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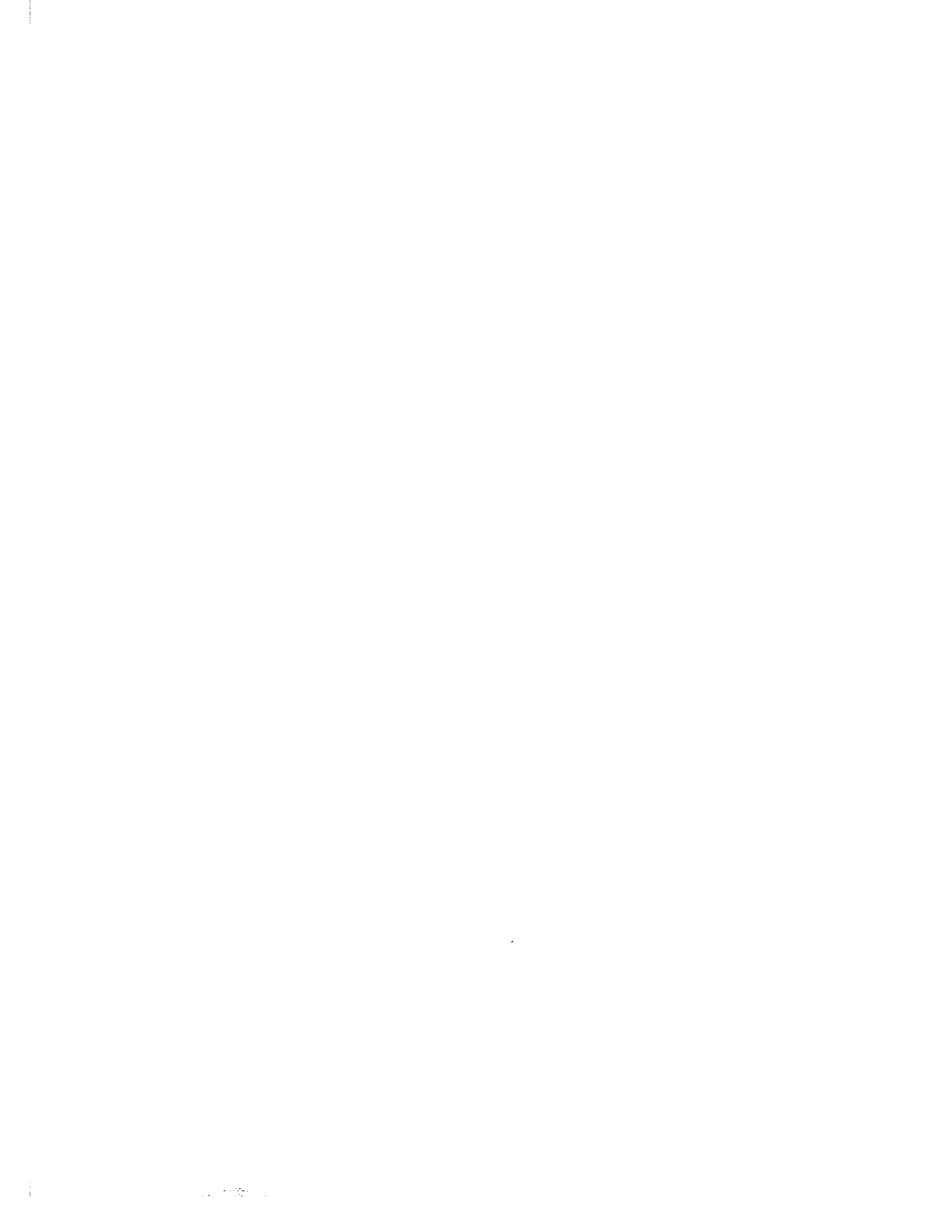
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**The Rhetorical Art of Some Vernon Refrain Lyrics**

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies,  
University of Ottawa,  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for a Ph.D. in English.**

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## Table of contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Technical Devices Contributing to the Rhetorical Art of Certain Vernon Refrain Lyrics: the Speaking Voice, the Refrain, and Word-play</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>2. Naming of parts in “Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent”: Lessons in Rhetoric</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>An edition of “Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent”</b> .....	<b>93</b>
<b>3. Noble Giving in “þat selden I seize is sone forsete”</b> .....	<b>102</b>
<b>4. Embodied Troupe in “Troupe is Best”</b> .....	<b>132</b>
<b>5. Functions of the Bird Episode in “Merci passeþ alle þinge”</b> .....	<b>175</b>
<b>An edition of “Merci passeþ alle þinge”</b> .....	<b>202</b>
<b>6. The Metaphysical Poetics of “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys”</b> .....	<b>213</b>
<b>7. The Material Semantics of “Þis world fareþ as a Fantasy”</b> .....	<b>263</b>
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>283</b>
<b>Appendix One</b> .....	<b>300</b>
<b>Appendix Two</b> .....	<b>302</b>
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	<b>303</b>

## Abstract

The dissertation considers how the anonymous authors of six moral and religious pseudo-ballade refrain poems first attested in the late fourteenth-century Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. poet.a.1) manipulate devices such as speaking persona, word-play, and allegory in ways that support rhetorical strategies hitherto unrecognized in Middle English lyric.

The study begins with stemmatic analyses that identify, as far as is possible from the physical record, the archetypal text, or “work,” of each poem. Chapter One then provides an overview of scholarship that has focussed on two important technical devices used in the Vernon refrain lyrics—the speaking voice and the refrain—and articulates how the lyrics use those devices in hitherto unrecognized ways. Chapter One concludes by considering the kinds of word-play found in other Middle English literature, in order to define that found in the Vernon lyrics. In the next six chapters, each of the six “works” is considered as a communicative event. Using mainly historicist, formalist, and reader-response methodologies, I explore, for each poem in turn, how the poet moulds language to signify indirectly so that the message is communicated figuratively, and how the implied audience is cast into a specific role vis-à-vis the communicative action in a way that inflects the message. I also explore how the rhetorical strategies of the poems are informed by various theories of signification, which are defined in relation to the socio-linguistic circumstances and philosophical currents of the time, and consider the poems in relation to other medieval, mostly earlier Middle English, lyrics.

In the Conclusion, findings are assembled to indicate how the recovery of the Vernon

refrain lyrics' rhetorical art expands the parameters that currently define Middle English lyric. I also turn from considering the implied audience of the "works" to considering the historical audience of the Vernon manuscript, and suggest that the recovery of the Vernon refrain lyrics' rhetorical art bolsters theories that maintain the Vernon manuscript was intended, at least in part, for an upper gentry or aristocratic audience, and that its thorough Englishness is more of a polemic assertion of the strength of the English language than a reflection of socio-linguistic conditions.

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## Introduction

What are the Vernon refrain lyrics? The answer will depend on what we are looking to learn from them. They are, most readily, a group of twenty-three lyrics written in a “pseudo-ballade” form that appear at the end of the late fourteenth-century Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng.poet.a.1).<sup>1</sup> That, at least, is their earliest dated attestation. The same series exists in the same order, with relatively few variations, in the slightly later Simeon manuscript (London, British Library, MS. Additional 22283). Nine Vernon refrain lyrics also appear in a total of thirteen later manuscripts, distributed as indicated in Appendix II. Any given Vernon refrain lyric, then, has from two to seven different manuscript versions. There is no single “text” of any one lyric. Moreover, given the definition of “text” in editorial theory, as “a sequence or array of words and graphic images transmitted in a document or documents or through other media,”<sup>2</sup> the texts of any given Vernon refrain lyric are potentially endless: two to seven manuscript versions, and countless other versions in other media, including, but by no means limited to, published editions. Any given lyric would appear to have a potentially endless number of modulations and material embodiments. By focussing on these expansive arrays of forms, we can learn about issues relating to, for example, the material conditions of manuscript production, or “the sociology of texts.”<sup>3</sup> It is also more or less possible to (re)create from the various manuscript texts an “archetypal text” of each lyric, which would enable us to view the lyric as a “work.” Editorial theory defines the work as the “correct text” that a critic may aim to recover: it is “the message or experience implied by the authoritative versions of a literary writing,” and as such has no “substantial existence.”<sup>4</sup> The “work” that is any given Vernon refrain lyric is in theory monolithic: whatever “correct text” can be surmised by tracing a track of transmission through various medieval manuscript texts. In practice, however, the “work” is

finally insubstantial and irretrievable, since it is inevitably conditioned by any critic's strategy of reading. While granting that the work (re)created by the critic will never match the authorial intention forever veiled behind texts, its identification, however contingent, can provide certain kinds of information. For example, identifying the most authorial text will also assist in plotting, through dialect mapping, the place of composition, which can be used to address broader questions of literary history.<sup>5</sup> Ascertaining the identity of the "work" can also serve interpretative aims, in cases where one might wish to invoke the intention of the author to study, for example, the extent of rhetorical self-consciousness in lyric poetry. This study, which seeks to probe the extent of rhetorical self-consciousness in the Vernon refrain lyrics, needs to begin by establishing a methodology for determining as far as possible the work for each of the lyrics to be discussed.

Even aside from post-structuralist pressures, caution should always attend efforts to determine a poem's work from its texts, and the situation with Middle English lyric is particularly acute.<sup>6</sup> Even faced with holographs, it is impossible to begin discussing any medieval text with the assumption that it is the authentic representation of the poet's intention. As is true for any historical period, "authorial action" (what the author wrote) is not the same as "authorial intention."<sup>7</sup> More fundamentally, though, the concept of "authorial version" is conditioned by post-medieval assumptions of the sovereign subject, and these assumptions misrepresent the Middle Ages when applied to them. As Ralph Hanna III has persistently shown, it is clear that in many cases medieval readers and scribes did not respond to a text in a way that respected the intention of the author, but often engaged in "varieties of active redaction," with the result that "audience reception differed radically from explicit authorial statement."<sup>8</sup> This implies that the text of any Vernon refrain lyric, though in every case the earliest attestation, may be the result of

collaboration or scribal editorial work. It is therefore impossible to assert that any given lyric represents authorial intention. But it should still be possible to argue that the lyrics could represent something close to authorial intention, as certain Middle English “verbal icons” (such as *Pearl*) do.<sup>9</sup> Given the lack of certainty about any lyric’s textual pre-history, the decision to define a text as being proximate to the intention of a single author or to that of a scribe/collaborator is to some degree a matter of choice, though responsible choice, in the face of the evidence. This possibility becomes even more viable once certain “verbal icons” have been identified among the group. My confidence in evoking authorial intention here is increased by their conscious “fixed form” structure,<sup>10</sup> by the fact that some Middle English lyrics written before the Vernon manuscript was compiled do qualify as consciously crafted poems, and by the findings of the pilot project for this dissertation, my M.Phil. thesis, which uncovered complex structural and thematic coherence in six Vernon refrain lyrics.

I should add, however, that although I invoke authorial intention in order to account for what I see to be the poets’ conscious manipulation of material to serve rhetorical aims, I am mindful of the fact that the original text is a social product. In aiming to recover the rhetorical strategies of any given lyric, therefore, it has been necessary to attempt to recover the social and cultural context out of which it emanates. In this regard, my theoretical approach moves beyond a purely formalist, New Critical reading to partake of the kind of “historical method” urged as being essential by textual theorists such as Jerome McGann.<sup>11</sup> I will attempt to recover, through historical investigation, the topical aspects of certain Vernon lyrics, as a necessary conjoint to recovering their rhetorical art. The “authorial intention” I refer to, therefore, is always embedded in a social context, which more or less conditions and absorbs that intention.

In turning to expand my M.Phil. findings in this Ph.D. dissertation, I performed an initial review of all the Vernon refrain lyrics for traces of rhetorical art: every text of every lyric was analysed to determine which ones would repay close critical attention. Five new lyrics were chosen, and I found it necessary to reconsider one lyric that was discussed in the M.Phil. That makes a total of eleven of twenty-three Vernon refrain lyrics that exhibit a holistic rhetorical art. Other lyrics employ technical devices artfully, but not, so far as I can see, in the coherent manner of these eleven.

The next step was to determine a methodology for ascertaining the “work” of each of the six lyrics. Four of the six have no attestations later than the Simeon manuscript. To determine the archetypal text for these it was necessary to collate all twenty-three lyrics as they appear in the Vernon manuscript (hereafter “V”) and the Simeon manuscript (hereafter “S”). The other two lyrics survive in later manuscripts, and it has been necessary to trace a recensionist account for each; those accounts have been incorporated into the respective chapters (Chapter Two on “Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent”, Chapter Five on “Merci passeþ alle þinge”). In the following analysis of various texts I refer to the lyrics by number, in order of their occurrence in V, as indicated in Appendix I. The thirteen other manuscripts will be referred to by their sigla, as set out in Appendix II.

Before collating V and S it is necessary to clarify the status of V. The Vernon texts of the lyrics are copied by scribe B, who was responsible for the greater part of copying in V, and some parts in S as well.<sup>12</sup> The Simeon texts of the lyrics are copied by scribe A up to 15.1, and by scribe C hereafter. A scribe, perhaps different than B, has made eight emendations in the Vernon copies of lyrics 2,9,15,16, 22, 23. Without the benefit of Dr. Kenneth Hunter’s transcriptions of the

substantive variants among the lyrics, John Thompson found that “these later insertions do not seem to represent any concerted editorial effort to ‘correct’ Vernon by collating it against another copy of the sequence,” but rather “look instead like casual additions by a later reader, working pen in hand and occasionally hoping to clarify the sense of what was being read in Vernon.”<sup>13</sup> The fact that in seven of the eight instances the corrections in Vernon do appear in later versions, however, indicates that the scribe of V is collating against an exemplar, and so that the corrections bring V closer to each “work.”<sup>14</sup>

Five of the eight corrections occur in lyrics that appear otherwise only in S, and four of these are incorporated into the S texts. These are as follows:

Lyric 15, “For charite is no lengor cheere”

Line 56: “pat” is interlined by a corrector in V, and also appears in S

Line 67: “ne” is interlined by a corrector in V, and also appears in S

Lyric 22, “And fond euermore to seye þe best”

Line 2: “nou” is interlined by corrector in V, and also appears in S

Lyric 23, “And make no tarijng til to Morn”

Line 16: “pat” interlined by corrector in V, and also appears in S

The one case where the correction is not incorporated into S is as follows:

Lyric 16, “Of wimmen comeþ þis worldes welle”

Line 59: “in” is interlined by corrector in V, but S has, alternatively, “wiþ”

The four cases of interpolations that are incorporated into S do not help in ascertaining whether the corrector was working from an exemplar or capriciously, for several reasons. Primarily, we cannot be certain that the S scribes were using V’s exemplar rather than V, and so getting right

what the V scribe got wrong and corrected. Moreover, the hand and date of the correcting scribe have not been determined. Thompson claims it is a later hand.<sup>15</sup> Doyle notes, more generally, that some emendations are made by the scribe and some by subsequent readers, but does not discuss the interpolations in the lyrics directly.<sup>16</sup> Should it be determined that the correcting hand in V post-dates that of S, we would have evidence either that S is copied from the same exemplar as V, or that S is the exemplar against which V is corrected. As it stands, the evidence only affirms that the S scribes were copying either from the corrected V texts or from V's exemplar(s). These four instances do not indicate whether the interpolations correspond with V's exemplar, and so whether they form parts of the archetypal texts, insofar as we can construct them.

The three instances where the Vernon emendation is incorporated into manuscripts other than S, however, support the theory that the Vernon corrector was working through collation.

The three instances are as follows:

Lyric 2, "*Deo Gracias* I"

Line 8: "al" interlined by corrector in V, and also appears in S and in A

Line 30: "seide" is interlined by a corrector in V, and also appears in S and A

Lyric 9, "For hos seip þe soþe he schal be schente"

Line 14: "mon" is interlined by a corrector in V, and appears in S and T

Although there are only three instances, it is likely that the repetition is not coincidental. Rather, they provide evidence to support the theory that the interpolations represent integral parts of versions of the lyrics that pre-date V and S. Boosting this theory is the fact that we have no cases where an emendation interpolated in V is not incorporated into a post-Simeon text.

Alternatively, the fact that the Vernon emendations are incorporated into later versions

could indicate that the subsequent versions have stemmata that link back to V rather than V's exemplar or one of its precedents. This theory seems more unlikely, however, because it favours viewing the overall transmission history of the lyrics as a narrative of how the twenty-three were dispersed from V rather than unusually gathered together there from various sources. Previous scholars have hypothesized that the exemplars of the Vernon lyrics must have come from various sources.<sup>17</sup> It is not unreasonable to suppose that if V were a more direct node on the stemmata we would more than likely have found a higher rate of co-incidental attestations of the lyrics in any given manuscript. As it stands, of the thirteen manuscripts that contain versions of the lyrics, two of them contain two lyrics (and two different lyrics), while two others contain three lyrics (both of them the same three lyrics). The remaining nine manuscripts contain only one lyric each.

Moreover, a preliminary dialect analysis indicates that the poems were conglomerated from various regions. Throughout the manuscript the scribe's dialect is regularly West Midland. Mary S. Serjeanston gives an account of the dialect of the Index of the Vernon manuscript, which appears on the first eight leaves of the volume.<sup>18</sup> The index was written by scribe A, who also supplied some rubrics and some foliation in the rest of the manuscript.<sup>19</sup> The rest of the manuscript was written by scribe B, who could, theoretically, show signs of a different dialect. A.I. Doyle notes, however, that "Meech suggested to Serjeantson that the original contents list ought to reflect more accurately scribal dialect than the texts potentially affected by those of the exemplars, and indeed Scribe A of V is said to conform generally to the habits of B except when letting through relics of earlier transmission in his copy of Aelred."<sup>20</sup> Serjeanston's analysis, therefore, can apply to the entire manuscript. Serjeanston localized the manuscript to "the South Shropshire–South Staffordshire area."<sup>21</sup> *The Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*

(hereafter *LALME*) localizes it to Worcestershire.<sup>22</sup> Any divergence from the West Midland dialect thus likely presents a trace of the poet's dialect or that of an intervening scribe. Though a full dialect analysis remains to be done, locations represented by those divergences are variously Eastern and Northern. Kenneth Hunter identifies East Midland characteristics in many vowel forms. For instance, the Eastern form "sinne" is often used instead of the western form "sunne," including in fourteen different rhyming positions.<sup>23</sup> O.S. Pickering refers to "Be token hit is þe Flourdelys" as being an "evidently northern poem,"<sup>24</sup> and other poems also show traces of a Northern provenance, including "þat selden I seiþe Is sone forþete" to be discussed herein. One recurrent trace of Northern dialect is the third person singular indicative ending *-es*. Serjeanston found only one instance of this Northern form of the verb, beside the regularly appearing, Southern *-ep*.<sup>25</sup> In a study of the language of the Vernon text of "Robert of Cicyle," Stephen Powell remarks that "[t]hird-person singular present indicative never appears with final *-s*, but rather with *-ep*."<sup>26</sup> In the Vernon refrain series, however, Hunter counted thirty-seven examples of the Northern *-es* form, just under a quarter of the amount of the normal *-ep* form.<sup>27</sup> These dialectic signs of different provenance for the lyrics collected in V make it very probable that the lyrics were gathered together from different sources, and, consequently, that the Vernon corrector was working through collation.

Having established with reasonable certitude that the exemplar for V includes the interpolated matter, the next step is to try to determine whether S texts were copied from V or from a common exemplar, which will be referred to hereafter as "*UR*."<sup>28</sup> Ascertaining the exemplar of the S texts will indicate whether we can expect to find any points where a variant S reading might comprise the archetype text.

It is evident that *V* was not copied from *S*, since *S* omits 1.76-9 and 10.29, but it is less clear whether *S* was copied from *UR* or from *V*. Opinion is divided. Doyle has hypothesized that *S* is copied from *UR* rather than *V*, given that the *S* scribe includes two additional lyrics, and room remains for more.<sup>29</sup> Kara Sajavaara considers what the implications of the additional two *S* lyrics are for the relationship between *V* and *S*, but refrains from offering a single hypothesis.<sup>30</sup> Burrow proceeds assuming a common *UR* exemplar.<sup>31</sup> Hunter avers that *S* is a copy of *V*, though he does so seemingly to assert their similarity in relation to later variants and redactions, and does not register an awareness of the possibility that *S* might be a copy of *UR*.<sup>32</sup> Thompson argues that *S* was copied directly from *V*, based on the perpetuation of punctuation errors. Simeon scribes perpetuate certain errors in marking where paraph marks were to be inserted as stanza indicators: lyric 12 at line 19 instead of 13; lyric 17 at line 21 instead of either 17 or 25; and lyric 21 at line 13 instead of either 9 or 17.<sup>33</sup> The perpetuation of errors does not in itself qualify as sufficient evidence to argue *S* copied from *V*, however, since it is equally possible that the scribes of both *V* and *S* were perpetuating errors from *UR*.

One way of determining whether *S* is ever closer to the archetypal text than *V* would be to chart instances where a “substantial variant” in *S* is repeated in later attestations. This analysis depends on distinguishing “substantive” variants from “accidental” variants, the latter being strictly orthographic.<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Hunter’s diplomatic transcription includes a list of substantial variants in all manuscripts. I have checked Hunter’s record against London, British Library, MS. Additional 31042; Cambridge, Trinity College, MS. 0.9.38; and the texts of the six poems to be discussed herein as they appear in London, British Library, MS. 22283. His record is approximately 90% accurate. Hermann Varnhagen’s edition of Vernon lyrics 1-7 and 9-13 lists

incidental and substantial variants of those poems in S.<sup>35</sup> The accuracy rate is likewise about 90%. In checking Varnhagen's work against S, I have found that he frequently does not record variants between *i* and *y*, and that he is less careful about representing the morpheme spacing found in the manuscripts. While granting some margin of error, until a more thorough record of all the texts can be obtained I have used Hunter's data as a basis for analysing the relative occurrence of Simeon and post-Simeon variants. I embarked on this analysis thinking that should we find a number of cases where the S reading is perpetuated rather than the V reading, we could be fairly certain that, in those moments, the S reading is closer to the archetypal text and therefore that the Simeon scribe was copying from *UR* rather than V. That would enable us to hypothesize that any S variant, even in poems that are not attested later than S, is potentially closer to the archetypal text.

According to Hunter's list, S has relatively few substantial variants from V: only 150 out of the total 27 lyrics. Hunter finds that S contains only 14 improvements of the 150 variants. He identifies as improvements 1.121; 6.42,46,56,57; 7.70,138,176; 10.4,37,49,65; 19.42; 23.48.<sup>36</sup> Burrow, using Varnhagen's list, notes that Simeon shows better readings at 1.21, 10.4, 10.65-6, 12.73, 13.5.<sup>37</sup> This includes three that Hunter does not mention, so effectively brings the total of possible improvements to seventeen. Given that Burrow was not drawing on a similar compilation for the remaining eleven poems (i.e. he was not using Hunter's transcription or a self-produced record of variants), it is reasonable to assume that even more cases of better readings in S could be cited. As a rough figure, we may say that between seventeen and twenty-five of the 150 S variants may be deemed better readings. These might indicate that the S readings at these points are closer to the authorial intention, and so corresponding to *UR* where V includes a variant. The evidence is inconclusive, however, for those superior readings could also indicate the work of a

scrutinizing or creative S scribe dealing solely with the V text.

Of the 150 variants of substance in S, 37 occur in lyrics that have later witnesses. Of these 37, only 5 S variants are found in later attestations. That adds up to 10.8 % of cases where later attestations have a Simeon form, and so almost 90 % where the Vernon form is preferred. These figures can be adjusted somewhat given that sometimes subsequent readings adhere to neither V nor S, and that in 4 of the 37 cases where S variants exist in poems that are later attested the lines containing those variants are missing in the subsequent witnesses (11.53, 55 and 12.42, 56). The possibility that the evidence can indicate that S is copying from *UR* in points where the S reading appears later, moreover, is further reduced through a closer look at each case. The five cases where a Simeon variant is repeated are as follows:

2.14 habbeþ] S haue; A hafe (“hafe” is an incidental variant of “haue”)

8.31 & of] SL: of

11.5 myst] SG: myhtest

13.5 3eore] SA 3eorne

20.64 ben] SPe be

For the most part, the repetition of S variants in subsequent versions can be defined in one of four ways: as a grammatical variation, dialect variant, coincidental likeness, or a likely scribal error in V. The S variant at 11.5 is a case of grammatical variation—a change in verb ending. Moreover, it is only repeated in one out of a possible five other manuscripts, making it less likely that it was taken from a source closer to the archetypal text. 20.64 is also a case of grammatical variation, a change in infinitive ending from the more recently used  $\phi$  to -n. It comes in the refrain line “For warnyng haue we to ben ware,” where all of the other ten instances of the refrain read “be.” The S

variant at 8.31 is only repeated in one out of a possible four later manuscripts, and can be attributed to coincidence. 13.5 is likely an error in V. The full line reads “Þus to crist ful 3eore he crizede.” “3eore” denotes “a long time ago” or “for a long time” (*OED* s.v. yore adv. 1., 3.).<sup>38</sup> Although the word has some sense in this context of a *chanson d’aventure* report of the narrator beholding a penitent seeking forgiveness, “3eorne” contains the stronger reading. “3eorne” means “eagerly, earnestly, ...zealously” (*OED* s.v. yerne adv. 1.). The other attestation of the lyric, in Ba, omits the word altogether. 2.14 is also a dialect variant: habbeþ is the second person Southern form for Midland “have(n).”<sup>39</sup> Altogether, there is not one clear instance where a strong substantial S variant is repeated in subsequent texts. Therefore the comparison does not provide evidence from which to determine whether S is copying from V or from *UR*.

The evidence leaves open two possibilities: either S was copying from *UR* and was a less careful scribe, or S was copying from V and was not necessarily a poorer scribe, since we have nothing against which to check the V scribe’s accuracy beyond those 37 instances (i.e. we have no prior text which might show greater conformity with later versions). The comparison does provide evidence to argue, again, tentatively and pending a further record of textual variants, that subsequent scribes were copying either from an exemplar going back to V or, more likely, to *UR*, but not to S. It also indicates that V is closer to *UR* than S is.

Even though this comparison does not provide clear evidence that S is copied from *UR* rather than V, the fact remains that at least 10% of Simeon variants have been deemed stronger readings. This may indicate that S is copied from *UR*. Mindful of this possibility, and of Doyle’s argument that S was copying from *UR* given that he includes an additional two lyrics, following John Burrow’s lead I shall assume that both S and V were copied from *UR*. The “work” or

archetypal text of each lyric that exists only in V and S, then, insofar as it can be recovered, resides in the strongest readings from S and V; this is most often, but not always, the V reading. For each of the lyrics to be considered here that exist only in V and S, each substantial S variant that registers a crux in reading will be considered with the possibility that it matches *UR* where V disagrees, and hence that the S reading may be integral to the “work.”

With methodological procedures in place for ascertaining the “work” of each poem, the following rhetorical analysis will proceed with recourse to authorial intention, while granting that no text existing materially or that we can imagine mentally will ever exactly represent authorial intention. Like all rhetorical analyses, this one considers each lyric as a communicative event, and explores the interactions among communicator, discourse, environment, and audience. Though sometimes I engage in the “new rhetoric,” which considers discourse from the perspectives engendered by cultural materialist theories, in all cases I apply the more traditional style of rhetorical analysis, which deals solely with discourse whose aim is consciously rhetorical: I seek to articulate how the poets shape language to persuade an implied audience to certain points of view. The analyses will make recourse, for the most part silently, to traditional rhetorical precepts such as those in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, while integrating historicist, formalist, phenomenological, and materialist methodologies.

The six lyrics are considered in their cultural contexts, which are variously political, social, philosophical, and literary. With the exception of “Þat selden I seize Is sone forzete,” which permits more precise dating,<sup>40</sup> the temporal limits of those contexts have been defined by considering the date of the compilation of the Vernon manuscript, which can be placed in the last quarter of the fourteenth century,<sup>41</sup> and the *terminus a quo* as the earliest likely date for the

introduction of the pseudo-ballade form into English, which has most recently been set between 1375 and 1380.<sup>41</sup> The means of recovering the contexts varies: it ranges from recuperating the denotations and resonances of minute lexical values, to delineating, from a review of previous uses of literary *topoi*, the “horizon of expectations” evoked by literary structures, to identifying philosophical and theological issues, to recounting social and political events and circumstances. The lyrics’ relation to their cultural moment is considered from various perspectives. In all cases I focus on how the lyrics bring cultural contexts into the formal world of the poems, in the form of references, allusions, and resonances, and mould them to particular rhetorical strategies. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 deal with moral lyrics that are more clearly situated in their socio-political circumstances, and in analysing them I also engage in a broader form of rhetorical analysis, which looks at all discourse from a “rhetorical stance” and consequently focusses more on the socio-economic factors that motivate the speaker and determine the audience’s responses.<sup>42</sup>

These six lyrics, like the five others discussed in my “Six Vernon Refrain Lyrics,” are distinguished from others by their employment of consciously literary persuasive strategies: they are not only rhetorical, they are also artful. The poems have multi-dimensional discursive structures, and they communicate through indirection. Different literary techniques sustain these structures. In all poems, and in some more than others, the multi-dimensional discursive structures involve the personae’s roles as characters; in most poems they involve word-play; in some poems they involve overlapping allegories; and in one poem the discursive structure involves a semiotic critique of a commonplace exemplum.

As well as considering the discursive structures from a formalist perspective using an historical method, I shall consider them, and especially the first three to be discussed, from a

phenomenological perspective, in terms of their “implied audience.” The poems summon their implied audience to apprehend various allusive discursive structures, and thereby engage with them in a holistic manner. In considering how the texts summon that engagement, and the role of the audience in constructing any given poem’s meaning, I shall be drawing on the theory of Wolfgang Iser.<sup>43</sup> For Iser, the “implied reader” is an entity inscribed within the text, and it is also a process through which the reader of the text concretizes its meaning. There is no determined “meaning” in the text that the reader must uncover, as purely formalist methodologies would have it. Rather, a text consists of determinate and indeterminate elements. The text also provides instructions to the reader regarding how to eliminate the indeterminacies, and thereby concretize meaning. Iser’s theory will prove particularly apt in the discussions of the first three poems, which cast the audience into specific dramatic roles so that they not only concretize the meaning but also embody it. My discussions of these poems will imply that their authors composed their works with expectations of reading similar to that articulated by Iser. For the remaining three poems, where the speaker’s casting of the audience is less direct, the analysis will be more strictly formalist and historical.

The title “The Rhetorical Art of Some Vernon Refrain Lyrics” does more than define what I propose to delineate in a descriptive fashion: “rhetorical art” also names a subject that is consciously commented on in many of the lyrics. The dissertation also considers what status rhetoric has in the world of certain lyrics: analysis often involves considering how rhetoric is explicitly identified, what status it is given, and how that status contributes to the message. The findings are different for each lyric, and they imply different forms of literary theory.

Although there are significant parallels, there is no common, overarching “poetics” defining

the six Vernon refrain lyrics as a group; nor is there a common theory of signification: the six provide a miniature cornucopia of rhetorical techniques and strategies, and also manifest various theories of signification. The recovery of the details of the group should qualify the currently dominant opinion about the poems' poetic and rhetorical qualities. Only handful of scholars have commended the poetic achievement of the lyrics. Although Rosemary Woolf did not give much space to them in her magisterial study of religious lyrics, she did identify the group as being "eccentric and striking," and in particular commended the death lyrics, which have been the favourites among critics.<sup>44</sup> John Burrow noted the powerful exempla and imagery of certain stanzas, and O.S. Pickering has supported his commendation, while pointing out the striking phrases, metaphors, and use of word-play in a different Vernon lyric.<sup>45</sup> Ronald Waldron, speaking more generally about the lyrics, sees in them "a didactic purpose ...in the process of being itself absorbed into an aesthetic mould."<sup>46</sup> Most critics, however, categorize the lyrics as sober and conservative, from both anthropomorphic and formal perspectives.<sup>47</sup>

The readings that follow will also qualify more particular accounts of their technical devices, to be discussed in Chapter One. More generally, the readings should help to extend the parameters that currently define Middle English lyric. Most of the Vernon lyrics discussed in the following pages are placed in relation to other medieval, usually earlier Middle English, lyrics on the same theme or using similar strategies. The comparisons in all cases show how the Vernon refrain lyrics modify the current profile of the genre. There will be more to say about the qualifications and modifications to current narratives of literary history in the Conclusion. The Conclusion will also present an opportunity to move from "work" to "text" to consider what these lyrics might tell us about the Vernon manuscript, about its intended audience as well as the motives

driving its compilation. Before proceeding to the analyses of the individual poems, however, Chapter One will provide an account of techniques that are fundamental to the rhetorical art of the lyrics to be discussed: the speaking voice, the refrain, and word-play.

## Notes to Introduction

1. The usual number of Vernon refrain poems is twenty-three, which numbers those appearing together in the last section of the manuscript (section V), on folios 407a through 412v. The whole series is edited in *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript*, Vol. 2, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS os 117 (London, 1901), pp. 658-735. All but "Pat selden I seize Is sone forsete" appear in *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown, rev. G.V. Smithers, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1957), pp. 125-205. "Pat selden I seize Is sone forsete" is edited in *Historical Poems of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia UP, 1959), pp. 102-6. Kenneth Hunter's Ph.D. dissertation provides a diplomatic transcription of the lyrics from the Vernon manuscript, and lists textual variants "of substance" ("The Vernon Lyrics" [Birmingham, 1978]). Another refrain poem appears outside of the group and earlier in the Vernon manuscript, on folio 122b. This 11-stanza poem with the refrain "Do prey for vs to þi sone so fre. Ave" (IMEV 1031) is listed in the manuscript's index as "A salutacioun to ure lady" (f.122r-123v). It is placed nearby other poems on the Virgin Mary. "Do prey for vs to þi sone so fre. Ave" is neither transcribed by Hunter nor edited by Brown; the most recent edition is in *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript* Vol. 1, ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS os 98 (London, 1892), pp.134-7. Five lyrics without refrains also appear among the group of twenty three: "Deus caritas est," "Of alle floures feirest fall on," "Crist 3ive vs grace to loue wel holichirch," "Ave Maris Stella dei Mater Alma," and "Sit laus deo patri summo Christo decus." The group of twenty-three refrain lyrics and five lyrics without a refrain appear in the same order in the Simeon manuscript, on folios 128b-133b. Two additional lyrics follow the group in the Simeon manuscript, one with the refrain "But he sey soth he schal be schent" (IMEV 4135) and another in the same eight-line stanza but without the refrain, which Furnivall and Hunter call "A Morning Thanksgiving and Prayer to God" (IMEV 1369). The former is edited in *Minor Poems*, 1, ed. Furnivall, pp. 740-3; and in *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, pp. 205-8. The latter is edited only in *Minor Poems*, 1, ed. Furnivall, pp. 744-6. "Do prey for vs to þi sone so fre" is not attested in the Simeon manuscript.

Throughout the dissertation, all quotations of the Vernon lyrics are from the facsimile of the manuscript: *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library*, Oxford, *MS.Eng.Poet.a.1*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), ff. 407-12. I have not reproduced the punctuation in the manuscript, but supplied modern punctuation. A list of the Vernon lyrics appears in Appendix One of this dissertation. Each lyric is listed with its IMEV number and the page numbers on which it appears in either Carleton Brown's *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century* (rev. G.V. Smithers) or Rossell Hope Robbins' *Historical Poems of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*.

2. William Proctor Williams and Craig S. Abbott, *An Introduction to Bibliographical and Textual Studies* (New York: MLA, 1999), p. 161.

3. I use the phrase "sociology of the text" in the manner in which it was employed by D.F. McKenzie ("The Sociology of a Text: Orality, Literacy and Print in Early New Zealand," *The Library*, 6<sup>th</sup> series, 6.4 [1984], pp. 334-65). Drawing from the discipline of anthropology, McKenzie investigates how the "text" of the English version of a colonialist treaty thrust upon a

native New Zealand people was used as “a political weapon in legitimating government of the Maori” (p. 362). Studies of the sociology of the text investigate the material and social factors determining the production, distribution, and reception of texts, to see how texts were used to serve political or sociological ends.

4. Peter L. Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age: Theory and Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1996), p. 173-4.

5. Ralph Hanna III’s study of two versions of an alliterative lyric with an “O and I” refrain beginning “Luke in his lesson” (*IMEV* 2020) exemplifies how the identification of the earlier text and consequently the lyric’s area of origin can be used to address questions of literary history (“With an O (Yorks.) or an I (Salop)?: the Middle English Lyrics of British Library Additional 45896,” *Studies in Bibliography* 48 [1995], pp. 290-7). Hanna compares two similar texts of the poem, one in a manuscript dated 1330-40 from the South West Midlands (London, British Library, MS Additional 45896) and the later in a manuscript from North Yorkshire (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson poet.175) dated to the second half of the fourteenth century. He finds that the hypothesis for the Yorkshire provenance of the text is stronger, and that other texts in Additional 45896 also have Northern provenance. These findings serve to discredit the theory of an “alliterative revival” located in the southwest, and testify “to some collision of separate local literary cultures, cultures which existed at a considerable geographical remove,” p. 295.

6. Post-structuralist theory uses the terms “text” and “work” differently from the way they are used in textual theory. Post-structuralist theory works from the premise that language, culture, and subjectivity are wholly inauthentic, derived from and comprised of social, ideological, and any number of other “codes.” From that premise, a literary work is read as a radically decentred text, produced not through the purposeful agency of an author, but through the intermingling of a plethora of social and ideological discourses; those discourses are also “texts,” and the “author,” similarly, is simply a node at some point of these intermingling of codes. Except for discussions on the semiotic critique in Chapter 5 on “Merci passeþ alle þinge,” this dissertation uses the term “text” as defined by textual theory only.

7. Williams and Craig develop this distinction, in *An Introduction*, pp. 77-8.

8. Ralph Hanna III, “Presenting Chaucer as Author,” in *Medieval Literature: Texts and Interpretation*, ed. Tim William Machan (Binghamton: MRTS, 1991), pp. 18, 19. Elsewhere Hanna has shown how the Ellesmere manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales* is an amalgamation of fragmented fascicles: “The (E)ditting (of) the Ellesmere Text,” in *The Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation* (San Marino, 1995), pp. 225-39. Evidence of such extensive editorial activity at an early stage in the transmission of Chaucer’s texts undermines the canonical ordering of the Tales found, for instance, in the standard *Riverside Chaucer*.

9. I use the term “verbal icon” as it is employed by Tim William Machan in *Textual Criticism and Middle English Texts* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), p. 56: “The supposition that an author’s final intentions and an authoritative text lay in the distant but

recoverable textual past has been the principle that has enabled textual critics to construct the medieval verbal icon.”

10. Apart from these theoretical challenges to the concept of “authorial version,” the context of a poem in a manuscript often challenges its status as an integral work. Sometimes a text that has an independent status in one manuscript is embedded in a sermon, a drama, or a longer narrative in another. In these cases it is often difficult to determine whether the lyric existed before its appropriation into the context or was extracted from it. Julia Boffey discusses at length one instance where it is difficult to separate text from context, with the poems entitled “A Pitiless Mistress” (*IMEV* 2161) and “A Sovereign Mistress” (*IMEV* 2188), which survive only in London, British Library, MS. Sloane 1212 (“Middle English Lyrics: Texts and Interpretation,” in *Medieval Literature: Texts and Interpretation*, ed. Tim William Machan [Binghamton: MRTS, 1991], pp. 121-38). More remarkably, what passes as a lyric may have served a completely different purpose for the users of the manuscript. Siegfried Wenzel, for example, overturned decades of interpretation of the “lyric” known as “How Christ Shall Come” (*IMEV* 1353) by demonstrating that “it is *not a lyrical ‘poem’ at all*, but the formal division of a Latin sermon put into English rhyming lines” (Siegfried Wenzel, “Poets, Preachers, and the Plight of Literary Critics,” *Speculum* 60 [1985], p. 345).

11. The kind of recovery I propose parallels that exemplified by McGann’s recovery of the topicality of Emily Dickinson’s “I Could not Stop for Death,” found in his “The Text, the Poem, and the Problem of Historical Method,” *New Literary History* 12 (1981), pp. 269-88. As McGann points out, the shortcomings of Alan Tate’s reading of Dickinson’s poem stem from his obliviousness to its manuscript version. Partly as a consequence of this obliviousness, Tate tends “to overread the poem at the linguistic level” and is reluctant “to take seriously, or even notice, either the fact or the importance of the poem’s ideological attitudes” (p.280). McGann proposes to remedy Tate’s failures by investigating the topical aspects of the poem. Most centrally, he points out that the figure of Death, generally taken to be a “gentlemanly suitor,” is, in fact, an undertaker (p. 282). McGann then goes on to show how the poem evokes contemporary stereotypes of the undertaker, and how this evocation is key to the poem’s wit.

12. The scribes of V and S are discussed by A.I. Doyle, in his Introduction to *The Vernon Manuscript: a Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng.Poet.a.1* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), pp. 11-12. What scribe is responsible for each Vernon text is indicated in the fold-out “Contents List” at the end of the facsimile. Vernon-Simeon scribe-B has not been identified in any manuscript other than V and S (Doyle, “Introduction,” p. 11).

13. John J. Thompson, “The Textual Background and Reputation of the Vernon Lyrics,” *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), p. 206.

14. Kenneth Hunter draws no conclusion as to whether the emendations were done casually by a later reader or were the result of checking against an exemplar. He states that “Occasional corrections are interlined in a script closely resembling that of the main text,” (“The Vernon Lyrics,” p. iv).

15. Thompson, "The Textual," p. 206.
16. Doyle, "Introduction," p. 11.
17. John Thompson, for example, has noted that the Vernon poems "explore their religious and moral themes with varying degrees of consistency, subtlety and imagination," and takes this variance as evidence that "increase[s] the likelihood that the clusters of material now gathered together to form the lyric sequence in part V of the Vernon collection were themselves derived from more than one source," "The Textual Background," p. 202.
18. Mary S. Serjeanston, "The Index of the Vernon Manuscript," *Modern Language Review* 32 (1937), pp. 222-7.
19. Doyle, "Introduction," p. 5.
20. Doyle, "Introduction," p. 11.
21. Serjeanston, "The Index," p. 227.
22. See Angus McIntosh, M.L. Samuels, Michael Benskin et al., *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, 4 vols. (Aberdeen, 1986), LP 7670.
23. Hunter, "The Vernon Lyrics," pp. x-xi.
24. O.S. Pickering, "Middle English Metaphysical Verse?: Imagery and Style in Some Fourteenth-Century Religious Poems," in *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, ed. O.S. Pickering (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), p. 90.
25. Serjeanston, "The Index," pp. 226-7.
26. Stephen Powell, "Textual and Generic Instability in the Middle English 'Robert of Cicyle,'" Ph.D. diss. University of Toronto, 1995, p. 175.
27. Hunter, "The Vernon," p. xv. "þat selden I seize Is sone forsete" shows a concentration of this northern form: see "weres" (2), "dures" (4). This poem also has a northern form of the plural imperative, "takes" (10). The normal plural imperative for this scribe ends in *-ep*, as noted by Kari Sajavaara in her study of the language of the Vernon version of *The Castle of Love* (*The Middle English Translations of Robert Grosseteste's Château D'Amour* [Helsinki, 1967], p. 116).
28. The siglum "UR" is employed to convey the theoretical text's antecedence to V and S, as well as its possible "ur" quality.
29. Doyle, "Introduction," p. 6.

30. Sajavaara finds that “[t]he existence in Simeon of two additional short lyrics...not found in Vernon, might suggest an independent origin of the two MSS.” (“The Relationship of the Vernon and Simeon MSS,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 68 [1967], pp. 431-2). He also suggests, however, that the two additional lyrics might come from a different exemplar than that used for the poems S shares with V: “The two unique poems look like later additions in Simeon by a different scribe (numerous *-th* spellings, for instance); they have both been copied after an open line, and the rest of the folio is blank. It seems quite probable that the two poems do not derive from the same exemplar as the other lyrics” (“The Relationship,” p. 432). The possibility that the two poems do not derive from the same exemplar, and that they may have been copied by a different scribe, makes it more difficult to use their presence in S as evidence that a single S scribe is drawing on *UR* for all the lyrics in this section.
31. Burrow, “The Shape,” p. 187.
32. Hunter, “The Vernon Lyrics,” p. vi.
33. Thompson, “The Textual,” pp. 205-6.
34. The terms “incidental variants” and “substantial variants” were introduced by W.W. Greg in his classic study “The Rationale of Copy Text,” *Studies in Bibliography* 3 (1950-1), pp. 19-36.
35. Hermann Varnhagen, “Die Kleineren Gedichte de Vernon- und Simeon-Handschrift,” *Anglia* 7.2 (1884), pp. 280-315.
36. Hunter, “The Vernon Lyrics,” p. vi.
37. Burrow, “The Shape,” p. 187-8.
38. Because the *Middle English Dictionary* only reaches the word worldshipe at the time this dissertation is being completed, any word glosses following that point in the alphabet are from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
39. In *LALME*, the Dot Map for the verb “have” in the type “hab(b)-” (Map 1010) indicates that this form of the verb was current in the South-West Midlands (Vol. 1, p. 527).
40. As Hunter notes, “Þat selden I seise Is sone foræte”, which refers to Richard the child-king, was likely written between 1377 and 1381, between the moment he ascended to the throne and the moment he asserted his authority in the Peasants’ Revolt (“The Vernon Lyrics,” pp. xvi-xix).
41. A.I. Doyle notes that “[t]he latest definite historical allusions in V are those in the ‘Vernon lyrics’, in part V, on the earthquake of 1382...and...the treatment of a Carmelite friar in 1384” (“Introduction,” p. 11). Doyle also suggests that the slightly later Simeon manuscript likely contained a note about the death of Sir John Clanvowe (in October 1391), and therefore S cannot have been completed before that date (“Introduction,” p. 11).

42. Susanna Greer Fein, "Twelve-Line Stanza Forms in Middle English and the Date of Pearl," *Speculum* 72 (1997), p. 393.
43. This broader form of rhetorical analysis is similar to the kind of "reinvention of rhetoric" that Terry Eagleton encourages at the end of his *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983).
44. Unlike certain reader-response theories, such as that of Stanley Fish, Iser's model maintains a certain degree of objectivity about what the text means, because it grants that the instructions in the text can be agreed upon consensually. Iser's theory of an implied reader is developed most thoroughly in his *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1975).
45. Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1968), p. 111.
46. John Burrow, "The Shape of the Vernon Refrain Lyrics," in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 197-9; O.S. Pickering, "Middle English Metaphysical Verse," pp.103-4, 109.
47. Ronald Waldron, "The Vernon Refrain Poems: Didacticism into Art," *Unisa English Studies: Journal of the Department of English* 31.2 (1993), p. 9.
48. R.H. Robbins found the Vernon lyrics to be working well within "carefully prescribed limits" ("A Refrain-Poem from N.L.W. Peniarth 395," *Trivium* 4 [1969], p. 44); Douglas Gray, while granting some poetic merit to some of their phrases, imagery, and handling of the refrain, found that "too often they are prosy or weakly discursive," with little "moral weight" (*Themes and Images in Medieval English Religious Lyric* [London: Routledge, 1972], p. 168); Derek Pearsall labelled their "dominant strain" a sort of "materialistic wisdom," whose moral quality would appeal to a "comfortable bourgeoisie" (*Old and Middle English Poetry* [London: Routledge, 1977], p. 143); Kenneth Hunter traced the conventions of the poems, and found them for the most part "following the manuals of devotional exercises" ("The Vernon Lyrics," xxxiii); John J. Thompson finds that they work well within "carefully prescribed limits" ("The Textual Background," p. 202); Takami Matsuda has put forward the possibility that "the series as a whole resembles a small moral florilegium, in which moral *utilitas* is the primary criterion for inclusion" ("Death and Transience in the Vernon Refrain Series," *English Studies: a Journal of English Language and Literature* 70.3 [1989], p. 113); Susanna Greer Fein labels them predominantly "aphoristic" ("Twelve-line Stanza Forms," p. 90).

## Chapter One

### Technical devices contributing to the Rhetorical Art of Certain Vernon Lyrics: the Speaking Voice, the Refrain, and Word-play

The six lyrics that form the subject of the subsequent six chapters share certain technical features in common. Those features define the rhetorical art of the lyrics and more or less differentiate them from the corpus of Middle English lyrics written earlier. Two of the most defining and fundamental features are the speaking persona and the refrain. The speaking voice is sometimes that of a reflective narrator whose role is partly figurative, and sometimes that of an orator whose speech creates a dramatic scenario. The refrain, in most cases, signifies poetically, in one of two manners: in some lyrics the refrain tropes its function as a recurring element in ways that represent mutability or a plurality of perspectives; in other lyrics the refrain accrues a cluster of associations and thereby comes to bear polysemous, and sometimes symbolic, meaning. Both the speaking voice and the refrain have been discussed in previous studies of the Vernon lyrics, but little has been said about the literariness of the two features. It is largely through the manipulation of these features, however, that the lyrics work as multi-faceted and polysemous communications which summon more complex kinds of heuristic encounters from their implied audience. In most of these six lyrics, moreover, another device which has not been discussed in previous studies of the Vernon refrain lyrics plays an important role in creating polysemous verbal textures: word-play.

In all twenty-three Vernon refrain lyrics, the communicative context is that of either a public speaker addressing an audience in an act of exhortation or a prayerful voice addressing God in an act of devotion. In all but one devotional lyric, the personae turn from addressing God to addressing a public audience.<sup>1</sup> All but one among the entire group of lyrics, therefore, can be

deemed rhetorical, that is, consciously designed to persuade the audience, rather than, or certainly as well as, purely devotional, that is, designed to be used by others in prayer. What distinguishes the lyrics that exhibit rhetorical art, however, is the fact that the speaking voice is embodied. Through his speech, the speaker conveys details about his circumstances, and thereby figures himself as a character. The kinds of characters created through the speaking voice fall, roughly, into two categories, categories that are defined by the speakers' relation to the message they communicate and to their implied audience. In some lyrics the character is a subjective persona who either reports his experience of an event or otherwise registers his awareness about how his subjectivity impinges on the authority of his advice. In other poems the character is a more or less dramatic orator delivering a public address. The Vernon lyrics therefore prove the exception to the characteristic speaking voice of Middle English devotional lyric, and add to a small group of earlier secular lyrics that manifest dramatic personae.

The speaking voice in the devotional Vernon lyrics depart from that of other Middle English religious lyrics, where the speaker is either Christ or Mary, or a Christian standing in for "everyman." Rosemary Woolf's classic account of how religious lyrics merged with popular devotion in their functionality delineates this everyman status. She argues that in Middle English religious lyric the voice is not that of the individual 'poet,' but of every Christian, and that the poems were created to be used by Christians in devotion: "whereas the seventeenth-century poets show the poet meditating, the medieval writers provide versified meditations which others may use."<sup>2</sup> The use of literary characters in certain Vernon lyrics, however, demonstrates a shift in the status and function of the speaker that sets it apart from the "individual" vs. "everyman" dichotomy. The message of these lyrics is qualified by the subjective experiences of the speaker,

who is both a literary figure and an experiencing poet, similar to the bifurcated status of Will in *Piers Plowman*. Although they may incorporate prayers, these lyrics were not designed to be used, in their entirety, as prayers: they dramatize a personal adventure that is sometimes allegorical, sometimes symbolic, and sometimes plainly realistic. This dramatization creates a figurative, rather than straightforwardly direct, communication. In one instance the audience is summoned to view the speaker as an interrogating observer who questions the bias of an exemplum, though in most cases the audience is summoned to view the speaker as a *figura*. The speaker, that is, not too unlike that in George Herbert's lyrics, presents a consciousness of how his life unfolds according to Divine providence. Eric Auerbach has described the view of history underlying the *figura* most eloquently:

[T]he here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, something omni-temporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event.<sup>3</sup>

In all devotional lyrics that develop literary characters, those characters are realized through devices that frame an embedded utterance with references to the character. The framing devices that realize the characters are of two different, though sometimes overlapping, sorts: *chanson d'aventure* openings and what Julia Boffey has so aptly labelled "focal texts," that is, texts that are reported by the speaker.<sup>4</sup> Usually these devices overlap: the speaker's "adventure" in the *chanson d'aventure* always involves his receipt of a text, though some speakers cite texts without recounting an adventure. In all cases the character is formed through his reflection on the text. Moreover, the speaker's reflection demonstrates, inflects, or qualifies the message that the

text propounds: sometimes the text prompts a transformation within the character, and sometimes the character interrogates the text in a way that ultimately repositions its, and his, significance. Both the *chanson d'aventure* and focal texts have been the subject of discussions on the Vernon lyrics, but none has outlined their contribution to the lyrics' holistic rhetorical art.

Helen Sandison charts the history of the *chanson d'aventure* in England. The convention originated in Northern France in the twelfth century and has two distinguishing features: the narrator introduces himself by means of a short preface, and he pretends that he witnesses or participates in the actions that he reports.<sup>5</sup> The adventure usually takes place in the spring, and at the beginning the narrator usually specifies the day and hour, and suggests the season with some allusion to nature. The device can be divided into three different sub-types. In a *chanson dramatique* the central role is played by either a nightingale praising spring or a woman lamenting her state, either a forsaken maiden or a *mal mariée*. In the *pastourelle*, the much more common type, a courtly *chevalier* woos a shepherdess. In the third, nameless, type, the narrator offers his own love lament as a substitute for the amorous adventure, but represents his soliloquy "occurring at a definite moment, under definite circumstances, as the outcome of an actual encounter or of a particular mood of his own."<sup>6</sup> All of these secular varieties became transmuted to devotional lyrics in France as well as England. The oldest English *chanson d'aventure*, a love lyric beginning "No<u> spri<nke>s the sprai" (*IMEV* 360), dates as early as 1303.<sup>7</sup> Four other amorous varieties date from the fourteenth century, and then the type is more frequently represented in the fifteenth century. The earliest religious lyrics that employ the *chanson d'aventure* opening are the three from Harley 2253: "Iesu crist heouene kyng" (*IMEV* 1678), "As y me rode" (*IMEV* 359), and "Nou shrinkeþ rose" (*IMEV* 2359).<sup>8</sup> In all three, the narrator sets

off on a spring morning and his thoughts turn to the salvific virtues of Christ or Mary.

Chronologically, the next religious *chansons d'aventures* are from the Vernon refrain lyrics. The first English moral lyrics to employ the convention are from the Vernon manuscript, those in the refrain group, as well as a short poem, written in ten eight-line stanzas rhyming predominately abcdbbeb, which appears in an previous part of the manuscript and begins "At a sermoun þer I seet" (*IMEV* 419).<sup>9</sup>

Criticism addressing the role of the *chanson d'aventure* and other focal texts in the Vernon lyrics has generally seen them as disjointed elements, or elements that enforce the theme in a mechanical manner. Sandison finds that "though preserving a semblance of narrative and dramatic form, [the moral *chanson d'aventure*] loses its marked narrative, dramatic, and lyric qualities, and becomes ordinarily a meditative poem fitted out with an adventitious and often incongruous prelude"; the preface is "patently an adventitious element or a meaningless survival."<sup>10</sup> Judith Davidoff, revising Sandison's study, still accords the *chanson d'aventure* opening only a conventional, generic power to direct attention or prepare the reader: "the more dominant pattern is either to provide the poet-narrator's reaction or attitude to whoever is to deliver the core, or to enable the audience to see how the situation of the core seems to have affected its spokesman."<sup>11</sup> There is some suggestion here that the persona's own experience, as reported in the opening, might play an integral role in the theme, but Davidoff finally sees the frame and the core as separate entities, with the frame ultimately subordinated while it accomplishes the pragmatic work of focussing attention on the importance of the core. Moreover, she finds that in the Vernon lyrics the connection between the frame and the core is "of the briefest and most mechanical kind."<sup>12</sup> Most recently, Julia Boffey addresses the *chanson*

*d'aventure* in a broader discussion of lyrics with “focal texts.” She commends the “poetic achievement” of these lyrics for their ability “to encapsulate, in miniature, subject-matter which is in other contexts amenable to much more capacious exposition, and to find ways of making it arresting and memorable.”<sup>13</sup> As well, when the central texts of the poems are delivered by an agent other than the narrator they serve to “corroborate their truth and to give them an air of objective universality” and “to make the audience-narrator relationship a more equal and comfortable one.”<sup>14</sup> In Boffey’s view, too, the text has a significance that is complete apart from the speaker’s relation to it: the text is concrete rather than polysemous; it functions prosaically rather than poetically; it is amenable to reinforcement rather than modulation.

