines the complexity of the Good Parliament's story and effects.¹²² Furthermore, Jewell insists on the unlikelihood—even the naïveté—of expecting a consistent narrative of parliament over the time span of the poem's three versions, writing that “only a blinkered political theorist never voices an inconsistency, or raises an opposite interpretation often to treat it ambiguously, seriously or satirically.”¹²³ Nonetheless, these writers tend to the poem's impact within the immediacy of the Good Parliament. Although I certainly contextualize the B-Prologue's parliament in the first dream vision within the context of the Good Parliament, as well, I insist that Langland's purposes were much more complex than writing a topical allegory that reflected an absolute narrative or political affiliation. This chapter maintains the importance of the Good

the Good Parliament's reform agenda, and his revisions were motivated by something other than horror over the co-option of his ideas?

¹²² Lassahn, “Langland's Rats Revisited,” 129.

¹²³ Jewell, “*Piers Plowman*—a Poem of Crisis,” 75.

Parliament to reading Langland's poem both because 1376 synthesized the culture of complaint that had developed since Edward I's law reforms and because the parliament captured the public's affect and attention precisely because of this synthesis. But, this alternate reading does not treat the Good Parliament as the beginning, middle, and end of the meaningfulness of Langland's poem.

The Parliament of Rats and Mice's debate over belling the cat is essentially a debate over a petition, which is a theme present even from the A-text's introduction of the fair field, as well. That is, the world's "ask" in the A-text remains in the B-text, but takes on a new value as a preamble to the petitionary debate in the B-text's new Rat Parliament when read after 1376. The Good Parliament serves as a catalyst for a larger discussion about the role of petitions and the larger culture of complaint, since 1376 witnessed more petitions submitted to date than in any single previous parliament;¹²⁴ the B-text augments the presence of petitionary culture and complaint and in so doing highlights the affect at the core of petitionary rhetoric. The tone of frustration over the papal election and the formation of the commonweal and the fear in the Parliament of Rats all take advantage of the affective attachment that the public had to the Good Parliament in order to show that this same affect is present in petitionary rhetoric, that affective rhetoric preserves the individual amidst institutional formulae, and in fact might account for the Good Parliament's almost contemporary legendary (or allegorical) status as an affectively resonant and therefore, influential, lasting *memory* that could reignite hopes for reform at any time in the future.

¹²⁴ Dodd explains that "126 'stand alone' grievances were enrolled" on the parliament roll in 1376. For more, see Dodd, "A parliament full of rats?" 34.

Throughout the first vision, the language of the petition is employed in a way that explores the intersubjective connections between characters, the interior experience of being a political subject before the law, and the affects produced by political experience. The vision, then, takes the rhetoric of the petition and aestheticizes it in poetic form, recontextualizing it in the psychical world of the dream vision genre and emphasizing the affect that accompanies the petitionary process. This chapter proposes that the tensions between individual lived experience and abstracted allegory are mediated by the petition in parliament, which helps to incorporate the political subject into the making of the archive.

VI. Conclusions: Petitions as Staging Intersubjectivity

Petitions are intersubjective and intersubjectively constructed. They are not literal narratives, but the stylized narratives meant to appeal to the emotion, attachment, and symbolic importance of the complaint, how it related to the larger realm, and how it constructed the relationship, and identities of those in the relationship, between king and petitioner, in addition to how it confronted individual and cultural trauma. However, how did this real-life complaint transform into a stylized, rhetorical construct? We know that petitioners would most likely have gone to a number of possible scribes to write the petition for them, rather than writing it themselves. So the question arises as to how this stylized narrative came into being: was it the scribe himself, or was it the petitioner's responsibility to elaborate his or her story? Or, rather, was it the process of conversing, thinking together, even scheming, that constructs the language of the final petition, much like the group process in the Parliament of Rats and Mice constructs its petitions?

Critics and historians who are quick to historicize Langland often miss the interpersonal cues in the formation of the archive, and as such miss the importance of process

to how individuals and the commonweal as a whole dealt with, bemoaned, were disappointed and enlivened by legal and political progress and setbacks. The means by which they publicly processed their reactions were through petitionary rhetoric, making the form, rhetoric, and language ubiquitous to any public expression. Critics who are quick to historicize sometimes neglect the processes it takes to move through the catalogued events that make up history, and these coping mechanisms are often expressed in literature as also stylized expressions of real-world affects. The excitement of 1376 and the unpopular reversals of its victories in 1377 must have caused an affective whiplash throughout at least London (Londoners hated John of Gaunt), and the political scenes added through the B-Prologue of *Piers Plowman* reveal to us the tone of utter devastation and frustration over such political loss. This is not a criticism of parliament; it is a mourning of it. Studies of the medieval petition in the *Piers Plowman* critical tradition need to be read as highly political, because the way we envision contemporary democracy bears on how we read the medieval petition, then as now.