It cannot be denied that the focal text remains concrete and prosaic, and that the connection between frame and core is relatively mechanical, in a few of the Vernon refrain poems, namely “Ay Merci, God, And graunt Merci,” and “For þi sunnes a Mendes make” (and, incidently, in “At a sermoun þer I sat” as well). In “Ay Merci, God, And graunt Merci ” the *chanson d'aventure* opening recounts the persona’s encounter with a penitent in the midst of seeking God’s reconciliation. From the second stanza on, the utterance is that of the penitent; the persona is not returned to again, so there is no sense of how his adventure affected him. In “For þi sunnes a Mendes make,” the adventure is the persona’s encounter with a “boske of briddes,” one of which attracts his attention and delivers the refrain “with reuþful mone, / ‘For þi sunnes a Mendes make!’” (7-8). The core material begins with the speaker’s matter-of-fact rationalizing of three reasons why humans should make amends, but there is no thematic import ascribed to that initial encounter apart from the receipt of advice, and the incident is lost sight of before the middle of the poem, not to be returned to again.

In the remaining four Vernon lyrics that employ *chanson d'aventure* openings, however, the relation between the texts and the reporting narrators is existential, for the effects the texts have on the reporter, or else the reporter's intellectual discernment of the texts, are explored. The responses of the speakers to the texts contribute to their status as embodied characters, and the quality of that characterization inflects the significance of the texts. In three—“*Mane Nobiscum Domine!*,” “*Deo Gracias I,*” and “And euer I þank my god of all”—the *chanson d'aventure* establishes the physical, spiritual, and psychological circumstances in which each persona encounters a text. The personae's reported experiences in receiving and interpreting texts convey the spiritual significance of those texts to the audience. The literary character, in coming to realize the implications of the spiritual text in his own life, thus becomes a means of instruction and persuasion; moreover, as in *Piers Plowman*, the message that is communicated often defies logical statement, functioning on a figural or symbolic level. These three Vernon lyrics have been analysed in my “Six Vernon Refrain Lyrics,” and, for illustrative purposes, I shall present a digest of my discussion of “*Mane Nobiscum Domine!*”<sup>15</sup>

The rhetorical effect of the *chanson d'aventure* in “*Mane Nobiscum Domine!*” stems from the way it reworks conventions associated with the device's original amorous theme, and melds them with the tradition of Christ the Lover Knight.<sup>16</sup> This melding is achieved through the accumulative repositioning and overlapping of the refrain's focal text, and of the circumstances that define the persona's initial encounter with that text. The opening locates the performance of the refrain in a particular moment in the liturgical year and the liturgical day, one that corresponds with the conventional spring-time encounter of the *chanson d'aventure*:

IN somer bi fore þe Ascenciun,

At Euensong on a Sonundai,

Dwellyng in my deuociun,

For þe pees<sup>17</sup> fast gon I prai;

I herde a Reson to my pai

pai / liking

þat writen was with wordes þre,

And þus hit is, schortly to say,

“Mane nobiscum domine.”

What þis word is forte mene

On Englisch tonge I schal 3ou telle.

In Concience and we be clene,

Digne þe lord with vs to dwelle;

þe feondes pouste for to felle,

pouste / authority

þat for vs dizede vpon þe tre;

In wit and worschipe wei and welle,

Mane nobiscum domine.

Whon þou from deth was risen and gon,

þen as a Palmere forþ gon pas,

þo met þou pilgrimes makyng moon,

But 3it þei wust neuur who þou was;

þus þen Carpes Cleophas:

Carpes / speaks

“Þe Niht is neih as we may se,

Þe liht of þe dai is waxen las,

Mane nobiscum domine.”

(1-24)

The refrain is at once a biblical phrase—an extension of Cleophas’s speech to the risen but yet unrecognized Christ on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 29); a liturgical phrase forming the versicle to an Evensong service set between Easter and Ascension Day, as stated in the York and Salisbury missal;<sup>18</sup> and the basis of the persona’s prayer. In entering fully into the liturgical moment, the persona’s initial relation to the phrase casts him as an imaginative participant in the whole dramatic, historical context in a way that is analogous to the *chanson d’aventure*, and particularly a *chanson dramatique* encounter: he is like a *chevalier* overhearing the “pilgrimes makyng moon” (19). In this his situation also corresponds to Christ’s position in the historical action, as one who, walking out, “as a Palmere...met þou pilgrimes makyng moon” (18-9), lamenting the absence of their beloved Christ, whom they do not recognize as being present with them. However, as the narrator turns to the audience in what appears to be a didactic move to tell “What þis word is forte mene / On Englisch tonge” (9-10), he begins a prayer requesting God to “Dwell with us,” and thereby aligns himself with the disciples longing for the presence of Christ. This effectively casts the poem’s audience in the position of the *chevalier* witnessing a dramatic narrative recreation of the scene.<sup>19</sup> In reenacting Cleophas’ petition, the address from this point on presumes Christ’s veiled presence: that is, even while the speaker prays for God’s presence, the audience knows, based on the biblical story, that Christ is present at that moment.

Through this subtle overlaying of *chanson d’aventure* contexts the poem enacts Christ’s immanence. The speaker’s relation to the text repositions him as a *figura*, aligned with the

disciples who shared the risen Christ's presence and the future redeemed souls who will dwell with Him eternally. At the same time, the communicative drama figures the biblical phrase as the divine Word. What that "word is forte mene" defies rational exposition: the translation that the speaker embodies and conveys is that between the spiritual and the corporal. In "*Mane Nobiscum Domine*," as in "*Deo Gracias I*," and "And euer I þank my god of all," a *chanson d'aventure* opening is employed to figure a spiritual or psychological transformation within the speaker, issuing from the receipt of a text, and that transformation becomes a key element of the poem's message, in the way that expands the significance of the focal text.

Two other Vernon refrain lyrics to be discussed in greater detail herein, "Be token hit is þe Flouredelys" and "Merci passeþ alle þinge," also employ framing devices that involve reference to a text, but in both the personae remain relatively detached from the texts. "Mercy passeþ all þinge," the one other Vernon lyric using a *chanson d'aventure*, does not incorporate a transformation within the persona. In it, the *chanson d'aventure*'s conventional natural setting (which had been replaced by an ecclesiastical encounter in the previous three lyrics) is amplified and interrogated. The narrator's reported witnessing, in the wilderness, of the Merlyon's release of a smaller bird it had captured in its claws is developed as an exemplum of mercy. In the end, however, the speaker turns to consider whether the action is in fact "kuynde" (natural), or whether it is "taut" by "gentrie" (183). The speaker's final questioning inflects the Christian doctrine with an examination of human nature as well as an interrogation of the upper class's proprietary claim over the virtue of mercy. The second poem, "Be token hit is þe Flouredelys," is more like the other devotional Vernon lyrics in its presentation of a figurative view of reality. It does not employ a *chanson d'aventure* opening but uses a framing device that similarly involves a

text. It begins and ends with reference to *De Viribus Herbarum*, a popular herbal treatise attributed to “Maacer” in the Middle Ages. This secular text is qualified in terms of its instructive power. Macer’s teaching is finally subordinated to the teaching of Christ, which is reported in the poem, just as the medicinal qualities of the flourdelys, commended by Macer, are finally subordinated to the salvific virtues of Mary and Jesus, both of whom the flourdelys comes to symbolize. The speaker also comes to reflect on his own act of creating the poem that is symbolic of the flourdelys, in a way that suggests his will is subordinated to God’s will, as the final maker who wields all “weole & wit and wisdam.”

In all of the Vernon lyrics mentioned and to be discussed, the speaker has a subjective existence apart from the text, and details of that existence expand the significance of the text and often transform the speaker into a *figura* as well. In the Vernon lyrics that are more strictly moral, the subjective existence of the character takes different forms. In “For charite is no lengor cheere” the speaker’s explicit retreat from claiming the authority of his discourse qualifies him as an example of the epistemological problem his discourse more straightforwardly relates, and in “Dis world fareþ as a Fantasy” the speaker’s indication of his own status similarly enforces the theme of transience and related themes. In the three secular lyrics that are discussed in the next three chapters (“For hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent,” “Þat selden I seiþe Is sone forþete,” and “Troupe is Best”), the speaker is also embodied, but the quality of embodiment is different: he is embodied in reference to an imagined present audience. He does not provide a narrative account of his adventures, but the features of his speech, including his direct hailing of members of an implied audience in a manner that implies they are present as a group, imaginatively figure him as an orator. To a greater or lesser degree, too, the speaker’s mode of speech casts him into the role

of a particular kind of character, one that inflects the message being communicated.

In contrast to the paucity of literary characters in religious lyrics predating the Vernon manuscript, the technique of using the style of speech to delineate a character has a fair number of interesting precedents in earlier Middle English lyrics, though they are not well recognized. In most of these earlier lyrics, such as those to be considered here from the Kildare manuscript (London, British Library, MS. Harley 913), London, British Library, Harley 2253, and London, British Library, MS. Addit. 45896, the character is a bumbler or a culprit, and the effect is comic.

One of the most interesting and little recognized instances of lyrics that develop literary characters is the twenty-stanza poem beginning “Hail, seint Michel with the lange sper” (*IMEV* 1078) from the Kildare manuscript written in Ireland in 1330.<sup>20</sup> It is, ostensibly, a satire on saints, members of religious orders, and merchants and guildsmen—“a satire of the people of Kildare” as it has been called. A closer look at the poem, however, reveals that two separate voices sound in this lyric: that of the singer who satirically hails specific members of a community in an ostensibly oral setting, and that of a reader commenting on the text of the satiric song. Its social satire is secondary to the satire of the commentating reader, who demonstrates his incompetence in misjudging the literary value and function of the song.

Each stanza includes two different voices, as in the following example:

Hail be 3e nonnes of seint Mari house,

Goddes bourmaidnes and his owen spouse!

Ofte mistredip 3e 3ur schone, 3ur fete bep ful tendre;

Dapeit be sotter pat tawip 3ure lepir!

Swiþe wel 3e vnderstode,

**Ɗat makid Ɔis ditee so gode. (49-54)**

Each stanza begins hailing a specific person, type, or group, and ends by reflecting back to comment on the first four lines. Many of these reflections refer to the quatrain's literary quality, often using precise technical vocabulary: for example, "Ɔis vers is imakid wel / Of consonans and wowel" (17-8).

In the few pages of commentary this poem has received, the two voices in the lyric have been taken as that of the same persona—of the "poet" who turns, in the last two lines of each verse, to laud his own accomplishments. There are good reasons, however, for hearing the voice in the last two lines of each stanza as being spoken by a persona other than that of the hailing song. The final two-line reflections are often ironical or naive, and sound more like the comments of an inept reader. The commentator persistently fails to grasp the implicit and often bawdy satire of the quatrain. For example, in the just quoted piece the first voice—the singer—would appear to criticize the men who treat the leather and thereby create faulty shoes. Through word-play with "mistredip" and "lepir" he actually satirizes the nun's unchaste state: "mistredip" also means "to lose one's chastity," (*MED* s.v. mistrēden v.) and "lepir" also means "the skin of a living person" (*MED* s.v. lether n. 2. (a)). The commentator would seem to miss this word-play completely. After another quatrain, almost as bawdy, the commentator adds: "He was a noble clerk and gode, / Ɗat Ɔis dep lore vnderstode" (113-4). Sometimes, too, the commentator completely misinterprets the literal references and so makes false inferences, as in the following:

Hail be 3e hokesters dun bi Ɔe lake,                      hokesters / tradesmen  
 WiƆ candles and golokes and Ɔe pottes blak,  
 Tripis and kine fete and schepen heuedes!

Wip þe hori tromcheri hori is 3ure inne!      tromcheri / internal organs for bait

He is sori of his lif,

Þat is fast to such a wif. (103-8)

The commentator presumably reads the cow's feet, sheep's head and "tromcheri" not as goods that the tradesmen sell, but as references to their wives. The overarching object of satire in this poem, then, is the inept reader or, perhaps more precisely stated, the participating scribe, who adds his own comments after copying out each verse.

The scribe's biggest interpretative blunder comes at the end of the address:

Makeþ glad, mi frendis, 3e sittip to long stille;

Spekiþ now, and gladiþ, and drinkeþ al 3ur fille!

3e habbeþ ihird of men lif þat wonip in lond;

Drinkiþ dep and makip glade, ne hab 3e non oþer nede.

Þis song is yseid of me,

Euer iblessid mot 3e be. (115-20)

Here the singer turns to address the company as a whole, and therefore imaginatively embodies all he has hailed as being present together in a tavern. Presumably, critics have read the "of" in line 119 as "from," which gives "this song is said by me." Elsewhere in this poem, and in other goliardic English poems in the manuscript, however, "of" often means "about," and in contexts like this one, where a discursive act is implied, it always means "about." Compare, for example, "And spekin of is lore," line 6 from the poem beginning "Þe king of heuen mid vs be" (*IMEV* 3400); and "Of his dep ne tellip hi nozt," line 39 from the poem beginning "Whose þenchip vp þis carful lif" (*IMEV* 4144).<sup>21</sup> When the line is read as "This song is said about me," the bumbling

commentator takes the singer's address to all as a direct address to himself.

As a satire of a reader, or a burlesque of a participating scribe, the poem is a witty demonstration of a reader's witlessness. It presents a kind of dramatic literary criticism similar, for example, to that found in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. In this case, the poem satirizes not only the inability of a reader to differentiate satire from high-minded art and to understand references on a purely literal level, but also to differentiate functional from fictional orality.

"Hail, seint Michel with the lange sper" bears some similarities to a group of three poems that Carter Revard has identified as "confessional satires."<sup>22</sup> The three poems are all in alliterative rhyming verse, and they all date from the early fourteenth century: "The Papelard Priest" (*IMEV Suppl.* 2614.5) from London, British Library, MS Additional 45896, "A Satire on the Consistory Courts" (*IMEV* 2287) and "The Man in the Moon" (*IMEV* 2066) from London, British Library, Harley 2253.<sup>23</sup> Revard labels these three poems 'dramatic monologues,' and argues that in each one the speaker "is not the poet but a 'character' and its satire is secondary to its revelation of its speaker's nature."<sup>24</sup> The speaker in "The Man in the Moon" is a manorial peasant, but he also assumes the role of a "legal expert." He claims that the man in the moon stole his thorns from someone's hedge and is afraid to come down because the hedgewarden (hayward) has taken a security-pledge for him to appear at the next manor-court session.<sup>25</sup> The speaker tries to convince the man in the moon of a way to contravene the hayward, by getting him drunk, but finally insults him for not paying attention. Similarly, the satire of the moral corruption of the consistory courts in "A Satire on the Consistory Courts" is, Revard claims, "secondary to the self-satirizing revelation of its 'speaker's character."<sup>26</sup> The speaker is a servingman, a household retainer, accused of having carnal knowledge of a woman and not marrying her. He maintains that he has

been slandered, but his speech gradually reveals that he is guilty. While Revard's readings of the two Harley lyrics are indebted to his recovery of the legal customs referred to in the poems, the confessional satire of "The Papelard Priest" is much more readily evident to the modern reader. In it, a member of the clergy complains about the many duties of priesthood, which only serves to reveal his immoral and sensual nature.

Other lyrics could be added to Revard's list, including another Harley lyric: "In May hit murgeb when hit dawes" (*IMEV* 1504).<sup>27</sup> The speaker in this poem is a character giving advice, though his stated anticipation of the benefits he would enjoy should his words be heard by his beloved qualifies his rhetorical aims. The male speaker praises women and warns them to be wary of men who speak dishonestly only to gain their sexual compliance. The critique of men's speech focuses not only on flattery, but also on the fraudulent manipulation of the custom of truthplight, which represented a bond as irrevocable as marriage, and was commonly believed to legitimate consummation before the church ceremony.<sup>28</sup> The embodiment of this male speaker, however, seems to carry the poem's rhetorical strategy beyond a pure description of the problem to a dramatization of it. In the final lines he particularizes himself as one who, even in the midst of giving the address, imagines what benefits he might enjoy should his words be heard by his beloved:

ah wolde lylie-leor in lyn      Ah, would the girl with a lily-white complexion in linen  
yhere leuely lores myn,      Hear my lovely lore,

wiþ selþe we weren sahte. (46-8)      with happiness we would be reconciled.

By revealing his belief that if his own love were to hear his "leuely lores" she and he would be reconciled in happiness, the speaker raises suspicion that his intention may not be selflessly and

earnestly moral—to objectively warn an audience of women, but primarily self-seeking—to persuade his beloved of his goodness and therefore win her heart. The speaker finally imagines his address to be not only an admonitory statement, but also a demonstration of his eloquence and wit. To the implied audience of the address—women—knowledge of the speaker’s own desires could very well compromise their faith in his ethos. As “A Satire on Consistory Courts,” “In May hit murgeþ” is a confessional satire whose admonitory effect is not necessarily subverted by the comedy. Normally such a tainted ethos would result in a loss of authority and thus a depletion of the persuasive force of the discourse. In this case, however, in revealing his self-interest the speaker demonstrates what he spends the rest of the poem trying to say plainly: women need to be wary of men who flatter because they often turn out to be traitors. Thus while the situational irony would seem to compromise the value of the advice, it in fact enforces it through mimesis.<sup>29</sup>

These five lyrics from three manuscripts indicate how speaking voices in earlier English lyrics were used variously to present literary characters. In each lyric the speaker is embodied, that is, he has an element of psychological and/or historical existence beyond the verbal utterance, an existence that is revealed by his speech. Certain Vernon lyrics to be discussed herein present similarly embodied speakers. “Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent” bears greatest resemblance to didactic confessional satire such as “In May hit murgeþ when hit dawes,” in the way that the rhetorical techniques of the purported admonisher’s speech tend to qualify him as a fawner just like those whom he criticizes, that is, one who is afraid to say the “sooth” for fear that he will be “schent.” But “Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent” differs in two key respects from the Harley lyric. For one, as there will be more opportunity to consider in the next chapter, the speaker registers his consciousness that his speech compromises his ethos. Secondly, the imagined

audience affecting the speaker's speech is not defined as a conditional future audience, as the "lylie-leor" in the Harley lyric, but a present, live audience. That is, the speaker's mode of address embodies him in the ironic situation of an orator admonishing his audience not to "shent" speakers who, like himself, admonish. The type of character evident in "Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent," and in three other Vernon refrain lyrics, is that of a public orator. All four of these lyrics form a sub-genre that can be called "dramatic oratorical address."

In each of the four dramatic oratorical addresses among the Vernon lyrics an oratorical character creates, through his speech, a dramatic scenario which involves the audience in a specific role. There are two possible ways of defining that scenario and audience. For one, we can define it as an implied fictional setting and audience. In that case a distinction needs to be drawn between the fictional audience of the address, insofar as it is the recipient of the speech within the fictional world of the poem, and the audience that *reads* the poem and imagines the scenario evoked, as happens when reading, or even listening to, *The Canterbury Tales*. From this perspective, the poem's fourteenth-century audience stands removed from the dramatic scenario evoked by the lyrics, as the modern-day audience does. On the other hand, it is possible to imagine the oratorical poems being read aloud to a social gathering, in which case the speaker's implied audience is more or less embodied in the audience present.

Given the lack of certainty about how the lyrics were disseminated in the fourteenth century, inferences about the mode of reception the poets had in mind when writing the poems must rest on a theoretical base. In their original medieval setting the poems likely were received through recital as well as through silent reading. The large size of the Vernon manuscript indicates that it would have rested on a lectern, and may very well therefore have been designed

for reading aloud; but there is no way of proving it was, and other functions have been suggested for the manuscript.<sup>30</sup> Even if it were proven that the Vernon manuscript was used for reading aloud, the fact that these “texts” of the poems were received aurally in their first extant context would not prove that the poets designed them to be read aloud.

The debate over how to read the orality inscribed in the Vernon lyrics participates in larger, on-going, debates over whether or not medieval texts that incorporate a narrator’s direct address to an audience were designed in such a way because the poet envisioned a listening audience, or for other, literary effects. Walter Ong has argued that with the rise of literacy, orality was outmoded as a means of disseminating texts, and therefore appeals to an audience in later medieval texts (and in certain texts up to the present day) are fictional, an “oral residue”: the texts were designed to be read privately, but still contain cues to a live audience.<sup>31</sup> These cues would have functioned variously; they may, for example, have conjured up the aura of a now-lost experience of witnessing a minstrel performance in a hall, or simply follow an established convention for introducing a poem. The theory of oral residue has been the bedrock for certain theories about the fictional orality in romances and in alliterative verse.<sup>32</sup> The theory of fictional orality does not preclude the possibility that the poems were recited aloud in the hall, but it does maintain that the inclusion of a direct address served stylistic and rhetorical ends rather than purely practical ends. Other scholars have argued that a narratorial direct address indicates that the poets had a listening audience in mind. Joyce Coleman has recently argued, against the evolutionary logic of Ong and other exponents of fictional orality, that even though society moved from an oral culture to an increasingly literate one, “aurality” was a common phenomenon among the literate upper-middle and upper classes in the Middle Ages. Coleman coins the term “aurality”

as an alternative to “orality” or “literacy.” “Aurality” describes literature as a social event that was consciously shaped by an author writing with the expectation that his text would be read aloud to an audience:

Although written for performance, the author had time to compose the text at his own pace and alone, knowing that it would be preserved in written form and that this written form would visibly dominate the group experience, in a way that no oral or memorial author’s text could do.<sup>33</sup>

Through a thorough-going analysis of historical and literary evidence, she finds that even after literacy had risen, gentry and noble families still often preferred to have texts read aloud because of the social occasion which that activity induced.<sup>34</sup> She thus urges replacing theories of “fictional orality” with “functional aurality,” and even claims that the trend for ‘fictional aurality’ is a sour product of the postmodern fixation on all things artificial.

Coleman’s recovery of a pervasive mode of aural reception throughout the Middle Ages increases the likelihood that the Vernon refrain poets did design their poems with the expectation that they would be recited to a convivial audience gathered together at particular social occasions. It is very plausible that this expectation affected the poets’ rhetorical strategy: they pondered how the fiction of oral performance, when transformed into an actual social occasion by reading aloud, could effectively fictionalize that occasion, by transforming it into a kind of “occasional drama.” The narrator’s hailing of an audience could thus be both functional (the poet did have a live audience in mind), and fictional (the poet cast that speaker as a fictional character, whose speech serves to transfigure the ‘real’ context of delivery).

The capacity of dramatic oratorical addresses to transfigure the context of delivery can be

described, in all cases, as the manipulation of the potential group experience actualized through oral delivery. Joyce Coleman has described the experience that could be achieved with a committed performer reading aloud to an audience:

With the addition of the performer's skills as composer, actor, singer, and/or editor (of the text as he or she performs it), the event can become a deep affirmation of the group's sense of self and togetherness—rather as today, audiences may leave a performance of some fundamental text of our culture—*Hamlet* or Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*—united in a feeling of sorrow or exhilaration.<sup>35</sup>

In the performance of dramatic oratorical addresses, this sense of group identity issuing through oral performance would have been directed to mould particular kinds of group identities, identities which would ultimately reinforce or inflect the message of the poem. The audience's sense of themselves resulting from the experience of performance likely had something in common with that of an audience of the York play *The Crucifixion*, or of *Mankind*. In the York play of *The Crucifixion*, for example, the audience's passivity before the actions of the soldiers crucifying Christ qualifies the audience as condoners of the action, indeed as partly responsible for Christ's death.<sup>36</sup> The audience as group, then, is not only united in a certain emotion—extreme grief at the death of Christ, but also united in a shared identity—those who cause Christ's death. In the Vernon lyrics, a similar audience-positioning would have occurred: the audience would essentially be cast into a specific role vis-à-vis the performance. In all cases their experience playing that group role would also serve an heuristic purpose of clarifying the message of the address, even in cases where the message is ambivalent. In a few cases, the speaker would also interpellate the audience into a particular socio-ideological identity.<sup>37</sup>

Three of the lyrics to be discussed in the following three chapters qualify as dramatic oratorical addresses: “For hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent,” “Þat selden I seize Is sone forzete,” and “Troupe is Best.” “Þat selden I seize Is sone forzete” presents the most straightforward instance of interpellating the audience into a clearly-identifiable socio-political identity. The casting of the audience into a role in “Troupe is Best” serves mainly an heuristic purpose of further defining “anthropomorphous trouth,” but it also tends to interpellate the audience, albeit more discreetly, into a socio-political formation. “Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent” is the most amorphous of the three, and its type of role-casting would have varied considerably from performance to performance. Before moving on to these, however, it will be worthwhile considering what is likely the most obvious dramatic oratorical address, “Azeyn mi wille I take mi leue,” which was discussed in my “Six Vernon Refrain Lyrics.”<sup>38</sup>

“Azeyn mi wille I take mi leue” is a *congé* or “farewell poem”: in it the speaker addresses the audience in a speech of leave-taking. The performer reciting the poem would thereby be cast in a specific role, as a character with a relationship of warmth and goodwill towards the present audience, and with an imagined future course of action. The audience, too, would be cast as part of the setting which the speaker assumes: a convivial crowd which cherishes one another’s company, including that of the departing friend. In this respect, the group would be defined through its shared fellowship. Having established a congenial setting through his amicable tone, the speaker goes on to trope his departure in ways that endow both the moment and his action with various literal and figurative significance. After initially arousing feelings of friendship and happiness, he brings the audience to reflect upon them from different perspectives. At the same time he is figured as a paradoxical exemplum.

The poem opens with an amicable and effusive tone.

Nou Bernes, Buirdus bolde and blype,

To blessen ow her nou am I bounde;

I þonke 3ou alle a þousend siþe,

And prei god saue 3ou hol and sounde;

Wher euer 3e go, on gras or grounde,

He ow gouerne with outen greue.

For frendschiþe þat I here haue founde,

A3eyn mi wille I take mi leue.

(1-8)

The chivalric diction, “Bernes, Buirdus bolde and blype,” resonant of the idealized world of romance, immediately calls up a scene of harmonious festivity. The hyperbolic style carrying the speaker’s exuberance through the first two stanzas—specifically the extended alliteration (1-2; 5-6; 14-5), descriptive amplification (1,4,5,9,10,13) and repetition of phrases or reformulation of sentiments (9,13,14,15)—creates a sense of conviviality and of the timeless suspension of the moment. The speaker thereby establishes a warm rapport with the audience and both expresses and evokes the comfort and joy that one feels in the company of good friends in good times. That becomes the foundational experience for the rest of the poem, which goes on both to challenge and to channel it in different directions.

The speaker brings the audience to reflect back and reevaluate this initial experience from two different perspectives, by pointing out the limits of human friendship and by suggesting its compatibility with Christ’s friendship. He metaphorically steps away from the harmony of the occasion, as he takes on a reflective and admonitory tone in the ensuing stanzas, which gradually

ease the audience away from the enjoyment of worldly comfort towards an alertness to the transience of life, the immanence of death, and the consequent need for vigilance. As the glad present moment is placed within the panorama of time and brought up as a foil to the coldness of death, the comfort of companionship is subordinated to the need for moral attentiveness. The speaker's implicit and explicit metaphors, however, also hint at a compatibility between human friendship and the relationship between human beings and God. The benedictions given in the first two stanzas include wishes for both the spiritual well-being and material comfort of the audience, and the prayer for Christ to keep one "comeli cumpanye" (12) melds the pair with the current situation: it figures forth a relationship with Christ analogous to the human friendship that is implicit in the poem's dramatic situation, and at the same time carries with it some hint of a wish for Christ to keep each person in "comeli" worldly company, just like that of the imagined gathering.

These negative and positive views of friendship are brought into tension in different ways throughout the poem. Perhaps the greatest strain is felt in the climactic moment of exhortation; the scenes and images of the admonitory stanzas (17-48) increase in gravity until the imagined horrific moment of God's condemnation:

Loke þat þi laumpe beo brennynge briht;

For leue me wel, but þou haue liht,

Riht foule þi lord wol þe repreue,

And fleme þe fer out of his siht,

For al to late þou toke þi leue. (44-8)

This imagined eschatological scene demonstrates the urgent need to subordinate human friendship

and worldly enjoyment, but the power of its ability to do so lies largely in the way it suggests that the current dramatic moment is an analogy for a heavenly one. The doctrinal truth figured forth is the loss of beatific vision that comes as a result of a soul's impurity when it passes from this world, but in this context, where joy of companionship has been equated with Christ's "comeli cumpanye," the scene strikes one with a sense of personal grief that would come with the loss of God's company if one does not pass the final judgement. The dramatic situation of the immanent disappearance of the departing friend from sight is thus refigured as an implicit metaphor for losing sight of God; the metaphor is strengthened by the way salvation is figured so vividly as a matter of seeing, with the "briht" "liht" of the vigilant Wise Virgin's lanterns enabling the "siht" of God.

The final stanza more particularly figures the departing friend as a figure of Christ. The pledge that bears the imprint of the self-sacrificial love of a friend— "3if euere I mi3te ful fayn I wolde / Don ou3te þat weore vnto þow leue" (61-2)— recalls the words of St. John—"Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15.13)—and points up the compatibility of human friendship with Christ's sacrificial love. Human friendship is envisioned positively, as a human experience which can express, exemplify, and be directed towards divine love. Although the poem states that friends will not always be together "For eueri þing schal haue an ende, / And frendes are not ay I fere" (19-20), it never explicitly belittles the value of friendship, as do so many other Middle English religious lyrics by using it as a foil to Christ's love or figuring it a distraction from piety. At one point the speaker asks:

Whon þat vr lyf his leue haþ lauht,

...

Wher are þi frendes ho wol þe knowe?

Let seo ho wol þi soule releue. (33; 37-8)

In its context, this is a real question rather than a rhetorical one. It points for an answer to the ultimate isolation of a human soul in death, but at the same time it points to the friendship of Christ as the One who redeems. Here, as in the other moments described, the poem sustains a complex view of both the powers and limits of human friendship, so the audience's perceptions about their feelings of comfort and joy initially aroused are finally ambivalent. On one hand the address urges that feelings of worldly friendship should be restrained as priority of attention is given over to ascetic vigilance; but at the same time it suggests that feelings of loving companionship enable one to apprehend heavenly existence and the love of Christ, and so provide, with fine equilibrium, a positive means of moral and spiritual guidance.

The way the speaker tropes his own departure by pointing up a cluster of literal and metaphorical meanings of his leave-taking, some of which evoke potentially contradictory emotional responses, also adds to the poem's complexity. The modulations of the refrain bring out different senses of taking leave: the taking leave of company "Aȝein mi wille I take mi leue" (8, 16), the taking leave in death—"Whon þat vr lyf hap taken his leue" (32), "Beo redi ay to take þi leue" (40), and a self-willed resignation from the world before death: "For al to late þou toke þi leue" (48); "And in good tyme to take vr leue" (56). These three senses and the range of associations and emotions that have been aroused with regard to them through the poem converge into a concentrated point in the final "nou is tyme to take my leue" (64), which comes across with a striking immediacy, marking as it does the silence of the speaker's voice and signalling his disappearance from sight. It suggests the immediacy of death, casting the speaker as

a sort of Everyman figure, and thereby may arouse a feeling of fear in the audience and throw a shade of irony over the speaker's accompanying friendly benediction. It also signals a friend's turning away from beloved company and thereby evokes some of the poignant sentiments brought on by an awareness of how much friends are cherished and of life's transience. The poignant sentiments seem to contradict those of fear, and the call for stoic detachment which that fear presupposes stands in the face of the wave of human affection that flows towards the departing friend, and draws those remaining even closer together.

The dramatic achievement of "Azeyn mi wille I take mi leue" resides in the way it brings the audience to experience tensions arising from different attitudes towards human experience, and particularly the experience of happy fellowship. The address maintains either an equilibrium or an ambivalence among different views or types of experience, the quality of which would vary according to how the text was performed. The performance of the address thus would ultimately define the present audience's sense of individual and group identity, though not without threatening to splinter the foundational identity of fellowship. The experience of being present at the poem's performance would have a powerful heuristic value. In the three other dramatic oratorical addresses to be discussed subsequently, the audience is also brought, through the orator's evocation of a particular situational context, to reflect on the meaning of their group identity, and that reflection serves heuristic, and sometimes ideological, ends.

The speaking voices of all the Vernon refrain lyrics that exhibit rhetorical artfulness create characters that qualify as belonging to one of two categories. Sometimes the character is a reflective narrator who has an existential, or intellectually critical, relation to a text, be that a "focal text" or the speaker's address in its entirety. Sometimes the character is an orator whose

speech turns the moment and setting of his address into a dramatic occasion. In both manners, the speaking voice is key to the rhetorical strategies of the poems. The speaking voice presents one way in which the strategies incorporate literariness and thereby augment the complexity of the message. The audience is brought into a more demanding kind of heuristic encounter: it is guided into partly discovering and partly constructing the message through either interpreting the deep narrative structure that the speaker is involved in, or being affected by realizing a role in a dramatic address that the speaker delivers.

Another device that contributes to the rhetorical art of the lyrics to be discussed, and that thereby augments the complexity of the audience's heuristic encounter, is the refrain. The twenty-three Vernon refrain lyrics, along with the poem "Quia Amore Languo" (*IMEV* 1460)<sup>39</sup> and *Pearl* are the first examples of the "pseudo-ballade" form in England.<sup>40</sup> The poems are composed of either eight-line stanzas rhyming ababbcbc, or twelve-line stanzas rhyming ababababbcbc, with the final line being the refrain. The refrain has been the subject of a number of discussions, but they have tended to consider its structural function while overlooking its poetic qualities.<sup>41</sup> That is, most discussions consider the refrain as a straightforward statement that is reinforced through reiteration. In all of the lyrics to be discussed herein, however, the refrain functions poetically: in some lyrics the refrain tropes its status as a recurring element, in others it accrues a cluster of associations, thereby making its message increasingly polyvalent, figurative, and/or symbolic.

John Burrow and Julia Boffey have recently theorized about the refrain in the Vernon lyrics, but neither explores its manifestation of semantic indirection.<sup>42</sup> John Burrow takes the stanzaic nature of the poems to be a cause of their structural looseness:

When the sense of each stanza makes any serious attempt to lead into its refrain (which is,

admittedly, not always the case), the poem's thought will tend to be radial rather than linear. Instead, that is, of a sequence of argument from stanza to stanza, one finds each stanza relating independently to the thought expressed by the refrain, like spokes to a hub; and in that case the order and number of stanzas may vary quite freely, without noticeable incoherence or loss.<sup>43</sup>

In this account, the refrain is taken to be the bearer of a single, straightforward meaning, "the thought," and there is no sense of the possibility that the refrain's message might be altered through its various contexts. Burrow's sense of the poem's 'radial' thought, however, does indicate how the refrain binds the lyric. In certain cases the refrain binds the lyric in a more suggestive, and often partly linear, way: though remaining the centre, it modulates in ways that bring into relief a development of thought. Rather than spokes and a hub, an analogy of an ascending spiral might better describe the structure: the centre acts as a magnetic force around which the stanzas circulate; though there is also linear development, of the refrain and of the thought of the poem as a whole.

More recently, Julia Boffey has commented on the role of the refrain in discussing the "focal texts" in the Vernon lyrics:

The refrains to the sequence of lyrics in the famous fourteenth-century Vernon Manuscript.../ sometimes simply repeated and elsewhere woven with variations into the patterns of the stanzas, demonstrate the effectiveness of pithy, sometimes proverbial and sometimes alliterative summaries.<sup>44</sup>

Although Boffey grants that the refrain does sometimes include variations, she seems to be referring to purely syntactic variations which in no case vary the meaning of the refrain, for she

goes on to praise their ability to provide “summaries.” Boffey, like Burrow, accords the refrain a strictly schematic, reiterative role: it is employed to reinforce the truth of a statement, to make it retainable in memory. The whole significance of the poem’s message, in this view, can be boiled down to the summary that the refrain embodies.

Although the characterization of the refrain provided by Burrow and Boffey does accord with a number of Vernon refrain lyrics, in a good many the refrains have a poetic rather than a purely structural role. In poems with a poetic refrain, its function is not finally to reinforce an axiom through restatement, but sometimes to endow a phrase with a significance beyond its literal statement, and sometimes to extract the various meanings it may resound with due to lexical and grammatical ambiguity. Each of these two effects is manifested as the refrain either tropes its function as a recurring element or accrues a cluster of associations through its various stanzaic contexts.

As a recurring element, the refrain can be troped, that is, its structural function as an element that recurs through the temporal unfolding of the poem can be given a figurative significance. John Hollander has theorized and exemplified the troping refrain. He observes that refrains function as a marker of temporal recurrence, and so enact “a dialectic of memory and anticipation.”<sup>45</sup> To trope the refrain in reference to its role viewed from a temporal perspective is to use it to represent a statement about time, memory, transience, and change. Hollander assigns the genesis of the “poetic refrain” to a particular moment in the history of lyric poetry—the rise of rhetorical self-consciousness—and he locates that self-consciousness historically as beginning, in English, in the Renaissance.<sup>46</sup> Such self-consciousness, however, and the consequent “poetic refrain” are evident in the Vernon lyrics, and fainter traces of it are discernable in lyrics that

predate the Vernon lyrics.

Not many lyrics with refrains predate the Vernon lyrics, and in many that do the refrain's function is "schematic." Hollander associates the "schematic refrain" with the literal quality of a medieval carol burden: "[e]ach occurrence of the danced-to burden increases its redundancy, and tends to collapse it into a univocal sign (*That was all full of meaning; now meaning stops for a while and we all dance again*)."<sup>47</sup> Though the great majority of carols are found in manuscripts of the fifteenth century or later, some early specimens exist.<sup>48</sup> "Svmer is icumen in" (*IMEV* 3223) is one such example, with each stanza breaking into the joyful song of spring: "Sing cuccu nu, Sing cuccu!" (13).<sup>49</sup> In some of the sixteen surviving lyrics with the "O and I" refrain, the refrain may also have a purely idiophonic quality reminiscent of the round dance, though critics have argued that it serves an exclamatory call to attention, or as an acronym referring to apocalyptic biblical texts.<sup>50</sup> The refrain in the Harley lyric "Alisoun" may also be compared to a round dance chorus: every stanza ends with a change to a livelier rhythm of short stressed and unstressed syllables, enacting the joy of the speaker in thinking about his beloved.<sup>51</sup>

Other earlier refrains, however, do trope their function as a recurring element. For example, each stanza of the Harley lyric beginning "Lutel wot hit onymon" (*IMEV* 1922)<sup>52</sup> titled by most editors "The Way of Christ's Love," ends as follows:

Euer and oo, nyht ant day, he haueþ vs in is þohte;  
 he nul nout leose þat he so deore bohte.      (7-8)

The refrain propounds the ever-active nature of God's mindfulness of humans, and thus at the same time enacts the redemptive cycle according to Christian belief. In contrast, in the secular version of the poem, "The Way of Woman's Love" (*IMEV* 1921) the refrain represents the

frustration of the unrequited lover:

Euer ant oo for my leof icham in grete þohte;  
 y þenche on hire þat y ne seo nout ofte. (7-8)

The satirical refrain to the Harley lyric known as “Richard the trichard” (*IMEV* 3155)<sup>53</sup> also possesses some element of poetical qualification, in the way its function as an item repeated through time enforces its final defiant and absolutist temporal marker “Nevermore”:

Richard, þah þou be euer trichard,  
 tricchen shalt þou neuermore! (6-7)<sup>54</sup>

The refrain of the secular “Lullay, lullay” poem (*IMEV* 2025) from the early fourteenth-century Kildare manuscript<sup>55</sup> also incorporates a sense of irony in its repeated matter. It is spoken by a human mother to her infant child, in response to his weeping. The mother attributes her child’s present and future sorrow to the human condition made miserable through Adam’s sin and the vicissitudes of the wheel of fortune:

Lollai, l<ollai>, litil child, whi wepistou so sore?  
 nedis mostou wepe, hit was izarkid þe zore  
 euer to lib in sorow, and sich and mourne euer,  
 as þin eldren did er þis, whil hi aliues were.

Lollai, <ollai>, litil child, child lolai, lullow,  
 In-to vncup world icommen so ertow! (1-6)

Though the return to the purely melodic “Lollai, lollai” is parodied in the context of perpetually overwhelming sorrow through the ages, the irony makes the mother’s attempt to comfort her child all the more poignant.<sup>56</sup> All of these early fourteenth-century poems show poets

manipulating the poetic potential of the refrain in reference to temporal themes, and thus working with some degree of rhetorical self-consciousness.

Although most of the Vernon lyrics that will not be discussed in this dissertation—those that do not exhibit a rhetorical art—do not trope the refrain, some do, and it is worth pointing them out briefly. Of the thirteen stanzas in the poem with the refrain “Keep Well Christ’s Commandment,” ten either mention, and more or less expand upon, one of the ten commandments.<sup>57</sup> The regular return therefore formally reasserts the superiority of “De lawe of crist” (4), and, moreover, figures the belief that Christ’s law of love supercedes the Old Testament laws. Similarly, in the poem with the refrain “Suffer in Time and that is best,” the steadfast return to a statement of suffering mimics the attitude that is being exhorted. “And sum tyme þenk on 3uster day” is perhaps the most obvious example of a refrain that tropes its function of recurrence: the poem presents the experience of transience as a reason for the need to detach oneself from the world and trust in God, and it unfolds by returning predictably to an urge to “sum tyme þenk on 3uster day.” The stable point is thus a constant call to memory, a constant harkening back to what has past. The performative action of the refrain, then, is to undercut the substance of the present moment: what is most stable is only forever receding. A similar embodiment of transience is created in the poem with the refrain “Þis world fareþ as a Fantasy”, which will be considered in greater depth in Chapter Seven.

Two other poems to be discussed trope their refrains in more complex ways. In “Þat selden I seize Is sone for3ete,” the repeated element narrates the truth of forgetting; at the same time, however, the fact that it is repeated would seem to remedy the very forgetfulness that it continually affirms. The paradoxical status of “Þat selden I seize Is sone for3ete” as a refrain is

complicated by the fact that the meaning of the statement modulates: in different contexts different semantic, and sometimes phonological, values of refrain words resound. A riddle as to what is forgotten is inscribed in the polyvalence of the refrain words, so once the full range of the significances of what the words say is grasped, the riddle is solved, and the phenomena are no longer forgotten. Such troping of the reiterative function of the refrain also operates in "For charite is no lengor cheere." As demonstrated in my "Six Vernon Refrain Lyrics," the significance of the word "chere" modulates among the connotations "precious, dear," "a expression indicative of an inner state," and "kind." Each of these denotations is extracted in relation to metaphors and themes developed in the stanzas. The refrain manifests polysemous meanings, and so demonstrates the difficulty of knowing things for certain. In that regard, the refrain manifests an epistemological problem that the poem conveys elsewhere in more discursive means. The polyvalence of the refrain, therefore, contributes to the poem's rhetorical argument for the need to avoid judging others and thereby restore charity.

As well as by troping its structural function, a refrain may function poetically by accruing a cluster of associations, and thereby creating a cumulative or even symbolic effect. This accrual of associations is enabled by the fact that refrains have "memories," as John Hollander puts it: "refrains are, and have, memories—of their prior strophes or stretches of text, of their own preoccurrences, and of their own genealogies in earlier texts as well."<sup>58</sup> The way that memory is used in these cases, however, comments explicitly on neither the passage of time nor the status of exact repetition. Rather, the refrain accrues a particular resonance or meaning in each stanzaic context, and as the poem unfolds these resonances accumulate. Given its role as the central axis of the poem, the refrain thereby serves as the means of suggestively holding together a vast array

of significances that enrich the poem's message. The refrain's cluster of associations is evoked and at the same time augmented with each occurrence.

What has already been said about "Aȝeyn mi wille I take mi leue" and "*Mane Nobiscum Domine!*" demonstrates the evocative effect of this kind of poetic refrain, and the refrains in three other poems to be discussed—"Maiden Marie and her Flourdelys," "Troupe is Best," "Merci passeþ alle þinge"—produce a similar accrual of associations. In "*Mane Nobiscum Domine!*" the "memories" of the phrase's context in the liturgy and the Bible are evoked to convey the message of Christ's immanence, and the reality of this immanence in the world is conveyed as the speaker of the phrase modulates from the present persona, to Cleophas, to the audience's imagined supplication before God. In "Aȝeyn mi wille I take mi leue", the polyvalent significance of the speaker's departure is carried through modulations of the refrain. In "Maiden Marie and her Flourdelys", the traditional symbol of the lily is given extra significance as the poem develops, through punning, the two senses of its name "flour de lys" (flower of light) and "flour delys" (flower of joy) in relation to Mary and Jesus. In "Troupe is Best," "troupe" is defined through various metaphors and allegories, and with each occurrence of the refrain that web of associations is foregrounded and augmented. In "Merci passeþ alle þinge", the significance of the phrase is enforced through shifts in voices who speak it: as the spoken phrase moves from the mouth of the little bird, to the narrator, to Christ it delineates a theological definition of mercy.

The six Vernon refrain lyrics to be discussed in the chapters to follow present rhetorical self-consciousness that has in some respects been anticipated in earlier Middle English lyrics, and in some respects not. By either troping their function as a recurring element of the poem, or accruing a cluster of associations as the poem unfolds and its memory grows, the refrains in

certain Vernon lyrics function poetically rather than purely structurally. The speaking voices in these poems also manifest different qualities of literariness in their status as embodied characters. The speaking voice and the refrain, therefore, involve the reader in deeper modes of engagement, such that the poems' mode of persuasion depends on their literariness. It remains to be seen how these two devices cohere with each other, and with other elements of the poems—including word-play, allegory, and exempla—in holistic ways in each of the six lyrics to be discussed.

Before moving on to a close look at those lyrics, however, a few words are in order about one other technique that is more or less important to most of them, but that has not been investigated: word-play.<sup>59</sup> As Helge Kökeritz explains, three main types of word-play are used by medieval poets, and these can be labelled with reference to rhetorical theory current at the time: *traductio*, *adnominatio*, and *significatio*.<sup>60</sup> The first two types describe word-play that involves repetition, repetition of the same word or a slight modulation of one word, in ways that evoke different meanings.<sup>61</sup> *Significatio* occurs when “a single word can be taken in two or more senses, but has the one the speaker wishes to give to it.”<sup>62</sup> *Significatio* accords with the modern definition of a pun, as double entendre. Of the three types of word-play outlined in medieval rhetorical theory, the one prevalent in certain Vernon refrain lyrics is *significatio*.

In the Vernon lyrics, however, puns extend beyond the strict sense of a “double entendre” on a single word, to include words that are closely related in sound but not identical. Puns that involve related but not identical words are found in other Middle English literature. Larry D. Benson has established criteria for determining when a pun is operative in a Middle English texts.<sup>63</sup> He exemplifies what qualifies as a pun as it has been set out in a previous article on Chaucer's puns, by Paull F. Baum.<sup>64</sup> A pun can exist when two or more meanings of a single

word are evoked, or when the meaning of a word that is similar but not identical in sound to the one uttered or printed is evoked.<sup>65</sup> In either case, the various meanings ascribed to the word(s) must have been current in the contemporary speech of the time. As well, both (or all) meanings of the word(s) must fit the context, thematically as well as syntactically. Using these criteria, Benson disregards many puns that have been imputed to Chaucer's works by critics. Specifically, he shows that most claims made for puns with the word "queynte" are erroneous because "queynte" did not refer, on its own, to the obscenity (*MED* cunte n.). In applying his criteria for identifying puns, Benson finds that "queynte" only operates as a pun in one place in Chaucer, in "The Miller's Tale," where a *rime riche* evokes the obscenity through the word's thematic and syntactic context:

As clerkes ben ful subtile and ful queynte;

And prively he caughte hire by the queynte (3275-6)<sup>66</sup>

The syntactic and thematic contexts of the second "queynte" call to mind the obscenity, a word that has a slightly different sound and "was well established in the language by Chaucer's time."<sup>67</sup>

I will employ Benson's criteria in identifying puns operating in certain Vernon lyrics, though with a few qualifications, which can be exemplified with reference to two different critiques of Benson's article, both of which consider the status of "queynte" as a pun. Joseph A. Dane considers the importance of rhyme for determining a pun, and he speaks directly to Benson's reading of the above passage from "The Miller's Tale."<sup>68</sup> Dane shows that Chaucer's *rime riche* mostly involves identical rhyme, and that "Chaucer seems to have regarded the particular grammatical rhyme involving an adjective and noun as a form of identical rhyme...permitted only where identical rhyme itself is permitted."<sup>69</sup> Benson had argued that the

pun on the second “queynte” works by surprise because we expect to hear the word “conte”; Dane shows that, given Chaucer’s habitual use of identical rhyme in *rime riche*, the audience would expect to hear “queynte.” Thus the word “queynte” must have signified the obscenity, a fact which Benson denies.

Dane’s argument about the implications of the regularity of Chaucer’s rhyme for his puns cannot, however, be transferred over to the Vernon poems with ease. Given that we cannot assume that the lyrics were written by a single poet, we have no overarching habitual pattern of rhyme to fall back on. In the subsequent analysis, in some places leeway is given where a pun word in a rhyme position involves phonological variation, as it does in Benson’s reading of “queynte” (“The Miller’s Tale” 3276). That is, in one of the pun word’s senses, the sound of the word conforms to the expected rhyme, but in the second sense, a slight phonological variation exists, which involves a mis-rhyme.<sup>70</sup>

John Fleming also qualifies Benson’s argument, by way of interrogating larger assumptions about Chaucer and about literary interpretation.<sup>71</sup> Fleming takes to issue Benson’s and other critics’ dismissal of the pun on “queynte” identified by D.W. Robertson in Troilus’s apostrophe to Criseyde’s empty palace, from Book V of *Troilus and Criseyde*:

Than seide he thus, “O paleys desolat,  
 O hous of houses whilom best ihight,  
 O paleys empty and disconsolat,  
 O thow lanterne of which queynt is the light,  
 O paleys, whilom day, that now art nyght,  
 Wel oughtestow to falle, and I to dye,

Syn she is went that wont was us to gye! (5.540-46)

Robertson claimed that “queynt” (543) includes a pun on the obscenity: “The ironic pun on ‘queynt’ is a bitter comment on what it is that Troilus actually misses, and the change from day to night is, ironically again, the fulfillment of his wish in Book III.”<sup>72</sup> Many critics disagreed with Robertson’s claim, for various reasons, but fundamentally, Fleming argues, because those critics had a preconceived sense of the “exquisiteness” of the passage which it appears in. In particular, Fleming argues that

“[t]he genital meaning of the word *queynt* is not to be banished by appeals to syntax, to literary genre, or to etymology—which are for Wrenn, Bloomfield, and Benson, respectively, the ostensible grounds for its indictment—but this is of course not the same as to say that there is a pun or rather an ambage in the word in *Troilus* 5.545, or in any other specific passage.”<sup>73</sup>

In challenging the criticism that denies the possibility of a pun in the passage, Fleming probes to the heart of what is at stake in banishing it. In response to Wrenn’s critique, he writes:

The appeal to those “who have a feeling for Middle English and know its syntax” [quoting Wrenn] is not in this instance an appeal to scholarly expertise but an appeal to a certain predetermined assumption about the poem. The passage in question is “exquisite” [quoting Wrenn] and, by implication, no exquisite passage can contain the substantive *queynt*. Wrenn’s specific criticism here is part of a more general indictment of moral simplism and tunnel vision in *A Preface to Chaucer*, a ‘theological’ predisposition to deny the complexity of poetry.”<sup>74</sup>

Fleming moves on to reconstruct a greater context through which the passage resonates.

He demonstrates how, in art and in literature, a pudendum was often associated with light or a lantern, and in so doing he shows that Chaucer was likely “informed by an anterior vernacular Ovidianism, particularly that of the *Roman de la Rose* and of Boccaccio.”<sup>75</sup> The Ovidian context gives credence to the likelihood, already substantiated by the tone of the whole *Troilus and Criseyde*, that there is “a frankly sexual element to Troilus’ grief.”<sup>76</sup> The reconstruction of this larger context brings Fleming to believe that the pun on “queynt” (*TC* 5.543) is operating, which increases the complexity of the passage and of the whole poem.

Caution should attend any attempt to transfer Fleming’s theoretical approach to the study of puns in the Vernon lyrics, since we do not know how accomplished the poets were, or what exposure to other literature they had. Nonetheless, Fleming’s argument clarifies how presuppositions tend to determine any reader’s attitude towards the possibility of finding puns, how various different contexts may illuminate a poem, and, perhaps most fundamentally, how different readers will find different meanings in any given passage, largely owing to the contexts they bring to bear on that passage. As mentioned in the “Introduction” to this thesis, the Vernon lyrics have been viewed as commonplace, prosaic pieces. It has seemed worthwhile to suspend those preconceptions and to try to reconstruct the contexts informing the poems, with the aim to define their complexity. At the same time, it has seemed best to proceed with caution in identifying the puns along the lines set out by Larry Benson: the ulterior sense in a pun word must have been current at the time, and it must fit the context both thematically and syntactically. As well, a pun may involve words that sound exactly the same, or that have slight phonological variation.

Given these criteria for what a pun is, it is possible to distinguish it from another, more

general sort of word-play operating in certain Vernon lyrics, one that does not fall under the rubric of the three types of word-play expounded in medieval rhetoric. This is the kind of word-play most evident in *Piers Plowman*, one which, as A. V. C. Schmidt describes it, involves the extrapolation of “metaphoric senses” of a word.<sup>77</sup> In certain places, a whole range of meanings for a word are redolent, though those meanings are not completely separate and mutually exclusive. The senses denote along a continuum, often from a secular to a divine sense of the word, in a way that effects “[t]he ‘release’ of spiritual meanings.”<sup>78</sup>

Neither type of word-play—puns or metaphoric senses of a word—has been investigated in the Vernon lyrics, though both types have been found in some earlier English lyrics. Puns in the Harley lyrics have been well studied, and critics continue to find puns in less canonical lyrics.<sup>79</sup> Some critics have also suggested that metaphoric senses of words are evoked in certain lyrics, especially devotional lyrics.<sup>80</sup> The investigation of word play in the Vernon lyrics, therefore, should contribute to our increasing perception of the verbal complexity of Middle English lyrics.

## Notes to Chapter One

1. The exception is "Do prey for vs to þi sone so fre. Aue," the only refrain lyric found apart from the group in the Vernon manuscript, on f.122v-123r.
2. Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, p. 6. Other critics have noted the preponderance among Middle English religious lyrics of the universal "I." For example, Douglas Gray writes: "The medieval poet speaks not only for himself, but in the name of the many; if he uses the poetic 'I' it will be in a way which may be shared by his readers," *Themes and Images*, p. 60.
3. Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953), p. 74.
4. The phrase "focal texts" is borrowed from Julia Boffey's analysis, "Loke on þis wrytyng, man, for þi devocion": Focal Texts in Some Late Middle English Religious Lyrics," in *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, ed. O.S. Pickering (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 129-45.
5. This general definition of *chanson d'aventure* is very similar to that given by Helen Estabrook Sandison, though I identify the speaker as the "narrator" rather than the "poet." Helen Estabrook Sandison, "The Chanson d'Aventure in Middle English" (Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr College, 1915), p. 2.
6. Sandison, "The Chanson d'Aventure," p. 18.
7. "Nou sprinkes the sprai" is found only in a manuscript of a late thirteenth-century law treatise, Lincoln's Inn, Hale 135. It is edited in *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1953), pp. 119-20.
8. These three Harley lyrics are edited in *The Harley Lyrics*, ed. G.L. Brook, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1956), pp. 52-3, 65-6, 60-2.
9. "At a sermoun þer I seet" is printed in *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript*, vol. 2, ed. Furnivall, pp. 476-8.
10. Sandison, "The Chanson d'Aventure," pp. 45, 82.
11. Judith M. Davidoff, *Beginning Well: Framing Fictions in Late Middle English Poetry* (London: Associated UP, 1988), p. 46.
12. Davidoff, *Beginning Well*, p. 52.
13. Boffey, "Loke on þis wrytyng," p. 132.

14. Boffey, "Loke on þis wrytyng," p. 134.
15. A longer discussion of "*Mane Nobiscum Domine*" is found on pages 33-39 of my "Six Vernon Refrain Lyrics: an Experiment in Critical Reading."
16. Rosemary Woolf discusses the Christ the Lover Knight tradition, *The English Religious Lyric*, p. 44-55.
17. As Frank Patterson has pointed out, "For þe pees" (4) was the name of a particular, and relatively popular, Collect used in Church services, which begins, "Deus a quo sancta desideria, recta consilia, et justa sunt opera," *The Middle English Penitential Lyric* (New York: Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature, 1911), p. 188.
18. Stephen Lawly, ed. *Breviarium ad usum ecclesie Eboracensis* (London: Surtees Society, 1890), Vols. 71,75. Francisci Proctor and Christophori Wordsworth, eds. *Breviarium ad usum insignis Ecclesiae Sarum*, Fasciculus I (Cambridge: Almae Matris Academiae, 1883).
19. The audience's role-playing will be explained further in the subsequent discussion of "dramatic oratorical addresses."
20. I quote from the most recent edition, *Die Kildare-Gedichte: die Ältesten Mittelenglischen Denkmäler in Anglo-Irischer Überlieferung*, ed. Wilhelm Heuser (Bonn: P. Hanstein's Verlag, 1904), pp. 150-8. The poem also exists, in a nineteenth-century transcription, in London, British Museum, Additional 20091, ff.65a-73a. Unfortunately little critical discussion exists on this poem. Arthur Moore for example, reports that it "is interesting chiefly as social commentary and hardly requires mentioning with the secular lyric," *The Secular Lyric in Middle English* (Westport: Greenwood P, 1970), p. 97. Heuser notes its rhetorical self-consciousness in his introduction to the poem: "Die Satire des Verfassers, der bedeutende dichterische Kraft verrät, ist frei, kühn und derb," p. 153. The nature of the satire of the "writer," however, has not been investigated further.
21. These two poems are printed in *Die Kildare-Gedichte*, ed. Heuser, pp. 119-121, 133-39.
22. Carter Revard, "The Lecher, The Legal Eagle, and the Papelard Priest: Middle English Confessional Satires in MS Harley 2253 and Elsewhere," *His Firm Estate: Essays in Honour of Franklin James Eikenberry*, ed. Donald E. Hayden (Tulsa, OK: U of Tulsa, 1967), p. 57.
23. "The Papelard Priest" was first edited by A.H. Smith in 1951 in an article in *London Mediaeval Studies*, and is still only available there, "The Middle English Lyrics of Additional MS 45896," *London Mediaeval Studies* 2.1 (1951), pp. 42-45. The lyrics of London, British Library, Additional 45896 have been discussed by Ralph Hanna III, "With an O (Yorks.)," "The Man in the Moon" is printed in *The Harley Lyrics*, ed. Brook, pp. 69-70. "A Satire on the Consistory Courts" is printed in *Historical Poems*, ed. Robbins, pp. 24-7.
24. Revard, "The Lecher," p. 57. Revard credits E.T. Donaldson for pointing out to him the self-satirizing nature of all the poems, p. 70, fn. 12.

25. Robert J. Menner has reconstructed the poem's references to hedging and hedges, "The Man in the Moon and the Hedging," *JEGP*, 48 (1949), pp. 1-14.
26. Revard, "The Lecher," p. 62.
27. "In May hit murgeþ when hit dawes" is printed in *The Harley Lyrics*, ed. Brook, pp. 44-5. The dramatic irony of this poem has been pointed out by others, most thoroughly by Andrew J. Howell, "Reading the Harley Lyrics: a Master Poet and the Language of Conventions," *ELH* 47 (1980), pp. 635-40. My particular contribution to the discussion of the poem relates to how the strategy depends on an 'embodied speaker,' and how it therefore accomplishes its admonitory aim more through dramatic than purely discursive means.
28. The seriousness of the reference to 'trouthplight' in this lyric was identified by Michael Franklin, who sees that the poets of the Harley love lyrics as a whole were aiming to make courtly love compatible with marriage, "Fyngres heo hæp feir to folde': Trothplight in Some of the Love Lyrics of MS Harley 2253." *Medium Aevum* 55.2 (1986), pp. 176-87. Franklin does not register the situational irony of the speaker.
29. Equivocation is sustained at the verbal level as well, which contributes to the effectiveness of the piece as a dramatic exemplum. The persona's portended intention to praise the virtue of all women and to warn women about the falseness of men is undercut by verbal ambiguity. After praising, in the first stanza, all women outright, in the second stanza he begins by defining women as "the best," but then goes on to qualify:
- Wymmen were þe beste þing  
 þat shup oure heuene kyng  
 3ef feole false nere. (13-15)
- As Andrew Howell has shown, the word 'feole' (15) causes some hesitation ("Reading," pp. 636-7). Grammatically, its reference is most obviously to "wymmen," so the unqualified praise of women is muted into a conditional state: "women would be the best things made by God if many women were never false." G.L. Brook defined the word as an indefinite pronoun referring to "all men," claiming that it is used as such elsewhere in the poems. The ambiguity remains, however, as the speaker allies himself, albeit light-heartedly, with prevalent anti-feminist discourse. He thus reveals an underlying distrust of women, which destabilizes his previous and subsequent general praise of them.
30. In its present state, the Vernon manuscript contains 350 of its original 422 or 426 leaves, each measuring 544 x 393 mm, and it weighs 48 3/4 pounds (about 22 kilograms) (Doyle, "Introduction," p. 1). The current consensus holds the Vernon manuscript to have been designed for a religious house of nuns or non-monastic women, and Doyle notes that such monasteries would likely have included lay lodgers, perhaps lay relatives of religious women who may have been the financial backers of the manuscript ("Introduction," p. 15). Thorlac Turville-Petre's hypothesis supports this theory of lay involvement: he sets the Vernon manuscript in the context of similar though smaller compilations produced through the initiation and financial support of the gentry classes in the same area of the West Midlands around the same time ("The Relationship of

- the Vernon and Clopton Manuscripts,” in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall [Cambridge: Brewer, 1990], p. 42). Ronald Waldron has also suggested that the Vernon manuscript may have been “designed as a repository of vernacular texts suitable for reading aloud at mealtimes to a fortuitous assembly of lay guests,” (“The Vernon Refrain Poems,” p. 9).
31. In his *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), Walter Ong uses the terms “oral residue” or “residual orality” in reference to writings from various historical epochs. At one point he provides examples of what defines “oral residue” in “English style” of the Tudor period and later: “its use of epithets, balance, antithesis, formulary structures, and commonplace materials,” p. 115.
32. See Dieter Mehl, “The Audience of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. Beryl Rowland (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), pp. 173-89, and Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1977), pp. 36-40.
33. Janet Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 28.
34. Coleman, *Public Reading*, pp. 74-147.
35. Coleman, *Public Reading*, p. 29.
36. Rosemary Woolf compares certain “*O vos omnes*” lyrics to the York Passion play to show how, in the address from Christ to the audience brings the audience to “take part in the representation” of the action of the Crucifixion, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*, p. 44.
37. I use the term “interpellate” in the sense Louis Althusser employs it in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Towards an Investigation),” trans. Locke and Brewster, in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 100-140. It refers to the process through which a social subject is ‘hailed’ into being through identifying with an image of his or her identity.
38. This discussion of “*Azeyn mi wille I take mi leue*” is revised slightly from my “Six Vernon Refrain Lyrics,” pp. 40-5.
39. Another lyric with the same refrain that has survived in considerably fewer attestations in *IMEV* 1463.
40. The term “pseudo-ballade” was coined by A.B. Friedman in his article “The Late Medieval Ballade and the Origin of Broadside Balladry,” *Medium Aevum* 27 (1958), pp. 95-110. Friedman’s article discusses the history of the French *balade* and of English variations on it. “*Quia Amore Languet*” is the only other lyric in pseudo-ballade form found in a manuscript predating the fifteenth-century. It is edited in many places, including *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown,

pp. 286-8.

41. Historical accounts of the development of the "pseudo-ballade" form have been provided by Helen Cohen (*The Ballade* [New York: Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature, 1915]), A.B. Friedman ("The Late Medieval Ballade"), and recently by Susanna Greer Fein ("Twelve-Line Stanza Forms"). Fein considers the formal similarities between the Vernon lyrics and *Pearl* in an attempt to determine the date of *Pearl*.
42. John Burrow, "The Shape," pp. 187-99; Julia Boffey, "Loke on þis wrytyng," pp. 132-33.
43. Burrow, "The Shape," pp. 188-9.
44. Boffey, "Loke on þis wrytyng," p. 132.
45. John Hollander, "Breaking into Song: Some Notes on Refrain," in *Lyric Poetry Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), p. 78.
46. Hollander, "Breaking into Song," pp. 74-5. The phrase "poetic refrain" was coined by John Hollander. He uses it to name the troped refrain. I have extended the phrase to signify, in addition, a refrain that creates associational clustering, which I will define more fully.
47. Hollander, "Breaking into Song," pp. 74-5.
48. Middle English carols are collected in *The Early English Carols*, ed. Richard L. Greene, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1977).
49. "Svmer is icumen in" is found London, British Library, MS Harley 978, a manuscript from the first half of the thirteenth century. It is printed in *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Brown, p. 13.
50. The sixteen Middle English lyrics with and "O and I" refrain are listed by *IMEV* number in Joseph Grennen's article, "'O and I' Refrain in Middle English Poems: a Grammatology of Judgement Day," *Neophilologus* 71.4 (1987), pp. 614-25. Grennen argues that the "O and I" refers to the "ictu oculi" from 1 Cor. 15:50-2: "In momento, in ictu oculi, in novissima tuba: canet enim tuba, et mortui resurgent incorrupti: et nos immutabimur," p. 621. Richard H. Osberg argues that it would have brought to mind the exclamation "oye," and so served as a call to vigilance, "A Note on the Middle English 'O & I' Refrain," *Modern Philology* 77 (1980), pp. 392-6.
51. "Alisoun" is from London, British Library, MS. Harley 2253. It is edited in many places, including *The Harley Lyrics*, ed. Brook, p. 33.
52. "The Way of Christ's Love" and "The Way of Woman's Love" are printed in *The Harley Lyrics*, ed. Brook, pp. 70-1, 71-2.

53. "Richard the trichard," first attested in Harley 2253 but dated through historical reference to sometime between the Battle of Lewes on 14 May 1264 and the fall of Simon Montfort on 9 August 1265, is generally taken to be the first Middle English refrain poem. It is printed in *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Brown, pp. 131-2.
54. The limits to the poetic quality of the refrain in "Richard the trichard," however, become apparent when it is contrasted with the refrain "Nevermore" in Poe's "The Raven" which, John Hollander finds, enacts the anxiety of the poet by denying "the return of dead beauty to memory" ("Breaking into Song," p.74).
55. "Lollai, l<ollai>, litil child, whi wepistou so sore?" is found in London, British Library, MS Harley 913. It is printed in *Die Kildare-Gedichte*, ed. Wilhelm Heuser, pp. 172-6, and in *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, pp. 35-6, from which I quote. It is the earliest known version of the "Lullay, lullay" songs. In all other versions, the mother is Mary and the child Jesus.
56. Rosemary Woolf has commended "Lollai, l<ollai>, litil child, whi wepistou so sore?," and noted its similarity to the Vernon lyrics, *The English Religious Lyric*, p. 155.
57. Of the remaining three stanzas, the first introduces, the last summarizes, and the third exhorts to "do unto others." The texts in Lambeth Palace MS. 853 and London, British Library, MS. Harley 78 appear to be more authorial than the Vernon text, since they develop the ten commandments in order, whereas Vernon places the sixth commandment between the eighth and ninth.
58. Hollander, "Breaking into Song," p. 77.
59. O.S. Pickering mentions that "Be token hit is þe Flourdelys" includes "striking phrase-making...sudden metaphor and word-play," quoting lines 49-65; but he does not elaborate on what is involved in the word-play ("Middle English Metaphysical," p. 91).
60. Helge Kökeritz, "Rhetorical Word-play in Chaucer," *PMLA* 69 (1954), pp. 937-52.
61. To borrow from the definitions provided by Sylvia Tomasch in her study of word-play in *Pearl*, in *tractio* homonyms are repeated, and in *adnominatio* "the form of a word is varied by the use of suffixes, prefixes, or transportation of letters or sounds" ("A Pearl Punnology," *JEGP* 88 [1989], p. 2.)
62. Kökeritz, "Rhetorical Word-play," p. 941.
63. Larry D. Benson, "The 'Queynte' Punnings of Chaucer's Critics," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer Proceedings* 1 (1984), pp. 23-47. A similar attempt to prescribe the criteria for identifying puns has been undertaken by Archibald A. Hill ("Chaucer and the Pun-Hunters: Some Points of Caution," in *On Language: Rhetorical, Phonologica, Syntactica: A Festschrift for Robert P. Stockwell from his Friends and Colleagues*, ed. Caroline Duncan-Rose and Theo Vennemann [London: Routledge, 1988], pp. 66-78). Hill's criteria for the most part overlaps

with Benson's, though without citing him.

64. Paull F. Baum, "Puns in Chaucer," *PMLA* 71 (1956), pp. 225-46.

65. One possible Chaucerian pun that involves a slight change in the sound of a word occurs in the first two lines from Book 4 of *Troilus and Criseyde*:

But al to litel, weylaway the whyle,  
Lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune.

Because of the presence of the word "Fortune," there may be a pun operating between "whyle" and "wheel." The pun was noted by Paull Baum, and considered by Larry Benson, "The 'Queynte,'" p. 26.

66. All quotations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987).

67. Benson, "The 'Queynte,'" p. 35. Benson published his argument slightly before the *MED* team had published its article on "queynte," and assumed that the word did not denote the obscenity ("The 'Queynte,'" p. 36-7). *MED* records now show that it did (*MED* s.v. queint(e) n.2. (a)).

68. Joseph A. Dane, "Queynte: Some Rime and Some Reason on a Chaucer[ian] Pun," *JEGP* 95 (1996), pp. 497-514.

69. Dane, "Queynte," p. 513.

70. This phenomena of mis-rhyme is most prevalent in "Troupe is Best," to be discussed.

71. John V. Fleming, "Quaint Light in Troy," Chap. 1 in *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's Troilus* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska P, 1990), pp. 1-44.

72. D.W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962), p. 500 (Qtd. in Fleming, "Quaint Light," p. 3).

73. Fleming, "Quaint Light," p. 23. The criticisms of Robertson's interpretation that Fleming refers to are: C.L. Wrenn, review of *A Preface to Chaucer*, by D.W. Robertson, *JEGP* 62 (1963), p. 794-801; Morton W. Bloomfield, "Troilus' Paraclausithyron and Its Setting," *NM* 73 (1972), pp. 15-24; Benson, "The 'Queynte.'"

74. Fleming, "Quaint Light," p. 4. Fleming points out how a similar kind of bias underlies Derek Brewer's dismissal of the same pun. Brewer wrote: "Why should this peculiarly pointless crudity be attributed to Chaucer?"... "What would the passage gain, compared with the vastness of the loss, if it were accepted?" (Derek Brewer, *Chaucer*, 3d ed. [London: Longmans, 1973], p. 203, qtd. by Fleming, "Quaint Light," p. 41). As Fleming remarks: "The terms in which the questions are posed reveal the peculiar difficulties of a text caught up in a conflict of critical sensibilities. Brewer apparently believes that to allow the reality of a pun on *queynte* would measurably

diminish the moral stature of the man Geoffrey Chaucer" (Fleming, "Quaint Light," p. 41).

75. Fleming, "Quaint Light," pp. 25-29, qtd. p. 28.

76. Fleming, "Quaint Light," p. 25.

77. A. V.C. Schmidt, "*Lele wordes and bele paroles: Some Aspects of Langland's Word-Play*," *Review of English Studies* n.s. 34.134 (1983), p. 148. *Piers Plowman* also, of course, contains other kinds of word play. Bernard F. Huppé discusses those types in his "*Petrus id est: Word Play in Piers Plowman, the B-text*," *ELH* 17 (1950), pp. 163-90. Much of Langland's word play falls under the category *adnominatio*, where a word is repeated in close proximity with an addition of suffixes, prefixes, or slight alterations in sound. One good example given by Huppé (who does not discuss Langland's word play with reference to classical rhetorical terms) is B.7.142-4 ("*Petrus id est*," p. 137). Langland also uses *tractio* and puns.

78. Schmidt, "*Lele wordes*," p. 148. One example Schmidt gives is the word "salve," which appears, among other places, in B.20.348. As Schmidt describes the word play: "The primary meaning of the noun *salve* is 'an ointment for application to wounds or sores'. Its secondary meaning, 'a remedy, esp. for spiritual disease, sorrow, and the like' (see *OED* s.v. 2a) is not found before Orm (c.1200). This metaphorical use owes something to the words *save* and *salvation*, both deriving ultimately from Latin *salvus* and unrelated etymologically to the native *salve*." (p. 141).

79. Good studies of puns in the Harley lyrics include Daniel J. Ransom, *Poets at Play: Irony and Parody in the Harley Lyrics* (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1985), and Andrew J Howell, "Reading the Harley Lyrics: a Master Poet and the Language of Conventions," *ELH* 47 (1980), pp. 619-45. Stephen Manning has argued for a pun on the reference to Mary as "makeles" (4) in the lyric "I sing of a maiden": "makeles" means "matchless," but it also evokes the word "mateless," referring to Mary's virginity ("I Syng of a Myden," *PMLA* 75 [1960], pp. 8-9). His argument, however, has been challenged by D.G. Haliburton, "The Myden Makeles," *Papers on Language and Literature*, 4 [1968], pp. 115-20. See also David Lyle Jeffrey's analysis of puns in a lyric from John Grimestone's preaching book, (*The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality*, [Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1975], pp. 244-5). More recently, Richard Firth Green has uncovered some puns in a lesser known macaronic poem entitled "On the Times": "Jack Philipot, John of Gaunt, and a Poem of 1380," *Speculum* 66 (1991), pp. 330-41.

80. For example, in reference to the "dew" in "I sing of a maiden" Leo Spitzer has shown how patristic writers identified dew with the manna that sustained the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16.3), and thus how dew signified as a type of Christ ("*Explication de Texte*" Applied to Three Great Middle English Poems," in *Essays in English and American Literature*, ed. Anna Hatcher [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962], pp. 238-40).

## Chapter Two

### Naming of parts in “Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent”: lessons in rhetoric

“Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent” is one of the eight Vernon refrain poems that are also attested in later manuscripts: a redaction exists in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS. 0.9.3, dated to the middle of the fifteenth century. The Trinity redaction omits the third and fourth stanzas, sets the remainder in a different order, and includes many variants. In his descriptive index of the Trinity manuscript, A.G. Rigg argues that although the Trinity version of the poem “is unusually corrupt and often fails to make sense[.]...[t]he editorial practice of SV makes it likely that the order and number of stanzas in [Trinity] represent the original.”<sup>1</sup> The “editorial practice” Rigg refers to is that hypothesized by Carleton Brown and others, of a Vernon scribe or compiler who took liberties in editing his material.<sup>2</sup> John Burrow has recently granted that Rigg “may be right,” and suggested that stanzas three and four in the Vernon text may be from the hand of the same interpolator who added stanzas to other Vernon refrain lyrics, all of which “exhibit a peculiarly learned and curious mind, with an interest in the concrete exemplifying instance.”<sup>3</sup> A close reading of the poem, however, indicates that the Vernon version, though not without its share of textual difficulties, is likely closest to the original.<sup>4</sup> The Trinity text’s loss of stanzas, along with its lexical and syntactical muddles, occlude the poem’s hitherto unrecognized rhetorical self-consciousness.<sup>5</sup> I will return to delineate details of how the Trinity version occludes the rhetorical self-consciousness after having analysed the Vernon text. (An edition of the Vernon, Simeon, and Trinity texts follows this chapter.)

“Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent” had proverbial status in late medieval England, and became “the central aphorism of the literature of truth-telling and articulate citizenship in late

medieval English.”<sup>6</sup> With the range of potential denotations of “schente,” from loss of worldly position to injury, it provides a vivid means of presenting problems issuing from the paucity of adequate counsel caused by a combination of hostility towards admonition and selfish desires to maintain social prestige. The theme of the injured soothsayer was elaborated in different discursive genres, as Andrew Wawn has so thoroughly shown.<sup>7</sup> The lyric genre provided an opportunity for quite different strategies of presentation, given the central role of a dominant speaker cast, in a more or less embodied form, as an authority addressing an audience. The speaker in a lyric can convey, either through outright acknowledgement or through his own mode of speech, the psychological and linguistic restraints experienced when one attempts to admonish a public audience of the fact that “Who says the sooth he shall be schente.” Of all Middle English lyrics, the Vernon refrain poem “Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent” presents the most embodied speaker and dramatizes most holistically the social predicament impinging on any speaker attempting to give advice.

In earlier Middle English lyrics, complaints about the lack of truth-tellers, when present, tie in with general, and shorter, moral laments which comprise subsidiary preaching material. The greater portion of lyrics which address the problem at length post-date the Vernon manuscript, and many of them are written in the same “pseudo-ballade” stanza form.<sup>8</sup> The lyric closest in style, and likely in date, to “Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent” is one of the two additional refrain lyrics appended to the Vernon group in the Simeon manuscript (*IMEV* 4135). It modulates the proverb in a way that effectively belittles the problem as a social concern: the threat of being ‘shente’ now refers to the pains of eternal damnation, so the poem’s refrain changes from an observation to an exhortation: “But [unless] he sey soth he schal be schent.”<sup>9</sup> The rhetorical

aim of this poem is to direct the audience's attention to the more important issue of salvation, and thereby enable people to see all forms of worldly discomfort as relatively minor, and in that way urge them to speak out and be more receptive to advice. The fearless and earnest speaker, uncontaminated by the threats of the world, becomes a model. Some poems, however, like the Vernon poem, give more credit to the predicament as a social problem, and attempt to induce change with recourse to more secular kinds of persuasion, often those relating to political or national amelioration. Some involve an acknowledgement by the speaker of the dangers he faces in telling the truth, and thereby make dramatic use of the fiction of an embodied speaker to a limited degree. For example, in a macaronic poem known as "On the Times" (IMEV 3113) likely written in the autumn of 1380, the speaker gestures slightly to the dangers he faces in giving advice, in the opening lines, "Syng y wolde, butt, alas! / *decidunt prospera grata*" (1-2), and more explicitly later on, "Whoo sayth the trewthe is y schent / *regnum violentia vastat*" (31-2).<sup>10</sup> A later poem with the title "*De Veritate & Consciencia*" (IMEV 3120) and a refrain modulating some formulations of "Where Trowth and Conscyens ys be come" begins:<sup>11</sup>

Summe manere mater wolde I fayne meve

And I wyst thes gentyllys all to paye

But for drede of high repreue

I wote not weele what I may saye (1-4)

Similarly, a poem from Digby 102, dated at about 1401 and once given the title "Treuthe, Reste, and Pes" (IMEV 817) begins:<sup>12</sup>

For drede ofte my lippes y steke,

For false reportours, that trouhte mys-famed.

**3ut Charitee chargeth me to speke.**

**Pou3 troupe be dred, he nys not ashamed. (1-4)**

**In all three poems, the speakers continue on earnestly despite their acknowledgement of impending harm, and without any attempt to cloak their advice.**

**In “Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent,” however, the speaker is embodied in a specific social setting, addressing an audience which, like the rest of the world, threatens to harm anyone who dares to give advice. His speech, abounding in rhetorical figures, demonstrates the kind of mystification of meaning in which sycophants engage when trying to give advice, in order to protect themselves. As in the didactic confessional satires from Harley 2253, the speaker then becomes the most persuasive demonstration of the problem. Or so it would seem. In fact, what further distinguishes this poem is the speaker’s explicit identification of the situational irony he is involved in, and of the rhetorical figures he is using. Although the speaker does sometimes forthrightly exhort, he often resorts to rhetorical techniques: he enacts different forms of duplicitous speech, and points to them as specimens to support his “lesson” (95). The incorporation of this technique, however, complicates the nature of the lesson, and of the ethos of the speaker, whom we may refer to as an oratorical teacher. The specimens are presented as the unfortunate consequence of hostility to soothsayers in society, and thereby support a lesson in morality. From another perspective, however, the specimens, and the way the teacher consciously marshals them, are presented as examples of how to use rhetoric to admonish effectively, and they thereby constitute a lesson in rhetoric. So long as a divide can be maintained between the teacher’s stable, authoritative voice and the artful voices of his specimens, this dual perspective is relatively straightforward. As so often in such multi-vocal texts, however, that partition is porous.**

When the teacher turns to identify his whole performance as a specimen, as he does most remarkably in his final words, his selfless objectivity is brought up for question, the lesson is recast on another level, and the tension of perspectives is raised to a new height.

The most clear-cut specimens of speaking occur in the first and penultimate stanzas. The address opens in the voice of a sycophant who blatantly misleads by advising people to “plese” this “wikked world” (5). The teacher then enters at the beginning of the second stanza, pointing to what has gone before with an indicative “Þus” (13). This is the first of the teacher’s many uses of indicative pronouns and adverbs to situate what he is saying at a given moment in reference to other parts of his discourse, which are pointed to as examples, causes, or effects of specific styles of speech. “Þus” (13) identifies the proverbial statement of the refrain as the reason for the widespread use of verbal deceit, but it also tends to identify the preceding speech as an example of how “þe soþe [is] kept in close.” Stanza two then proceeds to describe the duplicity of sycophants and the social pressures that define modes of speech.

Specimens in the penultimate stanza are identified more explicitly from within the stanza, and from the preceding stanza as well. “[Þ]is gyle” (71) refers to the verbal duplicity indicated throughout the poem, but it also points forward to the next two stanzas, which provide illustrative specimens. Stanza seven contains two specimens, and identifies them as “saamples”: “Such saamples we han and oþer two” (80). First the teacher impersonates the voice of a profligate blithely declaring his *carpe diem* attitude, until being suddenly shocked into a moment of awareness as he remembers the impending final judgement: “I drede hit draweþ to domes-day” (79). The second specimen occupies the final four lines of the stanza. The teacher impersonates a soothsayer who, on the verge of locating the root of society’s malaise in children’s upbringing,

breaks off, as if suddenly realizing the danger he faces in criticizing— “But hos seiþ soþ, he schal be schent” (84).

Even without the recasting of voices ushered in at the poem’s end, the status of the two “saamples” in stanza seven is vexed. Unlike the unequivocal profligate dramatized in the opening of the poem, these dramatic monologues enact psychological shifts. The first begins as a profligate urging dissolute behaviour, but his sudden shift to self-awareness reverses his initial endorsement of immorality. The second begins as a candid soothsayer, but his sudden shift to restraint compromises his character by revealing traits of a sycophant. The two cannot both be examples of a compromised soothsayer or of a regretful profligate; yet the fact that they are categorized together as “saamples” indicates that in some respect they are equal. Their parity, it seems, can reside only at one remove from the teacher’s impersonation: they are both examples of a soothsayer who resorts to rhetorical, dramatic means to teach his “lesson,” impersonations of a soothsayer using impersonation. The “gyle” being pointed to in stanza six and exemplified in stanza seven, then, is not, or at least not only, the guile used selfishly by people intending to mislead, but the artful, rhetorical techniques resorted to by soothsayers. The moral status ascribed to those techniques, however, is still difficult to peg. Perhaps most strongly, the teacher suggests that soothsayers resort to rhetoric only out of a selfish desire to protect themselves. But he may also be suggesting that soothsayers incorporate artful techniques out of a selfless desire to guide people in leading a good life, and that their efforts are endorsed by the Horatian advice *miscere utile dulci* (to combine the useful with the pleasant). The ambivalent designation of the “saamples” is compounded in the teacher’s final self-reflection.

The second of the two “saamples” promised in stanza seven occurs at the end, when the

speaker points to himself: “Bis lesson lerneþ alle at me” (95). Exactly what this “lesson” is, however, is unclear, and its opacity is complicated by the fact that “bis” may be understood as pointing back to the previous part of the stanza or forward to the refrain.

Considered in reference to the first part of the stanza, the teacher’s self-reflection is either ironic or breaks down the stability of his teaching “character” which, by positing a firm point of reference up against which irony can be measured, enables irony. The teacher would seem to be forwarding himself as an example of the lack of self-awareness and trustworthiness in society, by implying that he cannot see his “oune defaute” (90) and that no one can “trust” him (91). From one perspective, this self-inculcation is ironic, because the very act of identifying himself implies self-awareness: the teacher thereby exposes his previous statement as a fallacy of false generalization, and lends a positive tone to the end. On the other hand, the self-inculcation registers an admission of defeat, a moment of psychological awareness similar to that in “I drede hit draweþ to domes day” (79). From this second perspective, the teacher’s incorporation of rhetorical tactics that lend spice to his “lesson”—such as, for example, using impersonation—is presented as evidence of his “defaute”: he suggests that his speech is sycophantic. In this suggestion he aligns his performance with the “saamples” in the previous stanza, and the ambivalent status accorded to the soothsayers in those saamples is accorded to him. The question is raised: does this teacher incorporate artful techniques out of a desire to help, or merely to protect himself? The answer depends, to some degree, on whether or not one finds a decisive divide between the teacher’s “real self” and his “dramatic persona.” Should that divide be found, the poem would stand as a lesson in rhetoric as well as a lesson in morality; should, however, one find that the teacher’s real “self” collapses into his dramatic persona, the poem would present a

moral lesson along with a negative view of rhetoric. Even in the latter condition, however, rhetoric must be at least somewhat condoned, if paradoxically so, given the effectiveness of the moral lesson it enables.

The final ambivalence is intensified and complicated by the fact that “*Bis lesson*” may also point forward to the refrain. In this configuration, the uncertain status of the “*lesson*” is, moreover, compounded by a textual ambiguity: there is a possibility that the initial “*Ho*” in this last recurrence of the refrain is a conscious modulation of the “*Hos*” used hitherto. “*Ho*” may be only an orthographical variation of “*Hos*,” which signifies throughout as the indefinite pronoun “*whoever*.” But it may also be a different pronoun: the nominative relative “*who*,” referring back to the antecedent “*me*.” The historical record summons caution in reading this “*Ho*” as a relative pronoun. “*Ho*” was used throughout the Middle English period as an indefinite relative and an interrogative pronoun, though its use as a nominative relative is first certainly attested only in 1426.<sup>13</sup> Up until then, and continuing on after, “*þat*” and “*which*” were used as nominative relatives. Some questionable instances of relative “*ho*” do occur before 1426, however, which makes it at least possible that this “*Ho*” would have been so recognized in the 1380s.<sup>14</sup> The convoluted syntax resulting when “*Ho*” is read as a relative in this context does lessen the possibility that a change in pronoun is intended. “*Ho*” governed by the antecedent “*me*” should take the first person verb, which is commonly in these lyrics the form “*sei*.” In light of the strong contextual and thematic argument for a relative “*ho*,” however, this syntactic difficulty does not eliminate the possibility that the speaker’s self-reference is intended in this final moment. Moreover, only a slight phonological variation, a *-th* sound, distinguishes third person “*seip*” and first person “*sei*,” and that distinction is even further minimized given that the *-th* ending in “*seip*”

glides into the next word “þe.” The possibility that “Ho” is an intended alteration from the previous “Hos” is also increased in light of previous modulations of the refrain: the syntax of the proverb modulates to form a larger discursive unit with the previous line at 36, 60, and 84, and in the first two of these instances (36 and 60) that modulation involves a change in the pronoun. The speaker’s pointing throughout, moreover, further augments the possibility that this final “Ho” was intended to signify as a relative pronoun.

Whether “Ho” signifies indefinite “whoever” or relative “who,” the “lesson,” insofar as it is defined by the teacher’s relation to the statement of the refrain, plays off of his situational irony. With the pronoun denoting “whoever,” the teacher points out that the style and content of his lesson is conditioned by the mendacity of society tersely summarized in the traditional proverb. At the same time, he gestures to the situation that will ensue in a time following his address, when he will be “schente” for what he has just said. That future situation referred to, however, may be either of two completely opposite, but equally plausible, consequences: it may refer to his being “schent” at the hands of his hostile audience and thereby align him with the “pore prechour” (57), or it may refer to his imminent damnation and thereby align him with the speakers who incorporate “feble fables” and “brewe” “bargeyn” (68-9). These two possible allusions qualify the address in completely opposite terms: one as candid admonition which will provoke punishment on earth; another as duplicitious speech which will be punished after death. Again, the two possible ways of viewing the address are held in suspension.

The same ambivalences operate when “Ho” is read as a relative pronoun, but then the teacher identifies himself more explicitly, as the penultimate line extends through enjambment to qualify the teacher as the one “Ho seip þe soþe.” What he means in claiming to tell the “soþe,”

however, remains inconclusive. He may be referring to his forthright declamation in the first part of the stanza, and declaring that he is there, like the “poor prechour” (57), speaking the “sope” candidly. The final half-line would then manifest a switch from the teacher’s voice to the voice of his audience, pointing to him and condemning him with “[H]e schal be schent!” The address would thereby end, not inappropriately, with the teacher presenting one final, and surprisingly ironic, impersonation. Alternatively, the teacher may be referring to his address as a whole, and pointing out that although he is using rhetorical techniques, his performance dramatically represents the “sope” of the problem. In that regard he paradoxically acknowledges the fact that his mode of speech proves his claim that everyone has faults and that no one can be trusted. Behind that acknowledgement, however, must lie at least the suggestion that rhetoric and drama can be used to provide effective advice.

The array of possible endings to this poem exhibits most intensely its fluid, open status, owing partly to textual ambiguities that are difficult to reduce given our distance from the living language, and partly to the fact that the pitch of the address would vary from performance to performance, depending on any given reader’s intonation. There are, no doubt, more and different ways of understanding the end, and the poem as a whole, than those suggested here. Still, there appears to be no way of eradicating the paradoxes and ironies. Altogether, with its various attitudes, the speech presents an ambivalent view of the teacher’s ethos and of the status of rhetoric. From one perspective, in pointing to his performance as a lesson the teacher avers that he is compromising himself by using verbal dalliance instead of candidness, and so dispels rhetoric from having any useful purpose. On the other hand, he presents himself as one who is in control of his speech, and who is making claims that rhetoric can serve constructive purposes. The

poem's fluidity makes it difficult to say for certain what it "means," as desirable as that may be for many reasons, not least of which to situate it as a catalyst for either intensifying or countering remonstrances against textual "glossing" that were becoming increasingly associated with Lollardy during the 1380s.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, in its ambivalence it represents the tensions of its socio-linguistic moment, and, moreover, enacts the ancient and ongoing debate over whether rhetoric can play a positive role in public discourse.

The teacher's technique of impersonation and pointing sheds new light on the genesis of the two stanzas that appear in Vernon and are absent from Trinity. Certain stylistic traits already increase the likelihood that Vernon's stanzas three and four are integral to the original text of the poem. Stanza three concludes with a syntactical modulation of the refrain similar to that at lines 36, 60, 84, and perhaps also 96. As well, the idiom of beginning a sentence with "Let" or "For let," used twice in the two stanzas (lines 27, 38), is used elsewhere (19, 49). More fundamentally, however, the authenticity of stanzas three and four is supported by the fact that their speaker's manner of speech and self-consciousness about it enact the situational irony evident in the rest of the poem.

In the metaphoric language of stanzas three and four, which has been remarked on by John Burrow and O.S. Pickering but is more complex than has been hitherto recognized, the speaker ironically uses the "painted words" that he elsewhere disparages (16, 65).<sup>16</sup> He develops a poetic conceit of moral decay as physical sickness, through the complimentary metaphors of false and deceitful words as noxious food which causes sickness, and a moral guide as a physician who is needed to restore health. Lines 25-26 present an explicit metaphor of moral corruption as internal bleeding. That injury is identified later on as being the result of the self-protecting "counsellor"

who “fedes” his lords lies and flattery (“flaterynge” (30), “lesynges” (32) and “blaundise”(34)). This sycophantic activity is also presented as resulting in a particular kind of injury: making the lord “blent” (34). “[B]lent” signifies most readily here as “to impair or destroy (someone’s insight, discernment, moral sense or natural feeling), mislead” (*MED* s.v. blēnden v.(1) 2. (a)). The corporal metaphor, however, educes the physical sense, “to deprive of vision, make blind” (*MED* s.v. blēnden v.(1) 1. (a)).

The next stanza goes on to develop the corporal conceit by spelling out how moral exhortation can reform a person through a metaphor of the soothsayer as a “leche” nursing a “wounde” (38). The function of this metaphor as a figurative description of the process of moral healing effected through admonitory discourse is strengthened and specified with reference to what is “lippe i bounde” (45). Assuming “lippe” to be a scribal error, Carleton Brown emended it to “lip,” the third person singular of the verb “lie” (*MED* s.v. liēn v.(1) 1a. (a)).<sup>17</sup> “[L]ip” does lend a smoother syntactical structure, and does anticipate the description of the soothsayer’s impeachment in the next stanza; but considering the corporal conceit, other references to the mouth in the text (“[h]erte & mouþ” (9), “tonge” (11), “tonges” (69)), the poem’s concern with soothsaying, and the fact that the word “lippe” is in the Simeon manuscript too, “lippe” was likely intended. It is a figurative way of saying that the advice that could heal people of their moral malaise is now fettered, either through silence or through duplicitous speech, because of the dangers facing those who utter it and the cowardice of those who should be uttering it despite those dangers.

This play with “lippe,” in light of his registration of fear in line 37 (“And al is wrong, þat dar I preue”) brings the teacher’s manner of speech in these two stanzas up for question: does the

advice he gives here through figurative language qualify as being “lippe i bounde”? If so, does this binding inculcate him for using the “peynted wordes” he criticizes elsewhere? The irony of the speaker’s style accords with the tensions created elsewhere in the address through the techniques of impersonation and pointing, which makes it highly likely that stanzas three and four come from the same poet’s hand.

The ambiguities in the text would inevitably have spilled over to create a more or less conflicted moment of individual and social consciousness in the present audience. The performance of “Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent” would have the capacity to transform it from a dramatic monologue into a dramatic oratorical address in which the whole communicative scenario would take on a quasi-fictional aura. In reciting the poem, the reader would be performing, and the “real” social occasion of delivery would be turned into a drama in a way that incorporated the audience into a quasi-dramatic role. The speaker would play the role of the dramatic teacher (lending the ply between the teacher’s “real” and “fictional” personae yet another dimension), and the present audience would be cast into the role of the audience implied by the speaking character, that is, an audience pressuring the teacher into either cloaking his admonition or concealing it altogether. Insofar as the teacher would identify himself as one who will be schent for telling the “soþe,” he would imply that he is bound to suffer by the very audience he is addressing. In subtly casting the audience as persecutors, the performance likely would have created a sombre moment of social and individual consciousness. That sombreness, however, would have had a more or less sharp ironic edge, depending on how it was performed. A forthright charge of the audience’s villainy might well have issued in an ironic tone, as might a performance that educed that potential comedy of the impersonations: the address could then

have issued in the reverse effect of interpellating those present as individuals who are above the corruption of those whom it criticizes, and who most certainly will not “schend” the teacher for telling the “soþe.” But even then the tone of the moment likely would have been conflicted, given the niggling suggestion that the reason why the audience will not schent the teacher is because he has resorted to guile. In all the various ways in which the audience’s response may have been defined, the experience of the drama itself would have had a fundamental heuristic and admonitory effect. Those present would be incited to reflect on their role as the audience implied by the address, and their awareness of how they were being cast would have effected an experiential “lesson.”

To add to the many uncertainties raised by the poem is the issue of the Vernon text’s relation to the Trinity text. It seems reasonable to entertain the possibility that readers and scribes intervening between the poem’s authorial text and the Trinity version either failed to tease out its voices and consequent ironies, or censored its rhetorical technique. Many variations in Trinity appear to stem from efforts to present a mono-vocal text, and they almost always result in a more incomprehensible text. Before turning to investigate specific variants, however, a few words are in order regarding the “Vernon interpolator” that has been hypothesized by a number of scholars.

Although signs of a Vernon scribe or compiler who took liberties in tinkering with his texts have been proposed by several scholars,<sup>18</sup> others have found evidence to the contrary. Nita Scudder Baugh, for example, in her study of the affiliation of the VS text of *The Debate of the Body and Soul* with the text of London, British Museum, MS. Additional 37,787 writes:

It has often been thought that Vernon’s scribe was an editor and made changes in the text.

[She cites Carleton Brown’s remarks, as cited above, in endnote 2.] The existence of

Additional proves that at least in the text of the Body and Soul the changes must have been made in a parent MS. from which all three descend directly or ultimately.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, even where an interpolator is posited, his poetic and rhetorical skill do not always seem to be of a high order. For example, writing on Vernon's 374-line expansion of "The Foundation of the Feast of the Conception" in *The South English Legendary*, Manfred Görlach remarks:

The [Vernon] compiler made use of an unidentified text which he wove together with the "E" Short Life...The compilation is clumsily done, with differences of metre and style not sufficiently smoothed out and no connecting links between the heterogeneous episodes supplied.<sup>20</sup>

Although Vernon stanzas three and four of "Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent" may not have connecting links to the rest of the poem, they do conform to the metre and style of the rest, and also, more remarkably, sustain the same kind of rhetorical self-consciousness evident throughout. Given the clear evidence that some texts have not been manipulated by a "Vernon interpolator," and that in those places where such an interpolator has been hypothesized he shows signs of being unskilled in blending his added material with what is given, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the two stanzas present in VS and missing from T are the work of the same poet who wrote the rest of the poem.

The textual evidence of the poem supports that hypothesis. In the first stanza, for example, the first person pronoun is missing in line 3 of the Trinity text, which effectively shifts the discourse from a dramatic impersonation to a description of the problem, spoken by a third-person, authoritative voice. Lines 47-53 in Trinity maintain some element of the dramatized

profligate who experiences a sudden awakening as in its Vernon parallel (V 73-79), though the full impact of the speaker's motives for speaking is decreased by changing the initial "Sipen" (V 73) to "There for" (T 47). The second of Vernon's dramatic "saumples" in that stanza, however, is reduced to pure statement in Trinity. Vernon's "so" (83) may denote "in the following manner" (*MED* s.v. *sō* adv. 2a. (a)), "to such an extent" (*MED* s.v. *sō* adv. 8. (a)), or "so very, exceedingly" (*MED* s.v. *sō* adv. 9a.): its function is uncertain in Vernon because of the break in thought effected with the retracting "But" of the next line. In Trinity, however, the function of this "so" (56) is unequivocally *MED* meaning 2a.(a): it points forward to the refrain as a text that children are "tawght," a text which is paradigmatic of teachings that encourage sycophantic behaviour. Although this is itself a clever modulation of the refrain's function, it destroys the original dramatic monologue and obscures the logical argument that unfolds in reference to such dramatic techniques. The precise pointing separating the two "saumples" in stanza seven is also lost as Trinity replaces the word "saumples" (V 80) with "warnyngs" (T 54), and the explicit enumeration and direction "and oþer two" (V 80) to the indefinite "one or two" (T 54). The word "saumples" exudes a suggestiveness that is key to the poem's rhetorical self-consciousness: it identifies parts of the address not according to their apparent function—as "warnyngs"—but to their technique of demonstration. As we have seen, that identification raises uncertainty as to what the "saumples" are demonstrating, and consequently as to what the "lesson" finally is.

In addition to the erosion of the poem's logical structural complexity effected by Trinity's change of "saumples" to "warnyngs," another form of lexical replacement in Trinity results in loosening the semantic texture and structure of the poem. The best example of this is Trinity's substitution of "norissched" (V 83) with "tawght" (T 56). "Norissched" denotes most precisely

here “to bring up (a young person), foster, raise” (*MED* s.v. norishen v. 5a.(a)). The word, however, exudes two different resonances in this context. It alludes to “noriture,” a component of the education programme provided for children in royal or noble households. “Noriture” denoted instruction which led to the attainment of social graces, and it also included athletic, musical and perhaps literary pursuits. The other educational component was known as “letrure,” which involved training in reading, writing, languages, and history.<sup>21</sup> Specified with reference to an educational programme, this critique of children’s upbringing stands as an analogy for that of the lord’s “sacratarie” (29), as an anti-court complaint: the teacher avers that now children are being flattered and deceived instead of instructed, and are also learning to use their skill in courtly etiquette to manipulate and exploit.<sup>22</sup> The charge is further inflected as an anti-court critique by the fact that it draws upon, and effectively magnifies, the governing conceit of Vernon’s stanzas three and four. The most literal meaning of “[n]orissched,” “supplied with food or drink, feed” (*MED* s.v. norishen v. 1. (a)) also resounds, and suggestively equates the teaching that children receive with the noxious “flaterynge” (30), “lesynges” (32), and “blaundise” (34) of the lord’s “sacratarie” (29), all of which cause moral disease. As well, although the final two stanzas of Trinity are in the same order as those in Vernon, the sequence lacks cohesion because the pointing performed by “oper two” (V 80), which in Vernon prepares the audience for one, final “saumple” is lost with the indefinite “one or twoo” (T 54).

## Notes to Chapter Two

1. A.G. Rigg, *The Glastonbury Miscellany of the Fifteenth Century: A Descriptive Index of Trinity College, Cambridge, MS.0.9.38* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1965), p. 52.
2. *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, pp. xx-xxi. Other arguments for a "Vernon interpolator" will be discussed near the end of this chapter.
3. John Burrow, "The Shape of the Vernon Lyrics," pp. 93, 199.
4. Andrew Wawn also argues for the greater authenticity of the Vernon text, "Truth-telling and the Tradition of *Mum and the Sothsegger*," *Yearbook of English Studies* 13 (1983), p. 276.
5. Apart from John Burrow's notice of the vivid metaphors in stanzas three and four, Andrew Wawn has pointed to one moment of dramatic feigning in the poem, but attributed it partly to scribal corruption: "The penultimate verse mimics, no doubt as much by accident as by design, what might be charitably called the psychic drama and muddle of the truth-teller," "Truth-telling," p.275.
6. Andrew Wawn, "Truth-telling," p. 273. Wawn notes certain fifteenth-century compilations in which the proverb is found: *Douce Proverbs*, the *Rylands Proverbs*, and the *Middle English Distichs* of British Library MS 37049 (p. 274). It is item S492 in B.J. Whiting's *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly before 1500* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968).
7. Andrew Wawn discusses many late Middle English texts that use the motif of the injured soothsayer. Apart from "Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent," of the lyrics I will discuss here Wawn also mentions "On the Times" and discusses the Simeon poem with the refrain "But he sey soth, he schal be schent" ("Truth-telling," pp. 275-7).
8. Lyrics from Digby 102 are edited in *Twenty-Six Political and other Poems*, ed. J. Kail, EETS os 124 (London, 1904). The earliest are dated between 1400 and 1421, and many employ a similar pseudo-ballade stanza form.
9. "But he sey soth he schal be schent" is edited in *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, pp. 205-208.
10. "Syng y wolde, butt, alas!" is found in London, British Museum, MS Harley 536; MS Harley 941, and Dublin Trinity College, E.5.10. It has recently been edited by James M. Dean, *Medieval English Political Writings* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan U, 1996), pp. 140-46. Through tracing political allusions in the poem, Richard Firth Green has determined that it was written on the eve of the Peasants' Revolt, "John Philipot, John of Gaunt, and a Poem of 1380," *Speculum* 66 (1991), pp. 330-41.

11. "*De Veritate & Consciencia*" is from London, Wellcome Foundation Library, MS Wellcome 1493. It has been edited by George Kane, "The Middle English Verse in MS Wellcome 1493," *London Mediaeval Studies* 11 (1951), pp. 61-5. Kane believes that the poem was copied into the manuscript between 1415 and 1450, but likely closer to 1450 (pp. 53-4).
12. "Treuthe, Reste, and Pes" is printed in *Twenty-Six*, ed. Kail, pp. 9-14.
13. Mats Rydén identifies the first example of an anaphoric, nominative relative "who" in a Paston letter ("The Emergence of *Who* as Relativizer," *Studia Linguistica* 37.2 [1983], p. 127).
14. Hans Heinrich Meier lists some questionable earlier instances of relative "ho" cited in *OED*, but dismisses them all, claiming that they are the generalizing, indefinite "whoever" ("The Lag of Relative *Who* in the Nominative," *Neophilologus* 51 [1967], pp. 280-1).
15. As Marie Aston has pointed out, Wyclif's denial of the complexity of the Bible, and hence his dismissal of the need for "glossing," relates directly to his social vision: "[f]or lay people to prove themselves capable of theology, direct auditors of God, was to change the world" (*Lollards and Reformers* [London: Hambledon P, 1984], p.132). A good account of the hermeneutic impulse behind Wyclif's rejection of rhetoric can be found in Rita Copeland's "Rhetoric and the Politics of the Literal Sense in Medieval Literary Theory: Aquinas, Wyclif, and the Lollards," in *Interpretation: Medieval and Modern*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1993), pp. 335-57. Ralph Hanna has shown how the democratizing ideals of Wyclif and the Lollards were "premature," as evidenced in texts that show how Wyclif's followers had difficulty coping with rhetoric (Ralph Hanna, "The Difficulty of Ricardian Prose Translation: The Case of the Lollards," *Modern Language Quarterly* 51.3 (1990), pp. 319-40; Ralph Hanna, "'Vae octuplex,' Lollard socio-textual ideology, and Ricardian-Lancastrian prose translation," in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), pp. 244-63).
16. Burrow, "The Shape," p. 199; O.S. Pickering, "Middle English," 103-4.
17. *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, p. 153.
18. A list of studies that argue for the existence of a "Vernon interpolator" can be found in A.I. Doyle, "The Shaping," p. 9, fn. 34.
19. Nita Scudder Baugh, *A Worcestershire Miscellany Compiled by John Northwood, c. 1400: Edited From British MS. Add. 37,787* (Philadelphia: privately printed, 1956), p. 45.
20. Manfred Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of The South English Legendary* (Leeds: U of Leeds, 1974), p. 103.
21. A very good discussion of the education of children at court is provided by Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1980), pp. 71-91.

22. H. Rosamond Parsons notes that courtesy poems were often forthright in advising how manners, 'nurture,' could be used for social advancement ("Anglo-Norman Books of Courtesy and Nurture," *PMLA* 44 [1929] p. 393). See, for example, this section from the Anglo-Norman courtesy poem, *Edward*, from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 425, edited by Parsons, pp. 420-28:

Quant home te fete doun ou present,

Ne obbliez pas, jeo to defent,

Einz lui merciez doucement;

De lur avez plus souvent. (ll 295-8)

"When someone gives you a present, do not forget to thank him prettily, and you will have things from him more often" (trans. Parsons, p. 393).

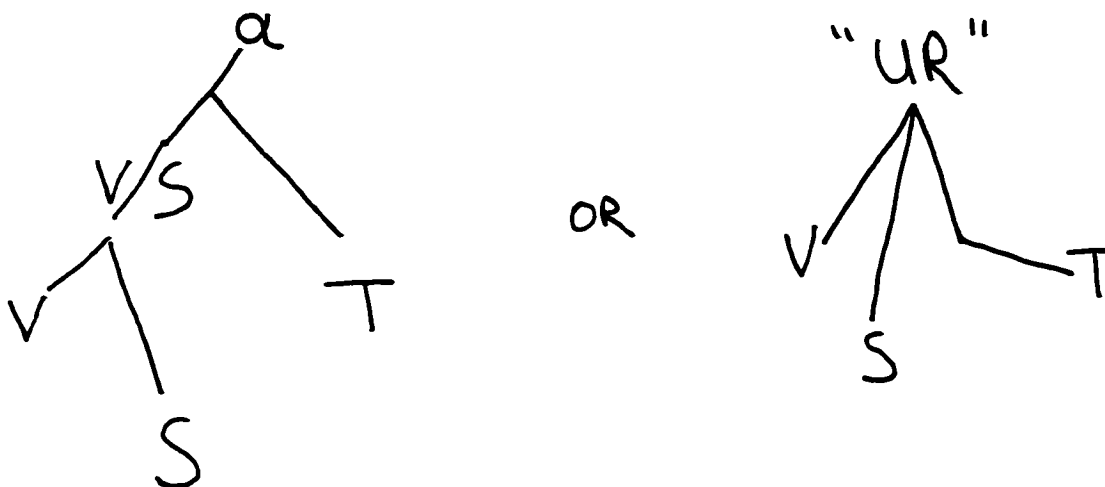
## Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent

**Texts and Present Edition:** Apart from the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts, “Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent” exists in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS. 0.9.38, a friar’s commonplace book dating from the middle of the fifteenth century. The Trinity redaction omits stanzas III and IV, sets the others in the following order—I, II, VI, V, VII, VIII—, and includes many variants. An edition of the Trinity College text can be found in A.G. Rigg’s D.Phil. dissertation, “An Edition Of A Fifteenth-Century Commonplace Book (Trinity College, Cambridge, MS 0.9.38),” (Oxford, 1965), 1: 35-7, 2: 255-9.

The present is a diplomatic transcription of all versions: the Vernon and Simeon versions in parallel, with the Trinity version following thereafter. I have transcribed from the Vernon facsimile of the manuscript, and from the Simeon and Trinity manuscripts. Rigg’s edition of the Trinity text includes modern punctuation and some emendations; the current edition is therefore the first diplomatic transcription of that text. I have indicated all expansions of scribal contractions with italic letters, and have retained all punctuation. The Trinity scribe includes flourishes on certain letters positioned at the end of words. I follow A.G. Rigg’s policy of ignoring all such flourishes except for the very marked curl sometimes found on a final “r”: these are silently expanded as a final “e.”

**Stemmatic analysis of the texts:** As I argue in the rhetorical analysis of the poem, VS is superior to T in almost all cases where a T variant exists. The one case where T is probably more authorial, however, is line 19 in T, which corresponds to line 21 in VS: the final word in T, “seynte,” corresponds with the rhyme scheme, whereas VS’s “Innocent” fails to. I propose the following

following stemmatic diagrams to indicate the possible transmission history of the texts:



**Notes on syntax in V:** The Vernon text contains many grammatical errors or ambiguities, some of which impair the logic of sentences. Some examples follow.

Stanza six contains the greatest concentration of grammatical difficulties in the poem. "To reuen þat is hem ful duwe" (64) is awkward. "[D]uwe" denotes "payable, owed" (*MED* s.v. dū(e) adj. 2. (e)). "[R]euen" denotes "to rob, plunder" (*MED* s.v. rēven v. 1(a)). If "þat" signifies as "what," as it customarily does and as the syntax suggests, the clause reads "to rob what is fully owed to them." "[R]euen" may be a scribal error for "reuen" meaning "to regret" (*MED* s.v. reuen v.(1). 1. (a)), thus giving "to regret as it is fully incumbent upon them to do." (The infinitive of *reuen* appears slightly later, at line 68.) The problem may also be faulty pronoun reference, especially given that other muddles in this stanza involve similar errors. Grammatically, "hem" (64) can be plural reflexive ("themselves"), or dative or accusative plural ("to them," "for them"). Given that the only possible antecedent here is "[m]en," "hem" can signify as the

reflexive “themselves”; though that issues in an illogical statement. The poet may have intended the pronoun to be understood as the dative “to them,” meaning “to others,” though the sentence lacks an antecedent that would enable that reading. The only way this clause works is by putting a caesura after “reuen”: then “þat” may refer back to the infinitive verb as the subject, and “duwe” may denote “proper, just, morally right” (*MED* s.v. *ḡū(e)* adj. 1.). The line would then translate: “To rob: that is, according to them, completely proper.”

Lines 67-8 present a similar case: “Whon Gabriel schal blowe his horn / His feble fables schul hym rewe.” “His” (68) may be a genitive masculine or a genitive neuter personal pronoun. As a genitive masculine, it can only refer back to Gabriel, implying that it is Gabriel, blowing his trumpet to announce God’s final judgement, who feels regret over his “feble fables.” The sense is equally as nonsensical when “his” is taken as a neuter genitive: then it refers back to the “horn,” implying that Gabriel will regret the feeble sound of his instrument. To make good sense, “His” (68) should refer to a sycophantic preacher who resorts to pandering diversions and consequently faces eternal damnation; but that antecedent is not operating grammatically here.