CONCLUSION:

FEELING BUREAUCRATIC: ACTIVISM AND POLITICAL PROCESS IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

“Delaying is a win.”

— *Angel Padilla, Indivisible National Policy Director*

November 15, 2017

For some readers, devastation and frustration over an unexpected political loss strikes close to home. After political loss, how can politics then move us forward? When access to governance, agenda-making, and policy is no longer feasible, how does the political system recuperate loss and maintain care? On November 8, 2016, 65.84 million people¹ in the United States asked similar questions when Republican nominee Donald J. Trump beat front-runner and Democrat Hillary Rodham Clinton in the race for the U.S. Presidency.² However, he lost the popular vote by about 2.9 million votes,³ sparking waves of activism around the country—both locally organized and nationally staged—soon to be known as the “Resistance.”⁴ In the face of a growing activism that resulted from a majority of the country having voted to stop the Trump administration’s agenda, Congressional staffers—i.e., the

¹ Jon Sharman, “Hillary Clinton wins 2,864,974 more votes than Donald Trump, final US election count shows,” *Independent*, December 21, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/hillary-clinton-3-million-popular-vote-donald-trump-us-election-a7487901.html>.

² Ben Schreckinger, “Trump beats Clinton,” *Politico*, November 9, 2016, <https://www.politico.eu/article/us-election-2016-result-donald-trump>.

³ Gregory Krieg, “It’s Official: Clinton swamps Trump in popular vote,” *CNN*, Politics, December 22, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/12/21/politics/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-popular-vote-final-count/index.html>.

⁴ David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *The Resistance: The Dawn of the Anti-Trump Opposition Movement* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), 1.

clerks and bureaucrats that work for the elected U.S. Members of Congress (MoCs)—wrote a how-to guide for interested activists on how to resist the Trump agenda. As a result, *Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda*⁵ was published online as a Google Document on Wednesday, December 14, 2016 around 7pm.⁶ On its cover, the guide states that in its contents “[f]ormer congressional staffers reveal best practices for making Congress listen.”⁷ The guide is a how-to manual on best practices for harnessing the political process in order to resist the Trump administration’s political agenda. Politics moves us forward not by fixating on outcomes (i.e., “we lost the election”), but by engaging political processes that, although institutionalized, are nonetheless accessible. The Resistance movement includes activists, but these activists are guided by activist-bureaucrats that use their political know-how to inspire others to creatively engage in political process. A modern *Modus tenendi parliamentum*, the *Indivisible* guide conceptualizes the capacities for political process in the face of loss, and, being an open-sourced document, provides a Natal function in its accessibility and culture of collectivity.

The *Indivisible* guide is a twenty-six-page how-to manual that instructs its users both on the political process and time-tested tools of political activism to trump Trump’s agenda. It is broken up into four chapters, ranging from the history of grassroots activism against President Barack Obama,⁸ to an analysis of how your MoC thinks,⁹ to instructions for setting

⁵ *Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda*, The Indivisible Project, 2016, <https://www.indivisible.org/resource/guide-english.pdf>.

⁶ Charles Bethea, “The Crowdsourced Guide to Fighting Trump’s Agenda,” *The New Yorker*, December 16, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-crowd-sourced-guide-to-fighting-trumps-agenda>.

⁷ *Indivisible*, 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

up a local political group,¹⁰ to finally protest strategies that actually work.¹¹ The majority of the how-to guide is devoted to outlining these strategies and to imagining scenarios that exercise the capacity of political process to provoke political activism. At first glance, although the guide's mission is to assist in the resistance to Trump's agenda, the political processes that they outline—i.e., town halls, public events, district office visits, coordinated calls¹²—are all activities that seem non-partisan. In fact, the guide is very self-aware of its own history, explaining that many of its tactics were inspired by the Tea Party, a resistance group that arose in 2009 as a backlash against Barack Obama's presidency, and which ultimately was successful in delaying the Obama agenda.¹³ The *Guide* explains that its proposed processes will work

because we've seen it before. The authors of this guide are former congressional staffers who witnessed the rise of the Tea Party. We saw these activists take on a popular president with a mandate for change and a supermajority in Congress. We saw them organize locally and convince their own MoCs to reject President Obama's agenda. Their ideas were wrong, cruel, and tinged with racism—and they won.¹⁴

Using their institutional knowledge and experience with protesters during the Obama administration, the guide reverse-engineers the Tea Party's success by attending not to its ideology but to its tactics—its processes for expression.

¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹¹ Ibid., 16.

¹² Ibid., 4.

¹³ Megan E. Brooker, "Indivisible: Invigorating and Redirecting the Grassroots," in *The Resistance: The Dawn of the Anti-Trump Opposition Movement*, eds. David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, 162-84 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), 162.