In the final stanza, the parallel structure of the long sentence at lines 85-90 is loose, owing partly to imprecise pronoun reference. It seems reasonable to assume that “þat” (89) begins a clause in apposition to the previous clause beginning “þat” in line 87: both relative pronouns refer back to “His cursed cours” (87), and both relative clauses qualify it.

**A. Parallel texts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng.poet.a.1 and London, British Library, MS. Addit. 22283:**

Pe Mon þat luste . to liuen in ese .	f. 408 <sup>b</sup>	Pe Mon þat lust . to lyuen in ese .	fol.130a
Or eny worschupe . her to ateyne	col.2	Or eny worschupe . her to ateyne	col.3
His purpos I counte . not worþ a pese		His purpos I counte not worþ a pese .	
Witterli . but he ordeyne	4	Witterly but he ordeyne .	
Þis wikked world . hou he schal plese		Þis wikked world hou he schal plese .	
Wiþ al his pouwer . and his peyne		Wiþ al his pouwer . and his peyne .	
3if he schal kepe him . from disese .		3if he schal kepe hym . from disese .	
He mot lerne . to flatere and feyne	8	He mot lerne to flatere and feyne .	
Herte and mouþ . loke þei ben tweyne		Herte and mouþ . ko þei ben tweyne .	
Þei mowe not ben . of on assent .		Þei mowe not ben . of on assent .	
And 3it his tonge . he mot restreyne		And 3it his tonge he mot restreyne .	
For hos seiþ þe soþe . he schal be schent	12	For hos seiþ þe soþe . he schal be schent .	
Þus is þe soþe . I kept in close		Þus is þe soþe I kept in close .	
And vche mon makeþ . touh and queynte		And vche mon makeþ touh and queynte .	
To leue þe tixt . and take þe glose.		To leue þe tixt and take þe glose .	
Eueri word . þei coloure and peynte	16	Eueri word . þei colour and peynte .	
Summe þer aren . þat wolden suppose		Summe þer aren þat wolden suppose .	
For no tresour . forte ben teynte .		For non tresour . for to ben teynte .	
Let a mon haue . not to lose		Let a mon . haue not to lose .	
He schal fynde . frenschipe feynte .	20	He schal fynde frenschupe feynte .	
Summe þat semen an Innocent .		Summe þat semen an Innocent .	
Wonder trewe . in heore entent .		Wondur trewe in heore entent .	
Þei beoþ a gast . of eueri pleynt .		Þei beoþ a gast of eueri pleynt	
For hos seiþ þe soþe . he schal be schent .	24	For hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent .	
Þe wikked wone . we may warie		Þe wikked wone we may warie .	
Þat eueri mon . þus Inward bledes .		Þat eueri mon þus Inward bledes .	
Let a lord haue . his Corlarie .		Let a lord haue . his Corlarie .	
He schal wel knowe . of al his dedes .	28	He schal wel knowe of al his dedes .	
Þau3 he be next . his sacratarie .		Þau3 he be next his sacratarie .	
Wiþ flaterynge . his lord he fedes		Wiþ flaterynge his lord he fedes .	
And with sum speche . he most him tarie .		And with sum speche he most hym tarie .	
And þus with lesynges . him he ledes	32	And þus with lesynges . hym he ledes .	
To gabben his lord . most him nedes .		To gabben his lord . most hym nedes .	
And with sum blaundise . make him blent .		And with sum blaundise . make hym blent .	
To leosen his offys . euer he dredes .		To leosen his offis . euer he dredes .	
For 3if he þe soþe seiþ . he schal be schent .	36	For 3if he þe soþe seiþ . he schal be schent .	

And al is wrong . þat dar I preue .  
 For let a mon . be sore I wounde  
 Hou schulde a leche . þis mon releue  
 But 3if he miste . ronsake þe wounde 40  
 For þaus hit smerte . *and* sumdel greue f408<sup>b</sup>  
 3it most he suffre . a luytel stounde col. 3  
 3if he kneuh . of his mischeue  
 With salues . he miste . make him sounde 44  
 Were grace at large . þat lippe i bounde  
 Hap . and hele . mihte we hent .  
 Lac of leche . wol vs confounde .  
 For hos seip þe soþe . he schal be schent 48

For let a frere . in Godes seruise  
 Þe pereles . to þe peple preche  
 Of vre misdede *and* vre queyntise  
 Þe trewe tixt . to telle and teche 52  
 Þaus he beo . riht witti and wyse  
 3it luytel þonk . he schal him reche .  
 And summe þer ben þat wol him spise  
 And bleþely wayte him *with* sum wreche 56  
 Þis pore prechour . þei wolen apeche  
 At counseyl . and at parliment .  
 But 3if he kepe him . out of heore cleche  
 For his soþ sawe . he schal be schent . 60

Sepþe þe tyme . þat god was boren .  
 Þis world was neuer . so vntrewe .  
 Men recchen neuer . to ben for swornen .  
 To reuen þat is . hem ful duwe 64  
 Þe peynted word . þat fel bi foren .  
 Be hynde hit is . a noþer hewe  
 Whon Gabriel . schal blowe his horn .  
 His feble fables . schul hym rewe . 68  
 Þe tonges . þat such bargeyn gon brewe  
 hit weore non harm . þous þei were brent  
 Þus þis gyle . is . founde vp of newe  
 For hos seip soþ . he schal be schent 72

And al is wrong þat dar I preue .  
 For let a mon be sore I wounde .  
 Hou schulde a leche þis Mon releue .  
 But 3if he miste ronsake þe wounde .  
 For þaus hit smert . *and* sumdel greue .  
 3it most he suffre a luytel stounde .  
 3if he kneuh of his mischeue .  
 With salues he miste make him sounde .  
 Were grace at large þat lippe ibounde  
 Hap *and* hele miht we hent .  
 Lac of leche wol vs confounde  
 For hos seip þe soþe . he schal be schent .

For let a frere in godes seruise .  
 Þe periles to þe peple preche .  
 Of vre misdede *and* vre queyntise .  
 Þe trewe tixt . to telle *and* teche .  
 Þaus he beo riht witti *and* wise  
 3it luytel þonk he schal *hym* reche  
 And *summen* þer ben þat wol him spise .  
 And bleþely wayte *hym with* sum wrenche .  
 3is pore prechour . þei wollen a peche .  
 At counseyl *and* at parliment .  
 But 3if he kepe *hym* . out of heore cleche .  
 For his soþ sawe . he schal be schent .

Seiþe þe tyme þat god was boren .  
 Þis world was neuer . so vntrewe .  
 Men recchen neuer . to ben for swornen .  
 To reuen þat is . hem ful duwe .  
 Þe peynted word . þat fel biforen .  
 By hynde hit is a noþer hewe .  
 Whon Gabriel schal blowe his horn .  
 His feble fables . schul hym rewe .  
 Þe tonges þat such bargeyn gon brewe .  
 Hit were non harm . þous þei were brent .  
 Þus þis gyle is founde vp of newe .  
 For hos seip soþ . he schal be schent .

Siben the sope . dar no mon say .  
 For drede to geten *him* a fo .  
 Best I holde hit . in good fay .  
 Let o day come . a noþer go 76  
 And mak as murie . as we may  
 Til eueri frend . parte oþur fro  
 I drede hit draweþ to domes day  
 Such sauwþles we han . *and* oþer two 80  
 Now knowes a child . boþe weole *and* wo  
 Þat scholde ben . an Innocent .  
 Whil it is song . is norissched so  
 But hos seiþ soþ . he schal be schent 84

Þis world wol han . his wikked wone  
 For soþe hit wol non oþer be  
 His cursede cours . þat is bi gonne  
 Per may no mon . from hit fle 88  
 Þat haþ longe a mong vs ronne .  
 His oune defaute . mai he not se  
 Þe fader trusteþ not . to þe sone  
 Ne non to oþer . in no degre 92  
 Falshede is called . a soutilte  
 And such a nome . hit haþ hent  
 Þis lesson lerneþ alle at me  
 Ho seiþ þe soþe . he schal be schent 96

Siben the sope dar no mon say .  
 For drede to geten . *hym* a fo .  
 Best I holde hit . in goode fay .  
 Let o day come . a noþur go  
 And mak as murie . as we may .  
 Til eueri frend part oþur fro .  
 I drede hit draweþ to domes day .  
 Such sauwþles we han . *and* oþer two .  
 Now knowes a child . boþe weole *and* wo  
 Þat schulde ben an Innocent  
 Whil it is song . is norisched so .  
 But hos seiþ soþe . he schal be schent .

Þis world wol han his wikked wone .  
 For soþe hit wol non oþur be . f.130b  
 His cursede cours . þat is bigunne . col.1  
 Per may no mon from hit fle .  
 Þat haþ longe a mong vs runne .  
 His oune defaute mai he not se .  
 Þe fader trusteþ not to þe sone .  
 Ne non to oþur in no degre .  
 Falshede is cald a soutilte .  
 And such a nome hit haþ hent .  
 Þis lesson lerneþ alle at me .  
 Ho seiþ þe soþe . he schal be schent

Explicit A song . Ho seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent

Textual notes:

14 mon] *interlined by corrector in V*

**B. Text from Cambridge, Trinity College, MS. 0.9.38**

Who sayth the truth shall be shente

f. 23<sup>a</sup>

Who so wyll leue yn ese  
 And hys worschypp woll not alayne  
 And purpose the contray not to dyspleyse  
 Certes but he wull ordeyne 4  
 Thys wykkyd worlde he muste plese  
 Wyth all hys powere *and* all hys mayne  
 Yff he wyll kepe hym from dysese  
 He muste lerne to flatery and fayne 8  
 Hertte *and* mowth he muste refrayne  
 That it be nocht at on assentte

Thus ys the sede ykept yn close  
 And *euery* man makyth it thought *and* queynt 12  
 They leue the texte *and* takyth the glose  
 Wyth euery worde y colouryd and peynte  
 Som ther beth . men wold suppose  
 For no tresore that wold be attaynte 16  
 Yff thow sey ofte yn there prese  
 Thow schalt it fynde bothe febell and faynte  
 Som ther beth that semyth a seynte  
 And wonder trewe yn here entent 20  
 They be a gaste of eche compleynte  
 And who seyth sothe he schall be schente

Nevyr syth that God was y bore  
 Thys worlde was never so vntrewe 24  
 A man reccheth nocht to be forsoore  
 To reue the ryght there it ys dewe  
 They peynte here woordys feyre a fore  
 Be hynde hit ys of a nother hewe 28  
 Whan Gabryell schall blowe is home  
 Suche barginys schall hem sore a rewe  
 The tongys that suche barginys brewe  
 Hyt were no charge thought they were brente 32  
 Thys gyse ys fownden newe  
 Who seyth soth he schall be schente

f.23<sup>b</sup>

Lete a frere Goddys lawe	
The perell to the pepyll preche	36
Of here doying <i>and</i> of here sawe	
The trewe tyxte to tell <i>and</i> teche	
Som there byth woll be full fawe	
Fayne of hym to take wreche	40
Hym to pryson to hong or drawe	
Wyth outyn ryght they wolde hym reche	
Thys poore frere they wold a peche	
Yn conseyle or yn parlement	44
But yf he kepe hym of here cleche	
Who seyth soth he schall be schent	
There for no man the soth dar say	
Leste he gete hym a foo	48
Therefor y rede yow yn goode fay	
Lete o day come <i>and</i> a nother goo	
And make we as mery as we may	
Tyll euery man parte other fro	52
Y leue hit drawyth to domysday	
Suche warnyngys we haue one or twoo	54
Now a chyld can well and woo	57
By skylle he scholde be an innocent	55
Yn hys yowthe he ys tawght so	56
Who seyth soth he schall be schent	
Thys wykkyd world woll haue hys wone	
Y wys hyt wyll none other wyse be	60
Hys corse a monge vs so long hathe ronne	
There ys no man from hyt may fle	
Thys it fallyth by all and summe	
Noman hys fawtys can a se	64
The fadyr trustyth nocht to the sone	
Nother none tyll odyr yn noo degree	
Falsnes ys holde a soteite	
Yn what man that it ys lent	68
Thys lesson lerne ye of me	
Who seyth sothe he schall be schent.	

Explicit

**Textual notes:**

*Title added later by hand "D," of the early sixteenth century (Rigg "An Edition" 35)*

5        *worlde ] worde with l written in and worlde in margin*

9        *There is an incorrect paraph mark to indicate a stanza break*

9-10    *There is no space after line 10 in the manuscript. Clearly the scribe thought lines 11 and 12 were part of the stanza, since lines drawn habitually in the right margins of poems in this manuscript to indicate rhymes join refrayne with close, and assente with queynte.*

11       *sede likely an error for sope*

15       *The punctus in this line is the only one discernible in this text.*

13       *glose is written and crossed through before texte*

*55 and 57 are marked a and b respectively, in the left hand margin. As in other instances of this method of correction, the inscription shows that a should precede b, not that they are to be reversed.*

## Chapter Three

### Noble Giving in "Þat selden I seize Is sone forȝete"

When Middle English writers draw attention to the language of their texts, its relative simplicity or "boystous" (rough, unpolished) quality in comparison with Latin or French is often stated, either straightforwardly or ironically. Stated straightforwardly, the simplicity of English is presented as a linguistic virtue reflecting analogous moral virtues or facilitating spiritual propensities.<sup>1</sup> More frequently as the fourteenth century unfolds, authors point to the "boystous" quality of English ironically, only to dislodge the stereotyped image through displays of rhetorical dexterity. For instance, Chaucer in the "Complaint of Venus" excuses himself because the English language does not have enough rhymes to match the "curiosite" [complexity] of Graunson, the author of the French poem he is translating. His ironic rhetorical deference encourages the audience to acknowledge rhetorical virtuosity, as indicative of his skill but also of the sophistication of English in comparison with the reputed preeminence of French. This deference ultimately interpellates the audience into an image of refinement, and so compliments them as being culturally equivalent to the French. It is generally assumed that the overt alignment of such sociolinguistic issues with nationalist themes in literary texts begins, in English, only with works commissioned by the Lancastrians in their programmatic establishment of a national language.<sup>2</sup> The Vernon refrain lyric "Þat selden I seize Is sone forȝete" on the passing of Edward III and the glory-days of the Hundred Years' War, however, similarly uses rhetoric to interpellate its audience as equal to the French in linguistic dexterity and promotes linguistic equality as an analogy for military equality. The lyric combines extreme sophistication in the use of rhetorical figures, explicit identification of the audience's role in interpreting those figures, and confident

forthrightness about the political importance of the English language.

Like that in “His seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent,” the speaker of “Þat selden I seiþe Is sone forþete” also draws the present audience’s attention to the language of his text, but he points to his rhetorical figures more blatantly and hails his audience into a different kind of subjectivity—a nationalist one—in being able to interpret them. He identifies his speech as the “Materē” that the audience must “wysli trete” and ‘construwe wel,” thereby signalling the existence of occluded rhetorical figures and also assigning the audience an interpretative role. Interpretation is programmed to lead to a multi-faceted amelioration, one that the speaker identifies early on as being to “puit [the audience] holly out of drede” (12). The audience’s realization of its own rhetorical competence, in construing the matter, is forwarded as a means of restoring its confidence in overpowering the French in military and linguistic arenas. In the final two lines, the speaker reports the success of his oratorical aim as he moves from direct address to narration, narrating that the present audience is playing its interpretative role and, in doing so, assuaging the “los.” As I will show, that assuagement entails a psychological transformation created through successful recall from memory and a parallel revival of confidence and national spirit, but it also entails a material transformation.

This ricochet from text to reader response to psychological and material transformation is guided even more carefully through the significance of the rhetorical figures. The “Materē” is three-dimensional. It has three key rhetorical figures, two of which are variant functions of a single image. The image of the ship is a hybrid figure which may be defined as an ‘allegorical conceit’ since it functions as both an allegory and a conceit. The other image is the “Ympe,” which expands into a horticultural metaphor. These three figures collaborate to issue forth a single

epistemological, social, and material recuperation. One aspect of the ship's rhetorical function—its allegoresis as the ship of state under the leadership of Edward III—is provided by the speaker. This allegoresis is meant to inspire, but also coincide with, the remembrance of England's former national dominance in the Hundred Years' War. This historical memory and the national spirit it is designed to generate are, however, only aspects of a larger array of things to be recovered. They serve as a loadstone to guide the audience's imaginative reconstruction of the other two figures: the ship's second function as a conceit, and the horticultural metaphor. Unlike the ship's allegoresis, these two puzzles are left for the audience to interpret. Their interpretation depends largely on the recognition of puns, which are the most important feature of the poem's poetics. The recognition of these puns leads to the identification of two phenomena existing in the present world that are seldom seen and soon forgotten. These two phenomena come to be revealed simultaneously but gradually as the address unfolds, and the apprehension of the ingeniousness of their weave, which is gestured towards in the final lines, could easily issue in an experience of marvel that is bound up with the myth of national glory. This series of declarative statements presents a very matter-of-fact way of explicating the interpretative process, which of course can never be so objective. The control the speaker maintains over the response, however, by pointing to the figures and then narrating an imagined transformation issuing from their construal, evidences a programmatic use of ambiguity, one which indicates that the resolution is self-evident.

The speaker directs the audience's attention to obscurities in his speech early on, in the second stanza:

I sei hit not wiþ outen a Cause,  
 And þerfore takes riht good hede,

For 3if 3e construwe wel þis Clause  
 I puit 3ou holly out of drede  
 þat for puire schame 3or hertes wol blede,  
 And 3e þis Matere wysli trete,  
 He þat was vr moste spede  
 Is selden I seye and sone for 3ete.

(9-16)

The full significance of this statement depends on ambiguous pronoun reference and puns. “[H]it” in line 9 points back to the previous stanza, but also to the stanza it is embedded in, to the discourse as a whole, and to the structural and thematic linchpin of the poem: the proverbial refrain.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, “þis Clause” refers to the sentence it is embedded in, the particular stanza, and the refrain; and “þis Matere” refers to all of those plus the poem as a whole. The audience is being prodded to sharpen its attention, to grammar and the various ways in which clauses can be construed through the various lexical values, and to the significance of rhetorical figures issuing from such construal. So many elements of the complex web emerge simultaneously that it is misleading to present them in linear fashion. As a start, we may consider “þis Matere” to be pointing towards the final two lines of the stanza, as a clause to be construed. The puzzle is over the identity of “He” (15). It does not take long to realize that “He” refers to Edward III, who is named subsequently in the allegoresis of the ship of state. But even here there is some suggestion of another personage who is lamented as being “seldom seen,” though this one is never named in the poem: Richard II. The suggestion is conveyed through a pun in the refrain.

The refrain’s proverb is the medieval equivalent of the modern “out of sight, out of mind.”<sup>4</sup> “[S]one denotes “immediately” [*MED* s.v. *sōne* adv. 1a. (a)]. Here, however, the

word's phonological quality and meaning are complicated through the resonances it absorbs in its shifting contexts throughout this political poem. "Sone" also comes to signify "son," or "a male descendent more remote than a son" [*MED* s.v. *sōne* n. 1.(a), 2.(a)]. The forgotten son referred to is, of course, Richard II, the living child-king. This second sense of "sone" is relatively latent in the second stanza, but the pun becomes more audible later in the poem. Unlike Edward III, Richard II is never named. As with the vagueness of "He" in line 15, withholding the name throughout serves a representative function: it demonstrates that Richard is forgotten by those who should be supporting him. His being "seldom seen" refers to the fact that he is seldom called to mind, and the poem aims to remedy this. As well, as I shall explain more fully shortly, his being "seldom seen" refers to the fact that a key object from material culture that bears his image, as it once bore the image of his grandfather Edward III, is also seldom seen

Recognition of the reference to Richard II as the "forgotten son" is greatly aided by the horticultural metaphor, which is introduced only in the eleventh stanza: "þe stok is of þe same Rote / An Ympe bi ginnes for to growe / And 3it I hope schal ben vr bote" (82-4). The "Ympe," the graft or young branch, refers to Richard's status as both a child-king and an off-shoot of Edward III.<sup>5</sup> Here we see something of how the heuristic design is integrated into the theme and the practical aim of the address: the remembering of what is forgotten coincides with the interpretation of rhetorical clues, and that should kindle loyalty towards the current monarch.

The speaker continues to urge support for Richard II through developing the nurturing aspect of the metaphor until the final stanza where he confidently narrates a recuperation:

And þefore gode sires takeþ reward  
Of 3or douhti kyng þat dyzede in age,

And to his sone Prince Edward  
 þat welle was of alle Corage;  
 Suche two lordes of heiz parage  
 In not<sup>6</sup> in corþe whon we schal gete;  
 And nou heore los biginneþ to swage  
 þat selde I seze is sone for ze. (105-12)

The final two lines present a surprising reversal of sentiment from lament to confidence. The complete nature of the assuagement is very complex, and part of its significance depends on the conceit of the ship yet to be discussed. Suffice it to say here that the speaker reports a relenting of much that was purportedly lost. That relenting involves the discovery of Richard II's identity. The speaker presumes that by now the audience will have identified the "Ympe," and perhaps the performer would have provided a final clue by giving extra emphasis to the pun-word "sone" denoting unequivocally "son" in line 107.<sup>7</sup> The audience would thus be coaxed into acknowledging that "high parage" still exists on earth, in Richard. The definitiveness of the closing reversal is more pronounced in the Simeon version of the poem, where the final word of the refrain has modulated from "for ze" to "for ze" (112). With a final "ze," the speaker thereby enforces the audience's relation to the "sone." More generally, since the loss lamented is, in part, the loss of an historical consciousness, however much romanticized, the recovery entails a recovery of the image of heroes and a heroic nation within the minds of the audience. Coinciding with this is a recovery of national spirit.

This resolution signifies even more complexly, however, when the ship's function as a conceit is apprehended. Through word-play, the allegorized ship of state also unfolds as

signifying a particular item from England's material culture: the gold noble.<sup>8</sup> The gold noble was minted by Edward III, and it bore the emblem of him steering his warship. (Please see Appendix One for a photo-reproduction of the noble.) The nobles of the early Ricardian era made use of the dyes already prepared for Edward III, and merely changed the name and the identifying central initial.<sup>9</sup> Edward III and Richard II, therefore, were both visible on the nobles, and in lamenting that the deceased hero and the neglected monarch are not being called to mind, the poem also laments that the nobles are scarce, for various reasons. Each detail the speaker singles out to allegorize also points to a particular detail on the graven image. "Ship" may even have been an alternative name for the coin at this time, as it was so by at least 1408.<sup>10</sup> The conceit of the ship identifies both a material manifestation of the image that is seldom seen and the means of support being summoned. It also bears a metaphysical significance. Some clauses that elaborate the allegorized details often have alternate senses that indicate the previous monetary strength of the gold noble and the previous abundance of nobles circulating in the realm. These senses are developed through metaphorical references to the nobles' weight and their purchasing power. The monetary value of the noble thereby comes to signify moral values and, enhanced through the cohesion of these metaphysical senses to the allegoresis, national worth.

Unlike other conceits where the vehicle can, relatively easily, be separated from the tenor (as in Donne's compass, for example), here the coin serves as more than a generic and static object of value to image forth a meditation on values and worthiness. Two aspects of the gold noble enrich the conceit through a sort of double redoublement: the symbolism of the image inscribed on the noble reinforces the nationalist theme, and the noble's use as an item of exchange figures into the address's meditation on kindness, generosity, and patriotism.

In the image on the obverse of the nobles, the king stands in his battleship holding a sword and a shield that bears the quartered arms of England and France. Inspired by the English victory at the battle of Sluys in 1340, the image attests England's naval supremacy in the Hundred Years' War. Edward's pretensions to the French crown are also indicated in the inscription surrounding his image. On coins minted between 1344 and 1360, and after 1369, the legend on the obverse reads "EDWAR D GRA REX ANGL Z FRANC DNS HYB" ("Edwardus Dei Gratia Rex Anglie et Francie Dominus Hibernie," "Edward by the Grace of God King of England and France and Lord of Ireland").<sup>11</sup> On the nobles of the Ricardian era, the legend was unchanged except for the name of the monarch: the claim to France remained.<sup>12</sup> Thus inscribed, the noble is itself a symbol of national dominance over the French. The coin bears a reminder of England's greatness, so the fact that it is seldom seen, as well as indicating the poverty of the nation, indicates that the story it depicts is forgotten, along with the national glory implied in that depiction.

In addition to the meanings accrued through the symbolism of the image on the nobles, their function as an item of exchange and their tendency to deteriorate are also given significance. Stated simply, the current paucity of nobles indicates the current reluctance of people to spend money, and the tendency of coins to deteriorate makes them an appropriate means of signifying moral and national deterioration. The technical and theoretical aspects of the monetary situation in England in the later fourteenth century inflect these aspects of the coin conceit.

The importance assigned to the quantity and quality of coins in the nation rests on the fact that Britain, like the rest of Europe throughout the Middle Ages, had a hard money economy. That is, the units of exchange were specie whose value was not nominal but determined by the inherent quantity and quality of bullion. The production of coins entailed elaborate procedures to

ensure that the weight and fineness of each specie met the standard weight and fineness specified by the Crown. In England, the weight was measured up against the standard Tower pound, so named after the standard weight kept in the Tower of London, in the proximity of the London Mint. The purity or fineness of the coins, in terms of the relative quantity of carats, also had to meet a standard. Before new coins were released for circulation a sample was sent to be 'assayed.' An assay was a chemical test that measured coins up against a standard. In hard money economies, the value of coins was reduced through a loss of their weight, and, it was believed, the wealth of a nation was reduced by the reduction in the quantity of circulating money.

Because the value of the coin was determined by its inherent quality, any reduction of that quality resulted in decreased value. Natural attrition was one cause of decay. John H.M. Craig has suggested that if loss by wear is put at £1,000 a year on a circulation of half a million, in fifty years the coins will have lost approximately ten percent of their original bulk, "which is enough to obliterate all design."<sup>13</sup> The second cause of diminishment was the notorious 'clipping.' People would deliberately snip pieces from coins, and thus build up a treasure of raw bullion. Ordinances throughout the fourteenth century forbid such activity, but their frequency reveals the extent of the problem.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to a deterioration in the quality of coins, the quantity of coins circulating in England was also reduced during the later 1370s and 1380s. The production of gold coinage in English mints fell considerably after 1373, not to be revived again until 1389: for instance, in 1373 the gold output equalled 3,879 French marks, in 1377 it equalled 708 French marks, and in 1382 it equalled 383 French marks.<sup>15</sup> In 1381, the House of Commons complained that the Mint received no bullion, that the superiority of English coin resulted in its export out of the country

(this despite the fact that the English government attempted, in several decrees, to prohibit the export of coins), and that the coins had lost 10% of their weight. A commission was appointed, and two of their resulting suggestions were that gold coins should circulate in England by weight alone, not by face value, and that all defective money in circulation should be recoined, with a waiver of the King's seignorage and a reduction of Mint dues.<sup>16</sup> This second recommendation is quite reasonable given that from 1351 the King was prohibited from recalling coins for debasement, so thirty years later many old coins would have been circulating whose value must have been reduced through wear and clipping.

The coin conceit resonates with these contemporary monetary conditions. There is every reason to believe that at the time the poem was written the actual value and the nominal value of many English coins did not cohere; the nobles thus present a palpable means of conveying the theme of the fickleness of friends, citizens, and soldiers. The decay of virtues and of national spirit are also implied in the different ways of accounting for the paucity of coinage circulating in the realm. The previously abundant sight of the noble is associated with its previously freer circulation, and so becomes an indicator of the former magnanimity of the English people as well as the former wealth of the English nation. The current paucity of nobles indicates the current reluctance of people to spend money, and in that way also attests to the lack of generosity of the nation. Moreover, in light of the bullionist theory underlying a hard-money economy, the lack of bullion translates into the poverty of the nation, and thus its lag in the "bullion war." These moral and political aspects of the conceit are integrated into the dramatic nature of the address; the speaker works to instill a wave of national spirit and generosity in the audience and thereby persuade them to share their wealth and thus remedy various facets of the problem lamented. The

lack of national wealth, national supremacy, national memory, virtues more generally and particularly generosity, all signify simultaneously.

The coin conceit is introduced in the first stanza:

A dere God what mai þis be,

þat alle þing weres & wastep awai?

Frenschip is but a vanyte,

Vnneþe hit dures al a day;

þei beo so sliper at assai,

So leof to han and loþ to lete,

And so fikel in heore fai,

þat selden I seize Is sone forsete (1-8)

The first two lines pose a question. Its answer is most readily “friends,” but it is also, implicitly, “coins.” The identification of “coins” as one answer is implied in various puns, initially in the way the question is posed. “Alle þing” signifies most readily as a noun, and as such reads as a general statement on the tendency of all things to deteriorate. The word is, with some phonological variation, also understood as the adjective *thin(ne)*. As such, “coins” is the implied subject, and the verbs “weres” and ‘wastep’ refer to their wearing away over time. “Coins” is the implied antecedent governing ‘þei’ (5) and ‘heore’ (7); the more readily discernable antecedent is “friends.” This bifurcation continues in line 5. The noun “assai” informs the theme of friendship in denoting “a testing of character or personal traits” (*MED* s.v. assai n. 2. (a)). “[S]liper” articulates the failure of such testing through its denotation of specific human qualities: “deceitful, forgetful” (*MED* s.v. sliper adj. (b)). However, “assai” also supports the coin conceit here in its

meaning “the testing or a test of quality (as of a metal or other object); assaying of metal” (*MED* s.v. *assai* n.1. (a)): the monetary value of the coins is “unable to be grasped” (*MED* s.v. *sliper* adj. (d)).<sup>17</sup> Through these few puns in the first stanza, the lyric establishes how the deteriorated state of coins symbolizes the debased status of friendship; just as the true value of coins cannot be discerned from their appearance, so too the true loyalty of friends, or the ‘trouth’ of a person, is not self-evident.

Stanza three specifies the conceit as a particular coin, the gold noble.

Sum tyme an Englisch Schip we had,

Nobel hit was and heih of tour;

Ɔorw al cristendam hit was drad,

And stif wolde stande In vch a stour,

And best dorst byde a scharp schour

And oþer stormes smale and grete;

Now is þat schip þat bar þe flour

Selden seze and sone forȝete. (17-24)

“Nobel” (18) functions here both as an adjective, describing the ship and the chivalry it represents, and as a noun, naming the gold coin (*MED* s.v. *noble* n(2)). “Heih of tour” qualifies variously as well. It is an adjective specifying the imaginative vessel’s high tower and a detail in the image of the ship on the noble; in addition, it specifies that the coin conformed to the standard measures of quantity and fineness. ‘Tour’ refers to the “Tower weight,” the weight of a coin expressed in terms of the standard *Tower Pound*.<sup>18</sup> “Heih of tour” thus specifies the noble’s worthiness in physical terms.

Once this level of punning and metaphorical associations is noticed, it becomes difficult to know the extent to which other aspects would have been either intended by the poet or noticed by the performer or the audience. They may be operating sporadically through specific word play in other parts of the poem, for example with the phrase “In synder flit” (31) from the next stanza. “In synder” means “separately, to be in separate places” (*MED* s.v. insōnder adv. 1(a)). Together with “flit,” a verb meaning “to convey” (*MED* s.v. flitten v. 1(a)), the phrase means “now the ship and rudder are in different places” and refers to the fact that Edward III has died and no “Roopur” provides governance to the state. However, “synder” may also signify here as “waste from metal combusted in a furnace, slag” (*MED* s.v. sinder n. 1(a)). This denotation draws out alternative meanings of the same verb “flit”: “to be lost, destroyed,” “to change, be altered” (*MED* s.v. flitten v. 2(e), 4(a)). The phrase thereby refers to the fact that the gold nobles, which contain images of a ship and a rudder (both an actual rudder<sup>19</sup> and that which it symbolizes, Edward III), have now deteriorated to metal slag.

Other moments of possible punning can also be identified. For instances, a pun on “hauenes” in line 38 may extend the conceit of the ship:

Dou3 þe see were rouh or elles dimuir,

Gode hauenes þat schip wolde gete. (37-8)

“[H]auenes” denotes “harbours, ports” (*MED* s.v. hāven n(1) 1(a)); the phrase therefore states that the ship was so stalwart it would always withstand storms and find safe harbours. A second meaning of “hauenes” is “property, possessions” (*MED* s.v. hāven n. (2)) This sense attests the strength of the gold noble in terms of its buying power.

There may also be a pun on the word “power” in line 46. The sentence describes the

actions of the English chivalry in the Hundred Years' War:

Þei tok & slou3 hem with heore honde,  
 Þe power of Fraunce boþ smal & grete,  
 And broust þe king hider to byde her bonde,  
 And nou riht sone hit is for 3ete (45-8)

“[P]ower” denotes most readily “a military force, an army” (*MED* s.v. pōwēr(e n. 9.(a)); the clause thereby states that the English chivalry once destroyed the French army in war. “[P]ower also means “financial resources, wealth” (*MED* s.v. pōwēr(e n. 2.); the clause thereby indicates the English destruction of France’s monetary supply. The pun is enforced by the next line, which states how the wealth of France was transferred to England. Jean II of France was captured at Poitiers in 1356 and held prisoner in England until the Treaty of Bretigny in 1360. Part of the terms of his release was the ‘bonde’ referred to here. Jean’s ransom was initially set at 4,000,000 gold crowns, but reduced to 3,000,000 in the treaty of Brétigny in 1360.<sup>20</sup>

The degree to which punning contributes to the poem’s rhetorical strategy remains uncertain. What has been demonstrated and suggested thus far, however, should indicate the possible ways in which it is used to lend a complex metaphysical significance to the coin conceit.

The two veiled figures—the coin conceit and the horticultural metaphor—are finally fused in the narrative resolution to this oratorical drama. The coin conceit accords with the practical aim of encouraging the audience to recuperate loyalty to the English monarch and the English nation and to demonstrate that loyalty in financial donations. Previous support from the commons has been noted in the allegoresis of the ship’s mast (73-6), and the last two stanzas urge the same action. The penultimate stanza encourages the audience to “Mayntene” the “Ympe,” where the

verb denotes not only “assist, uphold” (*MED* s.v. maintēnen v(2)) and “defend” (*MED* s.v. maintēnen v(4)), but also “assure public recognition of, spend money on” (*MED* s.v. maintēnen v(3)).

The last stanza also appeals for support through its play on the phrase “takeþ reward” (105). The noun *reward*, from AF *reward*, means, in phrase with “takeþ,” “pay attention to, consider” (*MED* s.v. reward n. 3.) The phrase also has a financial meaning with “reward” signifying its main denotation “a payment for services, remuneration; a fee; bonus” (*MED* s.v. reward n. 1(b)). The speaker goes on to suggest that he is exhorting the audience to give the gold noble, a metonym for financial support more generally. “[T]akeþ reward” thus urges both a remembrance of Richard II and a handing over of gold nobles, thereby fusing the means of recovering the two phenomena signified through the rhetorical figures. On the gold noble at least, Richard II has fully taken over from his grandfather as the helmsman of the great ship, and so the two figures are recovered in synchronicity: the forgotten son appears on the seldom seen noble.

The final resolution, insofar as it is a narrative of a purported psychological and material transformation in the dramatic occasion, alleviates the cluster of problems lamented throughout. For one, it registers the remembrance of paragons of chivalry and leadership who have passed away. The aim of such, however much romanticized, historical contemplation is to summon acknowledgement of the possibilities for personal and national greatness in the present moment. A chief component of these men’s greatness was their courage to uphold the glory of England; when the coins are given, that same national spirit and commitment to the war is palpably manifested. In a sort of redoublement, the act of financial donation also remedies what are elsewhere pinpointed as unkindness and a lack of friendship. Furthermore, in a second instance of

redoublement, the appearance of the gold nobles remedies forgetfulness by the fact that they contain, engraved on them, an image that tells the story of personal and national greatness. The address winds around to an essentially comic vision. The transformation of the refrain is paradigmatic of this vision: in its final context it presents a transformation of its previous senses, and indeed of its standard proverbial sense. It seems, initially, that in using historical examples to amplify this proverb the speaker posits a pessimistically cyclical view of history, and forwards the contemplation of the fall of heroes and national glory as instructive exempla of the tendency of all things to decay. On the contrary, while sustaining that assumption as the sounding board throughout, the speaker reverses it. Ultimately the contemplation of great deeds and illustrious heroes serves as a reminder of human potential capable of being realized at any moment by any person, as it is purportedly realized in the dramatic oratorical event.

The narrated resolution, as well as indicating that members of the audience have played their interpretative role, also interpellates the audience into an image of national identity. Perhaps the best word defining that identity is “copious”: it describes the richness of the English language, the monetary abundance of the English nation, and the generosity of the English people. The speaker casts the audience as rhetorically dextrous, and suggests that their recognition of complex rhetoric coheres with their own magnanimity and with the potential military supremacy of the nation.

“*Pat seldom I seise Is some forsete*” demonstrates extreme confidence in according the English language a high degree of rhetorical sophistication, in turning that complexity into a means of interpellating the audience into an image of being culturally sophisticated and analogously copious, and in integrating a nationalist identity into that image. In the way it moulds

an audience through its attitude towards language it is anomalous among Middle English poems. Its effect is distant from interpellating the English audience as “earnest folk” analogous to the simple language used by Robert Mannyng and the like. Moreover, while the poem resembles Chaucer’s “Complaint of Venus” in the way it entwines ‘curiositie’ and thereby interpellates the audience into an image of refinement, its dramatic oratorical nature and overt assignment of political importance to English intensify and specify the nature of that interpellation. The way in which “þat selden I seize Is sone forsete” engages linguistic with military and nationalist themes is, however, not unique among medieval war poems written on the strife between England and France. The use of the analogy in previous French and Latin poems indicates that it is rooted in a long tradition of war poetry and that it may well reflect a commonplace oral idiom of Anglo-Franco satire.

At least one surviving political poem written in French ridicules the “boystousness” of the English through sophisticated word-play: “Or vint la tens de May,” which Thomas J. Wright entitles “Song of the Peace with England.”<sup>21</sup> Written “on the occasion of the intermediation of Louis IX of France, between the contending parties in England, in the beginning of the year 1264,” the poem is a report of a conversation among members of the English army who are confidently planning to overthrow the French.<sup>22</sup> Their language casts them as fools, though here it is the Englishmen’s command of the French language that is an object of scorn. Their speech has many instances of ‘bad French’ which create lewd play on words “to increase the hilarity of the listeners, at the expense of the English and their King.”<sup>23</sup> The naive narrator, who supports the English cause and is oblivious to the “bad French,” reports the purported transactions of a great assembly at London. One of the twenty-two stanzas should suffice to exemplify the

bawdiness of the satire:

Le bon rai d'Ingleter se traina à .i. part,  
 Li et Trichart sa frer irrous comme lipart.  
 Il suspire de cul, si se claima à l'art, –  
 “Hui Diex! com puis-je voir de Normandi ma part?”

The good King of England drew himself on one side, –he and Richard his brother,  
 as angry as leopards.–He sighs from behind, and so cries with alacrity, –“O God! how may  
 I have my part of Normandy?”

The criticism here is not of the English language, but of the Englishmen's hybrid French, and so the scorn is blatantly colonial.

Pro-English Latin poems written during the Hundred Years' War in which linguistic prowess is a governing metaphor also survive. One example is that beginning “Anglia, fax hominum, pudor orbis, et ultima rerum,” which Wright entitles “The Dispute between an Englishman and a Frenchman,” written around 1350.<sup>24</sup> In it, French “effeminateness,” including its linguistic manifestation of “smooth utterance,” is the target of scorn, and this time the English language is at issue. Its metaphors centre around the relation between inner essence and outer show: the Frenchman claims that his “tidy” manners and speech reflect his inner “brilliance,” while the Englishman's roughness reflects his inner depravity. In the Frenchman's initial attack, this transit between inner and outer is linked to other claims about the superiority of French culture. He exonerates France's better taste in food and drink, claiming that the English eat food that grows from ponds and are “slaves to [their] gullets,” while the superior French show restraint and appreciate fineness. Making reference to the rite of Lyaeus, the Frenchman claims that because

the French appreciate fine wine, they are sustained by a divine spirit, while the English, eating from the ponds, speak "foul as pitch." The poem opens in the words of the Frenchman:

**Anglia, fæx hominum, pudor orbis, et ultima rerum,**

**Res rea plus aliis, quid facis esse reum?**

**Qua pice verborum premis aera, quo mihi telo**

**Insurgis, vel quod fulmen ab ore jadis?**

**Mentem sermo capit, sordes a pectore lingit,**

**Contrahit et virus mentis ab ore fluit.**

**Pullulat in ramum vitium radicis, et inde**

**Derivat facinus natio tota suum.**

England, shit of men, shame of the world...With what language, foul as pitch, do you assail the air? ... What thunderbolt do you launch from your mouth? Your speech takes over your thoughts and licks filth from your heart. It clots and the venom of your thoughts flows from your mouth. The corruption of the root spreads into the branch and from it the whole nation gets its villainy.

He goes on to contrast his own elegance, which he proclaims reflects his inner worth:

**Si molles expono sonos, aures primum asper**

**Verba reconciliat mollis in ore sonus.**

...

**Singula compta nitent, nitor intimus extima jungunt,**

**Et color interior exteriora colit.**

If I utter soft sounds, it is because what was at first a harsh sound to the ears makes the

words acceptable when softened in the mouth...Each neat trait is brilliant and the brilliance is that of my innermost and outermost being alike.

In response, the Englishman identifies the Frenchman's verbal attack as a prod to arms, and rebukes him by insisting that French ways are effeminate, and therefore not only unmanly but also, drawing on the *topos* of woman's vanity, deceitful.

quid agunt mitibus ora suis?

Parce viris, societ mulierem lis mulieri

...

Si linguam mollit pulsam, ne forte palatum

Obstrepat, et mulier fatur in ore viri.

What are your lips to do with their smooth utterance? Leave the men alone, let woman strive with woman...If your tongue softens its force so that your palate does not sound too loud then it is a woman talking through a man's lips.

The Englishman's rebuttal rests on a view of the falsity of rhetoric figured in terms of cosmetics. He, however, is in no way inferior to the Frenchman in rhetorical prowess. He reverses the Frenchman's attack by manipulating the figures of his attack in light of England's military and monetary superiority at this moment in the Hundred Years' War. The Frenchman had accused the English of drinking the 'lees,' oblivious to its inferiority, while the French drank the 'liquor.' The Englishman, however, transforms this cultural, gastronomic claim into a metaphor: the French, in their now impoverished state, drink the lees, while the victorious English drink the liquor. Moreover, he links the cause of French poverty and inferiority to Their avarice, presumably for wanting to grasp land not rightfully theirs. As well as claiming to rebuke the French boast of

superior culture by slyly reversing the culture-laden images of his argument, the Englishman also asserts his control of the Classical literary culture that the Frenchman claimed in his reference to “Pallas” and “Lyaeus.” “Bacchus” lends authority to the Englishman’s rebuttal: “Bacchus saves some of the lees for the servant’s table.”

The triumph of the Englishman’s rhetorical victory is disclosed in his final words, which are the final lines of the poem: “*Cum Gallus talis maculet mentem contagio Galli; / Gallice praestat enim parcere, parce loqui*” (“Since such French depravity stains the soul of the Frenchman—Frenchman silence is best. Shut up!”). He claims the English possess the substance that proves their greater worth: their military dominance and wealth translate into cultural dominance. In rebutting France’s cultural claims the Englishman demonstrates his appropriation of one of the arts reputed to be the strict purview of the French—the art of rhetoric. Given the French reputation for wit underlying this poem, that act of rhetorical one-upmanship demonstrates English superiority which is more overtly bespoken in military terms.

“*Anglia, faex hominum*” interpellates its English audience as being superior to the French morally, rhetorically, militarily, and culturally. Despite the fact that attention is drawn to the relative phonic quality of English and French, however, the linguistic metaphor remains somewhat disjointed, given that the poem is written in Latin. It does not evoke recognition of the capacity of the English language to meet the French language in refinement, but only of the Englishman to meet the Frenchman in the use of rhetoric in Latin. The Frenchman’s claim that English sounds harsh is not refuted, but belittled as immaterial. The poem does not finally interpellate the English audience into a national identity that is linked up with its linguistic aptitude, only with its skills in rhetorical reasoning, although that reasoning leads to the dismissal of the entire metaphor of the

inferiority of the English language that the Frenchman had constructed.

“Anglia, fæx hominum” and “Or vint la tens de May” show the extent to which linguistic issues comprised the idiom of military and cultural competition between England and France, and the extent to which that competition rested on France’s reputation for being superior in the arts of rhetoric. The English are presented as being less sophisticated, a fact reflected in two different linguistic realms: their use of an inferior, French language, and their use of the harsher-sounding English language. The only other English poems to address the Hundred Years’ War directly and with a related, though more tenuous, consciousness about the English language are from the group of eleven poems written by Lawrence Minot between 1333 and 1352 on the occasions of England’s wars against Scotland and against France.<sup>25</sup>

The virtuosity of Minot’s poems interpellate, much more suggestively than the Vernon lyric does, the English audience as linguistically and rhetorically able. The poems’ most obvious display of virtuosity lies in their vast array of metrics and stanzaic forms, which effectively present a cornucopia of English poetic accomplishments.<sup>26</sup> Minot also draws attention to those accomplishments through integrating a modesty *topos*. Given that the *topos* forms part of the formal romance prologue conventions beginning the seventh poem (*IMEV* 2149), it directs the audience’s attention to Minot’s manipulation of romance motifs as well.

Men may rede in romance right  
of a grete clerk that Merlin hight;  
ful many bokes er of him wreten,  
als thir clerkes wele may witten,  
and yit in many privé nokes

may men find of Merlin bokes.

Merlin said thus with his mowth:

Out of the north into the sowth

suld cum a bare over the se

that suld mak many man to fle.

And in that se, he said ful right,

suld he schew ful mekill might

and in France he suld bigin

to mak tham wrath that er tharein.

Untill the se his taile reche sale

all folk of France to mekill bale.

Thus have I mater for to make

for a nobill prince sake.

Help me, God, my wit es thin;

now Laurence Minot will bigin. (1-20)

This prologue thoroughly conforms to traditional romance prologues of the literary French type, as found in Chrétien de Troyes, for example. Although early English romances usually conform to the convention of gesturing to some source, often unspecified, they do not include the full catalogue of conventions used here<sup>27</sup>: the identification of a *particular* source (“Merlin”), the specification of that source as the “mater” in accordance with the scholastic idiom taken over by

the romancers, the indication of a patron or audience (a “nobill prince”), the humility topic (“my wit es thin”), and the identification of the poet (“Laurence Minot”). There is a good deal of irony in Minot’s claim that his “wit es thin,” asserted even while he demonstrates his grasp of the conventions of romance prologues, including the rhetorical deployment of those conventions. His ironic rhetorical deference elevates not only his own rhetorical skill, but also the capacity of the English language to sustain ‘noble’ topics. In a move analogous to the ‘*translatio studii*’ of French romancers’ appropriation of Classical culture, Minot’s strict conformity to the French model demonstrates the access of the English to French culture. Although the word “romance” (1) by this time refers to a broad textual genre, the ‘*translatio studii*’ element of Minot’s prologue is enhanced when it is read in its more traditional sense, as a reference to the French language. As with Chaucer’s modesty *topos* in “The Complaint of Venus,” Minot’s ironic deference effectively casts the audience as comparably sophisticated; here, however, given the war theme, that sophistication is endowed with a greater nationalist hue. That hue is enhanced through the contrast of Minot’s veiled boast to what he elsewhere criticizes as the hollow claims of warriors from other nations, who brag about their strength but are unable to live up to their words.<sup>28</sup> Minot, by pretending not to boast, boasts, but with the claim already behind him that the English have been victorious, that the prophesy has already been fulfilled, and, analogous to these military accomplishments, that he has already demonstrated his wit.

Minot may well have been familiar with the kinds of linguistic jibes made in “Anglia, fæx hominum” and “Or vint la tens de May.” Very possibly this seventh poem in the series is also responding to political propaganda. It celebrates the English victory at Caen in 1346, and when Edward III took Caen he purportedly discovered the Ordinance of Normandy, which was an

agreement between Philip of France and the Duke of Normandy, reporting a second conquest of England and a planned eradication of the English language.<sup>29</sup> It was sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and to the Dominican Friars and the Augustinians, evidently to be disseminated to the English public through preaching.<sup>30</sup> If Minot and his immediate audience were aware of the Ordinance, the ‘*translatio studii*’ element, while reacting to Edward’s propaganda, abets it through celebrating the expropriation of France’s linguistic and literary prestige. Even if Minot was not aware of the Ordinance, his rhetorical and stylistic virtuosity abets any attempt to restore dignity to the English language in the face of the kinds of attacks made in “*Anglia, fæx hominum*” and “*Or vint la tens de May.*” At the same time, given the embeddedness of linguistic and rhetorical consciousness in a celebration of military virility, it forwards linguistic confidence and rhetorical success as analogies for military success.

Although evidence of the nationalist linguistic propaganda operating in the Ordinance of Normandy is generally not thought to be found again in England until the Lancastrian era, we may someday be able to demonstrate that it also existed in the Ricardian era, should we substantiate what seems likely, that “*Þat selden I seiþe Is sone forþete*” was commissioned by a pro-Ricardian magnate. Until then, it is not too difficult to imagine that the Vernon poet, even without a clearly defined programme of linguistic propaganda compelling him, is also responding to the kinds of linguistic humiliations exemplified in the French and Latin poems. The puns have a national heuristic purpose: in exploiting the rhetorical power of semantic and phonological variation in the English language the address celebrates the very qualities of English that have been ridiculed. The rhetoric of “*Þat selden I seiþe Is sone forþete*” is nationalist right to the core of its poetics.

## Notes to Chapter Three

1. In his *Chronicle of England*, for example, Robert Mannyng forwards the simplicity of his style of English as an analogy for the moral and national virtue of earnestness in contrast to French duplicity (*The Story of England by Robert Mannyng of Brunne*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall [London: Rolls Series, 1867], . ll. 71-128. See further the discussion of Mannyng by Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1996), pp. 71-107. Many religious texts, Lollard and otherwise, also claim English as a suitable medium because it enables the audience to engage in a more intimate relationship with God than is possible through learned Latin discourse. For an overview of the religious implications of “vernacular theology” see Nicholas Watson, “Conceptions of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God,” *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997), pp. 85-124. A collection of key Middle English texts that exhibit a consciousness about their language, and a fine overview of the theoretical issues surrounding those texts, can be found in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1999).
2. On Lancastrian promotion of the English language see John Fisher, “A Language Policy for Lancastrian England,” *PMLA* 107 (1992), pp. 1168-80.
3. “Selden I seye and sone for 3ete” is proverb S130 in B.J. Whiting’s *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases*.
4. For example, in *The Proverbs of Alfred*, as found in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.14.39, the proverb comes in the context and form as follows: “For fewe frend we schulen finden / panne we henne funden; / for he þat is ute bi-loken / he is inne sone for3eten,” (*The Proverbs of Alfred*, ed. Walter Skeat [Oxford: Clarendon P, 1907], pp. 45-6).
5. The metaphor of Richard as the “stok” may also be signifying with more specific genealogical references, since his father and grandfather had names and heraldic devices that incorporated the image. One of Edward III’s badges was “The stock of stump of a tree coupled and eradicated or [gold], with two sprigs issuant therefrom vert [green],” which referred to his manor at Woodstock (J.H. Pinches and R.V. Pinches, *The Royal Heraldry of England* [Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1974], p. 54); and the Black Prince was known as “Edward of Woodstock,” because he was born at Woodstock. Thus the horticultural imagery, while being a vivid vehicle for carrying the dual tenor of ancestry and youth, is overlaid with additional heraldic resonances which sharpen its effectiveness by localizing it.
6. The Simeon manuscript reads “I not” for Vernon’s “In not.”
7. It is possible to imagine that the refrain word “sone” would have been pronounced *sōne* at line 64 as well, in the light of that stanza’s previous reference to Edward’s “sone” the Black Prince (59).

8. Richard Firth Green has suggested that in the poem beginning “Syng Y wold, butt, alas,” a pun evokes and ulterior sense of “jak” (105) as a small coin (“Jack Philipot,” pp. 332-34).
9. C.H.V. Sutherland, *English Coinage: 600-1900* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1973), p. 82.
10. Hoccleve uses the term “ship” for “noble” in the ballade to Henri Sommer, “Worshipful sir, and our freend special” (*IMEV* 4234), ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, *Hoccleve's Works: I, the Minor Poems* (London: Kegan, 1982), pp. 59-60, line 29.
11. The so-called “Treaty Coinage” lacks the French title, since Edward abandoned his claim to the French throne in exchange for other territorial grants under the Treaty of Bretigny concluded in May, 1360. The inscription on these Treaty coins is some variation of EDWARD DEI GRA REX ANGLIE DNS HYB Z ACQ (“Edwardus Dei Gratia Rex Anglie Dominus Hibernie et Aquaitanie,” “Edward by the Grace of God King of England and Lord of Ireland and Aquitaine”). With the breakdown of the Treaty in 1369, Edward reasserted his claim to France, and the French title was reinserted on the nobles. (Sutherland, *English Coinage*, pp. 77-9).
12. Sutherland, *English Coinage*, p. 82.
13. John H. M. Craig, *The Mint: a History of the London Mint from A.D. 287 to 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1953), p. xvi.
14. See further Hoccleve’s condemnation of “clippers” in his “Dialogue With a Friend” (ed. F.J. Furnivall, *Hoccleve's Works*, lines 99-196).
15. Figures on the output of gold coinage from English mints are from Harry A. Miskimin, *Money, Prices, and Foreign Exchange in Fourteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963), pp. 141-2.
16. Craig, *The Mint*, pp. 82-3..
17. The Simeon text has “cliper” for Vernon’s “sliper.” This is likely a simple scribal error. *MED* suggests that it is an error, and the only two instances it lists from the Simeon attestations of this poem and the next lyric in the series, “Warnyng to be ware.”
18. *MED* does not include this denotation under tour. *OED*, however, includes it as a separate entry, Tower pound. The first citation given under the entry is from the 1343 *Close Roll* 17 Edw. III. m.4d (P.R.O.) “Vne liure de pois de la Tour de Loundres.”
19. W.J.W. Potter notes that a rudder is apparent in the 1346 coinage, “The Gold Coinages of Edward III, Pt. 1: The Early and Pre-Treaty Coinages,” *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 7<sup>th</sup> ser. 3 (1963), p. 112.
20. Christopher Allmand, *The Hundred Years' War: England and France at War c. 1300-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), p.18.

21. "Song of the Peace with England" is preserved in a thirteenth-century manuscript: Paris, Bibl. du Roi, 7218. It is printed, with a translation, in *The Political Songs of England, From the Reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Thomas J. Wright (London: Camden Society Series, 1839; reprinted New York: AMS, 1968), pp. 63-8. In his notes, Wright reproduces a prose piece that follows the poem in the manuscript, entitled "La Chartre de la Pais aus Anglois," that engages similarly in satire through ridiculing puns," p. 360. I cite Wright's edition and his translation.

22. *The Political Songs*, ed. Wright, p. 63.

23. *The Political Songs*, ed. Wright, p. 63.

24. "Anglia, fæx hominum, pudor orbis, et ultima rerum" survives only in London, British Museum, Cotton Titus A.xx, which is dated to 1350. It is printed in *Political Poems*, ed. Wright, Vol. 1, pp. 91-3. I cite Wright's edition, and the translation provided in an appendix to *The Poems of Laurence Minot, 1333-52*, ed. Thomas Beaumont James and John Simons (Exeter: U of Exeter P, 1989), pp. 97-9.

25. The poems of Laurence Minot survive only in one early fifteenth-century manuscript, London, British Museum, Cotton Galba E.ix. Two recent editions of the poems are available: *The Poems of Laurence Minot, 1333-52*, ed. James and Simons; and *The Poems of Laurence Minot*, ed. Richard Osberg (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan U 1996). Citations are from Richard Osberg's edition.

Nothing is known for certain about Laurence Minot, though several theories have been offered about the milieu in which he wrote. Some have supposed that he was a war minstrel, but given the metrical virtuosity and other literary features of the poems, the theories that Minot was either a court poet or a "gentleman poet" from Yorkshire seem most plausible. Juliet Vale argues that the court could well have been Edward III's (*Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and its Context 1270-1356* [Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1982], p. 56).

26. A fine report of Minot's prosody and stanza forms is provided in Richard Osberg's edition of the poems (*The Poems of Laurence Minot*, ed. Osberg, pp. 19-26).

27. Discussions of the standard features of French romance prologues are provided by Douglas Kelly (*The Art of Medieval French Romance* [Madison: University of Wisconsin P, 1992]), and by Michelle A. Freeman (*The Poetics of Translatio Studii and Conjointure: Chretien de Troye's "Cliges"* [Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Publishers, 1979]).

28. The following lines from the second poem (IMEV 3080) are a case in point:

Bot many man thretes and spekes ful ill  
that sum tyme war better to be stane still.  
The Skot in his wordes has wind for to spill,  
for at the last Edward sall have al his will (31-4)

29. The Rolls of Parliament report the Ordinance of Normandy as follows:

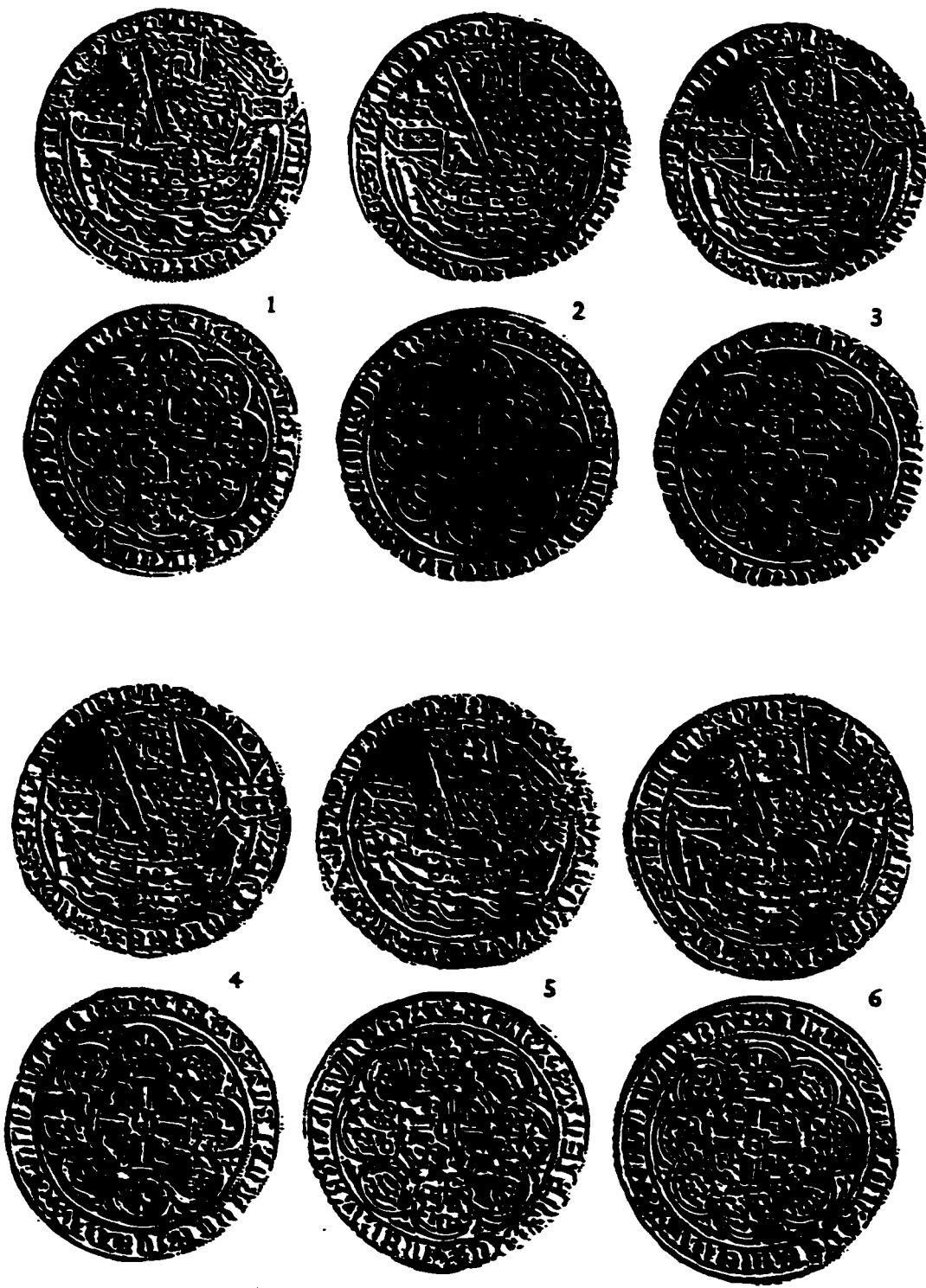
Et sur ce fu moustre une Ordinance faite par le dit Adversaire & ascuns Grants de Frane &

de Normandie, a destruire & ancintier tote la Nation & la Lange Engleys: et de faire Execution de ceste l'Ordinance le dit Adversaire avoit ordeignez le Count de Eu, & le Chamberleyn de Tankerville, od grant Multitude des Gentz d'armes, Genevois & Gentz a pie de y estrealez. (*Rot. Parl.* II, 158); qtd by Oliver Farrar Emerson in "English or French in the Time of Edward III," *The Romanic Review* 7 (1916), p. 138.

30. Emerson, "English or French," pp. 138-40.

APPENDIX I

The Gold Noble of Edward III  
Reproduced from W.J.W. Potter, "The Gold Coinages of Edward III"  
Plate VIII



## Chapter Four

### Embodied Troupe in ‘Troupe is Best’”

Troupe was a “keyword” in the Middle Ages, with legal, ethical, theological, and, in what was to come later in the fourteenth century, scientific senses.<sup>1</sup> The legal and ethical senses comprise what has come to be called “anthropomorphous troupe.”<sup>2</sup> Anthropomorphous troupe is defined by the solidarity of the group, a solidarity essential to the traditional feudal structure of medieval society. It depends on the centrality of the oath, the given word, and the incumbent reverence for fidelity in all forms of human association, from the intimacy of marriage to the formality of kingship. Troupe is honesty and faithfulness to others, whether in business dealings, friendship, or relations between a lord and retainer; it is also faithfulness to God. Troupe is also justice, insofar as principles of honesty and faithfulness are viewed in terms of the entire social fabric. A person can be defined as being “true,” or possessing “troupe,” which translates into one’s “troupefulness,” “oathworthiness,” or integrity as manifested through persistently keeping one’s word and living according to one’s principles. “Troupe” was also a recognizable name for Christ, and so all forms of “anthropomorphous troupe” could have been perceived as forms of *veritas vitae* and moral rectitude, as those concepts were used by philosophers and theologians, including Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas and Wyclif. Finally, troupe, in the later fourteenth century, grew into the modern sense of scientific troupe, a factual statement corresponding to reality, which had previously been denoted by the word “soþ.”

The semantic complexity of the term is engaged variously in Middle English lyrics and related discourse of the fourteenth century. Most famously, Chaucer’s poem “Trouthe” (*IMEV* 809) binds together the legal, ethical, and theological senses with his recurring refrain “And

trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede" (7). Earlier lyrics complaining of the lack of troupe in society often accomplish a cohesion of legal and ethical senses through compressed imagery and personification. John Ball's letters (*IMEV* 1654, 1655, 1791, 1796; *IMEV Suppl.* 1790.8), which draw on the discursive mode of these complaint lyrics and have been edited and discussed as lyrics, hail their audience into a formation of anthropomorphous troupe by encouraging them to bind together and embark on a mission to uphold troupe in the immediate action of the Peasants' Revolt.<sup>3</sup> The Vernon refrain lyric "Troupe is Best" combines all of these techniques. It extends the complaint lyric tradition of figuring the loss of troupe as the personified Troupe's exile and usurpation, and it develops metaphors that meld legal and ethical senses of troupe. Like Chaucer's "Trowth," it overlays anthropomorphous troupe with a theological meaning and uses a refrain to suggestively amalgamate and reinforce these meanings; and like John Ball's letters, it creates a communicative scenario that interpellates the audience into the embodiment of anthropomorphous troupe about to set out to uphold justice. Chaucer's poem is well known, but before turning to consider "Troupe is Best," I will consider the rhetorical strategies for figuring troupe and persuading the audience to embody it in earlier complaint lyrics and in John Ball's letters.

Middle English lyrics on "troupe" contribute to the genre of complaint literature, which denounces the decay of virtues, often by depicting the current state as one of degeneracy from pristine days. With the important exception of complaint lyrics from London, British Library, MS. Harley 2253,<sup>4</sup> those that precede "Troupe is Best" are preserved in sermons, preacher's handbooks, or friar's miscellanies, contexts that attest their practical use.<sup>5</sup> As mnemonic guides, many of these "preachers' tags" achieve an economy of compression through figurative language.

Some use social types as representative of particular virtues to embody the loss of those virtues. These fall into the category of the “The Twelve Abuses,” a format deriving from a Latin treatise called *De duodecim abusivis*, which represents the loss of virtues by depicting their absence from the types of people in which they should be manifest (e.g. “Kyng redeles,” “Old mon lychur”).<sup>6</sup> Personification is also prevalent. In some cases vices are given moral qualities: “Now couetys ys wyse / Now lechery ys schameles.”<sup>7</sup> In other cases personification is more vivid, with the virtues’ decay or destruction figured as their death, exile, or imprisonment. One popular and powerful site of such personification is the following one-stanza poem (*IMEV* 2145):

Men hem bimenin\* of litel trewthe,                      bemoan  
 It is ded and 3at is rewthe;  
 Lesing livet and is above,  
 And now is biried trewthe and love.<sup>8</sup>

Occasionally, personification in complaint lyrics extends beyond a purely mnemonic function and summons the audience to make logical connections. These lyrics demonstrate the kind of multi-dimensional discursive structure that one encounters in the Vernon refrain lyric “Troupe is Best.” For example, three poems (*IMEV* 759, 760, 1373)<sup>9</sup> from Oxford, Merton College, MS. 248, a manuscript that contains sermons and materials for sermons collected by John Sheppey, Bishop of Rochester, during his time at Oxford (1330–40), enrich personification through developing an allegorical mini-drama, delineating a diagrammatic allegory,<sup>10</sup> and assigning a character dialogue (using the rhetorical figure *sermocinatio*).

The three poems in question from MS. Merton 248 have been edited by Carleton Brown.<sup>11</sup> I include a revised edition, which retains orthography, morpheme spacing,

capitalization, and pointing. I have silently expanded contractions, and arranged the lines in poetic form: in the manuscript they are printed as prose. In the right margin beside the first line of each lyric, descriptors are written respectively, in what appears to be the same hand: “de falsitate,” “de falce” (or “de falte”—the penultimate letter is ambiguous), “de cupiditate.”

- |      |   |                           |   |
|------|---|---------------------------|---|
| I    | <p>Falsnesse and couetys er feris :<br/>           wil neyer oyer be sweke .<br/>           lewte and pouert ar peris :<br/>           haue þai no rithte in ys rike .<br/>           ilke man in lande no leres<br/>           wyt falsedam to pinchyn and pike<br/>           es yer no man yat yem sterys<br/>           bot heuer are vnlawis illyke...</p> | <p>4<br/>           8</p> | <p>Falseness and covetise are companions,<br/>           Neither will the other betray;<br/>           “Leaute” and poverty are equals,<br/>           They have no rights in this territory.<br/>           Each man in land noone/now? leads<br/>           with deceitfulness to oppress and rob;<br/>           there is no man that steers them<br/>           But ever they are equally unlawful.</p> |
| II   | <p>Falsenes I vnderstande<br/>           haues dreuen trw vte of lande .<br/>           and tort and fort as shoren yar owth<br/>           yat law sal lose is ouer clope</p>  | <p>4</p>                  | <p>Falseness, I undertand,<br/>           Has driven tru(th) out of land;<br/>           and <i>tort and fort</i> has shorn their oath<br/>           that law shall lose his overcloth.</p>  |
| III. | <p>I yinge al day I yinge of nowth<br/>           of nowth I set al my thowth<br/>           nowth of owth brynkis me tyl nowth</p>   |                           | <p>I think all day, I think for nothing,<br/>           To no purpose I set all my thought;<br/>           emptiness of ought/oath brings me to<br/>           nought:</p>  |

Be wor bertyr<sup>12</sup> I thowth yt nowth . 4 I would be better if I thought it not.

Before discussing the lyrics, some remarks are in order regarding the orthography, phonology and morphology of the poem. The lyrics appear on f.166vb of the manuscript, and they, as all other texts on ff. 166r-167r, are in a hand not found elsewhere in the manuscript, and dated to ca. 1330-40 (Laing 105). Margaret Laing has recently analysed the hand in her edition of an overlooked sermon that immediately precedes the poems.<sup>13</sup> She notes that the orthography of the scribe ("scribe C") is "highly idiosyncratic" but does have "an internal system and consistency" which she believes very likely "reflect[s] the genuine spoken idiom of some particular place."<sup>14</sup> Unlike the English in the rest of the manuscript, which is of a southerly type, this English is northerly, and the texts were "likely...composed somewhere in the North or North Midlands."<sup>15</sup> The full range of orthographical idiosyncrasies are recorded by Laing; I only mention the ones that pertain to the lyrics. The letter þ is not used, but a "y" is used for both [Ø~ð] and [i~j] segments. The vocalic function is usually, but not always, indicated with a dot above the "y." The scribe shows the East Anglian and Lincolnshire tendency to use "w" for 'v'/'u,' as in "trw" (II.2). He tends to drop etymological initial "h," as in "as" for "has" (II.3), and "is" for "his" (II.4); and he also employs an "unhistorical 'h'," as in the word "heuer" (I.7). Moreover, he sometimes leaves out the macron indicating an abbreviation, which might make it possible to read "no" (I.5) as "none" rather than "now."

Laing itemizes the northern and Norfolk features of the sermon text's language, which also appear in the poems. Northern features include "ilke" (I.4) for "each"; "s" endings rather than th/þ for the third person singular indicative of verbs ("leres" (I.4), "haues" (II.1), "brynkes" (III.2)). Norfolk traits include "nowth" for "not" and "thowth" for "thought"; "rith" for "right,"

(I.3); “sal” (rather than “s(c)hal”) (II.4). Taking all of these features into account, Laing localizes the dialect to “NW Lincolnshire or possibly in the adjacent areas of N Notts or on the WRY” (105).

The difficulty of the language, as well as the previous editorial decisions it has prompted, has occluded the richness of the lyrics.<sup>16</sup> As well as exemplifying traditional ways of figuring the loss of troupe in complaint lyrics preceding the Vernon manuscript, these texts incorporate an unusually high degree of figural compression and specific legal references. Lyric I suggests the loss of troupe in the land by concentrating on Falsehood’s unjust domination in specifically legal terms. “Lewte” is a complex word meaning “uprightness, honorableness, honest; truth; justice, fairness,” “loyalty, faithfulness” (*MED* s.v. *leautē* n. (a), (b)). “[L]ewte and pouert” are presented as personifications being without “rihte,” a noun meaning “that which is just, equity, justice,” “a just claim, an entitlement” (*MED* s.v. *right* n. 2(a), 5(a)). Lyric II also presents the lack of truth using a legal metaphor, but here that metaphor involves puns that enrich the personification. Lyric III develops personification through the rhetorical device of *serminocinatio*: it presents a character’s lack of “troupe” through his manner of speech.

Personification in lyric II issues in a diagrammatic allegory that exemplifies the lack of troupe in relation to a falsification of the oath. The power of the allegory depends on the pun with “shoren” and the allusion in the phrase “tort and fort.” Carleton Brown views “shoren” as a scribal error, and emends it to “sworen.”<sup>17</sup> Although the orthography of this poem is unusual, there is no other instance where “h” stands for “w.” The word is the past participle of the verb meaning “to shear or trim the nap of a woolen cloth” (*MED* s.v. *shēren* v. 4(d)). As such, “shoren,” obviously fits with the clothing metaphor that personifies law as wearing an “ouer

clope.” The logic of the allegory is increased by the reference to the legal claim alluded to by “tort and fort.” Carleton Brown glossed the two words separately as “wrong” and “strong.” Given the legal context, however, the phrase refers to the term that was incorporated into a defendant’s statement of defence in any kind of wrong in the law.<sup>18</sup>

Example of the use of the use of “tort et force” in a defence can be found throughout the *Brevia Placitata*, a tract from the middle of the thirteenth century which consists of precedents for pleading in the King’s courts.<sup>19</sup> The *Brevia* consists of a series of writs. Each writ is followed by the formal speech—known as an *encouplement* or *count*—that counsel for the demandant or plaintiff addressed to the court. The *count* was basically a story, which the plaintiff told in accusing the defendant. After each count came a formal *defense*, which would be uttered by the defendant or his representative. In all of the cases listed in the *Brevia Placitata*, the *defense* begins “Tort et force,” and in all cases it is the “tort et force” (the wrong) that the defendant denies.

The Merton lyric presents the formula “tort and fort” as a pair of personifications. The fact that they have “shoren” their oath suggests that the defendant is using the formula untruthfully, and that his compurgers are abetting him in his perjury. Given the basis of the legal system in anthropomorphous “troupe,” the fraudulent use of the defense represents the lack of such “troupe” in society.<sup>20</sup> The common process of law, especially in the local courts but also in the King’s courts, was proof by compurgation. In proof by compurgation, the defendant swore an oath of innocence, and his oath was ratified by the oaths of a number of oathworthy supporters, known as compurgers or “oath-helpers.” The compurgers abetting the defence of the accused did not swear to the truth of evidence presented, but to “the ethical truth of the

defendant.”<sup>21</sup> Their authority lay in their reputation as men of troupe, and the system was ratified by the high regard in which personal troupe was held in medieval society: since no one of good standing would risk losing their reputation by compurgating an untrustworthy litigant, the system proved effective. Oath-helpers effectively wagered their own troupe in aiding a defendant. The figure developed in this lyric thus presents, in a very compressed way, how the misuse of a formula manifests the breakdown of a person’s oathworthiness, and, because that oathworthiness was the basis of law, it leads to the impoverishment of justice. The ontological link between the formula of defence, the oath, and the law is figured compactly by showing the impact of the breakdown in terms of law’s impoverishment: law is also personified, and as a result of what tort and fort have “shoren” is depicted as being without an overcoat. Moreover, this whole scenario figures what the first two lines of the lyric state: that “[f]alsenes...haues dreuen trw vte of lande” (II.1-2).

Lyric III likewise demonstrates the lack of truth through the abuse of the “oath,” but it does so by presenting a lack of metaphysical “presence” in a character’s thinking, and hence the lack of referential capacity and binding power in his “word”: his speech dramatizes, and accounts for, his inability to be ‘true.’ Although the orthography causes ambiguity, it seems likely that “owth” in line 3 is to be read primarily as “oath,” as it is in II.3, where it rhymes with “clope,” and not as “ought” (as in “nothing”).<sup>22</sup> The repetition of the phoneme “ought” throughout (seven times in four lines), and the semantic pairing it makes between “thought” and “nought,” drive home the emptiness of this speaker’s thought, as well as the emptiness of his speech.<sup>23</sup> With no mean degree of ingenuity, the poet conveys a deep understanding about how the oath is bound to a belief in the performative capacity of language. Since an oath is defined through the binding

power of speech, the nonsense of this character's speech demonstrates his inability to create a substantial oath. Through play with sounds of language and with the fiction of orality, this verse dramatizes the inability of a human to be true.

These lyrics' insight into the depth of the moral and social disintegration caused through the lack of "troupe," and their economy in condensing that insight in and through language, are remarkable. Such formal, textual density also appears in "Troupe is Best", but there it is employed in the context of a more holistic view of rhetoric, one that takes advantage of the whole scenario of delivery—the triad of speaker, text, and audience—to convey the meaning of troupe. In its manipulation of the communicative scenario, and its resulting manner of interpellating the audience, "Troupe is Best" also shows affinities with John Ball's letters.

John Ball's letters adapt many of the motifs of complaint verse, but in Ball's hands they serve as a call to action. The power of the commonplace complaint material to incite rebellion can be attributed to two factors. For one, as Richard Firth Green notes, although Ball's letters may be entirely conventional, "their very conventions, however pacific in origin, had become inflammatory by 1381."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the letters add to the convention an urgent call: "nowe is time" is asserted four times throughout the series. The letters interpellate the audience as a group on a moral mission to set the vices and the virtues "aryght," and thereby to restore troupe in its embodied form as the proper social order. That restoration is to begin with the implied audience's realization of its own identity. As Steven Justice puts it, "trewpe was an organizing term of the rebel's expression and thought."<sup>25</sup> The letters urge each rebel to be a true man, like "Jack Truemanne," one of their purported authors. Moreover, they urge each true man to bind together with others, in terms of the rural tradition of community coherence, such that the group

itself manifests troupe. In the letters, the rebels' action in setting matters right is forwarded as an expression of the old tradition of troupe in rural politics, wherein each person was responsible for justice in the land.

Anthropomorphous troupe is also presented as a figuring of spiritual truth in John Ball's letters. Insofar as the letters incorporate the idiom of the Psalms, identify troupe as God, and refer to the future redemption of all through Christ, the community bound through solidarity is figured as the earthly manifestation of Divine truth and community members' actions are depicted as a foreshadowing of the final salvation of the godly.<sup>26</sup> The letters' implied audience, then, as well as being interpellated into seeing itself as the embodiment of anthropomorphous troupe, is also brought to see itself participating in a greater cosmic battle. Steven Justice has described the letters as a "theologically-inflected call to the political."<sup>27</sup> When the implied audience of the letters is considered, however, it is possible to extend that description to qualify the identity into which the audience is interpellated: the group is cast as an historical manifestation of Troupe, but also as a shadow of the holy community of the righteous. In this regard, the identity into which the audience is being interpellated parallels, to some degree, the slide between real and symbolic modes evident, for example, in the *figura* Piers Plowman as he appears in *Piers Plowman*.

The rhetorical strategy of "Troupe is Best" combines the sort of rich textual configuration of troupe in the lyrics from the Merton manuscript with the manner of audience interpellation programmed into John Ball's letters. In mixing complex rhetorical figures with a direct appeal to the audience, "Troupe is Best" resembles the rhetorical strategy of "þat selden I seye is sone for sete": the vehicles that convey troupe have ontological bearings that in themselves vivify the virtue troupe, and the audience's recognition of itself in the role it is cast by the speaker serves

the heuristic purpose of aiding them in comprehending troupe through experiential knowledge. Unlike in “þat selden I seye is sone for æete,” however, here the audience’s ability to construe figures consciously does not contribute to the identity into which it is being interpellated. The interpellated identity in “Troupe is Best,” moreover, tends to be multiple in a decentred rather than a centripetal manner. The figures depicting troupe are likewise multiple and dispersed, unlike the escalating conceit of the noble.

The interpellative action of “Troupe is Best” involves the speaker’s self-characterization and his definition of the implied present audience whom he addresses. The speaker interpellates the audience and himself as a cohesive group, bound together in troupe, by asserting his own troupe and by hailing specific members of a present, heterogenous audience. These definitions form the skeletal framework through which the speaker turns his address from an explication of troupe to a demonstration of it, and through which the implied audience’s response moves from a cerebral understanding of troupe to an experiential embodiment of it.

The speaker stakes his own reputation as a “true” person—that is, an oathworthy, honest, loyal person—on his claim that “Troupe is Best,” and specifically on his claim that troupe will always overcome falsehood, articulated in his wager in the penultimate stanza: “Baldelych þis dar I wage” (61). This key phrase has a variant in the Simeon manuscript, which reads: “Baldelych þis dar I a wage.” The addition of the indefinite pronoun changes “wage” from a verb to a direct object. Although the textual variant does not necessarily translate into a profound change in meaning, the Vernon version contains a greater sense of the sentence as a performative statement.

“Baldelych þis dar I wage” resonates as a specific legal action, and that resonance is strengthened by the fact that the speaker explicitly identifies lawyers and judges in his audience

(29-30, 34). “To wage” means “to offer surety for,” “to put something up at stake pending the outcome of an event; hazard” (*MED* s.v. *wāgen* v. 1(a), 2.). As mentioned earlier, an appeal to personal troupe as a means of proof was common in courts of law, being practised in cases of “proof by compurgation,” otherwise known as “wager of law.” This speaker uses that legal discourse to attest the troupe of his statement while at the same time asserting his own troupe: he ratifies the troupe of his subject matter by underwriting it with an appeal to his own troupe. He thereby demonstrates troupe.<sup>28</sup>

The speaker also turns the utterance from statement to demonstration by knitting together a heterogeneous audience as he proceeds. Through pointing and direct address, he consolidates a mixed audience: “þis ladyes” (11), “þis Merchauns” (13), “lordes...þat may deeme her riht as þe lest” (29-30) and “Hose medleþ wiþ þe lawe” (34). Moreover, although he at times enacts the traditional homiletic stance of addressing the audience as “þou” or “þe,” he often integrates all into a unified “we” (27, 28, 41, 43, 47, 53, 57, 71).<sup>29</sup> In these means of positioning the audience, he builds up an imaginative community bound by solidarity which, despite the poem’s founding allegory, transgresses traditional feudal ranks. Finally, this solidarity is figured in palpable, active terms, as a force capable of altering the current condition of society. In the final two lines, the speaker envisions all present helping to root out injustice:

Falshed hap ben most in pris,

Boþe bi North and eke bi west.

We schul him hunte as Cat dop mys,

Whon troupe hym cheues þat euer is best. (69-72)

In this final configuration, the audience is imagined, like that of John Ball’s letters, taking up the

old 'Folklaw' tradition, wherein every member of the community, bound through fidelity, is responsible for ensuring the preservation and lawfulness of the land.

The final configuration of the audience into an embodiment of troupe issues from the way the text casts them as participants in the quasi-fictional allegory of the poem. The audience becomes identified with the allegorical figures that have been drawn: in particular, the audience becomes identified as the champions of displaced Troupe, about to "hunte" Falsehede. Especially given this final inter-penetration of real and fictional worlds, the audience's interpellated identity is defined by the significance of the fictional figures. The figures are clearly grounded in particular historical circumstances and, therefore, manifest a blurring of distinction between the real and the fictional. This blurring of distinction also influences the final configuration of the audience: because of the socio-political grounding of the figures, while the audience comes to be identified with the allegorical world of the poem, it also comes to see its role in relation to the current socio-political circumstances that inform the allegory. Thus, that allegory is itself multi-dimensional.

"Troupe is Best" modulates traditional complaint discourse depictions of Troupe's usurpation and exile into a specific legal matter with relevance to contemporary social ills, and to a specific land, England. As well as serving the heuristic purpose of vivifying the meanings of "troupe," delineating "Troupe" in reference to specific contemporary ills strengthens and defines the interpellative work of the poem as a dramatic oratorical address. Because the figures for Troupe are grounded in recognizable social structures, the audience is summoned to see itself not only as the embodiment of anthropomorphous troupe, but also as engaged in seeking to rectify a specific social wrong and so to uphold the troupe that is justice. Similar to the way the central

conceit in “Pat selden I seye is sone for 3ete” is developed as a means of understanding, where understanding evokes and is refined through the very action it summons, in “Troupe is Best” the delineation of troupe deflects out to define the present audience as an embodiment of troupe, and so the audience comes to know troupe through imaginatively enacting it. In that way, the audience is brought to see that troupe is not something amenable to objective definition, but a quality that exists in a person and in an action.

The contemporary, realistic aspects of the social ill portrayed allegorically in the poem all centre around the depiction of troupe as a lord, though in some parts the depiction expands into the identification of troupe as an army. The political theory of lordship inflects the depiction variously, based on the different ways it is developed throughout the poem: as a legally viable bond whose decay in late fourteenth-century England spawned certain injustices, as a description of the absolute dominion of God, and as a structure defining international political relations. Of these, the first, legal aspect is the most resonant and powerful, given the prevalence of a legal idiom throughout, and given that practitioners of law are hailed more often than any other through the address. The legal thread of the allegory will thus be teased out first, beginning with an account of the theoretical basis of lordship and the social problems encountered in its increasing weakening throughout the fourteenth century.

England was, throughout the Middle Ages, a society wherein a vassal and a lord bound themselves to one another such that the vassal served the lord in war and in peace, and the lord protected and maintained the vassal. In the traditional, feudal form of that relationship, a bond was created in ceremonies of homage, which included an oath of fealty, a form of “troupeplight.”<sup>30</sup> In gesture and speech, the ceremony consecrated a relationship between humans

which mirrored that between humans and God. The oath had sacred binding power, and assured the vassal's troupe to his lord and a lord's troupe to his vassal. Bonds created through these oaths had longevity: the vassal was given, in exchange for his service, a fief of land or a benefice, and that land or benefice passed from generation to generation through heritage.

Through time, the sacred nature of feudal relations was lost as the bonds became divorced from "troupplight." From the end of the thirteenth century, the indenture of retinue, a written contract, began to replace the ceremony of homage.<sup>31</sup> At first these indentures bound the vassal to the lord for a lifetime, though as time went on the contracts created shorter-term associations. As well, sometimes, and increasingly frequently, a fief-rent—a cash payment—was given in place of land tenure, and this arrangement constituted contractual relationships. Associations lacking homage and the oath of fealty and based on the written contract were forms of "bastard feudalism."<sup>32</sup> Such nonfeudal<sup>33</sup> relations were common in the fourteenth century; they existed along with feudal relations, but eventually outmoded them. The practice of retaining men for a cash payment through the indenture became increasingly prevalent, and the indenture gradually replaced the verbal oath. One key distinguishing characteristic of the indenture was that its term was limited, and it did not include heritability, even in the case of lifetime indentures.<sup>34</sup>

The prevalence of less stable, indentured relationships between a lord and retainers led to unrest in the countryside, common during the reign of Edward III and heightening in the Ricardian era. The problem had roots in war indentures: in times of peace, retainers commissioned for war were still "maintained" by the lords, who purposefully built up groups to assert their power in the land, often by instigating and supporting mental and physical coercion. The roots of this factional lawlessness throughout the land are, however, more far-reaching,

immersed as they are in the complex of factors, among them famine and plague, contributing to the breakdown of feudal structures.<sup>35</sup> With the breakdown of feudal structures society was deregularized, and severe pressure was placed on the traditional means of enforcing law, in which “members of a group were collectively responsible for misdeeds committed by any one of their number.”<sup>36</sup> This process was compounded by, and in turn helped to perpetuate, influxes of gangs of brigands with which the English judicial system could not cope, and hence public order continued to dissolve. The problem, moreover, was further compounded because often those administering the law were corrupt: gentlemen professionals were also maintained by a magnate, and all too often would support that magnate, or members of that magnate’s retinue, at the expense of justice. The extent of the social unrest caused through illegal forms of association, especially maintenance, around the time when the Vernon manuscript was being compiled is indicated by the many statutes of the era.<sup>37</sup> The 1388 Cambridge Petition provides a lengthy definition of maintenance, a translation of part of which follows:

And because there are different opinions about the cases in which maintenance ought or ought not to be adjudged, the definition follows: that is to say when any lord, spiritual or temporal, lady, woman of religion or any other of whatsoever estate or condition he be, takes up or supports another’s quarrel to which he is not party for reason of blood or marriage, in order to have the whole of a part of that which is claimed, or instigates or procures for reward, gift, or promise the passing of inquests in quarrels to which he is not a party...[the sentence continues on to three time this length].<sup>38</sup>

As Anna Baldwin has shown, the social problems stemming from maintenance in late medieval England are represented in the Lady Meed episode in *Piers Plowman*.<sup>39</sup> The allegory of

Wrong as one of the retainers of Meed shows how wrong was rampant through the land because of the practice of maintenance, and particularly maintenance through which a noble, like Lady Meed, protected members of his retinue in courts of law. The episode also shows how the roots of the social problem are attributed to a rampant quest for financial gain. In *Piers Plowman*, however, the allegory is brought to a positive resolution, one that is undoubtedly prescriptive rather than representative, wherein Wrong and Meed are both imprisoned. "Troupe is Best," whose parallels with *Piers Plowman* call for a more extended treatment than will be provided here, also represents through allegory the problems wrought by maintenance.

The legal and social aspects of lordship allegorized in "Troupe is Best" deepen the traditional depictions of an exiled and usurped personified Troupe that are prevalent in complaint literature of the fourteenth century. The vehicle itself conveys the meaning of troupe, since feudalism was founded on fidelity between two parties. The way the figure is incorporated, however, expands its heuristic value. Troupe is personified as an exiled lord who should return to reclaim dominion over land legally his through "heritage" (58). The reference to Troupe's legal right of "heritage" legitimizes his lordship, and so provides justification for viewing the personified Falsehede's current reign as illegal. The illegality of Falsehede's reign is advanced further as the historical grounding is made all the more local and urgent in the final stanza. The speaker states that Falsehede reigns "þorw Meyntenaunce of couetise" (66). The phrase sounds most readily as a general statement that Falsehede currently reigns because of the all-pervasive greed in the land. The semantic depth of the word "Meytenaunce," however, extends the allegory and particularizes the problem in a way that figures tyranny in a contemporary social ill. Given the resonances of feudalism throughout the poem and the presence of the legal idiom,

“Meyntenaunce” likely resonates with its specific legal reference. Denoting thus, “covetise” may be read as another personification, who interferes with the law in order that Falsehede may reign.

The reference to the particular injustice of “Meyntenaunce” is enforced through reference to Falsehede’s “grount.” The word appears as “ground” in the Simeon manuscript, but, as I shall suggest anon, there is good reason to believe that “grount” was intended, and that its equivocation comprises a key pun. In the present context, in accord with the developing legal thread, it signifies as “ground.” The noun “ground” had particular senses relating to justification: “the basis of an institution, organization, faith, law, etc.,” “the grounds or reason for an action, claim; a valid reason for a request” (*MED* s.v. grōund n. 5(c), 6(c)). *MED* lists this poem under 5(c). Given the way in which Falsehede’s control of the throne has been presented as an illegal claim in light of Troupe’s right by “heritage,” and given Falsehede’s abetment through “mayntenance,” *MED* sense 6(c) is particularly apt: line 67 states that Falsehede has no legal grounds for reigning.

This concretizing of allegory in a particular social condition results in interpellating the audience into a particular identity. Insofar as the audience is drawn into the allegorical action in imaginatively embarking to “hunte” Falsehede, they are interpellated as a group about to set off to destroy the illegal forms of association which Falsehede and Covetise exemplify. Since that form of association is immediately “real” for the late fourteenth-century audience, the fictional action of the hunt is easily translated into the “real” work of ousting the falseness that Falsehede represents. Insofar as the inclusive “we” is cast into the role of social vindicator, pursuing justice in its efforts to oust Falsehede, the members of the audience are finally drawn into seeing themselves as a community bound together in troupe (loyalty) and upholding troupe (justice) along

the lines of the old Folklaw tradition.

Secular justice comprises the main tenor of the allegory of lordship, and the audience is interpellated most strongly into the identity of social vindicators, which identity manifests anthropomorphous troupe considered in both its ethical and its legal senses; but secular justice does not completely define the tenor of the allegory or the identity of the audience. The allegory also emits theological and nationalist resonances. The theological resonances deepen the audience's identity as the embodiment of "troupe," and the nationalist resonances lend that identity a non-heuristic ideological hue.

Troupe is explicitly identified as God at least once in the poem: "Troupe schal deme vs alle be dene" (25). When "Troupe" in the "Troupe as lord" formulation is read as "God," the statement is no longer allegorical, but a direct reference to Christ. Nonetheless, the identification of Troupe as Christ is enriched through two related resonances of the feudal metaphor: of the prevalent theory of the absolute dominion of God, and of the biblical understanding of "heritage" as the Christian heritage of eternal life.

Given the more or less latent identification of Troupe as God pervading the poem, the urge that "Troupe" be allowed to "bere his heritage" (58) resounds with the New Testament image of Christ as an heir of God's promise to Abraham, and of Christians as "heirs" of Christ.<sup>40</sup> The word "heritage" used in this doctrinal sense is found in other religious lyrics, including the very popular "A Ihesu, þi swetnes wha may it se" (*IMEV* 1781), which appears earlier in the Vernon manuscript: "Als fader of fude my luf to wyn / Herytage in heuen he has me boght" (23-4).<sup>41</sup> The image of Christians as heirs of Christ is rooted in Old Testament accounts of God's promise of a future inheritance to Abraham, found initially in Genesis 15; it led to the theology of

the covenant (Dt 28:15-68), where Israel is Yahweh's heritage; and it was later transformed into a more personal and spiritual hope (Ps 15.5-6). In the New Testament, Christ is the heir of his ancestor Abraham, as well as the fulfilment of the promise of inheritance made to Abraham (Gal 3.15-18), and that inheritance is to be shared by all believers. As both the heir of Abraham and the inheritance, Christ is both the means to the inheritance (the renewed life granted through Christ's Incarnation) and the essence of that inheritance. This biblical metaphor adds ambiguity to the conditional statement: "Wolde we sit lete troupe a zeyn / Be lord and bere his heritage" (57-8). It reads as an exhortation to let Christ have full dominion, by acknowledging Christ as the one who inherits and fulfills God's promise. At the same time, the phrase "bere his heritage" could also be governed by the subject "we:" the exhortation is for the audience to merit or recognize the renewed life of Christ in daily life, as a taste of, and a means to, eternal life in heaven.

The pervasive metaphor of troupe as lord also has a more contemporary theological resonance, referring to the theory of the absolute Dominion of God. The understanding of God as the supreme Lord, the one who holds rights to all lands and to whom all owe sole allegiance, was a prominent theological position in the later fourteenth century. The doctrine is elaborated most systematically in Wyclif's *De Civili Dominio* (c. 1376), and it underlies his other attacks on the temporalities of the church which date to at least 1373.<sup>42</sup> Although I will explain the theory with reference to Wyclif's writings, it is worth emphasizing that in doing so I am not claiming that the poet knew Wyclif's writings directly, or that the audience would necessarily have associated the sentiments with Lollardy. In considering the resonance of Wyclif's theory of dominion in *Piers Plowman* B 15.560-67, Pamela Gradon, for instance, notes that although Wyclif's criticism of the temporalities of the church can be found as early as 1373, the political issue of

dominion—the right to own temporal property—and its alignment with theories of God’s absolute Dominion were in the air apart from Wyclif’s articulation of them:<sup>43</sup>

the idea was neither new nor novel when Wyclif advanced it. It had been taught by Marsilius of Padua and John of Jandun, *damnatae memoriae*; even some of the Austin Friars, as Gwynn has pointed out, advanced a doctrine of dominion similar to that which led to Wyclif’s heretical stance.<sup>44</sup>

Wyclif argues that all dominion comes from God, and so can only be held by those who are morally and spiritually fit. The basis of this claim is the tenet that lordship implies usufruct, and, “since the unrighteous cannot use what he has to good purpose, he cannot be said to properly have it.”<sup>45</sup> As well, Wyclif argues that clergy should in no case hold temporalities, since God, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, forbids the endowment of clergy (the ability of clergy to own property). Clergy who do hold property are therefore living in mortal sin and so are unable to hold dominion. This theory informs many Lollard sermons, including the following entitled “Of Dominion:”<sup>46</sup>

But here we schal suppose as Cristen mennes bileue, þat god is cheef lord of eche þing of þis world. And so, al 3if kyngis & oþere han free lordschipe, neþeles god is more free lord of þat same þing, ne it is noust leeful to seculere lordis to aleyenen his lordschipe wipouten leue of god; as in mannes lordschipe a litil lord hap no leue to alienen his heritage but bi leue of þi chief lord, & þis lawe hap more resoun in þe lordschipe of god. Here may we se, siþ lordis of þis world hadde no3t leue of god þus to dowe his clerkis, here fool sifte schulde no3t stonde bi skile; siþ god may no3t be contrarie to him silf. But god ofte tyme in his two testamentis forbediþ his clerkis to be þus dowid; & so þis gile,

pat cam bi cautel of þe fend, schulde be now broken for defaute of ground.

(aleyenen/alienate      dowid/endowed      cautel/trick)

Insofar as this theory of the absolute Dominion of God resounds in the poem, the final urge to oust Falsehede from his position of dominion has a theological as well as a legal imperative. In addition to having no legal grounds for holding reign, Falsehede has no moral grounds, based on the principle of usufruct. The issue of usufruct is also drawn out through a second inflection of the word “grount” as moral or spiritual justification. Anne Hudson has shown that the noun “ground” was often used in Lollard discourse, and often meant “justifiable as from Scripture,” as it does in the above excerpt from a Lollard sermon.<sup>47</sup> Although “Troupe is Best” may not be easily categorized as “Lollard discourse,” it is reasonable to suppose that at least a resonance of the word’s deployment in such discourse informs the poem. The claim that Falsehede’s “grount” will beguile him therefore implies that Falsehede has no spiritual right to rule because of his unrighteous state. This definition of Falsehede, in turn, affects the identity into which the audience is being interpellated: in setting out to “hunte” Falsehede the audience is bound together not only as a social group seeking to restore justice, but as a Christian group seeking to restore moral and spiritual rectitude.

The legal and spiritual dimensions of lordship attained through the concretization of allegory help to define Truth’s final implied action: “We schul him hunte as Cat dop mys / Whon troupe hym cheues þat euer is best”(71-2). The word “cheues” has proven to be a crux. Carleton Brown glossed it originally, in his 1924 edition, as “succeed, prosper,”<sup>48</sup> and *MED* appears to follow him in placing the poem under entry (3b) of chēven v.: “to thrive, prosper, do well, succeed.” G.V. Smithers, registering some puzzlement, revised Brown’s gloss to “?flourish”

based on the Old French “chever.”<sup>49</sup> “[C]heues,” however, could also denote, more specifically and in relation to the poem’s concern with forms of social association, “to acquire or obtain something; also, inherit,” or “to recognize (somebody) as head or overlord, swear allegiance or be loyal to somebody; be faithful to God” (*MED chēven* v. 1(c), 6.). *MED* sense 1(c) would seem to fit, given the concern with heritage, if we read “hym” as an intensive pronoun. *MED* sense 6) would also seem likely.<sup>50</sup> The condition stipulated in the last line might forefront the multifarious identity of “Troupe” developed in the poem, and read: “When Troupe swears allegiance to Him (God), Who ever is best” or perhaps “When Troupe himself, who is ever the best, swears allegiance.” Either or both of these two denotations of *chēven* could be operating here, given the poem’s figuring of troupe in terms of feudal structure. Either way, the anticipated course of action figures the rectification of the legal and spiritual problem in terms of a return to proper feudal structures or customs.

In “Troupe is Best,” the feudal allegory redounds to explicate various meanings of troupe, and insofar as the audience comes to participate in that allegory in the final moment, the audience members are themselves interpellated as embodying the various senses of the word. That is, in prompting the audience to view itself and its pursuit of common social justice as a manifestation of Troupe, the address enables the audience to see truth not as an objective concept, but as a virtue that depends on its embodiment in an individual and among individuals in a community. The audience interpellated as the inclusive “we” of the penultimate line defines troupe multifariously through its communal association and anticipated action: “ethical” troupe of loyalty and co-operation, “legal” troupe in pursuing justice, and “spiritual” troupe in recognizing its spiritual heritage and seeking to restore the absolute dominion of God.

The allegory interpellates the audience into an ideological formation as well as an ontological one. The feudal metaphor extends to define troupe as a value completely extraneous to its semantic significance: it associates troupe with the English nation. The land of Troupe's expatriation is specified as England, and the psychomachia between Troupe and Falsehede is inflected as a specific armed struggle: the Hundred Years' War. This final facet of the allegory derives from the fact that the feudal structure defined international relations, and that a dispute over international feudal rights led to the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War. The feudal system defined international political associations as well as local ones: since homage was owed by anyone who held tenure of a fief (a grant of land) to the lord of that land, the leaders of territories that had been conquered were obliged to pay homage to the conqueror.

The main cause of the Hundred Years' War was a territorial and dynastic dispute.<sup>51</sup> Henry II and his sons once controlled an enormous continental empire. With the 1259 Treaty of Paris, however, Henry III was forced to renounce all lands but Aquitaine. He maintained Aquitaine as a duchy, and so was obliged to pay liege homage to the King of France (then Louis IX).

Skirmishes over territorial rights to Aquitaine were frequent in the later thirteenth and early fourteenth century, culminating in Philip VI's invasion of the land in 1337, under the claim that Edward III was harbouring Robert of Artois, an enemy of France. In retaliation, Edward III invaded France to win back his rights to the duchy, and thus the Hundred Years' War began.

By 1340, Edward had assumed the title King of France, and the war became more overtly a dynastic struggle rather than solely a territorial struggle. Edward claimed that he was heir to the throne through his mother, Isabelle, the daughter of Philip IV of France (1285-1314).

Isabelle had three older brothers, all of whom reigned successively: Louis X (1314-16), Philip V

(1316-22), and Charles IV (1322-8). Charles died without a son, and none of the other then-deceased brothers had a son to accede to the throne. In 1328, Edward III's government had asserted his right to the throne through his mother. The claim did not pass. Louis VI claimed the throne in 1328, and Edward's claim remained silent until Louis's invasion in 1337, after which Edward reasserted his right to the crown of France.

References to the Hundred Years' War, many of which draw out the political inflections of the feudal allegory, inflect the psychomachia of the poem. The imagined future return of Troupe to the domain legally his through heritage is figured as a moment of recapturing the dynasty that is entitled to the English nation.

The psychomachia between Troupe and Falsehede is presented, as traditionally, through war imagery. The imagery is introduced in stanza six:

Wolde we rule us al wiþ troupe,  
 And mak him hollych vr gouvernour,  
 We schulde keure out of synne & sloupe,  
 And of Chiualrye bere þe flour,  
 For troupe in were may most endour,  
 And euer is biggest at þe lest:  
 For godes loue graunt we him socour,  
 And mayntene troupe þat euer is best.       (41-8)

This stanza provides a fine example of the technique of semantic gliding so prevalent in this poem. Troupe is commended as an essential component of "Chiualrye." Initially the word denotes most readily "the ethical code of chivalry" (*MED* s.v. *chevalrie* n. 5.). The meaning of the word,

however, becomes increasingly materialized and specified in subsequent lines, as it takes on the sense “a body or host of armed mounted warriors or knights serving an overlord” (*MED* s.v. chevalrie n.1. (a)). The image thereby figures troupe as the best in battle. The image of Troupe as superior in military affairs, in “were” (war) (45), is enforced by the phrase “biggest at the lest.” “[L]est” (46) signifies “edges of combat area; sidelines of a battlefield” (*MED* s.v. list(e) n(2). 5. (b)).<sup>52</sup>

Battle imagery returns in the penultimate stanza:

And falshede & his lore weore lest,

Pei schulde not dure vn to a page

To werre with troupe þat euer is best. (62-4)

“[P]age” here denotes “a foot soldier, common soldier” (*MED* s.v. page n(1). 3. (b)). The syntax is somewhat obscuring, but the implication seems to be that even a “page,” who comprises the bottom eschalon of the military contingent, would not make any ground in warring with troupe. These battle metaphors concretize a psychomachia of the cosmic battle between troupe and falsehede.

That generality of a conflict of virtues, however, is specified and ideologically inflected through references to gains won by the English chivalry during the Hundred Years’ War:

Troupe was sum tyme here a lord,

Wiþ him alle vertues as I wene.

3it Spayne Brutayne wol bere record,

And oper diuerse londes be dene,

þat we endouwed hem as þei schulde bene

And made hem lordes to lyue in rest;

Per dorste no falshede with hem be sene,

So loued þei troupe þat euer is best. (49-56)

“Spayne” likely refers here to the victory of the English army, under the leadership of the Black Prince, at Najera (French “Navarrette”) in Castille in 1367. The reference to “Brutayne” is somewhat harder to pin down. Brittany was at this time a duchy of France, but frequently allied with England against France, since the Duke of Brittany, John IV, disputed his obligation to pay homage to the King of France. The English military held a strategic portion of Brittany, Brest castle, from 1342-97.<sup>53</sup> References to these two geographical locations therefore likely specify the war metaphor to England’s past successes in the Hundred Years’ War, and thereby inflect Troupe’s army as England’s armed force.<sup>54</sup> More generally, these references to the Hundred Years’ War define Troupe’s natural homeland as England.

In this light, the imagined future moment when Troupe will return from exile is presented as a moment of national supremacy. While the reference to the Hundred Years’ War suggests this nationalist equation, the equation is stated forthrightly through identifying that future moment as a time when “Al oþer londes schuld be ful fayn / To don vs feute and homage’ (59-60). The nationalist sentiments present elsewhere define that “vs” as citizens of England. The phrase is thus a technical way of stating that if Troupe rules here again (if people here abide in troupe), England will have lordship over all other lands.

Insofar as the audience is finally interpreted as a group about to hunt down Falsehede so that troupe can be restored to his rightful heritage, it is interpellated, however subtly, as a supporter of the Hundred Years’ War, determined to restore England to its position of national

dominance. In this regard, the casting of the audience serves a function that is extraneous to the manipulation of the dramatic scenario for heuristic and admonitory purposes. This nationalist inflection demonstrates how allegory that concretizes concepts through historical specificity often communicates something other than a concept, i.e., an ideological point of view. In this case, as so often, the concept reflects back to endorse the ideology: the absoluteness of Troupe legitimizes the Hundred Years' War. Indeed, the same critique could be applied to the use of the feudal metaphor to begin with, since the discourse also tends to sway opinion in a way different from that which I have tried to outline here: it endorses traditional feudal structures through associating them with troupe. It has not been my aim to make this kind of ideological critique here, though in the next chapter I will demonstrate how a fictional persona makes a similar semiotic critique. Rather, I have considered how the speaker, through defining his character as a man of troupe, hailing his heterogeneous audience into a cohesive community, and extracting a range of significances out of the feudal metaphor, uses the whole dramatic scenario to serve the heuristic purpose of clarifying the semantically complex meaning of troupe, and to persuade the audience to abide in it.

One final, disjointed, strand of this poem's multi-dimensional discursive strategy remains to be considered: its conscious use of rhetorical figures. Although the speaker does not seem to be interpellating the audience into an identity that is defined, in part, through its linguistic skills, as in "Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schente" and "Þat selden I seye is sone for 3ete", the poem does register a rhetorical consciousness. This consciousness presents itself as the rhetorical aspect of the battle between troupe and falsehede. The poem asserts the ability of figural language to represent truth, and it makes this claim with subtle references to Falsehede's degenerate rhetoric.

This assertion is made in the final two stanzas, but evidence supporting it is manifested in word-play used throughout the poem.

Stanza two contains the one overt pointer to the poem's rhetorical consciousness, as well as an instance of semantic density similar in form and topic to the shoren/overcoat metaphor of the poem in Oxford, Merton College, MS 248.

Troupe is best for kyng and kniht,  
 Certes hose rist wol rede,  
 Among þis ladyes feir and briht,  
 Hit schulde be loued in vch a leode.  
 Þis Marchauns worpli vnder wede,  
 To buyze & selle þei ben ful prest;  
 Among hem alle schuld no falskede,  
 But vsen troupe þat euere i best. (9-16)

Lines 9-10 imply that whoever is able to read "rist" will see that "troupe is best," and the stanza contains word-play which summons such careful reading. The second half of the stanza forwards, through puns, the potential deceit of business transactions through an ironic image of false clothing as disguise. Punning on "vnder wede" and "vsen" creates an image which encapsulates the stanza's message. The phonological form of the word that would rhyme with "rede," "leode," and "falskede" is *MED wēde* n(2). (a): "a garment, an article of clothing." "[V]nder wede" thus means "in clothing," and the phrase "worpli vnder wede" commonly meant "well dressed."<sup>55</sup> The phrase "vnder wede," without the modifying adverb, also bears the idiomatic sense "in a disguise, covertly, secretly" (*MED* s.v. *wēde* n(2). (e)). This equivocation between well-dressed and

disguised creates a tension in the characterization of the merchants; it ironically suggests that merchants are able to afford dressing themselves well because of their unlawful business dealings. In this mercantile context, and given the theme of “troupe,” it seems likely that a homograph is also intended with “wede.” The phrase may also be signifying as a compound noun meaning “security for a loan” (*MED* s.v. underwedde n.). The use of this compound noun is not frequently attested, however, and may not be operating so specifically here. “Wede” denoting “something temporarily held by or deposited with a creditor in order to ensure payment of a debt of fulfillment of an obligation” (*MED* s.v. wed n. 1.(a)), however, is frequently attested, and would augment the poem’s prevalent legal register. The phrase could easily be understood as “under pledge,” or even “under wager,” as a means of describing the merchant’s “troupe” in negotiations. When “wede” is read as wed, of course, it no longer rhymes with the other long *es*, but the speaker may well be signalling this in line 10. Moreover, in an oral performance the lack of rhyme with wed could very well have brought to the audience’s mind wēde, and thereby encouraged the audience to recognize the pun.<sup>56</sup>

The triple pun leaves the characterization of the merchants in an ambivalent state, with resonances being emitted referring to the merchant’s quality of truthfulness, in terms of pledge, of untruthfulness in terms of disguise, and a hint of excessive sumptuousness in apparel which suggests covetousness. The final two admonitory lines extend the moral and imagistic senses implied in “vnder wedde.” The exhortation to “vsen troupe” is, most obviously, a prod to be honest in business dealing. The verb “vsen,” however, also commonly signified “to wear (a garment, piece of jewellery, clothing, etc)” (*MED* s.v. ūsen v. 1b.).<sup>57</sup> This covert sense reflects back to enforce the previous senses of raiment implied in “vnder wedde.” The final phrase folds

back on the previous pun in a way that answers all three of its resonances: it specifically exhorts practising truth (i.e., abiding by one's pledge and not feigning), and characterizes those who practice troupe with the traditional metaphor of being robed in troupe.<sup>58</sup>

As well as using personification allegory to define Truth, then, the poet also employs dense and ontologically apt metaphors that drive to the heart of issues of troupe by linking them with contemporary situations. There is good evidence, moreover, that the speaker registers a consciousness about his use of rhetorical figures to communicate truth, and that he integrates this self-reflection into his rhetorical strategy. "Troupe" becomes suggestively associated with rhetorical finesse, so that the poem passes itself off as part of the proof that "troupe" is superior to falsehood. This self-consciousness is registered in the final two stanzas.

The self-consciousness of the penultimate stanza is more tenuous, but it is possible to read an identification of falsehood's "cunning" in the word "lest."

Baldelych þis dar I wage:

And falshede & his lore weore lest,

þei schulde not dure vn to a page

To werre with troupe þat euer is best. (61-4)

The thought is obscured here through semantic ambiguity and a somewhat incongruous development of a metaphor. "And" (65) could denote either "and" or "if." The latter is more likely, given that the clause is conditional. "[L]est" reads perhaps most logically as "least," but there is reason to believe that it may also signify "an instance of adroitness or cunning; a skill, an act; trick, stratagem" (*MED* s.v. *list(e)n*(1). (b)). One would expect the word to be spelt with an "i" rather than an "e," but the poem presents the same orthography in the word "lest," meaning

“liste” (46), which shows that the poet is willing to alter orthography and phonology to fit the rhyme with “best.” Moreover, the proximity to mention of falsehood’s “lore” prepares for such a reference to verbal cunning. The action “dure” in the next line makes any reading difficult, and may be evidence of the poet’s attempt to carry the metaphor of clothing throughout. It is possible to read these lines as stating that the verbal skill and cunning of false lore can never outdo troupe.

The final stanza would reinforce that reading, and extend the rhetorical battle.

Falshed may wel regne a while

þorw Meyntenaunce of couetise,

Atte last his grount wol him be gyle,

A while þou3 he be neuer so wyse.