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

The “clerks of Congress,” or the staffers for U.S. Members of Congress, were central to the creation and dissemination of the guide. They themselves wrangle Washington D.C.’s political processes to preserve expression for constituents on a daily basis. The authors of the guide consist of about “thirty or so thirty-somethings,”¹⁵ younger Congressional staffers who, as explained in an op-ed written by *Indivisible*’s founding leaders, all “served as congressional staff members during the early years of the Obama administration.”¹⁶ However, the guide does not self-present as an authoritative, Democratic Party-sanctioned policy document, but instead as procedural wisdom, “tricks of the trade,” so to speak, about how to maneuver U.S. political institutions. The guide explains that “[e]very single person who worked on this guide and website is a volunteer. We’re doing this in our free time without coordination or support from our employers,”¹⁷ thus presenting itself as a para-institutional document, a whisper network of sorts that conveys unofficial knowledge useful for official political action. Noteworthy, however, is that these staffers are moonlighters, using their unofficial, off-the-clock, *personal* time to influence the activities of the very official institutional business in which they engage during official time. Indeed, this echoes the activities of the clerks of parliament in fourteenth-century England, many of whom also moonlighted by assisting in the writing of private, individual petitions to the king, when they weren’t busy writing the official documents for the parliament.¹⁸ In this way, both groups—the medieval clerks and the modern staffers—aim to share their knowledge of official,

¹⁵ Bethea, “The Crowdsourced Guide.”

¹⁶ Ezra Levin, Leah Greenberg, and Angel Padilla, “To Stop Trump, Democrats Can Learn From the Tea Party,” *The New York Times*, Opinion, January 2, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/02/opinion/to-stop-trump-democrats-can-learn-from-the-tea-party.html>.

¹⁷ *Indivisible*, 2.

¹⁸ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, 314.

institutional processes in order to aid the “fair field ful of folk” in their efforts to petition the sovereign through official channels of government. Moonlighting, as outside of the official economy, exists parallel to it in order for unofficial culture to influence official practice.

It is through this unofficial guide that congressional staffers were able to infuse their political project into the political process. Although the guide uses many of the same tactics that the Tea Party successfully used during the Obama years, such as a defensive “just say no” approach and organizing locally,¹⁹ the authors change the political ideology that motivates these processes, and instead conceptualize a world in which U.S. political process can be used to enact a specific progressive worldview. The guide is very clear to distinguish itself from the Tea Party movement in one key area: the resistance movement’s *ethos*. For example, the guide states that this resistance must be “built on the values of inclusion, tolerance, and fairness,”²⁰ valuing the capacity for expression and offering a contemporary vision of the “social link.” That is, although the processes are similar, the impetus and inertia for these processes are wholly different. The guide resuscitates political failure (i.e., the success of the Tea Party) only to transform it into progressive political action. This transformative ability is the ideological message at the heart of the guide: a progressive political vision can find transformation in the very strategies by which we seek common profit—or, the public good.

These are lofty ideas: a progressive vision of politics in the Age of Trump seems out of reach and out of touch. However, worth remembering is that the history of parliament as told in this dissertation, one in which a group of government workers used their imagination

¹⁹ *Indivisible*, 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

and their intelligence to shape the very growth of an institution, is a history of both innovation and of lofty ideals. These ideals are not out of touch, as they made an impact on the ground in the fourteenth-century political arena and helped to shape the lived, expressive, and bodily realities of those who engaged in political process. Martha Nussbaum reminds us that “[i]deals are real: they direct our striving, our plans, our legal processes.”²¹ She continues to explain that, although documents like constitutions are “ideal documents in the sense that they are not always perfectly implemented all the time, [...] they are also real, supplying a basis for legal action when the rights they guarantee are not delivered.”²² The *Modus* and the *Indivisible* guide certainly offer idealized visions of deliberative institutions and suggest lofty ways of engaging in politics (remember the *Modus*’ fantasy of the committee of twenty-five). But these idealizations, conceptualizations, and fantasies provoke action—provoke processes—and thus affect political work on the ground.

The *Indivisible* guide offers a twenty-first century vision of my argument in this dissertation. In an interview with Angel Padilla, *Indivisible*’s National Policy Director, Padilla states that, in the Age of Trump, “delaying is a win.”²³ The *Indivisible* movement understands that Trump and the Republicans have control over the national policy agenda; but, this does not foreclose politics for the other side, because politics is not only about outcomes, but is also about processes of engagement and expression. Delaying is a win because it elongates practices of group care, preserves expression, and postpones potential trauma. Delaying is a win because it incites political process. If we focus less on political

²¹ Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013), 383.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Booker, “*Indivisible*,” 177.

outcomes and more on the ability to engage in political process, this itself is a “win.” Feeling bureaucratic is at the center of activism: such feelings harness and embrace political process for the affective project of protest, of seeing alternate conceptualizations of the world.

Political process is not a cumbersome bureaucratic nightmare, but is a way to get things done. My theory of political process offered in this dissertation is especially important in the twenty-first century, where a technocratic and administrative fascination with elections won, bills passed, and political productivity eclipses the very human processes and affects at the core of our politics. Valuing the capacity of political process admits entry to a politics of psychoanalysis.

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