Falshed hap ben most in pris,

Boþe bi North and eke bi west.

We schul him hunte as Cat doþ mys,

Whon troupe hym cheues þat euer is best. (65-72)

At least one, and upwards to four, puns are operative here. As mentioned previously, “grount” has been glossed as “ground” by Hunter and Brown.<sup>59</sup> G.V. Smithers’ revised edition of Brown’s work, however, acknowledges uncertainty and, in lieu of a gloss, prints “obscure” beside “grount” in the glossary.<sup>60</sup> Given the bestial imagery developed later on in the stanza, “grount” (67) likely also signifies as the noun form of the verb denoting “to grunt like an animal,” “to make a sound of complaint, fear” (*MED* s.v. *grunten* v. 1(a). 2.).<sup>61</sup> Falsehede is finally reduced to a beast, and the imagined audience, as an embodiment of Troupe, is cast as the one who hunts it

out “as Cat doth mys.” In certain respects, the aural sense of the pun supports its deployment here, for the “grount” of Falsehede can be read as sonic manifestation of its inferior rhetoric, signifying that his discourse lacks all eloquence, and hence all basis in troupe.

This scourge of Falsehood’s purported eloquence suggested in the pun on “grount” is likely strengthened through a pun on the second instance of the word “while,” in line 68. The “while” at line 65 signifies most obviously “a temporal interval” (*MED* s.v. whīle n. 1a. (a)). The “while” at line 68 can also be read as a pun with “wile,” meaning “a deception, a trick” (*MED* s.v. wīle n(1). 1. (a)), especially given the conceptual clustering achieved through its alliteration here with “wise” later in that line. The noun “wile” was sometimes spelt “while.”<sup>62</sup> Helge Kökeritz, moreover, notes that “initial *w* and *wh* had already coalesced in the colloquial language of the capital, in the SE Midlands and the South...consequently *while* and *wile* were homonyms” (946).<sup>63</sup> The orthography of the manuscript, and of other manuscripts produced in Worcestershire, also increases the likelihood that the “while” and “wile” were pronounced the same way. In *LALME*’s linguistic profile of the Vernon manuscript, for the test item “wh” (the letters corresponding to etymological modern English “wh-”) the form most frequently attested is “wh,” but “w” is also attested.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, in the Item Map for “while,” roughly one quarter of the manuscripts that represent Worcestershire include “wile” as either the main spelling or an alternate.<sup>65</sup> The pun on “while” in line 68 is also, moreover, supported by its lexical and thematic context: given the slight phonological shift necessary in “grount,” the presence of “wise” later in the line, and the use of punning elsewhere in the poem, it is reasonable to consider that the pun is intended.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the likelihood of more rather than less word-play is enhanced through the extravagance of the final allegorical hunt: its sheer virtuosity functions as a covert

claim to Troupe's having the rhetorical power to overcome Falsehede at his game of verbal manipulation. In its covert meaning as "wile," "while" at line 68 is not, as "while" at line 65 is, an adverb qualifying "reign": "while" (68) signifies in apposition to "grount."

Rhetorical self-consciousness contributes to the address's potential meaning, and it coheres with the speaker's admonishment to read "rist"; but it is not clearly programmed in a way that defines the implied audience, as it is in "Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schente" and "Þat selden I seye is sone for ȝete." The implied audience is defined by the multi-faceted feudal allegory with which it becomes identified in the last stanza. That allegory enriches the message of the text, and the message is actualized by the audience's recognition of its individual and social identity as the embodiment of anthropomorphous troupe reified in the light of theological Troupe. Considered from the phenomenological perspective that this dramatic oratorical address summons, "Troupe is Best" not only develops a semantic polyvalence of the the word "troupe," but also interpellates the audience into a correspondingly polyvalent identity. As in other dramatic oratorical addresses, this one manipulates its communicative scenario to serve a heuristic purpose.

That concludes the discussion of dramatic oratorical addresses among the Vernon refrain lyrics. The three Vernon refrain lyrics to be discussed in the next three chapters may well have been recited aloud, but their live performance would not have involved the same kind of transfiguration of the communicative scenario. Their speakers may still be defined as characters, but meditative or reflective ones. They are defined in relation to the text they report, either the inner, focal text, or the poem itself. In being defined in relation to those texts, the speakers help

to define the meanings of those texts. Although the poems do not directly interpellate their implied audiences, the audiences play the interpretative role of concretizing the potential meaning of the poems by apprehending their multi-dimensional discursive structures.

## Notes to Chapter Four

1. The account of the word "troupe" in this paragraph (except for the discussion of *veritas vitae*) is indebted to Richard Firth Green's "semantic history" of the word, found in his *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999), pp. 8-31. The main goal of Richard Firth Green's thorough delineation of the word "troupe" is to trace the impingement of the scientific senses of the word onto the ethical and legal ones, and the anxieties over the ramifications of that impingement as they are registered in legal and literary texts of the time. In the process of doing so, he provides a meticulous account of the meaning of the word in medieval England, from Anglo-Saxon times up to the fifteenth century.
2. The phrase "anthropomorphous truth" was coined by Aron Gurevich (*Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. G.L. Campbell [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985], p. 178), and much elaborated by Richard Firth Green (Green refers directly to Gurevich on page 36 of *A Crisis*).
3. Richard Firth Green has pointed out how John Ball's letters are indebted to the lyrics, and has considered the theoretical implications of this indebtedness ("John Ball's Letters: Literary History and Historical Literature," in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Contexts*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt [Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992], pp. 176-200).
4. Important English lyrics of complaint from London, British Library, MS Harley 2253 include "Song of the Husbandman" (*IMEV Suppl.* 1320.5), "Against the Pride of Ladies" (*IMEV* 1974), and "A Satire on the Consistory Courts" (*IMEV* 2287). They are edited in *Political Songs*, ed. Wright, pp. 149-52, 153-55, 155-59 respectively. (A more recent edition of these poems appears in *Alliterative Poetry in the Later Middle Ages: an Anthology*, ed. Thorlac Turville-Petre [Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1989], but I have been unable to consult it.) The idiom of these poems is more literary and specific, and thus very different from other complaint lyrics associated with preaching material.
5. Siegfried Wenzel has provided valuable discussions of lyrics in the context of preaching material (*Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986]).
6. A discussion of the origin and variety of this type of "Twelve Abuses" complaint (Type A) can be found in Wenzel, *Preachers*, pp. 176-82.
7. Quoted from Wenzel, *Preachers*, p. 183.
8. The poem is cited from Wright's *Reliquiae Antiquae: Scraps from Ancient Manuscripts, Illustrating Chiefly Early English Literature and the English Language*, Vol. 2 [London: William Pickering, 1843, repr. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966], p. 121). Wright edits the poem from London, British Library, MS Harley 2316, an early fourteenth-century manuscript. Wenzel discusses the poem, and lists five variants (*Preachers*, pp. 191-3). He points out that the nature of the variations among the six indicate that they are not individual translations of the Latin, but influenced by oral transmission. The Latin is as follows:

Heu, plebs conqueritur, quia raro fides reperitur,  
Lex viris [var. iuris] moritur, fraus vincit, amor sepelitur. (*Preachers*, p. 191)

9. Following the three poems to be considered here are one macaronic couplet (printed in *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, p. 259), a Latin couplet (which Brown and Smithers do not mention in their notes), and a fourth Middle English poem, “hallas! Men planys of litel trwthe” (*IMEV* 2145) (printed in *Religious Lyrics* immediately following “y thinge al day” (*IMEV* 1373), p. 54).
10. I employ the distinction between “dramatic allegory” and “diagrammatic allegory” as it has been drawn by Elizabeth Salter, “Introduction,” *Piers Plowman: Selections from the C-text*, ed. Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall (York: York Medieval Texts, 1967), pp.10-16.
11. *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, p. 54. Brown does not print “Falsenes I vnderstande” (*IMEV* 760) as a separate poem, as it is in the manuscript, with the marginal title “de falce” (or “de falte”).
12. “Be wor bertyr” is perhaps the most difficult point in the poem. Brown emended it to “me wor bettyr.” I think this is the general sense. “Be wor” may present a protracted subjunctive case, and “bertyr” may well be a scribal error.
13. Margaret Laing, “A Fourteenth-Century Sermon on the Number Seven in Merton College, Oxford, MS 248,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 98.2 (1997), pp. 99-117.
14. Laing, “A Fourteenth-Century,” p. 102.
15. Laing, “A Fourteenth-Century,” p. 102.
16. Little critical discussion of the complaint lyrics from the Merton manuscript exists. Siegfried Wenzel briefly compares the punning in the second poem with the much more popular “Erþe toc of erþe” (*Preachers, Poets*, p.133).
17. *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, p. 54.
18. The previous obscurity of the metaphor in this poem can be attributed, in part, to the commonplace skewing that results from modern interpretations of law French. William Rothwell has recently exposed how an ignorance of law French can mar our understanding of medieval law. One example of misleading translation is rendering Anglo-Norman “tort et force” as “tort and force”:
 

If the reader’s Anglo-French does not reach to an understanding of the medieval meaning of items such as *defend*, *tort* or *mette sur* found in the original text, he will be not a whit wiser on reading them ‘translated’ into ‘English’ as ‘defendeth,’ ‘tort,’ and ‘surmiseth.’ Any English speaker today who is untrained in the specialized language of the law would inevitably attach to these terms meanings at variance with the sense intended in the original Anglo-French.”

(“The Problem of Law French,” *French Studies* 46.3 (1992), p. 266).

19. *Brevia Placitata*, ed. G.J. Turner (London: Selden Society, 1951). I am grateful to Dr. Paul Brand for helping to explain how this legal formula was used.

20. Richard Firth Green demonstrates how “trouth” was the basis of medieval law throughout *A Crisis in Truth*. For his description of proof by compurgation, to which this paragraph is indebted, see pp. 100-106. Green points out that proof by compurgation was used in Chaucer’s day and beyond (*A Crisis*, pp.104-6).

21. Green, *A Crisis*, p. 101.

22. Evidence that “owth” (II.3) is not a scribal slip is found in the orthography of another text for which this scribe was responsible: “The Sermon on the Number Seven,” whose language Margaret Laing has examined. Laing notes that in some places “-ow” represents OF -ou, as in “lecchow” for “lecher,” and “powre” for “poor”; and in some places “-ow” represents a French *o* sound, as in “regowche” (MdE “rejoice”) (“A Fourteenth-Century,” p. 121).

23. The rhetorical device used here is similar to the creation of a character named “Nemo”: ‘Nowth,’ while it should denote an lack of substance, comes to be something that is palpable and subject to thought: “of nowth I set al my thowth.”

24. Green, “John Ball’s,” p. 189.

25. Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), p. 138. The objective identification of Ball’s followers as the embodiment of “trouthe” can also be inferred from chronicle reports, which, as Richard Firth Green notes, record how Ball’s followers identified themselves as “the trew communes” (*A Crisis*, p. 6). See, for example, the following excerpt from *Anonimalle Chronicle*, quoted by Green (*A Crisis*, p. 6): “Et les ditz comunnes avoient entre eux une wache worde en Engleis, ‘With whom haldes yow?’ et le respouns fuist, ‘Wyth kynge Richarde and wyth the trew communes.’”

26. The letters’ reliance on the idiom of the Psalms has been pointed out by Steven Justice (*Writing and Rebellion*, pp.73-4). The identification of troupe as God is evident in a letter attributed to John Ball in Knighton’s *Chronicle* (*IMEV* 1791): “Iohn Balle, Seynte Marye prist, gretez wele alle maner men, & byddest hem in þe name of þe Trinite, Fadur, and Sone, and Holy Gost, stonde manlyche togedyr in trowþe, and helpez trowþe, and trowþe schal helpe 3owe” (All quotes from the letters are from the edition by Green, “John Ball’s,” pp. 193-4). The reference to the future redemption through Christ is evident in two letters that contain a variation on the line “þe Kynges sone of heuene schal paye for al” (“Iohan þe Mullere” [*IMEV* 1796], line 2; and “Jakke Mylner” [*IMEV* 1654], line 4).

27. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, p. 74.

28. The Simeon version of the sentence still involves the speaker in a performative statement, but one that is less closely tied to his personal "troupe." The noun "wage" means "a pledge, guarantee, surety" (*MED* s.v. *wāge* n.1. (a)). The sense conveyed is that the speaker dares to wager something other than himself.
29. See, equally as important, the frequency of "vs" and "vr" (7, 25, 41, 42, 60)
30. In the ceremony of homage, the vassal placed his hands inside the hands of the lord and swore to be faithful to him. Bracton states that the vassal is to say the following words in the ceremony: "I become your man with respect to the tenement which I hold of you...and I will bear you fealty in life and limb and earthly honour...and I will bear you fealty against all men...saving the faith owed the lord king and his heirs" (Henri de Bracton, *De legibus et consuetudinibus Anglica*, ed. George Woodbine and trans. S.E. Thorne [Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1968-77], Vol. 2, p. 232, qtd from Green, *A Crisis*, p. 157).
31. This account of the change from homage to indenture is taken from Richard Firth Green (*A Crisis*, pp. 154-64).
32. The term 'bastard feudalism' is a contentious one. It was coined by the Victorian historian Charles Plummer, but given its currency through a classic study by K.B. McFarlane ("Bastard Feudalism." *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 20 [1943/45] : 161-80). McFarlane defines bastard feudalism as a relationship involving a contract—the indenture—in which the exchange of cash succeeded the exchange of land. He associated the rise of 'bastard feudalism' with the need for Edward III to raise a large army for his military campaigns in the 1340s and after. J.M.W. Bean, however, recently argues for a dismissal of the term "bastard feudalism" because he finds that even in relationships based on the cash nexus, the social unit of a lord and retainers continued to exist (*From Lord to Patron: Lordship in Late Medieval England* [Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989]). Bean finds a continuity of the concept of 'lordship' from Anglo-Saxon times through to the early modern period. For Bean, the marked change in late medieval England was that lords became patrons; that is, with the increase in centralized bureaucracy, they became able to wield power on behalf of their retainers. I retain the term "bastard feudalism" because I see that the primary characteristic of feudalism is the verbal oath, and 'bastard feudalism' denotes associations between a lord and his retainers which, sealed through indentures, lack "trouplight." In doing so I follow, among others', Richard Firth Green's account of developments in social structures in late medieval England (*A Crisis*, pp. 154-64).
33. I use the term "nonfeudal relations" to mean relations that are not sealed through an oath.
34. Green, *A Crisis*, p. 157.
35. Good accounts of the causes of factional crime in the fourteenth century are provided by John Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: U of Toronto P), 1973, pp. 1-36; and, with a greater focus on the disturbance wrought in courts of

law, Percy Henry Winfield, *The History of Conspiracy and Abuse of Legal Procedure* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1921), pp. 131-60.

36. Bellamy, *Crime*, p. 2.

37. Paul Strohm mentions two statutes of 1377 that complain of maintenance, livery, and other forms of illegal association (*Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992], p. 181, fn. 2). Strohm itemizes some of the illegal forms of association prevalent at the time: "covinage, or conspiracy to oppress neighbors by force; maintenance, or connivance in joint legal pleading; champerty, or the instigation of legal pleas; improper swearing and oath-taking to bind the fortunes of a single group; and nontraditional retaining, especially through the use of livery or emblematic apparel to secure and advertise short-term alliances for mutual profit." (*Hochon's*, p. 57)

38. This portion of *The Westminster Chronicle* is written in French. I quote from the English translation provided in Hector and Harvey's edition (*The Westminster Chronicle, 1381-1394*, ed. L.C. Hector and Barbara Harvey [Oxford: Clarendon P, 1966], p. 359). I was led to *The Westminster Chronicle* by Paul Strohm's discussion of this excerpt (*Hochon's Arrow*, p. 60). *MED* provides the following definitions of maintenance: "wrongful or officious interference in others' law suits, especially by a lord or his followers trading on his political influence," "abetting a wrong or wrong-doer" (*MED* s.v. maintenance n. 1(a), 2(b)).

39. Anna P. Baldwin, *The Theme of Government in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 39-49.

40. Much of this paragraph on the Christian concept of heritage is indebted to J. Harvey, "Inheritance (In the Bible)," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), Vol. 7, pp. 515-17.

41. "A Ihesu, þi swetnes wha may it se" is printed in *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, pp. 61-5. The poem survives in fifteen manuscripts, complete or fragmentary. Brown prints the earliest witness, in MS. Rawlinson.Poet.175. For other references to Christian heritage in lyric poetry, see "Lullay, lullay, litel child," lines 11-12 (*Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, pp. 80-1).

42. Pamela Gradon, "Langland and the Ideology of Dissent," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 1980 (66), p. 186.

43. It is important to stress the popularity of the theme of God's absolute dominion when considering the poem in the Vernon manuscript, since the manuscript is often defined as staunchly orthodox, even anti-Lollard. See, for instance, Thorlac Turville-Petre, "The Relationship of the Vernon and Clopton Manuscripts," in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 43-4; and Norman Blake, "Vernon Manuscript: Content and Organization," in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 58-9. If the manuscript can be thought of as a textual force against Lollard heresy, as I too think it can, the presence of *Piers Plowman* and of "Troupe is Best" suggests that certain

reforming tendencies were relatively universal and non-partisan at the time the manuscript was compiled.

44. Gradon, "Langland," p. 186. Gradon refers to Gwynn, pp. 59-73.

45. R.L. Poole, "Preface," *John Wyclif. Tractatus de Civili Dominio. Liber Primus* (London: Trübner & Co., 1885), p. xxii.

46. "Of Dominion" exists solely in Dublin, Trinity College, MS. C.III.12. It is edited in *The English Works of John Wyclif*, ed. F.D. Matthew, *EETS* os 74 (London, 1880), pp. 282-93. The title may not be original. Matthew notes "Dr. Shirley retains Bale's title of this tract *De Dominio Divino*" while saying "it is certainly erroneous," p. 282. The quote is from page 284.

47. Anne Hudson, "A Lollard Sect Vocabulary?," in *So meny people, langages and tonges*, ed. M. Benskin and M.L. Samuels (Edinburgh: Middle English Dialect Project, 1981), pp. 21-2.

48. *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, p. 299.

49. *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, p. 299.

50. The denotation of "cheues" as swearing allegiance is found, with overt nationalistic overtones, in the final verse of a fifteenth-century poem on the Siege of Calais:

O oonly god, in whom is all,  
Save Calais the tovn riall,  
That euer is mot wel cheve  
Vnto the crown of England (163-6)

The poem is printed in *Historical Poems*, ed. Robbins, p. 83.

51. A good account of the start of the Hundred Years' War is provided by Christopher Allmand, *The Hundred Years' War: England and France at War c. 1300-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988).

52. Note that "lest" at line 62, which appears identical to "lest" at line 46, does not signify as a noun. It may denote "last" or "least."

53. Michael Jones, *Ducal Brittany, 1364-1399* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970), pp. 143-71.

54. It is worth pointing out that while the address stands as an implicit critique of the English chivalry, the call for the chivalry to abide by 'troupe' is likely not a call to return to older forms of feudal military service. By the 1380s national armies were formed almost exclusively through indentures, and had been increasingly formed as such for some time. The use of indentured retinues increased from the 1340s onwards, when Edward III needed to raise large armies to fight abroad. The King would make contracts with powerful commanders in the land, requiring them to supply him with an army. Those lords, in turn, would appoint deputies to round up a group of retainers, so that the commander might fulfill his contract with the King. It is highly unlikely,

then, that the association of previous military success with “Troupe,” given the resonances of feudalism associated with “Troupe” in general and in this poem in particular, is a call to older forms of feudal service, unless we are able to associate it with the summons of the English feudal levy issued on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of June, 1385, to send an army to Scotland. This summons, which called out all men who owed military service through feudal obligation, was the last one in England, and the first one since 1327 (N.B. Lewis, “The Last Medieval Summons of the English Feudal Levy, 13 June 1385,” *The English Historical Review* 73 [1958], p. 1. [This footnote is indebted to Lewis’s article.]). Rather, the allegory speaks in general terms about the need for the virtue Troupe, even in relationships based on the more individualistic and temporary forms of indenture.

55. The *MED* does not include the collocation “worþli vnder wede” as meaning well-dressed, but see *OED* s.v. *weed* sb(2), 2.(b): “In the expletive phrase ‘in’ or ‘under weed,’ usually appended to an adj. worth(l)i (i.e. well dressed).” Examples listed in *OED* include fourteenth-century romances.

56. This pun, then, would operate in the way the pun on “while/wheel” operates, given the proximity of the word “whyte” to Fortune, at the beginning of Book 4 of *Troilus and Criseyde*, as noted by Paull Baum and cited in Chapter One of this dissertation (fn. 65).

57. See, for example, the use of the word by John Trevisa, who was writing close to the time and place of the Vernon manuscript’s composition: “I moot use wyde hosen and schon” (*Polychronicon: Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Joseph Ransom Lumby and Churchill Babington [s.l. Kraus Reprint, 1904], vol. 4, p. 301).

58. The cloth metaphor may have an additional significance in the context of the reference to maintenance: it may allude to the practice of livery. Livery was the granting of badges or clothing by a lord to members of his retinue. It provided a means of identifying members of a retinue, but also of flaunting a lord’s power. Paul Strohm provides an overview of the practice in his appendix “The Literature of Livery,” (*Hochon’s*, pp. 179-85), wherein he cites the following verse (on page 180):

Nou beth capel-claweres with shome to-shrude [clothed];  
hue bosketh huem wyth botouns, ase hit were a brude,  
with lowe lacede shon of an hayfre hude [heifer’s hide],  
hue pyketh [choose] of here prouendre al huere prude. (25-8)

Strohm is quoting from *Historical Poems*, ed. R.H. Robbins, pp. 27-8.

59. Hunter, “The Vernon Lyrics,” p. 327; *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, p. 313.

60. *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, p. 315.

61. Although the *MED* lists many instances of the verb ‘grunten,’ it does not list the noun form. *OED* lists the first instance, in the sense of ‘groan,’ at 1553, and in the sense of a bestial grunt at

1615 (*OED* s.v. grunt n.)

62. *MED* lists two instances where “wile” is spelt with an initial “wh.”

63. Kökeritz, “Rhetorical,” p. 946. Kökeritz notes two examples of the homonym rhyme with “while” and “wile” in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*: bigyle:while:wyle (I.716-9), whyle: begyle: be wyle (II. 268-71). In identifying these last two rhymes as a case of *admoninatio* (the repetition of a word and its derivatives), he presumes that “wile” does derive from OF “guile.”

64. *LALME*, Linguistic Profile 7670, Vol. 3, p. 555

65. *LALME*, Item Map 41(2), Vol. 2, p. 178. Statistics for the Vernon map are not recorded for this item.

66. There is also, of course, the possibility that the word was originally ‘wile’ but changed to ‘while’ before it was inscribed in the Vernon manuscript.

## Chapter Five

### Functions of the Bird Episode in “Mercy Passeþ alle þinge”

In “Mercy Passeþ alle þinge” a *chanson d’aventure* frames the poem, comprising the matter of the first two and the last two stanzas. The narrator recounts how he, in a decidedly wild land, witnessed a Merlyon capture a smaller bird, and carry it to a tree where she held it all night before finally letting it fly away “on þe morwe” (20). The importance of this account to the theme of the poem lies primarily in its function as a sign, that is, as an image that represents something else. The sign signifies in different ways, and altogether these facilitate the exploration of the concept of “mercy” from different angles and help to persuade the audience to be merciful for different reasons. As a literary function, the sign serves a formal purpose through the way its signification is refracted variously throughout the poem. This literary function is achieved through the sign’s status as an uninflected, raw image, and as an image resonating with interpretations it had received elsewhere: in romances, natural histories, didactic works, and falconry treatises. The rhetorical function of the sign, however, extends beyond its formal purpose as a means of communicating indirectly, in a poetic fashion. The resonances that the image accrue through the textual tradition also emit ideological timbres, particularly the beliefs that mercy is a virtue innate in all humans and most innate to the noble class. These ideological inflections are exposed when the narrator questions why the Merlyon behaves the way it does. His questioning points out how the image signifies as a cultural sign, a sign whose meaning is determined by the nexus of social codes within which it is inscribed, even though it is passed off as natural. The ideological inflections of the sign having been exposed, the rhetorical arguments of the poem are interrogated in a way that demonstrates the narrator’s intellectual honesty and so gives greater

conviction to his assertion of human's dependance on God's mercy. The framing *chanson d'aventure* image, as a multi-faceted sign that effects the poem's multivalent discursive structure, is integral to the poem's theme and to its rhetorical art.

In the economy of the poem, the sign signifies, through analogy, the virtue mercy. Mercy was theologically defined as the "compassionate sorrow for another person's misfortune along with a will and effort to alleviate that misfortune."<sup>1</sup> Identification with the suffering person is a key aspect of mercy, as Thomas Aquinas writes: "a defect is always the reason for taking pity, either because one looks upon another's defect as one's own, through being united to him by love, or on account of the possibility of suffering in the same way."<sup>2</sup> This identification ideally exists on a spiritual rather than a purely emotional level. Mercy springs from a desire to love God and be united with him. For this reason mercy falls under the purview of the greater virtue, charity, which controls the emotion. Human mercy is also understood as a reflection of divine mercy, as demonstrated through Christ, the source of merciful love.

Although the poem attempts a discursive report of this complex understanding of mercy, it communicates it most effectively through poetic indirection. The most effective method of indirection is the inflection of the initial sign, the *chanson d'aventure* scenario, onto other scenarios in the poem. That inflection is accomplished through both parallel imagery and the transposition of the voice speaking the refrain: images and voices of successive stanzas adhere to one another in a way that circuitously conveys theological truths of mercy and works to persuade the audience to be merciful towards fellow humans and to call on God's mercy.

The voice of the little bird in the presence of the Merlyon is an integral aspect of the sign in its literary function. The first two instances of the refrain are attributed to the voice of the little

bird. First, while the bird is still in the grip of the Merlyon, the narrator imagines what it would say: “Hit coupe not speke but þus hit mente / How Merci passeþ alle þinge” (11-12). After the bird has been released the narrator reports its song, now apparently audible in the real world:

Ful stille I stod my self al on  
 To herken hou þat Brid gan synge:  
 “A wey wol wende boþe Murþe and moon,  
 And Merci passeþ alle þinge.” (21-4)

The subsequent transposition of the refrain to other voices serves as a pivotal means of presenting parallels among different scenarios. The different speakers who voice the refrain become identified through their similar utterance, and that very identification represents a theological understanding of mercy. Moreover, the image of the bird in the “tree” is transposed in ways that enforce that identification.

As the poem continues, Christ’s suffering is forwarded in a way that shows immediate implications for the role of the audience within the Divine and moral economy of mercy, and those implications are enforced through parallels with the bird scenario. Christ’s suffering is presented as an on-going and thus immediately present condition. This perpetuity is conveyed most dramatically when His voice moves from past to present tense and the poem modulates into the traditional “*Homo vide*” or “*O vos omnes*” lyrics, in which Christ speaks from the Cross and calls the audience to imagine themselves standing before Him:<sup>3</sup>

“Lift vp þin eise and þou maist se  
 Mi woundes wete blodi al bare  
 As I was rauzt on Roode tre.” (62-4)

This call to present imagining is only temporary, and the poem immediately returns to the past tense. “Þou seze me for defaute forfare / In seknes and in pouerte” (65-6). But the evoked drama is long enough to create a vivid image of Christ and to summon the audience into an immediate imaginative experience of His suffering. The stanza ends with the refrain voiced by Christ: “And tolde þe hou þat charite / And Merci passeþ alle þing” (71-2). The attribution of the refrain words to Christ at a moment when He has been cast as the perpetual sufferer serves to identify Him with the smaller bird caught in the claws of the Merlyon. This identification is made all the more overt by the parallel imagery of the two episodes. Christ refers to Himself as “rau3t on Roode tre.” The extension of the image “Roode” to the more figurative “tre” recalls the image earlier in the poem of the Merlyon which, clutching the little bird in its feet, “fleiz in to a treo anon.” The bird suffering in the tree is an analogy for Christ suffering on the cross.

The contextualizing of the “*Homo vide*” moment with the subsequent account of the Seven Deeds of Corporal Mercy also compounds the cluster of aspects of mercy that together comprise the complexity of the virtue. The dramatic effect of the “*Homo vide*” lyrics, as it is evoked in this poem, is to cast the audience into the role of those responsible for Christ’s suffering, similar to the audience involvement in the Crucifixion plays.<sup>4</sup> In the context of this poem especially, the direct appeal allows the audience to grasp experientially what they believed to be truths about human and divine mercy, and the intersection of the two. The present audience is cast as an analogy of the Merlyon holding the suffering bird in a tree: Christ’s suffering is caused by humanity’s sinfulness. Moreover, Christ’s words stress that He acted out of mercy in entering into humanity to alleviate human sinfulness (43-4; 49-10). At the same time as Christ presents himself as the one suffering to alleviate our sins, He presents himself as one who, in His

humanity, is in need of mercy. Through intermingling this “*Homo vide*” section with the biblical account of the Seven Deeds of Corporal Mercy, the poem conveys a theological ground for human mercy. While the “*Homo vide*” pose asks the audience to behold Jesus’s suffering and to reflect on how they cause that suffering, the imbeddedness of the pose within Jesus’s retelling of His biblical account of corporal mercy identifies His Passion, and Himself, with all indigent people in need of mercy (97-100).<sup>5</sup> Through this identification, the audience summoned to witness in the “*Homo vide*” section is cast into the role of those responsible not only for Christ’s perpetual suffering, but for the suffering of indigent fellow humans. This transposition leaves the audience with an instinctive grasp of the theological basis for mercy, of the fact that each human, made in the image of God, is sacred, so that in mercifully loving any person one is loving God Himself: mercy extends beyond the emotion of compassion to find its proper place in charity.

The refrain is transposed into one more context in the final lines of the poem in a way that brings the audience to identify with the suffering variously depicted. After recapitulating the Deeds of Corporeal Mercy the narrator moves on to general moralizing, evoking the imminence of death (109-16), appealing to the essential quality of humans to love and fear God (121-32), and engaging the evils of the age *topos* (133-68), until it finally returns to the *chanson d’aventure* material in the final two stanzas. After admitting his own limits to understanding, the narrator addresses a prayer to God for mercy, a prayer that ends with a vision of the collective audience voicing the refrain:

Whon heo hedde holden so al niht,

On Morwe heo let hit gon a way.

Wheþer gentrie taust hire so or noust,

I con not telle 3ou in good fay,  
 But God, as þou art ful of mist,  
 Þous we plese þe not to pay,  
 Graunt vs repentaunce and respist,  
 And schrift and hosel or we day.  
 As þou art God and mon verray,  
 Þou beo vr help at vre endyng,  
 Bi fore þi face þat we mai sai,

“Now Merci passeþ alle þinge.” (181-192)

With the initial episode having been recalled to mind, the audience’s imagined voicing of the refrain is impressed as a parallel to the voice of the smaller bird after having been saved through the mercy of the more powerful Merlyon. The initial image is thus effectively transposed in a way that assists the audience in imagining their helplessness and the consequent need for God’s mercy. This need has been convincingly forwarded through repeated references to the fact that through “Riht” (justice), humans should be condemned (37-40; 85-8). The closure not only asserts the tenet that “The merciful shall receive mercy” (Matt.5.7), but also reasserts the imperative, already made evident through the voice of Jesus, that God’s mercy ought to be a model for human conduct.

In summary, through overlaying the voices speaking the refrain and modulating the initial image of the bird captured in a “tree” the poem conveys a theological understanding of mercy. That is, mercy involves identification for the one suffering and a will to alleviate that suffering, and the will is moved by a love of God in addition to an emotional response of pity. The

signification of the initial episode is enhanced as it becomes transposed so that parallel episodes adhere in a kind of palimpsest art.

As well as serving as an analogy for mercy, the episode functions as a sign of the ordained order of nature. In the Middle Ages, the natural world was widely viewed as a clear image of God's divine plan and of moral law. The analogy between nature and morality is based on a belief in natural law. In the Thomistic formulation of natural law, all creatures but man, and all inanimate matter, obey the eternal law of God in their very being. Humans, however, can disobey it because they have choice. When humans disobey that law they violate their nature.<sup>6</sup> Discourses moralizing the action of creatures in the Middle Ages—including bestiaries and natural histories—rested on the assumption that the natural world provided a model for Christian morality. For example, what was likely the most important natural history in later medieval England, Bartholomaeus Anglicus' encyclopedia *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, avers that all creatures obey God's will when they act according to their nature.<sup>7</sup>

The Merlyon's behaviour is described throughout as its fulfilment of the eternal law, and it is thus overtly forwarded as an analogy for the naturalness of merciful behaviour within humans. The instinctiveness of the Merlyon's actions is asserted in the beginning and at the end of the poem:

Heo dude after þe cours of kynde,  
 And fleiz in to a treo anon.  
 Þorw kuynde þe Brid gan Merci fynde,  
 For on þe morwe heo let hit gon. (17-20)

And þis men knowen wel I nouh,  
 For Merlyons feet ben colde,  
 Hit is heor kynde on Bank and bouh  
 A quik Brid to hauen and holde. (173-6)

As a signifier of the “course of kynde,” the scenario serves as an analogy for what the narrator interprets as the natural behaviour of humans:

To god and mon weore holden meste  
 To loue and his wrappe eschuwe,  
 Now is non so vnkuynde a beeste  
 Pat lasse doþ þat weore him duwe; 124  
 For Beestes and foules, more & leeste,  
 Þe cours of kynde alle þei suwe,  
 And whonne we breken Godes heste  
 Aþeynes kuynde we ben vn trewe; 128  
 For kuynde wolde þat we him knewe,  
 And dradde him most in vre doing:  
 Hit is no riht þat he vs rewe,  
 But Merci passeþ alle þing. 132

Breaking the moral law –“Godes heste”–is presented as a violation of one’s nature. That, at least, is the fundamental lesson of the analogy; but when the narrator later registers his uncertainty over whether the Merlyon was “taust” (183) he inflects the status of the natural as a guide to and embodiment of the good.

So far I have been considering how the scenario signifies based on the interpretations offered within the structure of the poem: as a sign of mercy, and as a sign of what is natural. The scenario also signifies through the resonances it emits from its use within a larger textual tradition. Those resonances summon certain cultural and literary assumptions and expectations from the audience, and thereby enrich and extend the meaning and the persuasive effect of the image in the poem. Some resonances silently support the rhetorical argument. Others are interrogated by the narrator in a moment when he doubles back on the image and problematizes its signifying status. In order to identify the possible texts whose treatment of the bird image may be impacting on the rhetorical effect of its use in the poem, an attempt should be made to identify the implied audience of the poem. Other semantic elements in the poem assist in audience identification, particularly the words ‘courtesy’ and ‘lustiness,’ both of which refer to specifically courtly values.

In the section decrying the ‘evil of the times,’ the standard lament about the decay of morals is, at moments, specified as a lament of the decay of courtly values. The narrator mourns the lack of ‘corteis knihthod’ (157) and ‘gentyll cortesy’ (161). The valence of “courtesy” is potentially large. In works by the *Pearl*-poet it extends to denote God’s grace, under the assumption that the courtly ethos is a reflection of the community of heaven. This theological sense of courtesy may be resounding covertly in this poem, especially given the underlying analogy being made between God and man: “I made þe Mon 3if þat þou minne / Of feture lich myn owne fasoun” (42-3). Apart from analogies, however, “courtesy” was a virtue firmly associated with the court, and it was cultivated and recognized as such. For example, the attribution of courtesy as a courtly quality is apparent in the way it is expected of the Knight in *Piers Plowman*: “Hit bicometh to the, knyhte, to be corteys and hende.”<sup>8</sup> ‘Courteous’ behaviour

was proper outward behaviour which was believed to be a sign of inner worth. It was therefore cultivated as a courtly code of conduct. Children of noble families were taught courtesy, through the educational practice of nurture which was assisted by Latin and vernacular courtesy literature.<sup>9</sup> There will be more to say shortly about the narrator's reflection on whether the waning of courtesy implies a lack of cultivation or of innate worth, but it suffices to say here that the honing of the evils of the times topic into a degeneration of courtesy presents a courtly way of perceiving the moral demise of society, and so indicates that the implied audience was courtly.

Another indication of an implied courtly audience is the fact that moral impoverishment is twice registered as a lack of 'lustiness':

Vnlustily vr lyf we lede,  
 Monhod and we twynne in two,  
 To heuen ne helle take we non hede,  
 But on day come a noþer go. (145-8)

Awei is gentyl cortesy,  
 And lustines his leue haþ take;  
 We loue so slouþe and harlotrie,  
 We slepe as swolle swyn in lake. (161-4)

"Lustiness" was an exclusively courtly virtue, denoting, positively "courtly joy, youthful happiness," "vigor, energy, strength, vitality" (*MED* s.v. lustines(se n. (a), (c))). Approbation for the quality is apparent in some courtly literature, such as Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*:  
 "there nas / Nat swich a famous knyght of gentillesse, / Of fredom, and of strengthe and

lustynesse" (1403-5). The quality was more often, however, frowned upon, in its particular denotation of "love of pleasure, voluptuousness" (*MED* s.v. lustines(*se n.* (e)). See, for instance, its negative connotation in the following passage from Chaucer's translation of *Roman de la Rose*: "Thou hast ...spent thy youthe in ydilnesse, / In waste and wofull lustynesse" (5116-8). Even in romances the quality could be condemned, but only in courtly literature was it ever approved of, usually, as in the *Legend of Good Women*, as a chivalric virtue. Indeed, in the Thornton version of the poem "lustines" (162) is replaced by "lightsomnes." "Lightsomnes," a much rarer word, signifies more unequivocally "gladness, joy; spiritual cheerfulness" (*MED* s.v. lightsōmnes(*se n.*(2) (b)). There is a possibility that the Thornton reading is more authorial, but, given the endorsement of the trait in the adjectival form at line 145, and the courtly register of the poem more generally, the Vernon/Simeon reading is most likely authorial. The Thornton variation may represent the work of a reader who disapproved of "lustiness," perhaps because by the mid-fifteenth century its negative connotations had increased. In its more original version, the poem's endorsement of 'lustiness' and the appeal to 'gentyll courtesy' align it with an implied courtly audience.

Such an audience would be sensitive to resonances emanating from the bird scenario as it was used in courtly literature.<sup>10</sup> Before delineating those sources, it is worth pointing out that in almost all cases the larger bird is identified as a "sparrowhawk" (French 'esprevier', Latin 'nisus'), not the merlin. Constance Heiatt notes that the identity of this bird as the merlin was common in England, though she provides only this poem as a Middle English instance.<sup>11</sup> This poet appears to be the first writer in English to attribute the behaviour to the merlin. The attribution to that particular species may be owing to the long tradition of allegorizing animals based on the

etymology of their names, a habit which evinces the influence of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*.<sup>12</sup> In accordance with this tradition, the merlin may be understood as having received its name from its merciful behaviour.

The tale of the sparrowhawk capturing a smaller bird and holding it all night until the morning in order to keep its feet from freezing was allegorized in courtly literature: the beloved is depicted as the sparrowhawk, and the lover as the smaller bird in its throes. The beloved is usually a female, as the Merlyon is in the poem, referred to as "heo" (17, 181, 182) and "hire" (10, 183). The most thorough allegorization is in Guillaume de Machaut's *Dit d'Alerion*, believed to have been written between 1342 and 1357.<sup>13</sup> In the *Dit*, the sparrowhawk is the first of four birds the narrator falls in love with. It eventually moults and leaves him, and before he passes on to his next love adventure he tells the tale to reveal "the truth about the sparrowhawk / in justice to her nobleness" (1277-8). In telling the tale (1285-1317), Guillaume adds that the sparrowhawk "treats [the captured bird] as gently as / she can" (1300-01). As well, after having released the little bird, the sparrowhawk recognizes it and guards it all day, because the small bird "served [the sparrowhawk] well / and justly earned the reward" (1336). The narrator then offers an allegory of the tale as an example of unwavering loyalty, a virtue so central to the courtly love ethos. The lady is likened to the sparrowhawk, and the little bird in its grip to the lover who "lies in terror of refusal" (1391) though sustained by hope. When the lady releases him she shows her love to him; then he flies up and they live together in "sweetest pleasure" (1414), "giving delight throughout their lives" (1428). The tale is interpreted in a way that supports the ethos of courtly love: the long-suffering of the lover is celebrated as a testimony to the truth and nobility of his love. In this case that faithful suffering is finally rewarded.

An audience acquainted with the court that Chaucer was privy to, or with some similar court in England, would likely have been familiar with Guillaume's *Dit*. Its influence is apparent in French and English writers in England. The most direct borrowing of the *Tale* as a whole is in Oton de Graunson's *Livre Messire Otes*, and, less directly, in his *Complainte amoureuse de Sainct Valentin*.<sup>14</sup> Oton, a Savoyard knight, served in England from 1369 until his death in 1397.<sup>15</sup> He is believed to have been an acquaintance of Chaucer, and Chaucer refers to him in *The Complainte of Venus* as "flour of hem that make in Fraunce" (82). The *Dit* also influenced Chaucer. Heatt points out that Chaucer appears to be the first writer in English to identify ladies as hawks and their lovers as falconers, and "the influence of the *Alerion* probably lies behind two sequences portraying falcons as courtly lovers in 'The Parliament of Fowls' and 'The Squire's Tale,'"<sup>16</sup> Chaucer's indebtedness to the *Dit* may, however, be more precise. One line from *Troilus and Criseyde* seems to be a direct echo of Guillaume's sparrowhawk allegory: moments before Troilus and Criseyde consummate their love, after Troilus has recovered from his swoon which had been induced by his belief that he has lost Criseyde, the narrator says: "What myghte or may the sely larke seye, / What that the sperhawk hath it in his foot?" (III.1191-2). The source for this allusion has been attributed to Boccaccio's *Filocolo* 2.165-6.<sup>17</sup> It seems, however, that Guillaume's sparrowhawk story is the likeliest echo here. The allusion comes at a moment when Troilus has just been granted the mercy of Criseyde.<sup>18</sup> Troilus, then, corresponds to the little bird suffering on account of Criseyde, because he is unsure of her love for him.<sup>19</sup> Insofar as the allusion to Guillaume's *Dit* is operating, it serves rhetorically to strengthen the comment on the themes of suffering and mercy in love.

An audience like Chaucer's may indeed have recognized an echo of the *Dit* in "Merci

passer alle pinge.” It suffices, however, to point out what can be said with more certainty: that any courtly audience would be familiar with the allegorization of birds in a context of courtly love which is apparent in the *Dit*, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and in all of the other courtly texts already mentioned. The familiarity with the tradition of ‘noble birds,’ however specific or broad, would affect the way an audience understood how the tale is signifying in “Mercy passer alle pinge.”

If the audience recognized that the capture and release demonstrate courtly love, then it would likely also recognize an inflection of the *chanson d’aventure* conventions. Here, as in other poems in the Vernon series, the poet converts this tradition to a religious theme, effectively ‘solemnizes’ it in a way that creates an undertone of courtly love as an analogy for divine love, by drawing out elements of the ‘Christ the Lover Knight’ tradition.<sup>20</sup> Here the traditional springtime encounter of a *chevalier* happening upon a distressed lover is transferred to a moralized animal world. For any courtly audience, this episode would have some resonance of a lover caught in the grips of a beloved; the bird’s cry for mercy would thereby correspond to the traditional cry of the forlorn beloved that the *chevalier* happens upon in *chanson d’aventure*. It is then the faithfulness of the little bird that earns its reward of mercy: although he lives in fear because he is unsure of the disposition of the beloved, after long-suffering he is rewarded. This courtly interpretation inflects all the refractions of that scenario throughout the poem. Finally, the suffering lover corresponds to the suffering Christian, to whom God finally shows mercy. The *chanson*’s amatory resonance, extracted largely through the bird scenario’s resonances from other texts, serves to convey the poem’s theme of charity under the aspect of amatory love.

In another vein of the tale’s extension, witnessed in three different texts, the sparrowhawk’s actions provide a direct model, indeed an inspiration, for generosity on the part of

those in positions of power, specifically of financial power.<sup>21</sup> *Ci nos dit*, a didactic treatise written in France around 1320, reports a social consequence of the sparrowhawk's exemplary merciful adventure: "Et pour ceste nobleice, quant li oiseleur portent oisiaus de proie pour vendre, il sont quites de touz trevers s'il portent un espevier"<sup>22</sup> [And for this nobleness, when falconers carry birds of prey for sale, if they carry a sparrowhawk they are released of all customs.] The mercy of the sparrowhawk indicates that nobility involves being generous to those under one's power.

This account is also told in Gace de la Buigne's *Le Roman des Deduis*, a treatise on falconry.<sup>23</sup>

Pour la grant noblesce de luy,  
 Il ne doit treü a nulluy,  
 Maiz a tous paages est quitte  
 Et les autres oyseaulx aquitte.  
 Si vous prie que nous oions  
 Les tres nobles condicions  
 De quoy nature a ennobli,  
 Sans qu'elle ait rein mis en oublie,  
 L'esprevier qui si seignourrie  
 Les nobles par sa courtoisie.<sup>24</sup> (6381-6390)

For the great noblesse of it / It does not demand tribute from anyone / But taxes are  
 exempted from all / And other birds freed from obligation / If you would like that we  
 watch / The very noble circumstances<sup>25</sup> / Of which nature has ennobled / Without which  
 she has nothing put in doubt / The sparrowhawk which governs (instructs) the nobles by its

courtesy.

Gace was the first chaplain of John le Bon, King of France, and accompanied him to his captivity in England in 1356. He remained in England until July 1359, when he was sent back to France. In his prologue to the *Roman*, Gace reports that he began writing the work at Hertford, England, in 1359. It is not known when he finished the work, though he died before 1384. The work was very popular, as attested by the large number of surviving manuscripts that have been reported by Blomqvist, the editor of *Le Roman*.<sup>26</sup> None, however, has a provenance in England, which makes it more difficult know if his work was known there. The fact that Gace was dwelling in England when he took up the work, however, suggests that some English audience would have shared the same cultural traditions.

Further evidence that an English courtly audience would have been familiar with the interpretation found in *Ci nos dit* and *Le Roman de Deduis* is given by the fact that it also appears in the first English falconry treatise, *The Boke of Saint Albans*:

Also as I sayde ye may call hir a spare hawke : for an oder cause. for and ther weer a shippe fraght full of hawkis . and no thyng ellis. And ther were a spare hawke among thaim ther shuld no custom be payd be cause of hir."<sup>27</sup>

Although this was written in the second half of the fifteenth century, the lore could have had a long tradition in England as well as France.

There is enough evidence to suggest that the tradition of interpreting the bird's actions in terms of social consequences would have been familiar to a courtly audience, and particularly to the implied audience of the Vernon poem. Indeed, the poem includes a hint of this social interpretation. Release from debt is integrated into one of the seven acts of mercy in a way that

demonstrates how the general teaching about the negligence of the strong towards the weak is specified as a critique of those in positions of financial power:

“Pou seze me ded aboue to graue,  
 On Bere seuen dayes and mo,  
 For luitel dette I ouste þe þo,  
 Pou forbed my burizing.” (79-82)

This critique would be strengthened by any resonance the framing episode would bear of its interpretation in regards to the customs owed by falconers.

The tale of the sparrowhawk also was allegorized in a courtly love tradition and interpreted as a real social model in a more didactic strain of writing; the assumption these two treatments share, however, indicates a more widespread cultural signification of the tale. Both the allegorization and the interpretation assert that the sparrowhawk’s action is a sign of its innate nobility. This social commentary was customary, and it also appears in one final genre of text that includes the tale: the natural history.<sup>28</sup> Thomas of Cantimpre tells the story, as do Albertus Magnus and Vincent of Beauvais.<sup>29</sup> Thomas explicitly identifies the bird with ‘nobility’:

*Nisus avis est nobilis, ut dicit Liberum rerum... Nisus in hyeme captam avem sub pedibus nocte tota vivam tenet propter frigus memorque, ut vulgus docuit, impensi beneficii mane captivam evolare premitit: memorabile exemplum et plane pium.*<sup>30</sup>

The sparrowhawk is a noble bird .... The sparrowhawk in winter holds a captured living bird under its feet for a whole night on account of the cold and, grateful, in order that it may teach the multitude [or “as the common people teach”], for its great service in the morning it allows the captive bird to fly away: a remarkable tale and fully pious.

The discourse of natural history therefore supports, and perhaps even serves as a source for, the interpretation, in romances, falconry treatises, and moralistic texts, of the sparrowhawk's action as a sign of its innate nobility. The greater authority accorded the genre of natural history indicates the degree to which this interpretation was credited. For a medieval audience, the image signifies beyond its analogical function, and even beyond any discrete resonances from specific texts: it is a cultural sign that supports the ideology of inherent nobility transferable through heredity.

As a cultural sign, its signifying function is to support the hegemony of the elite. In "Merci passeþ alle þinge," the narrator's final uncertainty over what the sign signifies exposes the constructedness, the nonessential nature, of that signification and of the hegemony it supports. In the last stanza, after relating that the Merlyon let the little bird go in the morning the narrator adds: "Wheþer gentrie taust hire so or righte / I con not telle 3ou in good fay" (183-4).<sup>31</sup> Through voicing uncertainty he demystifies this cultural sign as a transparent signifier of inherent nobility in a way that corresponds to a Marxist semiotic critique as found, for example, in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*.<sup>32</sup> By raising the possibility that a particular sign habitually understood as being natural may in fact be constructed, the persona exposes how ideas and structures that develop through human cultivation (particularly, as we have seen, through the nexus of discourses) have become erroneously passed off as natural. The rhetorical move here is similar to that of the Wife of Bath, when she asks "Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?" (692).

The narrator's uncertainty permits two related but discrete possible interpretations. In one, with "gentrie" denoting "nobility of birth or rank; noble birth" (*MED* s.v. *gentrie* n. 1. (a)) the bird is personified. Uncertainty exists over whether or not mercy, as a courtly virtue, is more characteristic of the noble class than of any other. The poem thus effectively registers how

Christian virtues have been appropriated by the nobility as being under their exclusive purview, and particularly how nobility of character has become attached to the noble class. The perpetuation of this myth in the sparrowhawk tale corresponds to that in the “pity renneth sone in gentil herte” commonplace of romances, which is similarly interrogated by Chaucer. In questioning the personal locale of one “gentil” virtue, “Merci passeþ alle þinge” more generally interrogates the innateness of “gentillesse” within the genealogy of gentry. The poem thus fits into a larger nexus of Middle English texts that interrogate the myth of inheritable nobility, including Chaucer’s works—most notably the lyric “Gentillesse,” “The Wife of Bath’s Tale”—but also *Ayenbite of Inwit*, *Piers Plowman*, and John Gower’s works.<sup>33</sup>

There is, however, another way of reading the narrator’s uncertainty: the question may be literal, such that the bird retains its status as a creature from ‘nature.’ “Gentrie” thus signifies as “noble persons, gentry” (*MED* s.v. gentrie n. 1. (b)) and “taust” refers to the training the bird received from the gentry, as part of their practice of falconry. This would accord with the species, since the merlin was “a small European falcon” and so would have been caught from the wild, tamed, and trained as an assistant in hunting and other purposes. In any case, the word “taust,” entering the poem in its final stanza, strikes the audience as a stark departure from the theme of “kynde” developed throughout. That contrast is made all the more striking by the frequency with which the words “kynde” or “unkynde” appear in the poem (eight times). The excessive naturalness of the opening scene, which explicitly places the episode within an uncultivated “wyldre wode syde” (1), also encourages us to perceive the Merlyon’s actions as natural. Moreover, the manipulation of expectations associated with the *chanson d’aventure* would enforce the audience’s sensitivity to the wildness of the scene: *chanson d’aventures* conventionally take place in a much

tamer, less threatening, and more pleasant landscape. The uncertainty registered by the narrator over why the Merlyon acts the way it does problematizes his previous identification of the Merlyon's behaviour as "kuynde" (17-20; 173-6), and jars the audience into facing the possibility that the image they have been viewing all along as a product of nature may not be so at all—it may be the product of culture. The possibility remains that merlins are naturally treacherous.

Given that the 'kyndness' of humans to be merciful has been likened to a natural trait in the Merlyon, the narrator's final uncertainty over how the bird was taught raises a fundamental question about whether or not humans are by nature merciful and courteous. The possibility that they are not is strengthened through the use of other animal imagery in the poem. A simile relates humans to another creature, which could equally well be a natural model: "We slepe as swolle swyn in lake" (164). Unusual, too, is the ferociousness of the other creatures presented in the opening scene.

Bi west, vnder a wylde wode syde,  
 In a launde þer I was lente,  
 Wlanke deor on grounde gunne glyde,  
 And lyouns Raumping vppon bente;  
 Beores, wolues wiþ Mouþes wyde,  
 Þe smale Beestes þei al to rente,  
 Per haukes vnto heore pray þei hyde, (1-7)

The scene is disturbing in its rawness: it raises questions about the problem of evil in the world, and makes no effort to allegorize them away. This is the setting in which the narrator beholds the one merciful deed, and while it seems all along that the Merlyon's act assuages the treachery, the

narrator's uncertainty over what made the bird act that way seems to suggest that there may be a predominance of cruelty in nature, in animals as well as humans.

The persona's uncertainty over the natural mercy of the bird registers his own misgivings about human nature, misgivings which are more straightforwardly conveyed in the "evils of the times" section. If the Merlyon learned its merciful behaviour, the implication is that humans learn to be merciful, and courteous, and all of the other 'noble' traits listed in the poem. The audience would be familiar with the programmatic teaching of 'noble' behaviour among the gentry. A key conduit of chivalric virtues were courtesy books, written for children of the nobility.<sup>34</sup> Courtesy books became more prevalent in English the fifteenth century, and at that time they narrowed in to a codification of manners, largely for eating, speaking, and socializing. The earlier books, however, are more holistic, in that they prescribe morals as well as manners. For example, the earliest and, judging from the quantity of surviving texts, the most popular Anglo-Norman courtesy book, *Urbain le Courtois*, expounds the ten commandments and includes some remarks on treating the less privileged with respect. Occasionally the virtue of mercy is forthrightly mentioned, as in the following lines from another Anglo-Norman courtesy poem, "Edward," from MS Bodley 425, a fourteenth-century manuscript: "Soiez franz et bone vianders / Et a les poveres soiez amoners" (265-6).<sup>35</sup> An awareness of these programmatic efforts to teach courtesy may lie behind the narrator's uncertainty over whether the Merlyon's behaviour is cultivated or natural, insofar as that behaviour is presented as an analogy for human behaviour. If so, the poem questions the basic tenet which these courtesy books, and all efforts to cultivate courtesy, espoused. The name given to such programmatic instruction in courtesy was 'nurture': as the organic metaphor indicates, courtesy books were used with the belief that nobles are innately courteous and virtuous,

and only needed training to extract and refine those traits, to help them to flourish. The narrator's uncertainty raises the possibility of a slippage between the form and the substance, between outer manners and interior virtue. It implies that teaching 'nurture' is not an act that extracts that which is innate, but one that covers over a fundamental lack.

This skepticism, however, is not necessarily the dogmatic view of the poet, and not necessarily included as a means of subverting traditional modes of conceptualization. It is voiced by a narrator who is as consciously constructed and rhetorically effective as other narrators in the Vernon refrain poems. Here the narrator's expression of uncertainty augments the psychological realism of the poem by endowing him with intellectual honesty and emotional conviction. The comment enhances the narrator's dramatic function in a way that supports the poet's aim to persuade the audience to be merciful to others and to seek God's mercy. Significantly, immediately after expressing his uncertainty the speaker turns to pray for God's mercy. With the one sign that has been a lynchpin for the whole analogical structure rendered impenetrable, a neat allegorization of a transparent natural order, which should enable a glimpse of God's design, becomes impossible. The narrator recognizes the distance of the human condition from God's image; but this only reassures him of the need for God's mercy.

The emotional conviction created through the manipulation of the sign in this final moment, although it may be the most striking aspect of the poem, does not cancel out other resolutions granted by the sign's other ways of signifying—the final association of the audience speaking of mercy in the face of God as an analogy of the released little bird from the claws of the Merlyon, for example. Rather, the various ways in which the sign signifies create a multi-dimensional discursive structure which enriches the meaning and the message of the poem. To recapitulate, the sign is

refracted within the enclosed world of the poem to draw out parallels that demonstrate the nature of mercy, parallels which also extend out to incorporate the audience as it is imaginatively placed in certain roles (as the persecutor of Christ in the "*Homo vide*" section, for example, or as the grateful one saved from damnation in the final lines). This poetic manipulation of the sign is aided by the resonances it brings into the world of the poem from its use in other texts. Those other texts, taken as a whole, also demonstrate how the image functioned as a cultural sign to perpetuate the myth of the inherent nobility of the noble class. When that signification is exposed as a cultural construct, the basis of the analogy used to demonstrate the innate quality of human mercy, both as the prerogative of the noble class and as an evident natural tendency in all humans, collapses. This problematizing of the sign registers the narrator's acknowledgement, in the face of rampant cruelty that defies explanation, of a gulf separating the human world from the divine, and so, by pointing out the feebleness of human power, helps to persuade the audience of the need for God's mercy.

## Notes to Chapter Five

1. J.M. Perrin, "Mercy," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), vol. 9, p. 673.
2. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns & Oates, 1947), 2, 2ae, 30.2, Vol. 2, p. 1318.
3. Rosemary Woolf provides a discussion of "*O vos omnes*" lyrics (*English Religious Lyric*, pp.42-5).
4. Rosemary Woolf has pointed out the similar rhetorical strategies in the Crucifixion plays and "*O vos omnes*" lyrics (*English Religious Lyric*, p. 44).
5. Christ only identified six deeds of corporal mercy (Matthew 25.35-46). The seventh, bury the dead, was added later.
6. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a2ae, 91.2-4, Vol. 1, pp. 996-9.
7. A useful discussion of *De Proprietatibus Rerum* is offered by D.C. Greetham, "The Concept of Nature in Bartholomaeus Anglicus," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41 (1981), pp. 663-77. *Piers Plowman*, B.XI.334-71 provides an extended meditation on how Reason governs all creatures but humans (William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: a Critical Edition of the B-Text Based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt [London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1987]).
8. *Piers Plowman* C.VIII.47 (William Langland, *Piers Plowman : an Edition of the C-Text*, ed. Derek Pearsall [London: Edward Arnold, 1978]).
9. H. Rosamond Parsons provides an account of Anglo-Norman courtesy books, and editions of some of the key texts ("Anglo-Norman Books").
10. This account of the use of the bird scenario in other courtly literature is indebted to Constance B. Heatt's "Introduction" to her translation of Guillaume de Machaut's *Dit d'Alerion* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993), pp. 3-37. All quotations from the *Dit* are from this translation.
11. Constance B. Heatt's remarks on this poem are brief:  
 Whatever may have been the case in France, in England it was the merlin which was said to behave in this way. The story is allegorically exploited in a Middle English lyric Brown and Smithers entitle "Mercy Passes All Things," which tells how "A Merlyon, a Brid had hente" and carried it off for the night, but let it go in the morning. Lines 174-82 explain [the lines are quoted].  
 ("Stooping at a Simile: Some Literary Uses of Falconry," *Papers on Language and Literature* 19 [1983], p. 348). Heatt also points out that a later poem from *Tottel's Miscellany* uses the story of the merlin (p. 348).

12. The oldest 'source' of the medieval bestiary is the Greek *Physiologus* ("the naturalist"). It was translated into Latin, and the text which influenced its 'first change' in that language was Isidore's *Etymologiae*, particularly Bk 12 of that work, entitled "De animalibus" (Florence McCulloch, *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries* [Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1962], p. 28).

13. The allegorization of the tale into a courtly love vortex may also have had precedents earlier in the English tradition, as the following brief lyric from c.1300 suggests

So longe ic have, lavedi,  
 yhoved\* at thi gate                      hovered  
 that mi fot is efre, \* faire lavedi,      frozen  
 for thi luv faste to the stake

This poem is found in a collection of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sermons in Berlin, Preußische Staatsbibliothek Lat. theol., and edited in "Middle English Lyrics: Handlist of New Texts," ed. Rossell Hope Robbins, *Anglia* 83 (1965), p. 47.

14. Heatt, "Introduction," p. 20.

15. James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991), p. 210.

16. Heatt, "Introduction," p. 20.

17. The reference to *Filocolo* is noted in the "Explanatory Notes" of *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson, p. 1041.

18. The dialogue immediately preceding the allusion provides a telling analogy to this poem: Troilus says:

"Allas, upon my sorwes sike  
 Have mercy, swete herte myn, Criseyde!  
 ...  
 And she answerde, "Of gilt misericorde!  
 That is to seyn, that I foryeve al this  
 ...  
 "And now," quod she, "that I have don yow smerte,  
 Foryeve it me, myn owene swete herte." (III. 1172-83)

19. In regards to pronoun reference in the sparrowhawk allusion, *The Riverside Chaucer* notes that "[i]f only one of the birds is to be considered female, it is not the sperhawk (*his* foot)," (p. 1171). "His" could also be signifying as the neuter genitive here, but the point needs further consideration.

20. On the "Christ the Lover Knight" tradition, see Woolf, *The English Religious*, pp. 44-55. Another solemnized *chanson d'aventure* occurs in "*Mane Nobiscum Domine*" where, as I mentioned in Chapter One, the speaker overhears the versicle at liturgy, which are the words

spoken by Cleophas and another disciple to the present yet unrecognized Christ on the road to Emmaus.

21. The common allegorization of the tale as a sign of admirable relinquishment of power is noted by Baudouin Van den Abeele, *Le fauconnerie dans les lettres françaises du xii<sup>e</sup> au xiv<sup>e</sup> siècle*. *Mediaevalia Lovaniensia* 1, 18. (Leuven: Leuven UP 1990), pp. 212-4.

22. Qtd from Van den Abeele, *Le fauconnerie*, p. 213.

23. Constance B. Hieatt has suggested that *Le Roman des Deduis* may have been influenced by Guillaume's *Dit* ("Appendix A: 'Learned' Sources of Information about the Alerion," in *The Tale of the Alerion [by Guillaume de Machaut]*, trans. Constance Hieatt [Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993], p. 182).

24. This quotation is from the following edition: Gace de la Buigne, *Roman des deduis*, ed. Åke Blomqvist (Karlskrona, 1966).

25. The denotation of "condicion" as "status or station in a society" may also be operating here (*MED* s.v. condicioun n. 1. (b)).

26. Gace de la Buigne, *Roman des deduis*, ed. Blomqvist, pp. 13-19.

27. Quoted from Van den Abeele, *Le fauconnerie*, p. 214.

28. Once again, I am grateful to Constance Hieatt's work for referring me to these natural history texts ("Appendix A," pp. 179-83).

29. For example, Albertus writes under NISIS [sparrowhawk]: "It is said that in winter it holds a live bird beneath its feet for its warmth and that in the morning, mindful of the favor, it allows it to go away alive" (Albertus Magnus, *On Animals: a Medieval Zoologica*, trans. Kenneth F. Kitchell and Irvn Michael Resnick (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1999), p. 1639). As noted by Hieatt, Vincent of Beauvais attributes the trait to a 'goshawk' (accipiter) in Bk. 16, ch. 19, and not to the sparrowhawk, which is treated in Bk 16, ch.92 ("Appendix A," p.181). Vincent also attributes the story to "Philosophus," assumably Aristotle. No such tale exists in the corpus of Aristotle, but, as Hieatt notes, "it may have been attributed to Aristotle in Vincent's source" ("Appendix A," p. 183).

30. Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liver de Natura Rerum*, ed. H. Boese (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), p. 217.

31. In working from a hypothesized archetypal text, it seems reasonable to replace the Vernon text's "nouzt" with Thornton's "righte," given the rhyme with "nighte" and "myghte." That restoration considerably changes the sense of the line, given the importance of "righte" in relation to mercy throughout the poem.

32. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972). For Barthes, a myth is a means of communicating, but a “second order semiological system.” In it, what is a ‘sign’ in the first order, linguistic system, becomes a signifier of the second. One example he gives is of a magazine cover that presents an Algerian saluting the French flag. Its simple meaning is patriotism. But that image in fact becomes a signifier of French imperialism. The work of myth is always to pass off the culturally-produced as natural; the mythologist, in uncovering how this works, ‘demystifies’ matter. Barthes’ model is useful for elucidating how the image is interrogated in “Mercy Passes all Things,” but there it extends beyond a mere semiological analysis: the image of the bird gets its meaning from a previous textual tradition, and it is that whole tradition which is demystified.

33. Other English, as well as French and Latin, texts which question the myth of inheritable nobility are listed in G.M. Vogt’s “Gleaning from the History of a Sentiment: ‘Generositas virtus, non sanguis’,” *JEGP* 24 (1925), pp. 102-28.

34. Courtesy literature intersects with other genres. For example, romances were used didactically as models to be emulated. This is evident in one courtesy poem, the popular Anglo-Norman *Urbain le Courtois*, which explicitly holds up romance heroes as models ( lines 67-80). (Line references refer to the edition of the “later version” of the poem by H. Rosamond Parsons, “Anglo-Norman,” pp. 408-419.)

35. The quotation from “Edward” is from Parson’s edition, “Anglo-Norman,” pp. 420-28.

## **“Merci passeþ alle þinge”**

### **I. The text in London, British Library, MS. Additional 31042**

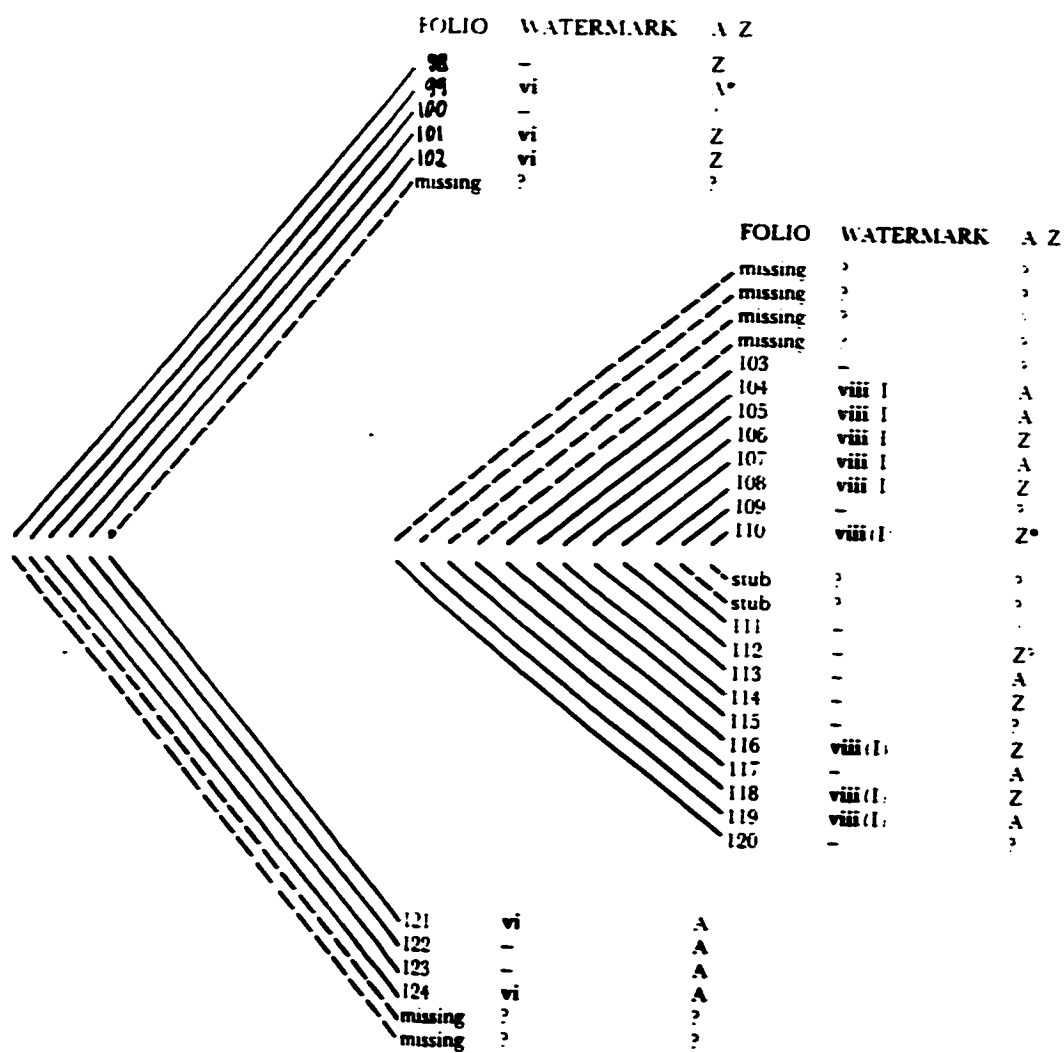
In addition to the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts, “Merci passeþ alle þinge” exists in London, British Library, MS. Additional 31042. There it appears as the last of three refrain lyrics on the subject of mercy, the previous two being “A Song How þat mercy Passeth Rightwisnes” (*IMEV* 560) and “Doo mercy Bifore thy jugement” (*IMEV* 3533). The Additional text of “Merci passeþ alle þinge” has been edited by Karl Brunner, in *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 132 (1914), pp. 323-327.

London, British Library, MS. Additional 31042 is one of two miscellanies copied by Robert Thornton in northern Yorkshire in the mid-fifteenth century. (The other, larger and more well-known, Thornton manuscript is London, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91.) “Merci passeþ alle þinge” appears on ff. 123v-124v, and it is the last item on quire f, the largest quire. John Thompson has provided a detailed analysis of Additional 31042 in his study of the manuscript (*Robert Thornton and the London Thornton Manuscript: British Library MS Additional 31042* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987). His discussion of quire f appears on pages 26-31, 35-47. Thompson found that “gathering f is defective, consisting of a fragmentary batch of watermark viii (I) paper inserted into a smaller batch of watermark vi paper” (p. 38). His reconstruction of the f gathering, which I produce below, posits that it once comprised 36 folios.

The last stanza of “Mercy passes alle thynges” is squeezed into the bottom margin of f. 124v, below the penultimate stanza. (A photo-reproduction of f.124v. can be found in Thompson, *Robert Thornton*, plate 27.) This final stanza is written in the same hand though in a smaller script with different ink. In order to fit the whole stanza onto the page, the scribe

squeezed two metrical lines into a single manuscript line. Thompson uses this alteration in the text's mise-en-page to hypothesize that two folios are missing after f. 124, which would have been the conjoints to ff. 98-99. He claims that the two folios that once followed f. 124 were not blank cancels. The last stanza of "Merci passez alle þinge" was originally inscribed on the now lost folio after 124, but sometime while Thornton was still working on the book that later folio became damaged, and he copied the final stanza into the bottom margin of f. 124v to save it from being lost. His hypothesis is supported by an analysis of the watermarks. Ff. 98-102 and 121-124 were made by watermark vi moulds: "The need to match the few remaining leaves of vi paper with their most likely conjugates and the evidence of the chain indentations both suggest the collation offered in fig. 7 (*Robert Thornton*, p. 30). I reproduce Thompson's fig. 7 herewith.

Fig. 7. Gathering f (ff. 98–124), reconstructed



## II. The transmission of the text:

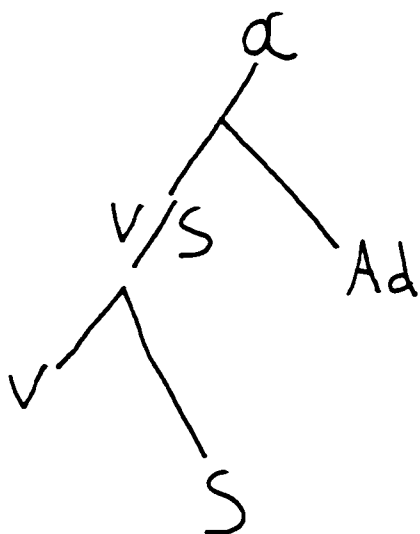
In general, the V/S text is superior, on grounds of greater logical consistency and richer semantics. V/S sustains the gendering of the Merlion as a female (“heo” (15, 17, 20, 181, 182), “hire” (10, 178, 183)). The A text, however, wavers between the masculine and feminine pronoun in referring to it: in lines 10-15 the Merlion is referred to as a female, but then in line 17 it is referred to as “He.” In the final stanza the merlion is referred to as “he” (181, 182) and the little bird as “hir” (181, 182). This irregular gendering causes some confusion in the following line, “Whethir gentrys taughte hir that or right” (183), where the “hir” would seem to refer to the little bird rather than the merlion.

A few examples of moments where the semantic density is richer in V/S should suffice to illustrate its status of greater proximity to authorial intention. Lines 86-8, for example, carry a particular legal register that is lost in the Additional version. “[A]reyn” (86) had the legal sense “to call upon to answer to a charge or accusation, try, arraign” (*MED* s.v. arreinen v. 2. (a)). “[T]resoun” in the Middle Ages had the more generalized charge, as “an act of treachery...a betrayal to whom one owes loyalty, a betrayal of trust” (*MED* s.v. treisoun n. 4. (a)). The verb “ateyne” also had a particular legal sense: “to bring to justice; arraign...convict” (*MED* s.v. atteinen v. 4.). The A text seems to weaken the legal sense of “arayn” by changing the specific legal offence of “treason” to “to reason” (88).

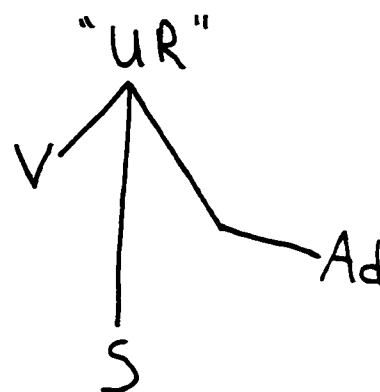
In certain cases, however, the A text is clearly superior, or potentially so. V/S “furst” (54) is obviously inferior to A’s “thrist.” Most significantly, A’s “righte” (183) is superior, on the basis of rhyme, to V/S “nouzt”; this variation also has interpretative significance, as discussed in the rhetorical analysis of the poem. The rhetorical analysis also indicates grounds for taking A’s

“clerkes” (173) to more authorial than V/S’s “men.”

Given that A does contain several meaningful stronger readings, I propose the following stemmatic diagrams for the three surviving texts of the poem:



OR



**Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng.poet.a.1**

Bi west . vnder a wylde wode syde . f.407a  
In a laurde . per I was lente . col.1  
Wlanke deor . on grounde gurme glyde .  
And lyouns Raumpyng . vpon bente . 4  
Beores . wolus . wip Moubes wyde .  
Be smale Beestes . bei al to rente .  
Per haukes vnto heore pray bei hyde . 8  
Of whuche . to on . I tok good tente .  
A Merlyon . a Brid had hente .  
And in hire foot . heo gan hit bringe .  
Hit coupe not speke . but þus hit mente .  
How Merci passeþ alle pinge . 12

Merci was in þat . Brides muynde .  
But þerof kneus . þe Hauk non .  
For in hir foot . heo gan hit bynde  
And heold hit stille . as eny ston . 16  
Heo dude after . þe cours of kynde .  
And fleis in to a treo anon .  
þowr kynde þe Brid gan Merci fynde  
For on þe morve . heo let hit gon . 20  
Ful stille I stod . my self al on  
To herken . hou þat Brid gan syngre .  
A wey wol wende . boþe Muþe and moon .  
And Merci passeþ . alle pinge . 24

How Merci passeþ . strengþe and riht .  
Mony a wyse . seo we may .  
God ordeyned Merci . most of miht  
To beo aboute . his werkes ay . 28  
Whon deore Ihesu . schal be diht .  
To demen vs at doomes day .  
Vr swine wol beo . so muche in siht .  
We schul not wite . what we schul say . 32  
Ful fersliche Riht wol vs affray .  
And blame vs for . vr mis lyuing .  
þen dar non prese . for vs to pray .  
But Merci . þat passeþ alle ping . 36

**London, British Library, MS. Addit. 22283**

Bi west vndur awylde wode syde . f. 128b  
In a laurde per I was lent . col.2  
Wlanke deor on grounde gan glyde  
And lyouns raumpyng vpon bent  
Beores wolius wip mouþes wide  
Be smale bestes bei al to rent .  
Per haukes vnto þare pray bei hyde .  
Of whuche to on I toke goode tent  
A Merlyon a brid hedde hent .  
And in hir foot heo gan hit bringe .  
Hit coupe not speke but þus hit ment  
How merci passeþ alle pinge  
12

Merci was in þat briddes Muynde .  
But þerof kneus þe hauk non .  
For in hire foot he gan hit bynde .  
And heolde hit stille as eni ston . 16  
Heo dud aftur þe cours of kynde .  
And fleis in to a treo anon .  
þowr kynde þe brid gan Merci fynde .  
For on þe morve heo let hit gon . 20  
Ful stille I stod my self al on .  
To herken how þat brid gan syngre .  
A wey wol wende boþe murthe and moon  
And Merci passeþ alle pinge . 24

Hou merci passeþ strengþe and riht  
Mony a wyse seo we may .  
God ordeyned Merci most of miht  
To beo a boue his werkes ay . 28  
Whon deore Ihesu schal beo diht .  
To demen vs at domes day .  
Vr swine wol beo . so muche in siht  
We schul not wite what we schul say . 32  
Ful fresliche riht . wol vs affray .  
And blame vs for vr mistyuing .  
þen dar non prese . for vs to pray .  
But Merci passeþ alle pinge . 36

**London, British Library, MS. Addit. 31042**

Be weste vndir a wilde wode syde f.123b  
Appon a launde there als I was lend col.2  
Fful wlonke dere one grounde gonre glyde  
And lyouns raumpyng one that bent  
Beris and wolnes with mouthes wyde  
the smale bestes þay al to schent  
the fawcouns to there praye þay hyed  
Of wich to one I tuke grete tent  
A Merlyone hade a birde hent  
And in hir fote scho ganre it bryngre  
It couthe nochte speke bot thus it ment  
þat Mercy passes alle thyngre

Mercy was in þat birdes mynde  
Bot þer of couthe þat hawke none  
For in hir fete scho ganre it bynde  
And heelde it still als any stone  
He dide it aftir þe course of kynde  
And sloughe vp to a tree anon  
Thurgh kynde þe birde gonre mercy fynde  
Ffor one þe morne scho letc it gone  
Fful still I stode myselfe allone  
To herkenre how this birde gonre syngre  
Aways will wende bothe myrthe and mone  
And Mercy passeth alle thyngre

How mercy passeth strengthe and myghte  
One many a wyse wete we maye f.124r  
God ordeyned Mercy moste of myghte col.1  
To be abowunre his werkes aye  
Whene dere Jesus schall be dighte  
To deme vs alle at domes daye  
Oure synne will seme so mekil in sighte  
We schal not wete what we schal saye  
Ffreche righte will vs so affraye  
And blamenre vs for oure mys doynge  
Es none so priste for vs dare praye  
Bot Mercy þat passes alle thyngre

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng.poet.a.1

Riht wolde sle vs . for vr synne .  
 Miht wolde don . execution .  
 And Rihtwys god . þen wol begymme .  
 Forte reherse vs . þis resoun . 40  
 I made þe Mon . 3if þar þou minne .  
 Of feture lich . myn owne fasoun  
 And after crepte . In to þi kinne . 44  
 And for þe suffred passoun .  
 Of þornes kene . þen was þe croun .  
 Ful scharpe vppon . myn hed standyng  
 Min herte blood . ran from me down  
 And I for 3af þe . alle þing 48

Myn herte blood . for þe gan blede  
 To buye þe . from þe fendes blake  
 And I for 3af þe . þi misdede  
 What hast þou suffred . for my sake 52  
 Me hungred . þou woldest not me fede .  
 Ne neuer my furst . ne woldestou slake  
 When I of herborwe . hedde gret nede 56  
 Pou woldest not . to þin hous me take  
 Pou sese me . a mong todes blake  
 Ful longe . in harde prison lylng .  
 Let seo what onswere . constou make  
 When weore þou kynde . in eny þing 60

And hou I quenched . al þi care .  
 Lift vp þin eise . and þou maist se  
 Mi woundes wete . blod al bare . 64  
 As I was rauzt . on Roode tre .  
 Pou sese me . for defaute forfare .  
 In seknes . and in pouerte  
 3it of þi good . woldestou not spare .  
 Ne ones come . to visyte me . 68  
 Al corþli þing . I 3af to þe  
 Boþe Beest and fisch . and foul fleoyng  
 And tolde þe hou þat charite  
 And Merci . passeþ alle þing 72

London, British Library, MS. Addit. 22283

Riht wolde sle vs . for vr surme .  
 Miht wolde don execution .  
 And rihtwis god . þerne wol bigynne .  
 Forte reherse vs . þis resoun . 40  
 I made þe Mon . 3if þar þou minne .  
 Of feture liche . myn owne fasoun  
 And aftur crepte In to þi kynne . 44  
 And for þe suffred . passoun .  
 Of þornes kene . þen was þe croun .  
 Ful scharpe vppon myn hed standyng  
 Min hert blood . ran from me down .  
 And I for3aaf þe alle þinge 48

Myn hert blood . for þe gan blede .  
 To buye þe from þe feondes bolde .  
 And I for3aaf þe þe þi mysdede . 52  
 What hast þou suffred for my sake .  
 Me hungred . þou woldest not me fede .  
 Ne neuer my furst . ne woldestou slake .  
 When I of herborwe . hedde gret nede .  
 þou woldest not to þin hous me take . 56  
 þou sese me a mong todes blake  
 Ful longe in harde prisoun lylng  
 Let seo what unswere . constou make .  
 When were þou kynde in eny þing . 60

And hou I whenched al þi care  
 Lift vp þin eise . and þou maist se .  
 My woundes wete . blod al bare . 64  
 As I was rauht . on roode tre  
 þou sese me for defaute forfare .  
 In seknes and in pouerte .  
 3it of þi good . woldestou not spare .  
 Ne ones come to visyte me . 68  
 Al corþli þinge I 3af to þe  
 Boþe beest and fysche and foul fleoyng  
 And tolde þe hou þat charite .  
 And Merci passeþ alle þing 72

London, British Library, MS. Addit. 31042

There rihte will fleme vs foroure synne  
 And myghte will do executiounne  
 At Rightwysnes god will begymme  
 And reherse to vs this resone  
 I made the man als þou may mynne  
 Of fetures lyke to myn own facyon  
 And aftir I crept in to thi kynde  
 And for the suffrede harde passyon  
 Of thornes kene þat was my crown  
 Ful scharpe appon myn hede stonyng  
 Myn hert blode for the rane down  
 And I for gyfe the alle thyng

Myn hert blode for the gon blede  
 To bye the frome þe fendis blake  
 And j for gifte þe thi Misdede  
 What hase þou suffrede for my sake  
 Me hongert and thou ne wolde me fede  
 Ne ones my thriste þou wolde not slake  
 When I of herbere had grete nede  
 Into thi house þou ne wolde me take  
 þou see me amonge þe todes blake  
 Ffull longe in presone ful harde lylng  
 Let see what ansuere þou canest make  
 Where was þou kynde in any thyng

And how I quenche alle thi care  
 Lift vp thyn eghne & þou may see  
 My woundes wyde bloody and bare 124r  
 Als I was raughte one þe Rode tree col.2  
 Pay sawe me for defaute forfare  
 In seknes and in pouerte  
 3itt of thi gudes wold þou none spare  
 Ne ones come to vesett me  
 All erthely thyng I gaffe to thee  
 Bothe Bestis Fische and foule flyenge  
 And toke the gud will and charyte  
 Ffor mercy passes alle thyng

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng.poet.a.1

Hou mihtou . eny merci haue .  
 þat neuer desyredest . non to do .  
 þou seest me naked . and cloþes craue . 76  
 Barehed . and Barefot . gan I go .  
 On me þou vochedest no þing saue .  
 But beede me wende . þi wones fro .  
 þou seest me ded . aboute to graue .  
 On Bere . seuen dayes and mo . 80  
 For luitel dette . I ouste þe þo f.407a  
 þou forbed . my burying . col.2  
 þi Pater noster . seyde not so .  
 For Merci passeþ alle þing . 84

þeos are þe werkes of Merci . seuene  
 Of wauche . crist wol vs areyne  
 þat alle schul stoney . wip þat steuene  
 þat euer tresoun . miste a teyne . 88  
 For heer . but ȝif we make vs euene .  
 þer may no miht . ne ȝiftes ȝeyne .  
 þerme to þe kyng of heuene . 92  
 þe Bok seip . þat we schul seyne .  
 Wher hastou lord . in prisoun leyne .  
 Whome weore þou . in corþe dwellyng .  
 Whon seest we þe . in such peyne .  
 Whon askedest þou . vs eny þing 96

Whon ȝe seest ouþer . Blynde . or lame  
 þat for my loue . asked ȝou oust .  
 Al þat ȝe duden . in myn name .  
 Hit was to me . boþe deede . and þoust . 100  
 But ȝe þat hated . cristendame .  
 And of my wrappe . neuer ne roust .  
 ȝour seruise schal . ben endeles schame  
 Helle fuir . þat slakes noust 104  
 And ȝe þat wip my blood I boust .  
 þat loued me . in ȝoure lyuynge .  
 ȝe schul haue þat ȝe haue soust .  
 Merci þat passeþ alle þinge . 108

London, British Library, MS. Addit. 22283

Hou myhtou . eny Merci haue  
 þat neuer desiredest . non to do  
 þou seest me naked and cloþes craue  
 On bere seuen dayes and mo . 80  
 For luytel dette I ouste þe þo  
 þou forbed . my buryinge .  
 þi Pater noster seide not so .  
 For Merci passeþ . alle þing . 84

þeose are þe werkes . of Merci seuene . 86  
 Of whuche crist . wol vs areyne .  
 þat alle schul stoney . wip þat steuene .  
 þat euer tresoun miht a teyne . 128n  
 For here but yf we make vs euene  
 þer may no miht ne ȝiftes ȝeyne .  
 þen to þe kyng of heuene .  
 þe Bok seip þat we schul seyne . 92  
 Wher hastou lord in prisoun leyne .  
 Whon were þou in corþe dwellyng .  
 Whon seest we þe in suche peyne .  
 Whon askedest þou vs eny þing 96

Whon ȝe seest ouþur blynde or lame .  
 þat for my loue asked ȝou oust  
 Al þat ȝe duden . in my name .  
 Hit was to me . boþe dede and þoust . 100  
 But ȝe þat hated . cristendame .  
 And of my wrappe . neuer ne roust  
 ȝour seruise schal ben endeles schame .  
 Helle fuir þat slakes nouht 104  
 And ȝe þat wip my blood I bouht  
 þat loued me . in ȝoure lyuynge .  
 ȝe schul haue . þat ȝe haue souht  
 Merci þat passeþ alle þing . 108

London, British Library, MS. Addit. 31042

Hou myghte þou any Mercy haue  
 þat neuer deserved none to doo  
 þou see me naked and clothes craue  
 Bothe Bare þe hede and Bare fote goo  
 One me þou vouchede no thyng saue  
 Bot bade me wende thy wones fro  
 þou sawe me dede and bowun to graue  
 One bere ly seuen dayes and moo  
 Fful littill gude I oughte þe þoo  
 When þou forbede me my beryeng  
 Thi pater noster bade the not so  
 Ffor Mercy passeþ alkym thyng

Thies bene the werkes of Mercy seuen  
 Of whiche god will vs arrayne  
 Ffor alle schullen stirre vp with þat steuen  
 þat euer to resone myghte atayne  
 Ffor here Bot if me make vs euen  
 There may no grace oure gastes gayne  
 Bot to þe heghe kyng of heuen  
 þe boke sayse þat we schall sayne  
 Where hase lorde in presone layne  
 When was þou in erthe duellyng  
 When sawe we the suffre payne  
 When asked þou vs any thyng

When ȝe sawe ouþer blynde or lame  
 þat for my lufe askede ȝow oughte  
 Alle þat ȝe dide in my name  
 Ffor þat was I bothe in dede and thoghte  
 Bot ȝe þat hadden Christendome  
 Of my wrethe no thyng ȝe roughte f.124v  
 ȝoure sorowes schall be endeles schome col.1  
 The fire of helle þat slakes noghte  
 And ȝe þat with my blode j boughte  
 And loueden me in ȝour leuynge  
 ȝe schollen haue þat ȝe haue soughte  
 Mercy that passes alle thyng

**Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng.poet.a.1**

Pis tyme schal tyde . hit is no may .  
 And wel is him . þat hap þat grace  
 For to plesse . his god to pay .  
 And Merci seche . while he hap space . 112  
 For beo vr moup . crommed with clay .  
 Wormes blake . wol vs embrace .  
 þen is to late Mon . in good fay .  
 Te seche to A Mendē . of þi trespass . 116  
 With mekenes . þou may . heuene purchase .  
 Oper Meede . þar þe non bring .  
 But knowe þi god . in vche a case .  
 And louc him best . of any þing . 120

To god and mon . weore holden meste .  
 To loue . and his wrapþe eschuwe .  
 Now is non . so vnkuynde a beeste .  
 þat lasse dop . þat weore him duwe . 124  
 For Beestes and foules . more and leeste  
 þe cours of kynde . alle þei suwe  
 And whome we breken . Godes heste  
 Aseynes kuynde . we ben vn trewe . 128  
 For kuynde wolde . þat we him knewe .  
 And dradde him most . in vre doing .  
 Hit is no riht . þat he vs rewe  
 But Merci passeþ . alle þing . 132

Now harlotrye . for murþe is holde  
 And vertues tomen . in to vice .  
 And Symonye . hap chirches solde  
 And lawe is waxen . Couetyse . 136  
 Vr feip is frele . to fleecche and folde  
 For treupe is put . to luytel prise .  
 Vre God . is glotonye . and golde .  
 Dronkenes . Lecherye . and dyse .  
 Lo heer vr lyf . and vre delyce .  
 Vr loue vr lust . and vre lykynge .  
 3et 3if we wole . repente and ryse .  
 Merci passeþ . alle þinge . 144

**London, British Library, MS. Addit. 22283**

Pis tyme schal tyde . hit is no nay .  
 And wel is him þar hap þat grace  
 For to plesse his god to pay .  
 And Merci sccheþ whil he hap space . 112  
 For beo vr moupþe . crommed with clay .  
 Wormes blake wol vs embrace .  
 Penne is to late . Mon . in goode fay  
 Te seche to amende of þi trespass . 116  
 With mekenes þou may . heuen purchase .  
 Oper meede . þar þe non bring .  
 But knowe þi god in vche a case .  
 And loue hym best of eny þing . 120

To god a mon were holden meste .  
 To loue and his wrapþe eschuwe  
 Now is non so vnkuynde a beeste .  
 þat lasse dop þar weore hym duwe . 124  
 For beestes and foules more and leeste .  
 þe cours of kuynde alle þei suwe .  
 And whon we breken godes heste .  
 Aseynes kuynde we ben vn trewe . 128  
 For kuynde wolde þat we hym knewe .  
 And dradde hym most in vre doing .  
 Hit is no riht þat he vs rewe  
 But Merci passeþ alle þing . 132

Now harlotrie for murþe is holde .  
 And vertues turmen in to vice  
 And symonye hap chirches soldē .  
 And lawe is waxen couetise . 136  
 Vr feip is frele to fleecche and folde .  
 For treupe is put to luytel prise .  
 Ur god is glotonye and golde .  
 Dronkenes . lecherie and dyse .  
 Lo here vr lyf . and vre delice .  
 Vr loue . vr lust . and vr lykynge  
 3et 3if we wole repēt and rise .  
 Merci passeþ . alle þinge . 144

**London, British Library, MS. Addit. 31042**

This tyme schal tyde . þat es no maye  
 Wele es hym þat hase þat grace  
 Ffor to plesse his god to paye  
 And seche Mercy willes he has space  
 Ffor when oure mouthes ben crommed with clay  
 Wormes blake will vs embrace  
 þan es to late in gude faye  
 To make amendis for oure trespas  
 With meknēs þou may heuen purchase  
 Oper mede thare the none brynge  
 Bot knowe thi god in iche a case  
 And loue hym beste ouer alle thyngē

To god are we halden moeste  
 To loue hym and his wrethe ethe chewe  
 Now es none so vnkuynde a beste  
 Ne lesse dose þat hym es dewe  
 Ffor bestes and fewlis . moeste and leste  
 þe course of kynd al wey pay sewe  
 And we ofte breken goddis heste  
 Agayne kuynde we bene vn trewe  
 Ffor kynd wolde þat we hym knewe  
 And dred hym moeste in oure doynge  
 It es noþte rihte þat he vs rewe  
 Bot Mercy passes all thyngē

Now harlotrye for myrthe es tolde  
 And vertus are toumed into vyce  
 And syn full oftymes es solde  
 And lawe es ledde by couetyse  
 Oure flesche es frele and ethe to folde  
 And trouthe es put at littill prise  
 Oure god es Glotonye and golde  
 Drounkenhede lecherye and the dyse  
 Loo here oure lyfe & oure delyttēs  
 Oure lufe oure luste & oure lykynge  
 3it 3if we will repēt & ryse  
 Mercy schall passe all thyngē

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. poet. a.1

Vnlustily . vr lyf we lede  
 Monhod and we . twynne in two .  
 To heuen ne helle . take we now hede  
 But on day come . a noþer go  
 Who is a mayster . now but meede .  
 And pruide . þat wakened al vr wo .  
 We stunte neiper . for schame ne drede .  
 To teren vr god . from top to to .  
 For swere his soule . his herte also  
 And alle þe Membres . þat we cun Mynge .  
 Ful harde vengeaunce . wol falle on þo  
 But merci passeþ alle þinge .

148

152

156

And corteis knihthod . and clergie  
 þat wont were vices . to forsake .  
 Are nou so Routed . in Ribaudye  
 þat opur merþes . lust hem not make  
 Awei is gentyl . cortesyne  
 And lustines . his leue hap take .  
 We loue so slouþe . and harlotrie .  
 We slepe . as swolle swyn in lake  
 þer wol no worschupe . wip vs wake  
 Til þat Charite . beo mad a kyng .  
 And þen schal . al vr synne slake  
 And Merci passeþ alle þing .

160

f.407a

col.3

164

168

I munge no more . of þis to 3ou .  
 Al þaus I coupe . 3if þat I wolde  
 For 3e han herd wel . whi and hou  
 Bi gon þis tale . þat I haue tolde  
 And þis men knowen . wel I nouh .  
 For Merlyons . feet ben colde  
 Hit is heor kynde . on Bank and bouh  
 A quik Brid . to haueu and holde  
 From foot to foot . to flutte and folde .  
 To kepe hire . from clomesyng  
 As I an hauporn . gan bi holde  
 I sau3 my self . þe same þing

172

176

180

London, British Library, MS. Addit. 22283

Vnlustily vr lyf we lede .  
 Monhod and we twynne in two .  
 To heuene ne helle take we non hede .  
 But on day come a noþur go .  
 Who is Maister now but meede .  
 And pruyde . þat wakened al vr wo .  
 We stunt noþur for schame ne drede .  
 To teren vr god . from top to to  
 For swere his soule his hert al so .  
 And alle þe Membres þat we con mynge .  
 Ful harde vengeaunce wol falle o þo .  
 But Merci passeþ alle þing

148

152

156

And corteis knihthod . and clergie .  
 þat wont were vices to forsake .  
 Are nou so roted in rybaudye .  
 þat opur murþes lust hem not make .  
 Awei is gentel . curtesye .  
 And lustines . his leue hap take .  
 We loue so slouþe . and harlotrie .  
 We slepe a swolle swyn in lake .  
 þer wol no worschupe wip vs wake  
 Til þat Charite be made a kyng .  
 And þerne schal alle vre symes slake .  
 And Merci passeþ alle þing

160

164

168

I Munge no more . of þis to 3ou .  
 Al þaus I kouþe . yf þat I wolde .  
 For 3e han herde whi and hou .  
 Bigon þis tale þat I haue tolde .  
 And þis men knowen wel I nouh  
 For Merlyons . feet ben colde .  
 Hit is heore kuynde on bank and bouh  
 A quik brid . to haue and holde .  
 From foot to foot . to flytte and folde .  
 To kepe hire from clomesyng  
 As I an hauporn gan bi holde .  
 I sau3 my self þe same þing .

172

f.129r

col.1

178

180

London, British Library, MS. Addit. 31042

Vnlustely oure lyfe we lede  
 Manhede and we twynnen in two  
 To heuen ne helle we take no hede  
 Bot one day come anoþer goo  
 Who es a mayster nowe bot meede  
 And pryde þat wakeneth all oure woo  
 We schonen noþer for schame ne drede  
 To tere oure god fro top to too  
 Ffor to swere his hert his soule also  
 And all his membris þat we con mynge  
 Ffull harde vengance will lighte on thoo  
 Bot mercy passes all thyng

Now curtasye kynghode & Clergye

3at wont were wyfes for to forsake

þay are so roteþe in rebaudrye

þat opur myrthes liste þam none make

Awaye es gentill curtasye

And lightsomes his leue hase take

And we love slouthe and harlotrye

To slepte als a sowe dose in a lake

þer will no wirchiþe with vs awake

Till charyte be maketh kyng

3an sall oure synnes slake

And Mercy schall passe all thyng

I munge of þis no more to 3owe  
 All þofe I couthe 3if þat I wolde  
 Ffor 3e hafe wele herde and howe  
 þis tale bygan þat I hafe tolde  
 þis clerkes knowen wele ynoughe  
 þat merlyons fete þay bene so colde  
 It es his kynd on banke and bough  
 A quyke birde to hafe in holde  
 Ffro fote to fote to flyte & folde  
 To kepe hir fete some clomsyng  
 Als I ane hawthorne gane by holde  
 I sawe myselfe this selcouthe thyng

**Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. poet. a.1**  
 Whon heo hedde holden . so al niht .  
 On Morwe heo let hit gon a way .  
 Wheper gentrie taust hire . so or noust .  
 I can not telle þou . in good fay . 184  
 But God . as þou art ful of mist .  
 Þou3 we plesse þe . not to pay .  
 Graunt vs repentaunce . and respit .  
 And schrif and hosel . or we day . 188  
 As þou art God . and mon verray .  
 Þou beo vr help . at vre endyng .  
 Bi fore þi face þat we mai sai  
 Now Merci passeþ alle þinge . 192

**London, British Library, MS. Addit. 22283**  
 Whon heo hadde holden . so al niht  
 On morwe heo let hit gon a way .  
 Wheper genteri taust hire so or nouht  
 I can not telle þou in goode fay . 184  
 But god as þou art ful of myht  
 Þou3 we plesse þe not to pay .  
 Graunt vs repentaunce and respit  
 And shrift and hosel or we day . 188  
 As þou art god and Mon verray  
 þou beo vr help at vre endyng .  
 Bi fore þi face þat we may say .  
 Now Merci passeþ alle þinge . 192

**London, British Library, MS. Addit. 31042**  
 When he had holden hir all þe nyghte  
 At þe mome he lete hir wend hir waye  
 Whether gentrys taughte hir that or righte  
 I can not telle þow in gud faye  
 Bot god als þou arte full of myghte  
 Alle þofe we plesse þe not to paye  
 Grant vs repentaunce & replyghte  
 Schrifte and howsell are oure dyinge daye  
 God als þou arte man verrey  
 þou be oure helpe at oure endyng  
 By fore thi face þat me may say ???  
 That mercy passes alle thyng . . . . . ?

**Textual notes:**

- 2 Bm: *laye* written and crossed out between *i* and *was*
- 6 Bm: *rent* written and crossed out between *to* and *scheni*
- 34 Bm: *dede* written and crossed out between *mys* and *doynge*
- 43 S: this line was copied in error after line 40, expuncted, and recopied in its correct position
- 53 Bm: *þou* inserted above the writing line, with a ^, between *erihely* and *i*
- 69 Bm: *thyng* inserted above the writing line, with a ^, between *vouchede* and *thyng*
- 77 Bm: *no* inserted above the writing line, with a ^, between *vouchede* and *thyng*
- 169 Bm: in the word *menge*, the first *e* is written over *y*
- 191 V: the letters after *s* in the last word are illegible
- 191-2 Bm: the final letters of each line are illegible

## Chapter 6

### The Metaphysical Poetics of “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” and other Poems

A philosophical science, metaphysics has manifested itself in various theories throughout the ages, theories that offer diverse explanations for the cause of being as well as for how the human mind is able to grasp that cause and, in that act of intellect, demonstrate its own metaphysical aspect. Poets too, throughout the ages, have explored these questions in relation to their own art, and have left us with various sorts of metaphysical poetry. Such poetry reflects, more or less, the particular brand of metaphysical thought current in any given poet's contemporary milieu. The most well-known metaphysical poetry is that of the seventeenth-century, written by John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne. This poetry is characterized by its “concordant discord,” its direct association of apparently unlike phenomena through a metaphysical conceit; it also incorporates the poets' awareness of their own selves as participating in the veiled harmonies of the universe. Various attempts have been made to account for seventeenth-century metaphysical poetics with relation to contemporary religious and philosophical thought.<sup>1</sup> It is generally acknowledged that seventeenth-century poets present, for the first time in English lyric, insight into how their own mind and creative activity relate to cosmic forces acting in all areas of nature, and the incumbent ramifications of that awareness on theories of language and of poetry.

Such metaphysical consciousness in the lyric genre, however, can be found in English lyrics written before the seventeenth century, including those in the Vernon manuscript. Some Middle English alliterative poems, including *The Dispute Between Mary and the Cross* to be discussed later in this chapter, have been called “metaphysical” because of their use of extravagant

metaphors and conceits.<sup>2</sup> These poems have been defined as such only because of their stylistic features, however, with no thought given to the possible philosophical or theological qualities of their metaphysics. Some of these poems, however, qualify as being “metaphysical” in a philosophical sense, as do certain others that have been illuminated previously by readers. One key aspect of a philosophically-grounded metaphysical poetics is a self-conscious, reflective persona.

Metaphysics deals with the relationship of being to existence. A thinker engaged in metaphysical contemplation takes as his subject the being of any thing, and attempts to account for its existence. In so doing, he penetrates to the immaterial aspect of material being. As well, he considers what any given immaterial aspect shares in common with the immaterial aspect of other beings. This ideally leads to an apprehension of the unity of beings, as the fundamental existence of separate beings is discovered to participate in a single essence, a Prime Being or a first principle beyond being. The movement of the human mind in seeking essences and primal unities is also apprehended as a manifestation of the thinker’s own ontological essence, since thought itself attests the existence of a present being and the participation of that individual being in a universal essence which transcends individual existence. The apprehension of metaphysical reality in the world outside the thinker’s mind, therefore, corresponds to and evinces the metaphysical essence of the thinker himself. Philosophically-grounded metaphysical poetry, then, will involve a persona’s self-reflection.

As David Jeffrey has shown, one Middle English poem that represents a poet-persona engaged in metaphysical contemplation is “Gold & al þis werdis wyn” (*IMEV* 1002), from John of Grimestone’s preaching book (Edinburgh, N.L.S., MS. Advocates 18.7.21).<sup>3</sup>

Gold & al þis werdis wyn  
 Is nouth but christis rode,  
 I wolde ben clad in christes skyn,  
 þat ran so longe on blode,  
 & gon t'is herte & taken myn In-  
 þer is a fulsum fode.  
 þen 3ef i litel of kith or kyn,  
 For þer is alle gode. Amen.

Jeffrey identifies how the development of the conceits in this poem look forward to the metaphysical poetry of Herbert and Donne:

Grimestone puns effectively (“þis werdis wyn”) on *world-word* and *wine-joy* to introduce a typical movement toward radical physical identification (“I wolde ben clad in christes skyn”) which is metaphysical through the mystery of transubstantiation as well.<sup>4</sup>

He goes on to relate the pun to a verbal epistemology of divine illumination, which holds that Christ’s status as both God and man models and enables the translation between the material and the spiritual in all phenomena, including that of a human speaker and of the words he or she uses:

A further reading of the poem’s first two lines thus becomes: “Wisdom, and all the joy of words, / is nothing except for the cross of Christ,” a tacit recognition by the poet, appropriately, of his art, of the profound and mysterious dependency of word or metaphor upon Word or Metaphor, of the intimate relationship between philology and the incarnation.<sup>5</sup>

“Gold & al þis werdis wyn” therefore proves the exception to Rosemary Woolf’s observation that

Middle English lyrics, unlike seventeenth-century lyrics, do not present poets conscious of their mental activity.<sup>6</sup>

Speakers who become aware of their spiritual nature in working creatively with language are also present in at least three Vernon refrain lyrics: “*Deo Gracias I*” and “*Mane nobiscum domine*,” which were discussed in my “Six Vernon Lyrics,” and “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys,” to be discussed here. The metaphysical thought evident in these poems corresponds to medieval theories of divine illumination as the agent of all knowledge of eternal truth. In its concern with how knowledge is given to humans through the power of God, “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” also addresses the relative merit of the Divine Will and the human will in attaining virtue and effecting salvation. Similar to John of Grimestone’s poem, the metaphysical nature of “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” resides in its copious word-play, which creates a complex symbol. Moreover, references to teachers and forms of knowledge other than Christ in the poem—those of Macer and Cato—inflect the theme of epistemology. As in other Vernon refrain poems, words, images, allusions, and speaking persona possess multivalent significance, and together they create a multi-dimensional discursive structure which requires the audience’s interpretative work to concretize meaning.

The philosophical position that “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” evinces is Augustinian. It is informed by the Augustinian trinitarian theories of knowledge as divine illumination and of the relative powers of free will and grace. These theories were current in medieval England, and would have been well known by any educated clergy. In his discussion of the “Augustinian Revival” in fourteenth-century England, William J. Courtenay points out that many commentaries were written on Augustine’s works, namely *The City of God*, *The Trinity*, and *The Confessions*.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, “[t]he fact that several of these commentaries are referred to as lectures suggests that Augustine may briefly have become a minor text in the faculty of theology or the religious schools.”<sup>8</sup> As well, Peter Lombard assembled Augustine’s analyses in the *Book of the Sentences*, which “became required a subject of meditation and teaching for every professor of theology.”<sup>9</sup>

Augustine’s theory of knowledge as divine illumination is found in his account of analogies of the Trinity within the human mind. It is indebted to neo-Platonic thought (especially the writings of Plotinus), and particularly the theory of knowledge as remembrance. For Plato, knowledge of the forms is implanted in the soul before humans are born, and so remembrance is the drawing forth of that which was known at a previous time. For Augustine the word “remembrance,” when applied to knowledge of eternal truths, means recognition, a being mindful of the present indwelling of God in the soul, and particularly in the mind, the “spiritual eye,” which is the highest part of the soul. God’s presence in the mind exists in two ways. God is the Light which shines into the mind and so allows the intellect to perceive eternal truths: in the way that the sun illuminates the world so that humans may see species in the world, God, the eternal Light, illuminates the eternal truth so that humans may understand. God is also present in those eternal truths. Although the truths can be grasped by an enlightened intellect in the human mind, their true home is in the mind of God. The co-residence of these truths in the human and Divine mind therefore manifests divine participation in human life; because humans are made in the image of God they have access to divine truths, and that access, when realized by the apprehending mind, indicates to it that its true being is in the image of God.

The similarity between the human mind and God, and thus the identification of the working intellect as the means of apprehending the metaphysical aspect of human existence, is

developed in *The Trinity*. In it, Augustine describes different kinds of trinities within the human mind; these trinities provide an analogy for God, the Holy Trinity, and help to explain mankind's existence *ad imaginem Dei*. The second and main trinity, developed in Book XI of *The Trinity*, is that of memory, intellect, and will. These three faculties work in the inner mind in a manner analogous to the act of visual perception. In any act of beholding a material phenomena, three aspects are involved: the object beheld, the vision (which is sense informed by the object beheld), and the power of the sight (the attention of the mind on the object). Ever after the sense has been informed by the object beheld, it holds a place as a species in memory. A similar Trinitarian procedure is involved when humans draw forth images from memory. Now the object beheld is the species in memory. The vision is the "inner vision," the intellect impressed by the image held in the memory to form a "species which arises in the gaze of thought."<sup>10</sup> The will is the power that holds the inner eye on the memory and allows the inner vision to arise. This is the fundamental grid for a psychology of thought: "when these three are drawn together into unity, then from that combination itself, they are called thought."<sup>11</sup>

The grid becomes metaphysical when Augustine considers the essence of mind. Memory is not restricted to the memory of an object once beheld, or of truths once learned; it can be a memory of the 'reality' of the mind itself. As such, the mind sees beyond its functionality to its essence: it recognizes itself as an object of knowledge. The mind can also remember, or be mindful of, its perpetual essence as the highest element of humanity and thus that element which is closest to God. Having been created by God, it bears His essence. When the mind contemplates itself, then, it contemplates the highest truth, and this act of self-contemplation qualifies as the most enlightened form of existence:

Hence this trinity of the mind is not on that account the image of God because the mind remembers itself, understands itself, and loves itself, but because it can also remember, understand, and love Him by whom it was made. And when it does so, it becomes wise; but if it does not, even though it remembers itself, knows itself, and loves itself, it is foolish.<sup>12</sup>

Being mindful of the essence of the mind is, however, difficult because humans have a propensity to be distracted by material phenomena or images of them. Therefore intelligence, in the form of eternal reason, is needed to assist the mind. This intelligence is, likewise, rendered effective by the Divine Intelligence, and is aided by the Divine Light shining on the object of knowledge: the eternal truth of the mind. The eternal reason seeking to know the mind results in the mind's knowledge of itself.

The way Augustine conceives of mind's knowledge of itself incorporates his theory of the ontology of the Word. This theory, as well as establishing the link between the trinity of the mind and the divine Trinity, also develops a verbal epistemology of the metaphysical aspect of language, of language as a sign of the eternal presence of God. The mind expresses its knowledge of itself in what Augustine calls a 'word': "this true knowledge of things, thence conceived, we bear with us as a word."<sup>13</sup> By calling 'true knowledge' the "word," Augustine strengthens the correspondence he sees it bears, in its genesis as well as in its being, to Christ, the Word. This correspondence manifests how the capacity for the human mind to access divine truths is directly related to the doctrine of the Incarnation. Gilson summarizes the analogy as follows:

For as the Father eternally conceives a perfect expression of Himself which is the Word, so the human mind, made fruitful by the eternal reasons of the Word, produces a true

knowledge of itself within itself. This actual expression is obviously distinct from the latent memory of self it expresses, but it does not become detached from it; what becomes separate is only the external word whereby our inner knowledge is externalized in the form of words or other signs.<sup>14</sup>

The analogy between Christ as the expression of the Father and true inner knowledge as the Word incorporates a verbal epistemology that grants priority to the spiritual essence of all words. Augustine develops this epistemology most clearly in the final book of *The Trinity*. If the true knowledge grasped by the mind is defined as a word, the verbal words that articulate that knowledge have a being that is not primarily phonological or verbal, but that is prior to their corporeal manifestation. Words spoken are ontological: the essence of their being resides in the mind of the speaker. Moreover, insofar as they are words of divine knowledge, the essence of their being resides ultimately in the divine mind. The spoken word of divine knowledge therefore attests the indwelling of God within the speaker; its analogy with the Incarnate Word is real. Christ existed as a Word in the mind of God before He became flesh, so He emanates from God's mind. Likewise, the word that is the knowledge of divine matters, a knowledge that is only made accessible through the redemption of Christ, exists in the mind of humans before it is made sonic or material. The parallels are more than analogies here since it is only through the divine participation of God, through illumination or His presence in the Ideas themselves, that true knowledge is conceived and born. Therefore the words that speak the divine truth are a sign of the divinity present within the speaker. As Marcia Colish describes Augustinian verbal epistemology, speech of divine truth is not heuristic, it is instrumental or expressive: "[s]tatements are thus held to be not heuristic, or productive of knowledge in the first instance, but expressive

of a knowledge already existing in the mind of the knower.”<sup>15</sup>

Augustine’s verbal epistemology was seminal for other “realist” thinkers in the Middle Ages, and those who followed him also reformulated his theory. Two of the most important are Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas. Anselm’s reformulation of Augustine’s Trinitarian philosophy is found in this *Monologion*, which is a meditation on the “supreme essence.” Anselm follows Augustine in arguing that all that exists, exists through the supreme essence; in identifying the rational mind as that which comes closest to the supreme essence; and in distinguishing two qualities of the mind seeking knowledge that demonstrate divine illumination: the mind’s “close resemblance [to the supreme essence] helps bring the inquiring mind closer to the supreme truth, and the excellence of its created nature teaches the mind what to think about its Creator.”<sup>16</sup>

Aquinas wrote commentaries on Boethius’s *De Trinitate*, which is itself indebted to Augustine. The first Question in the commentary is “On the Knowledge of Divine Realities.” In it Aquinas, drawing on Aristotle, posits an “agent intellect” that exists naturally within humans and allows them to know certain, limited truths without the illumination of any “external light.”<sup>17</sup> Some truths, however, the natural intellect is unable to know on its own; these are “what pertains to faith and exceeds the capacity of reason, future contingents and the like.”<sup>18</sup> The human mind can apprehend these truths only with the aid of a “superadded” divine light supplementing the natural light of the agent intellect.<sup>19</sup> Although Augustine and Aquinas differ in regards to the relative necessity of God’s participation in acts of knowledge, they both agree that a direct illumination from an ever-present God is required for humans to know divine truths.

The Augustinian theory of divine illumination in coming to know divine truths is present,

in various modifications, in all medieval philosophies that grant the possibility of such knowledge, that is, in all but nominalist philosophies. It can also be traced, bound up with the particular verbal epistemology it give rise to, in John of Grimestone's lyric, and in the Vernon lyrics where the personae demonstrate a realization about the 'word': a 'word' of doctrine and their conceptualization of that 'word' in poetry. "*Mane Nobiscum Domine*," and even more so "Be token hit is þe Flourdelys" are distinguished, however, in the way they align that verbal epistemology with Augustinian theories of the will. Augustine's theories of the will are paramount in his trinitarian theories of illumination; they are dealt with more thoroughly by him in texts other than *The Trinity*; and they are extended and modified by Thomas Bradwardine and others in the fourteenth century in a manner that responded to and spawned contentions with other theologians at the time.

The presence of the will in the inner trinity of the mind indicates that it is an essential agent in any act of knowledge. The begetting of the Word within the mind is made possible through the participation of the will, which is, in its most intense state, love. The will, finally, controls all the movements of the soul. In Augustinian philosophy, desire precedes the birth of knowledge in the mind: "by our seeking and finding what we wish to know, an offspring, namely knowledge, itself is born."<sup>20</sup> The intellect's love of the mind as the highest form of God's creation causes the intellect to seek to recognize the mind; that seeking results in the birth of the word, of the "true knowledge" of the mind. Likewise, this true knowledge, as the offspring of the mind, is joined to the mind through love: the generative and the binding power of love are both implicit in the account of the will in the inner trinity. The role of the will, as love, in this metaphysical analogy provides a way of likening the trinity of the inner mind to the Holy Trinity, since the Son was born

through the Love of the Father, the Son is Love, and the Trinity is bound together through Love.

That mirroring of the Divine Trinity only happens, however, when the will is directed to its proper subject: the divine truths. Otherwise it fails to conform to the Holy Trinity and obstructs the image of God within the mind. Because the knowledge of divine truth is linked to moral rectitude, such obstruction leads to a compromised moral state. The agency of the will in gaining knowledge, then, is linked to the agency of the will in moral action; the will begets not only knowledge as offspring, but also deeds. While granting that divine illumination is essential for acquiring divine knowledge, Augustine, by giving a central role to the human will, still grants some agency to humans in attaining that knowledge.

In *The Trinity*, Augustine articulates the function of the will with recourse to its role in the act of sight. What we perceive depends on where the will wills our attention to be turned: our forgetting of certain things in our memories, and our delusions in interpreting certain things in our memories, are caused through the initiating power of the will in selecting where our attention will be focussed. The will determines what the object of our attention will be, and so what the offspring in the intellect will be. Our turning away from contemplation of the divine forms, and the consequent fall into error, are caused by the misguidance of the will. Although God aids us in our apprehension of the divine truths, through illumination, the will must first seek those truths, and seek the assistance of God in attaining them.

The importance of the will therefore rebounds back from a pure theory of knowledge to a doctrine of salvation. Knowledge of the “word,” as the eternal reason of God, translates into a knowledge of the moral order, and because that order must be known, and loved, before humans can be moved to follow it, the role of the will in choosing right action is preceded by the role of

the will in coming to know what that right action is. The movement of the soul to know the divine truth present in the mind is therefore crucial for the soul to live uprightly, and to somehow merit salvation.

In elaborating the theory of the freedom of the will, Augustine is able to hold that human sinfulness is caused through human agency, and so that the eternal punishment of sinful souls is just. Augustine's initial writings on the freedom of the will, most particularly *On the Freedom of the Will*, were an attempt to distinguish a position polemically opposed to the Manichaeans. The Manichaeans viewed an essential struggle in the world of the force of Good against the force of Evil; that struggle was waged within the human soul as well as in the physical world. Contrarily, Augustine held that God is responsible for all good: all that is good, so evil does not exist. What we call evil is a privation of good. God is not, therefore, responsible for evil or for human sin; humans sin through willfully turning away from the eternal good:

All good is from God and, consequently, there is no nature that is not from God. Hence, that movement of the soul's turning away, which we admitted was sinful, is a defective movement, and every defect arises from non-being. Look for the source of this movement and be sure that it does not come from God.<sup>21</sup>

Augustine is then at pains to argue the paradoxical position that although God has foreknowledge of everything humans will throughout their lives, they do not will by necessity: he argues this by making the distinction that although God has foreknowledge of all human action, He is not the agent of that action.<sup>22</sup> Augustine does not, however, deny that God's grace is needed to assist the will in achieving its highest purpose. The relation of grace to will is addressed more thoroughly in *On Grace and Free Will* where Augustine argues that humans can in no way merit God's grace: it

is a free gift. This later position would seem to deny the degree of free will that Augustine granted in his earlier writings, and it came to define the “New Augustinianism” of the fourteenth century.

Augustine’s teachings on free will and grace were revitalized in the fourteenth century as one side of overarching debates on the relative power of God’s *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta*. These debates were spawned by the *moderni*, a group of scholastics which was associated mainly with Oxford University and whose most influential fore-father was William of Ockham.<sup>23</sup> The *moderni* asserted God's freedom and the contingency of the world by elaborating upon a distinction between the two powers of God: the *potentia absoluta* and the *potentia ordinata*. The distinction resounded in views on the created order of the world and on divine nature, particularly as it relates to a scheme of salvation. As it relates to the created order, the *potentia absoluta* referred to all the possibilities that were initially open to God, of which only a portion were realized when He created the world, and the *potentia ordinata* was the plan God choose to ordain in the world. Thus God's power is not identical with His willed ordinances in the world, rather they are “only the most common way through which the ordained will of God is expressed.”<sup>24</sup> The ordained order can not be taken as an analogy for God's nature since He could have expressed His will in any one of innumerable, unimaginable systems. As it relates to divine nature and the scheme of salvation, the *potentia ordinata* was “the relative power God had himself limited by entering into a covenant with man whereby salvation was promised to those who fulfilled their part of the bargain” and *potentia absoluta* “ensured God's freedom in all things, no matter what He may have promised to man in the Old and New Testament covenants.”<sup>25</sup>

The newly emphasized distinction between God's two powers had resonances in the

epistemological realm—the growth of nominalism and the “new physics,” and in the soteriological realm—the relative values of man's free will and God’s grace in salvation. When the apprehensible universe is taken to contain a vestige of God, the use of the faculties of perception and reason are granted the potential to justify faith in God, since God is evident in creation. Moreover, humans are brought to see their own good works as evidence of the Will of the Father. According to the *moderni*, however, there is no uncontingent synthesis between the apprehensible world and God's full plan or ultimate power, and the mechanical law of causation is denied. God cannot be known through phenomena. Similarly, the final cause of a person’s good works resides in his free will, and the power of intervening grace is reduced: man is a free actor in the world, and, it is incumbent upon him to work in the world in a way that might fulfil his part of the covenantal bargain set up by God and thereby merit salvation. Still, because this program of work is derived from only a human knowledge of God's *potentia ordinata*, the *moderni* held that it does not guarantee salvation.

This *moderni* view on the potential for people to act out of their free will to merit grace was questioned by the “New Augustinians.” The two most prominent thinkers in this school were Thomas Bradwardine (1290-1349) and Wyclif. Bradwardine spoke out against the *moderni*, whom he labelled Pelagians for holding the view that an individual could earn his own salvation without the grace of God.<sup>26</sup> Bradwardine's countering determinist theology, set out in his *De Causa Dei*, held that God was the first cause of all human acts, so any disposition towards good was seen as a sign, not a cause, of God’s grace. Thus the possession of right reason had no causal power, since prudence could not effect any change in a person's spiritual state; it was, rather, an endowment from above. As well as removing the moral value of human actions

(because they are not freely willed), Bradwardine's theology had epistemological implications. While denying that human reason is able to comprehend absolute truths, he still held that the world revealed God's will and was evidence of His hand at work. For Bradwardine, "the task of ascertaining truth...resolved itself into clarifying the precise way in which God works, and His relation to His creatures."<sup>27</sup> A further attack on the *moderni* came from Wyclif, who held a doctrine of grace as well as a realist (or "ultra-realist") philosophy and epistemological approach. Like Bradwardine, Wyclif held that "the grace by which we are predestined to salvation cannot be elicited by merit, for God naturally justifies men to eternal life before the predestined show merit in the world."<sup>28</sup>

As a group, the Vernon refrain poems represent these fourteenth-century philosophical and theological debates: the thought of the *moderni* is evident in certain Vernon refrain poems, one of which will be considered in the next chapter, while the poetics of "Be token hit is þe Flourdelys," like "*Mane Nobiscum Domine*" is influenced by the "realist," Augustinian theories. "Be token hit is þe Flourdelys" embodies the Augustinian theory of divine illumination, and the related theory of the Divine Will active throughout the entire universe and discernible in all movements of the created world. These theories inform the role of images, of allusions to other texts, and of the persona. The action that characterizes all these aspects of the poem is *translatio*: they all attest an interchange between ontological and material modes of existence. "Be token hit is þe Flourdelys" figures the spiritual dimensions of words, of ideas, and of natural phenomena—including the flourdelys and the speaking persona—in a way that transforms it from a didactic statement to a suggestive, symbolic representation.

The persona may be called a poet-persona. As such, it is less distinctly a character than

the personae of lyrics considered in previous chapters. Nonetheless, the poet-persona does play a specific role: the role of one coming to learn and pass on knowledge of the mysteries of faith, a role that corresponds to the activity of any religious poet. The persona's consciousness can be considered as expressive of the poet's own experience, but it can also be thought of as a means of extending the didactic. Both perspectives are plausible: the audience of "Be token hit is þe Flourdelys" faces a dilemma similar to that of *Piers Plowman* over whether to see the narrator as engaged in the process of discovering or of teaching. Having outlined the theological thought that informs "Be token hit is þe Flourdelys," it is possible to trace the theory of divine illumination back to hypothesize its inception within the experience of the poet, and still articulate its effect in terms of didactic value. Such an account might go as follows: the poet, in the act of discovering the meaning of divine truths, the 'word,' that he believes in, is made aware of the divine source of his knowledge. That compels him to incorporate that awareness into his poem in the form of poetic self-consciousness, and that incorporation ultimately serves to extend the instructional value of the poem into a more holistic view of the doctrine of Redemption that he seeks to convey, one that includes its bare factual meaning as well as the theo-psychology behind its apprehension in the mind. Accordingly, when I refer to the poet, I am here referring to both the poet and the poet-persona created by him.

Before turning to the poem, it is worth distinguishing its symbolist poetics from that of other Middle English Marian lyrics that develop the image of the lily—the flower that represented Mary—in a more conventional, and strictly allegorical manner. As well as attesting Augustinian philosophical positions, the poem accords with the "symbolist" mentality that Marie D. Chenu has perceptively traced in twelfth-century literature and philosophy, much of which was influenced by

neo-Platonic thought. The symbolist mentality dwells on the analogies between the natural world and the sacred: “everything was a *sacramentum* in the technical sense of the word, that is, a sign of inner reality.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as E. de Bryne, whom Chenu quotes, puts it, “symbolism is the aesthetic expression of ontological participation.”<sup>30</sup> The chief symbol in “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” is the flourdelys. As a symbol, the image lily departs from its uses in earlier Middle English lyrics, where it is developed as an allegory. The nature of the difference between the two employments of the image falls in line with the distinction between the symbol and the allegory provided by Chenu:

Symbolism arises out of a persistent habit of our nature. In the course of intellectual experience, we somehow “hide” our clear perception inside images that mediate mystery to us and so acquire their force and value, indeed their aesthetic force and value. As for allegory, it does not start from such aesthetic experience and rise to the purely intellectual level; it starts with critical analysis and from it derives abstract thoughts which it ultimately employs in a didactic presentation. In the final state, explanation submerges signification.<sup>31</sup>

One earlier lyric that develops the image of the lily in a purely allegorical manner is the thirteenth-century “Ful feir flour is þe lilie” (*IMEV* 885), from Cambridge, Trinity College, MS 323, which begins as follows:

Ful feir flour is þe lilie,  
 wid fif leuis hire sal hulie;  
 fif to beren hire is ful imunde,  
 for þat is hire propre cunde.

Þat firste bitokenit charite,  
 to louen þin louer more þen þe,  
 vid word wid horte vid al þi mist,  
 for þat is treve loue arist.  
 after þis lef is þer oþir:  
 þu loue wel þine broþir.<sup>32</sup>

The opening states that the number five represents Mary, as does the lily. The poet then proceeds to state what each leaf “bitokenit,” using a word that also appears in “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys.” “Bitokenit” means “to be a symbol or emblem of something, represent, symbolize” (*MED* s.v. bitōknen v. 1.) The speaker then applies an allegoresis to the lily, though in a fairly unsystematic manner. The first leaf represents charity (couched in the language of courtly love), the second love of neighbour, the third righteousness, the fourth service of Christ, and the fifth shriving of sin: but repetition of vices and admonition for various leaves tends to collapse the categories. The poem does not return to mention Mary, but ends with an address to the audience to think on heaven and forsake sins. The exegesis applied to the lily here is of the most logical and straightforward kind. The poet uses his vehicle clinically, and suggests no ontological synthesis, no reason why the lily itself demonstrates these moral truths, through analogy or otherwise.

In contrast to the allegorises of the lily in “Ful feir flour is þe lillie,” “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” develops the image of the flower into a symbol of divine truth. The symbolism is generated in two ways: one with regards to the particular species of flower—the flourdelys, and another with regards to the flower’s quality as a living creation participating in the sacramental nature of the created world. As a particular species, the image signifies in three ways: through the

already-established association of the lily as a symbol of Mary; through its medicinal quality, forefronted with reference to “Maacer” the authoritative herbalist; and through the descriptive epithets embedded in its compound French name. As well, its quality as a natural creation springing from a seed is highlighted as meaningful, insofar as it evinces participation in the divine essence that creates all things. Its quality as the particular species rebounds on its quality as a generic plant, insofar as the sacramental vision of nature holds that all of nature parallels the generation of the Word: together the many significances of the image demonstrate the flower’s participation in the universal essence of the Creator. Moreover, the poet likens the growth and blossoming of the flower with the ‘springing’ of Christ which that flower represents and also participates in insofar as the Father is also responsible for it; he also, in a subtler way, likens that growth and blossoming with the inception and birth of knowledge in his own mind. In critical terms, we may say that the conventional aspect of the vehicle—the cultural identification of the flourdelys with Christ and Mary—is continually extended as the poet probes to the ontological quality of the vehicle—the divine essence of the natural flower. This probing turns the poem from allegory to symbol.

Part of the significance of the flourdelys lies in its status as a medicinal plant. The reference to “Maacer” (11) in the poem alerts the audience to this quality. Macer was the reputed author of an herbal describing, in 2269 lines of Latin verse, seventy-seven herbs and their medicinal properties. This herbal, entitled *De virtutibus herbarum*, was “one of the more widely read books in this field during the entire medieval period.”<sup>33</sup> Nine translations of the work into English survive, as do many false English translations.<sup>34</sup> The capacity of the lily to heal the body renders it an appropriate symbol for Christ who heals souls and grants eternal salvation, and for

Mary, the Mediatrix of grace who has intercessional powers.<sup>35</sup> The medicinal quality of the lily is thus one aspect enabling the image to signify a unity between material and immaterial worlds.

Indeed, one of the most resonant moments of word-play in the poem evinces the salvific feature of the symbol: that with the word “vertu.” The word appears in the context of the doctrine of salvation:

Whon we weore wrapped al in wo,  
 Þorw werkes þat we had wroust wrongwys,  
 Þi godnes gert vs graiply go,  
 Þorw vertu of þi Flourdelys. (21-4)

The noun “vertu” means “the antidotal power of an herb or a venom” (*MED* s.v. *vertū* n. 6. (b)). It also means “divine power, divine might,” and more particularly “sacramental grace, sanctifying grace; the spiritual benefit of sacramental grace or of a Christian virtue” (*MED* s.v. *vertū* n. 9. (a), 10. (a)). The word denotes at once the physical substance of the flower which leads to corporeal healing, and the spiritual essence of God’s grace which leads to spiritual healing and salvation. This is only one of many instances in the poem where words themselves are shown to present, through their very polysemeity, the divine influx in the universe, and thus evince the epistemology of the Word underlying the poem.<sup>36</sup>

The strongest instance of word-play showing the metaphysical quality of words resides in the name of the flower itself. The word “flourdelys” unfolds in two different directions, but those two paths converge through their reference to the doctrinal truths relating to Christ and Mary, both of whom the flower symbolizes. “Flourdelys” can be read as “flour delys,” “flower of joy” or as “flour de lys,” “flower of light.”<sup>37</sup> Through its bifurcated denotation, the word that names

Christ and Mary at the same time expresses the mysterious quality of their powers and thereby motions towards a mystical complexity that defies logical explanation.

The theme of joy pervades the lyric. One of the doctrines developed is the five joys of Mary: the Joy of the Annunciation (25ff.), the Joy of the Nativity (41ff.), the Joy of the Resurrection (57ff.), the Joy of the Ascension (73ff.), and the Joy of the Assumption (97ff.). Moreover, Mary, as well as Christ, is more generally associated with the joy brought through salvation. The theme of joy is enforced through explicit description throughout: Gabriel's visit to Mary is the "Murieste meetyng" (28); Mary's conception of the child creates inexpressible joy: "What Murpe was mad no Mouþ mist mele" (35); the singing of angels at Mary's ascension also defies description: "Wip more murpes mist neuer mon meete" (103); and Christ Himself is described as "Blisful" (41; 127). The joy associated with the flower through its name typifies the doctrine of salvation which the flower represents: joy and salvation are inseparable.

In keeping with the lily's denotation as "flour de lys" (flower of light), Christ is traditionally known as the Light; so too is Mary, as evinced in the popular medieval hymn "Ave Maris Stella," a macaronic paraphrase of which appears in the Vernon series. Unlike the dispersal of the theme of joy throughout the poem, the metaphor of the divine pair as a provider of light is elaborated in a single stanza. On the surface it appears that this is a separate metaphor, but, in light of the meaning of "flourdelys," it augments the central complex symbolism of the flower.

A studi steer þer stod ful steere,  
 For steeres men þat bi stremes gun stray,  
 And neore his worþly wille weore,  
 Þei wolde haue went a wilful way.

No feyntysenes þei founded in fay,  
 Þat burth was buried in Marbel bys,  
 And whon god wolde he went his way,  
 And þenne was sprad þe Flourdelys.           (49-56)

The first “steer” (49) here denotes two words, both of which enforce the image of a guide: that of “helmsman” or “rudder,” and that of “star,” which Hunter glosses it as.<sup>38</sup> “Steer” may denote “the rudder of a boat or ship” (*MED* s.v. *stēr(e* n.(2) 1. (a)), and “helmsman, pilot” (*MED* s.v. *stēr(e* n.(3) (a)). As such, “studi” functions as the West Midland form of the adjective *stedī*, for which this poem is cited as the sole example of the special nautical sense “not deviating from course” (*MED* s.v. *stedī* adj. (b)). Christ and Mary are therefore presented as the pilots of the ship, a metaphor for the soul, driving it to ensure that it does not go astray in “stremes.” Elsewhere among the Vernon lyrics, however, a related spelling, “sterre,” means “star”: in the macaronic “*Ave Maris Stella*,” the first two lines of each of the first two stanzas are as follows:

Heil, sterre of þe See so briht!  
       Þow graunt vs to ben vr gyde;  
 ...  
 Liknet artou to sterre of see,  
       To lihten vs, grete and smale;<sup>39</sup>           (1-2; 13-4)

Especially given the flourdelys poem’s effusion of polysemous words, the first “steer” (49) is a homograph, signifying as both ‘star’ and “steersman.” In its dual signification, it summons identification with Mary based on her characterization as “star of the sea.” The dual capacity of steer in this context figures a profound vision of how God provides guidance to humans: for one,

taking the commonplace metaphor of the ship as the soul, divine direction is embedded in the soul itself, as a natural means of directing it to do well; as well, divine direction is a light exterior to the soul, shining on items and illuminating them so that humans can progress well. This dual aspect parallels the Augustinian bifurcated account of how God can be found through the workings of the mind—He is inscribed in the forms of true knowledge, but He is also a superadded light which illumines truth so that people may discern it.

In all of these ways the particular species, the *flourdelys*, is developed as a literary symbol: the medicinal attributes of that species and the implications of its French name figure doctrinal truths. The flower, moreover, also signifies as a generic plant, in the way any other plant could. The attributes of the plant at various stages of its development (seed, branches, *blosme*) come to have reference to Christ, in regards to His advent into the world. More generally, the sheer existence of the flower as a natural creation comes to signify the divine essence of all created life. Through these aspects, the image's symbolic power is deepened, insofar as it shows how the whole created world evinces the presence of the Creator and the ontological unity of all of creation.

The physical attributes of the flower, its “*Braunches*” (15) and “*Blosmes*” (15,19), are suggestive of Christ. The noun “*braunches*” signifies most readily as “branches or twigs of a plant” (*MED* s.v. braunch n. 1.). It also means “a line of genealogical descent or ancestry; a race,” “a descendant, offspring” (*MED* s.v. braunch n. 4. (a), 4. (b)). As well, the word has a particular denotation in relation to Christ, as the redemptive branch of the tree of humanity. In the context of the poem, “*braunches*” alludes to Christ's humanity, and particularly his ancestry from Adam, who is mentioned three times in the poem. “*Blosme*” is likewise an epithet for Christ

(*MED* s.v. *blosme*, n. (c)). The life-cycle of the flower therefore subtly signifies the whole genealogical tree from Adam until his promised redemption in Christ. Moreover, the mention of “branches” implicates all Christians into that redemption, for it calls to mind Jesus’s own analogy for the vine: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser...I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty” (John 15.1-5). Through this biblical resonance, the symbol figures the unity of the whole redeemed Church as a single body.

Apart from specific reference to the historical Christ, the flower endorses a more universal meaning through its status as a member of God’s Creation. This sense is initiated with reference to the “holy seed”: “What segge on soil pat pat seed seuz / Hit is holy at myn a vys” (13-4). The holiness of the seed refers to development of the image as a symbol of Christ, insofar as it signifies God’s seed implanted into Mary’s womb. In addition, given the poet’s subsequent explicit identification of the role of the Divine Will in the created world, the reference to the “seed” has some resonance of Augustine’s “seminal reasons” (*rationales seminales*).<sup>40</sup> Influenced by neo-Platonic thought and based in a reading of 1 Cor. 3. 6-10, Augustine’s theory of seminal reasons holds that the world is and has been, from the moment of its creation by God, pregnant with all being yet to be. The theory is elaborated most thoroughly in Augustine’s *Commentaries on Genesis 8.12*, but it also appears in other works, including Book III of *The Trinity*. The theory was taken up by a number of other theologians, including Bonaventure.<sup>41</sup> In keeping with his overall view of the overwhelming efficacy of the Divine Will in worldly life, Augustine argues that in the beginning God created all things simultaneously and that He controls each movement in nature through time. He explains this using the metaphor of hidden seeds, planted in the world by

**God at creation, which blossom forth through time:**

**For the Creator of the invisible seeds is the Creator of all things Himself; since whatever things become visible to our eyes by being born receive the first beginnings of their course from hidden seeds, and take their gradual growth to their proper size and their own distinctive forms, according to the rules that have been fixed as it were from the beginning.<sup>42</sup>**

**At other moments Augustine states that while humans plant and water the seeds, it is God who instills life, not only through creating the seeds, but through playing an active role when the moment comes for the hidden seeds to be revealed: “While man plants and waters, who draws up the moisture through the root of the vine to the cluster of grapes and makes wine except God who gives the growth?”<sup>43</sup> In the lyric, the holiness of the seed refers not only to the fact that it is the seed of the flourdelys which is a symbol of Christ, but also to the fact that it springs from God: it is holy insofar as the whole of sacramental nature is holy.**

**The status of the flower as a creation springing from God’s Will is enforced by a later, more direct and highly suggestive reference to God’s creation of and participation in the world:**

**Of al þe floures bi Frith and Felde,  
 Hit is þe freolokest for to fynde,  
 Þat weole & wit and wisdom welde,  
 And al þis word hap wroust In wynde.  
 Nou comely kyng, Corteis and kynde,  
 Þat halp vs heere from vre enemys;  
 Þe mon þat þis matere made in mynde**

Seide non is lich to þe Flourdelys. (113-120)

God is here portrayed as the creator of Christ and the creator of the world, in a way that conveys His participation in all that is. The “freolokest” (most beautiful) flower refers to Jesus. God and Jesus together are the one who “weole & wit and wisdam welde” (115); that is, God participates in every movement of intellect. Lines 115-116 have proven a crux. Brown read “welde” as present subjunctive of the verb “wield, rule”; and “wynde” as the verb “winden,” meaning “to wind,” thereby rendering “In wynde” as “enter in.”<sup>44</sup> Such a formulation posits the subject as Christ “in potential,” and specifies the reference to His birth into the world. In Smithers revision, he retains the gloss for “welde,” but for “wynde” gives only “obscure.”<sup>45</sup> Kenneth Hunter glosses “welde” as “possess,” and “In wynde” as “out of nothing.”<sup>46</sup> I favour Brown/Smither’s reading of “welde” as “rule and govern,” in accord with the commonplace sense of the verb signifying in regard to God’s supervenient powers: “of God or a member of the Holy Trinity: to rule and control (the world, heaven and earth, all things) as creator and supreme master” (*MED* s.v. *wēlden* v. 1b. (b)). This meaning would seem to accord best with Hunter’s reading of “In wynde.” The sense of the two lines, in this context, seems to be “God governs all acts of intellect in this world, and has wrought all of creation out of nothing.”

What God is identified as making and governing remains somewhat ambiguous, and that ambiguity, augmented by a pun on “word,” supports an expansion of analogies to include Christ, flower, poem, poet. “[W]ord” (116) has been read as a orthographical variant or a textual corruption, although it is attested in both manuscripts: both Brown and Hunter gloss it as “world.”<sup>47</sup> Given the abundance of word-play in the poem, there is no reason to doubt that it could have been understood as such, giving the sense that God created all things in the world out

of nothing. Again, this meaning reinforces the symbolic realism of the flourdelys as an item from the world and therefore evidence of the divine. The identification of God as the Final Cause of all the created world supports the polysemous function of the image of the lily: the poem not only represents God through the symbol of the flower, but turns to present Him as the creator of that flower—of the “Blosme” Christ, but also of the natural flower.

But “word” likely also denotes as it is: “word.” This is the more difficult meaning, though it is well supported by the specific reference to other cognitive elements, wit and wisdom, in the previous line.<sup>48</sup> Exactly what “þis word” refers to, however, is more difficult to peg. “[W]ord” may refer to Christ, or to the doctrine of salvation, the true knowledge, given a poetic representation in the poem. It may, likewise, refer to the poem itself, and thereby identify God as the final cause of the poem. The poem’s further references to the “mynde” (119) and, in the next stanza, the poet’s identification of what he thinks “in [his] þoust”(125) also suggest the poet’s recognition of the presence of God at work in the act of intellect, illuminating the mind so that he might know the truth, and present in that truth.

The bifurcated denotation of “word” as “world” and “word” demonstrates that the production of knowledge, and the verbal passage of knowledge accomplished through the poem, is governed by the same Creator who creates material phenomena. Moreover, the emergence of knowledge about God is likened to the emergence of Christ, and both share the same essence, by virtue of the fact that they are made by God, and specifically by His Incarnation. In these analogies lies the metaphysical unity of Christ, flower, poet, poem: just as the seminal reasons spring from God’s mind, so too does Christ, the Word made flesh; moreover, the natural birth and growth of the flower is likened to the poet’s own ability to watch the “word” grow in his mind

and realize that it springs from God. These generated and generative aspects of the natural and doctrinal aspects of the symbol enable it to symbolize the mental processes of coming to know divine truth and of creating the poem itself.

The ontological unity generated through word-play, imagery, and allusion unfolds even further through ambiguity about what “mynde” is being referred to. The phrase “Pe mon þat þis mater made in mynde” (119) echoes the earlier description of Macer : “As Maacer her of made in his Mynde / Þus kenned him Catoun his craftes he kneu3” (11-2). The reiteration effects either a parallel or a contrast between the two moments of intellectual activity. Macer’s function in the poem, then, extends beyond inflecting the lily with resonances from medicinal herblore: he functions as an exemplum of the production and dissemination of human knowledge. Exactly how he inflects the epistemology is, however, difficult to peg. The references to Maacer and to Catoun serve as a means of either contrasting scientific knowledge gained through texts with metaphysical knowledge gained through divine illumination, or of proving the proverbial claim that all truth is God’s truth. Given the awkward syntax of the sentence, it is difficult to tell in what direction the teaching transpires—whether Cato taught Macer or Macer taught Cato. It seems to signify that Cato taught Macer. Why “Catoun” would be cited as Macer’s teacher is a puzzle. Cato wrote *De Agri Cultura*, a text mostly about husbandry although it does include some medicinal recipes. This would be a plausible source referred to as Macer’s knowledge of herbs, but I have found no evidence attesting its availability in medieval England. It appears in five medieval manuscripts, ranging from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, and all of Italian and French provenance, but no other English author (perhaps medieval author) cites it.<sup>49</sup> Given the lack of reference to this work in English texts of the time, we cannot assume that the poet is

alluding to it. If Cato is read as Macer's teacher, the text alluded to its most likely *Disticha de Moribus ad Filium*, a very well-known moral text in the Middle Ages, a Middle English translation of which appears in the Vernon manuscript.

A reference to Macer in the English translation of the *Disticha*, moreover, makes it more likely that Macer is being implied as the teacher of Cato. One section of *Great Cato*, in the Vernon manuscript, prescribes certain texts to be read for the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge: Virgil for agriculture, Lucan for the history of war, Ovid for love, and Macer for the medicinal power of herbs:

*Herbarum vires, Macer tibi carmine dicet*

...

3if þou wolt ben a ffisicien,\*                      physician

ffor vueles to 3iuen bote,\*                      remedy

Macer þe strengþe of grases\* telles,              herbs

Boþe of crop and Rote.<sup>50</sup>              (273-6)

Given this lore, "him" in line 12 of "Be token hit is þe Flourdelys" likely functions as a reflexive, with the implication being that Cato taught himself through reading Macer, and "his craftes" refers to Macer's medicinal recipes.

In whatever way the dissemination of knowledge was meant to be understood, the references to the teaching of Macer and Cato inflect the epistemological theme of the poem. Macer and Cato may function as a contrast to Christ as the inner teacher of the spiritual truth or, what seems more likely, they may be evidence that even pre-Christian knowledge came from God. Cato, at least, was embraced as a thinker compatible with Christianity.<sup>51</sup> The Vernon text of

*Little Cato* explicitly addresses his status as a “heþene” but only to redeem him as a ‘virtuous pagan’:

Catun was an heþene mon,  
 Cristened was he nouht:  
 In word ne in werk aþeynes vr fey  
 No techyng he non tauht.

---

To holy writ al in his bok  
 A-cordyng was he euere;  
 Of god of heuene com his wit,  
 Of oþer com hit neuere.

---

þe lore þat he tauhte his sone,  
 Is neodful to vs alle;  
 Vnderstond hose wole,  
 For caas þat may be-falle.<sup>52</sup> (9-20)

Although it is possible that the reference to Cato and Macer may evoke pre-Christian and scientific knowledge as a contrast to Christian illumination, it seems more likely that they represent the maxim “All truth is God’s truth, where ever it may be found,” a maxim that extends from 1 Cor.3.5-9. The poem then tends towards a unified vision, which holds that God, as the inner teacher, wields all “wit and wisdom” throughout all phenomena and throughout history.

The theme of the transmission of knowledge is expanded through two references in the

poem to Christ as a teacher. Not only is Christ the “Flourdelys,” He teaches the Flouredelys to Adam and Eve: “Adam and Eue bi hond he hent / And tauzte hem faire þe Flourdelys” (63-4).

The matter of that teaching is specified further on:

þus purchased he þe pepul heor pees,  
 And goodly for 3af hem al heore gilt,  
 And seide, “Adam eft nou I þe sese  
 In blisse þat for blod was buld:  
 No wey wonde but wurch what þou wilt.”  
 þus hap he now bi tauzt þat wyse,  
 And þus feole prophecies ben folfeld  
 Of Marie wiþ þi Flourdelyse. (73-80)

Given the complexity of the figure of the “flourdelys,” Christ’s teaching of it here may seem somewhat sparse. His identification of Himself as the redeemer and His granting Adam and Eve participation in redemption in terms of their heritage is common enough, but the teaching of how they are to attain that heritage is surprisingly non-didactic. They are told, simply, not to fear, but to “wurch what [they] wilt.” The instruction supposes a great confidence in their wills to rightfully follow the truth, with only the knowledge of their salvation as the guide to their actions. This can be explained by the fact that they have already been granted a legal right to heaven. “[S]ese” (75) means here “to endow somebody, enfeoff; put somebody in legal or formal possession of a kingdom, land, feudal estate, goods, etc.” (*MED* s.v. seisen v. 2a. (a)). Christ teaches that his resurrection restored humans, or at least those who are preordained, to a proper wilfulness, one that is in line with the Divine Will. Christ’s teaching is not a “craft,” as Macer’s is,

but a knowledge of the supreme truth of Christianity: eternal life. This account may, indeed, be read as a doctrine of predestination. But it may also reflect a belief that knowledge of salvation evokes an overwhelming love in those to whom it applies, and this love expresses itself as a desire to keep one's will in accord with God's Will. This is the notion of obedience developed by, among other theologians, Anselm in *Cur deus homo*: "For absolute and true obedience is that which occurs when a rational being, not under compulsion but voluntarily, keeps to a desire which has been received from God."<sup>53</sup>

The meditation on the co-operation between the human will and Divine Will enters the poem in at least two other places, and in each moment it is accompanied by an Augustinian sense that all properly wilful action is really the working of the Divine Will within the human soul. The helmsman image provides the first example:

A studi steer þer stod ful steere  
 For steeres men þat bi stremes gun stray,  
 And neore his worþly wille weore  
 Þei wolde haue went a wilful way.                   (49-52)

The sense here is that, if it were not for the "worþly will" of God, humans would have gone their "wilful way," which means here their misguided way; the metaphorical guide, both a helmsman and a star, is therefore identified as the Divine Will. A similar reference is made to the will of Mary, and here it carries a more overt sense of predestination:

Sipen þou þi worþly wones hast wonnen,  
 And wones In worschipe at þi wille,  
 Vre grith was graunted, vr grace bi gunnen,                   grith/peace

For vs þat was ordeyned þertille (105-8)

Line 106, which seems to refer to Mary's Assumption, grants Mary a decisive role in willfully choosing to bear Christ. At the same time it suggests Mary's agency in effecting salvation through her position as Mediatrix. In lines 107-8, the agency of the human will is diminished as the poet avers that grace comes to those who were "ordeyned" to heaven.

In keeping with the tendency to portray the human will under the guidance of the Divine will, the poet seems to recognize his work as a sign of Christ. As mentioned previously, he suggestively identifies his own teaching as the word of God, and himself as a conduit through which that word flows. In particular, he identifies the seat of that teaching as being in his "mynde" (119), a place that is also the seat of the image of the flourdelyys. The line "Þe mon þat þis matere made in mynde" (119) might seem to loop back and refer to Macer, whose activities were referred to in a similar formulation: "As Maacer her of made in his Mynde"; but I think rather that a parallel is being made. The multivalent and highly elliptical discursive structure suggestively implies that the knowledge and mental image belonging to the "mon" (119)—Macer or the poet or likely both—come through the power of God who wields all "wit and wisdom," mentioned four lines previously. God inspired Macer, just as God inspired the poet: this "word" then refers to the poem, and the "mon" (119) refers to the poet. The locus of activity within the poet's mind is reinforced in the next stanza, where he says "Al þus I þenk hit in my þouzt" (125). There may even be an additional hint, discernible when some knowledge of the audience's expectations is considered, which dissociates the identity of the second "mon" (119) as Macer. In *Macer Floridus De Virtu Herbarum* the rose, not the lily, is identified as the best flower, the "flour of flourz, sithen she over-passiþ alle oþer floures in sauour and in kynde or manere."<sup>54</sup> The lily is

ranked second best. The second “mon,” however, identifies the flouredelys as “feolokest” (114), for which “non is lich” (120). Granted, as mentioned, several false *Macers* existed, so the poet may not consciously be manipulating the audience’s knowledge of the source even if he did mean to refer to it here; but likely the audience would have recognized any specification of the lily as the best to be an aberration in the conventions of herbal lore. This makes it even more likely that the second reference to the “mynde” suggests that the poet is also referring to his own mental activity, tracing the image of God with the help of His illumination. Thus he “finds” the flouredelys in his mind, in his act of coming to know and create. In registering an awareness of his mental activity, the poet registers an awareness of the relevance of his discourse to his own life and activity of teaching even as he teaches. By attributing the Final Cause of the poem to God, the poet backs down from his admonitory role, and from the ability of his words to serve an heuristic purpose: he claims to represent, even witness, divine truth, and thereby move the audience to love it.

Moreover, it seems that the poet recognizes that his own creation is a symbol of God through his poetic self-consciousness. In the first stanza the poet identifies a dual status of the poem, as a “lesson” but also as a “token”: “What leode þis lesson lykes to lere / Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” (7-8). As mentioned in the discussion of “Ful feir floure is þe lilie,” “betoken” denotes “to typify, symbolize.” But here the speaker does not refer to what individual parts of the image represent, but to what “þis lesson” as a whole symbolizes. The speaker here seems to be pointing out that the poem embraces both a discursive and metaphysical import similar to the way Christ is both the teacher and the subject of the teaching. The poem, the “word,” is both something to be taught, a “lesson,” and something that symbolizes through its very being as a discursive creation.

The two features redound upon each another: the “lesson” incorporates a holistic view of ‘true knowledge,’ one that includes insight into the metaphysics of knowing. As a “token,” it symbolizes Christ the redeemer of all being as well as the metaphysical unity of all being, and so the lesson is simply to participate in the joy of salvation, a participation which will have a salutary effect of guiding the will to follow the Divine Will.

Part of the poem’s qualification as a “token” lies in its sheer aureateness, its explicit use of rhetorical “floures.” The aureateness of this poem has been noted, but merely cited as a forerunner of the artificiality that was to overtake Marian lyrics in the fifteenth century. There is good reason to believe, however, that rhetorical figures are being consciously employed by the poet, to contribute to his poetic purpose. At least one other poem that is akin to “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” in its daring use of literary conceits, and that also exists in the Vernon manuscript, calls rhetorical figures “floures.” It is *The Dispute of Mary and the Cross*: “Þeis þis tale beo florissched with faire flour, / I preue hit on Apocrafum” (497-8).<sup>55</sup> The underlying claim being made by the poet of “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” seems plausibly to be that it is itself a “flour” made of words, and that it springs ultimately from God and evinces the Word symbolized by the flower; thus its very stylistics renders it a “token” of spiritual truth.

The meditation on epistemological questions in “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys,” its use of complex symbolism, and its consciousness of itself as a witness of God’s immanence align it with a body of contemporary and longer poems that are either alliterative or use alliteration as an organizing or ornamental device.<sup>56</sup> These poems all use complex imagery and arguments, and some of them also, like *Pearl*, identify the shape of the poem as representative of the symbol developed within it. Two poems that explicitly identify their verse form are *The Foure Leues of*

*the Trewlufe* and the already mentioned *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*.<sup>57</sup> In uncovering their structure, Susanna Greer Fein has labelled these poems “incarnational verse.” Fein’s definition of “incarnational verse” is taken from John V. Fleming. In it, “the intentions involved, at least in part, are those of the visible demonstration ...of certain abstract and ideal truths.”<sup>58</sup> Fein goes on to add that “the design ... stand[s] as a mark of the author’s salvific purpose”<sup>59</sup> Fein also hypothesizes the membership of these two poems in a larger “school” of alliterative verse. That school should now include “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys.”<sup>60</sup>

*The Foure Leues of the Trewlufe* is particularly pertinent because it too develops a conceit of an herb, one called the “trewelove,” whose physical characteristics liken it to Christ, the Trinity, and Mary. The plant was also known as “the herb paris,” from its Latin name *Paris quadrifolia*.<sup>61</sup> It acquired the name “trewlufe” because its cross-like shape made it a perfect emblem of true love; in some parts of England it was called “true love’s knot.” By the fourteenth century there was a tradition of bearing it upon the body when hoping for amatory success; Absolon in Chaucer’s “The Miller’s Tale,” for example, used the charm (3692-3). The herb was also developed in many fourteenth-century texts as a symbol of divine love, given its cross-like shape.<sup>62</sup>

In *The The Foure Leues of the Trewelufe*, the poem itself becomes emblematic of its key symbol in two ways. The first way depends on how the inner audience, the forlorn maiden whom the narrator happens upon, interprets the didactic address given to her: she interprets the address, which forms substance of the poem, as a source of comfort and an explicit answer to her prayer. Secondly, as Susanna Greer Fein has so astutely shown, the poem itself is structured in a design mirroring the shape of the trewlufe.

The *chanson d'aventure* narrator happens upon a maiden grieving profusely in a garden, because she can find a trewlufe nowhere. She prays to Mary to send her “somme socour... / [s]om sight of þat selcouth þat I hafe lange soughte / With care” (20-2). At that moment a turtledove, a symbol of true love from the avian world, appears and asks her why she mourns. The maiden immediately finds the turtledove’s words comforting; the bird comes closer; and the maiden, after interpreting the turtledove’s alighting as an answer to her prayers (36-9), reveals that she sorrows because she has been seeking the trewlufe in every field and has not found it. She asks the turtledove to tell her how to find a true love. The turtledove tells her that she can find it “[W]hare it es spryngande [and] ever-more newe” (57). The location is given no further specification, but, although the implied site is heaven, there is some suggestion that it is also within the maiden’s mind. Initially the turtledove says that she can only approach the true love through “concelle,” which is glossed as “secret, confidential knowledge”: “Alle thi sythe may þou sighe and neuer mare be nere, / Bot if þou hade concelle on one þat I knewe” (55-6). There is the sense that the knowledge will bring her nearer; and that is because she will be able to find it in her own mind, given that the image of God resides there. The turtledove launches into identifying the four leaves as the members of the Trinity and Mary; after identifying the first leaf as the Father, he tells the maiden to “Halde this lefe in 3our mynde, / Till we + his felawes fynde” (75-6). Although attention to the mind is not drawn again as the turtledove moves on to provide straightforward moral exhortation as well as doctrinal instruction, the initial setup clearly establishes an epistemology that identifies finding, seeing, and knowing in the psychology of the mind. The maiden had prayed to Mary for “[s]om sight” (21) of the trewlufe. She recognizes the turtledove as an answer to her prayer, and the turtledove guides her, through an allegoresis of the herb, into

apprehending the ‘sight’ of the trewlufe in her mind; as she imaginatively reconstructs the symbolic image, she glimpses the image of God therein.

The quality of the poem as verbal magnifying glass interceding between God and His image within the mind of the faithful is strengthened by its formal structure, its cross-like shape.

Fein has demonstrated how:

a significant degree of mirror imaging occurs, too, between the two halves, suggesting a chiasmatic reversed symmetry. A broad outline of these correspondences may be charted in simple form, by stanza number:

1 Maid suffers	40 Maid is comforted
4 We search for stable love	36 Pride causes us to slip
8 Mankind falls from God	32 Judgement calls him back
12 Christ’s Nativity	28 Our own death
16 Crucifixion, Mary isolated	24 Resurrection, Mary crowned
20 Harrowing of Hell <sup>63</sup>	

The themes and issues of the stanzas have been consciously arranged to represent the form of the trewlufe, and the central event in that shape, that which makes it all possible and accounts for its salvific essence, is the Harrowing of Hell. The emblematic quality of the poem forwards it as a means of comfort for the audience, as a special conduit to the grace of the trewlufe. Although the poet does not, in the way “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” poet does, register an awareness of the divine substance of the poem through meditation on God as the Final Cause of all wit, *The Foure Leues of the Trewlufe* has many features of the kind of Augustinian metaphysical poetics found in “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys”.

The thematic structure of *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross* also forms a shape of the Cross, and one that has as its fulcrum the Harrowing of Hell, as Fein has so insightfully instructed us. In *The Dispute*, Mary and the personified cross debate, with the cross finally correcting Mary's chastisement of it for crucifying her Son by pointing out the joy brought to the world because of His death. The emblematic parallelism is simpler than that of *The Four Leaves of the Trewelufe*, being the oscillation between the two speakers through the forty stanzas:

1-8 Mary	33-40 Cross
9-17 Cross	24-32 Mary
18-20 Mary	21-23 Cross

The poem thus tidily arranges the dispute in opposing halves of 8:9:3 / 3:9:8.<sup>64</sup> It develops an array of sophisticated and tightly developed conceits. The main conceit is Mary's criticism of the cross (tree) for destroying her own fruit (Son); which ends with Mary identifying with and acknowledging the cross as the second mother of humankind. As Fein summarizes it, "the figurative fruit of the mother's womb has been transformed to the literal fruit upon a figurative tree."<sup>65</sup> Many other conceits are established, including those of stones, of blood, and of the birthing process. The midpoint in this design is also the Harrowing of Hell, but here it is presented as a figure of Christ's birth, as His blood breaks through the gates of Hell (238-42). This poem also explicitly identifies the status of the cross as a talisman, which suggests that the poem itself, partaking in that sign, incorporates those talismanic powers and so serves a salutary purpose for the audience. Any such radical identification between the Cross and the poem, however, is shied away from in the final stanza, as the speaker consigns the story to "Apocrafum".<sup>66</sup>

Þe Clerk þat fourmed þis figour,  
     Of Maries wo to wite som,  
 He saiþ him-self þat harde stour,  
     Whom godes armus weore rent aroun.

The Cros is a cold Creatour,  
     And euere 3it haþ ben def and dom.  
 Þeiz þis tale beo florissþed with faire flour,  
     I preue hit on Apocrafum,  
 For witesse was neuer foundet

    þat neuere cristes cros spaþ; (491-500)

*The Dispute* and *The Foure Leues* share affinities with “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” in that they use highly elaborate conceits to develop sacred mysteries and motion towards the poetic artifact itself as in some way participating in the mystery being described. It may be possible to extend the parallel further, since the central moment in “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” is also the Harrowing of Hell. The first line of the second half marks the movement away from the harrowing scene; it reads “Vp of his graue þen is he gon” (69). Christ’s second, and metaphorical, birth is presented in likeness to the flower’s rising from the ground.

The two longer poems differ from the Vernon lyric, however, in the way their personae stand apart from the statement. In *The Foure Leues*, the chief narrator is only the overseer of the turtledove’s sermon to the maiden, and he wanders off at the end, seemingly unaffected. The narrator of *The Dispute* carefully dissociates the tale from the realm of orthodox belief, by identifying the rhetorical “flour[es]” as ornamental rather than essential, and by consigning the

whole story to “Apocrafum.” In neither poem does the narrator motion towards the ramifications for his own mind of seeking and acquiring divine truths. They do not incorporate a sense of God as the agent of their creative and epistemological acts, and as a result, though still accurately ascribed the descriptor *metaphysical*, in the sense of a concordant discord in the use of imagery, the poems finally lack the fuller demonstrative power residing in the Vernon lyrics and “Gold & al þis werdis wyn,” a power made possible by the poets’ conscious awareness of the ontology of their minds in action. What limits the metaphysical aspect is, in both cases, the artificiality of the conceits: a talking turtledove and a talking Cross. In the “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” the symbol is wholly natural: the natural quality of the vehicle is shown to be meaningful of the symbolic universe. In that naturalness the Vernon lyric shows a greater awareness of and confidence in the influx of the Word in the world, and particularly how this immanence, this universal *translatio*, is apprehensible in language and metaphor.

It is nonetheless helpful to speak of the “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys,” and other poems like it in the Vernon refrain series (“*Mane Nobiscum Domine*” and “*Deo Gracias I*”), in reference to this larger alliterative tradition, and perhaps even trace a similar point of origin for them. O.S. Pickering has aligned *The Dispute* with three other Middle English poems that he claims evince a metaphysical school, and through a dialectical analysis, located that school in the East Midlands.<sup>67</sup> One of these, *Whon grein of whete is cast to grounde* (IMEV 3952) is, like *The Dispute*, found in the Vernon manuscript.<sup>68</sup> The other two are *Alle æ mowyn be blyth & glade* (IMEV 235) and *Festivals of the Church*, both of which, like *Whon grein of whete*, develop daring conceits for Christ’s body. “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” and “*Mane Nobiscum Domine*,” although preserved only in the predominantly West Midland dialect Vernon and Simeon manuscripts,

contain orthographical features that suggest a more easterly genesis, as do some other poems in the refrain series examined by Kenneth Hunter. Many show the intermingling of westerly and easterly forms stemming from OE  $\ddot{y}$  ( $\ddot{u}$ ). The West Midland form is “u” while the East Midland form is “i.” The anomalous appearance of “i” in two rhyme positions in “Be token” suggests an East Midland providence. At line 133 the East Midland form “synne” appears, rhyming with “wynne.” At another point, it appears that a scribe has changed the same sound to suit his own dialect, though in so doing upset the rhyme scheme: the word “buld” in the phrase “In blisse þat for blod was buld” is set relative to other rhyme words “gilt” and “wilt,” and was likely originally the East Midland form “bilt” instead.<sup>69</sup> “*Mane Nobiscum Domine*” includes the same form “synne” at three places, lines 43, 58, and 68, the last of which is a rhyme with “inne” and “twynne.” A more rigorous dialect analysis of the Vernon refrain lyrics is required, but evidence as it stands would align at least these two Vernon poems with the easterly school of alliterative verse, one which has been described as “metaphysical.”

Perhaps the better map of affinities, however, is less provincial. The quality of metaphysical verse evident in “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys” is less limited by the concordia discors of witty conceits, but shares affinities with the kind of poetry suggestively but roughly sketched several years ago by Geoffrey Shepherd in his Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture. Shepherd offers rich insight into a broad thematic characteristic of fourteenth-century alliterative verse. Extending the affinities of alliterative verse with mnemonic technique, he describes it as a “poetics of memory,” a poetics inevitably bound up with the Augustinian view of the *memoria Christi*:

In telling the truth, that is in embodying the illumination in words, the reciprocally engaged

and reciprocally modifying faculties of the mind working through words afford not only a human model of the Divine Trinity, but their activity is also directly linked with, and powered by, the Trinity in virtue of the illumination.<sup>70</sup>

The poems evince a “high view of poetry,”<sup>71</sup> guided by a purpose that is either prophetic or oracular. Some, including *Piers Plowman*, *Mum and the Soothsegger*, and *Joseph of Arimathea*, develop the theology of the Trinity.<sup>72</sup> Others, like *Cleanness* and *St. Erkenwald*, and *Susannah*, emphasize prophetic episodes. In all cases, speech is presented as the working of grace. Shepherd limits the extent of Augustinian influence in Middle English poetry to some point below the poet’s consciousness of its implications for his own act of creation:

None of the alliterative poets turns a steady inquisitive gaze upon his own composing.

These poets recognize a gift of grace in themselves, they acknowledge it in scripture....[b]ut they have neither the occasion, the interest, nor the vocabulary to examine closely how they write.<sup>73</sup>

It would seem that Shepherd’s characterization of the alliterative tradition requires modification. The poet of “Gold & all þis werdis wyn,” a poem that is not alliterative but uses alliterative technique, does examine closely how he writes. And “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys”, a poem whose aureate alliteration seems to be self-consciously recognized as part of its rhetorical “floures,” presents a poet gazing into the workings of the mind in a way that unfolds expansive metaphysical insight. The way that poem communicates through subtle word-play, moreover, demonstrates that the vocabulary for examining creative action was readily available within the rich resources of the English language.

## Notes to Chapter Six

1. See, for example, the studies by Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979), and Louis L.Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: a Study in English Religious Literature* (New Haven: Yale University P, 1962).
2. See, for instance, the remarks by David Lawton in "The Diversity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 20 (1980), pp. 154-7; and O.S. Pickering's extended discussion ("Middle English Metaphysical").
3. "Gold & al þis werdis wyn" is printed in *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, p. 88.
4. David Lyle Jeffrey, *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1975), p. 244.
5. Jeffrey, *The Early English Lyric*, pp. 244-5.
6. Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, p. 6.
7. William J. Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), p. 319. Courtenay argues that the "Augustinian Revival" spans the entire century: "In many respects, therefore, Bradwardine was the culmination of an Augustinian revival at Oxford that reached back to 1325. Yet the real heirs to the new Augustinianism, as the mention of Wyclif suggests, are to be found in the second half of the fourteenth century," (p. 324).
8. Courtenay, *Schools*, p. 320.
9. Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. L.E.M. Lynch, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 219..
10. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), p. 337.
11. Augustine, *The Trinity*, p. 322.
12. Augustine, *The Trinity*, p. 432.
13. Augustine, *The Trinity*, p. 281.
14. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy*, p. 222.
15. Marcia Colish, *The Mirror of Language: a Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1968), p. 5.

16. Anselm of Canterbury, *Monologion*, trans. Simon Harrison, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p. 72.
17. Aquinas discusses the powers and limits of the natural light of the intellect in Question One (On Knowledge of the Divine), Article I (Does the human mind need a new illumination of divine light for knowledge of truth?) of *The Exposition of Boethius's On the Trinity* (*Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. by Ralph McInerny [London: Penguin, 1998], pp. 110-14.
18. Thomas Aquinas, *The Exposition*, p. 113.
19. "In the pursuit of [knowledge of God] the human mind is especially helped when its natural light is strengthened by a new illumination, such as the light of faith and the gifts of wisdom and understanding through which the mind is said to be raised above itself in contemplation insofar as it knows God to be everything that it naturally comprehends," (Thomas Aquinas, *The Exposition*, p. 117).
20. Augustine, *The Trinity*, p. 289. Aquinas, in his claim that knowledge precedes will, departs from Augustine in this regard: "It is intellect which as such and in the first place moves the will, for will, as such, is moved by its object, which is the good apprehended. The will moves the intellect as it were accidentally, that is insofar as understanding itself is apprehended as a good, and thus it is desired by will, with the result that intellect actually understands," (Thomas Aquinas, *The Human Good. Summa contra Gentiles*, 3, in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. by Ralph McInerny [London: Penguin, 1998], p. 271).
21. Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will*, in *The Teacher. The Free Choice of the Will. Grace and Free Will*, trans. Robert P. Russell (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), p. 163.
22. Augustine, *The Free Choice*, pp. 220-2.
23. This discussion of the *moderni* will be taken up in more detail in the next chapter. Apart from the works cited in this paragraph, my understanding of Ockham and the *moderni* has been greatly informed by Gordon Leff's *William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1975) and Armand Maurer's *The Philosophy of William of Ockham in the Light of its Principles* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1999). An excellent introductory overview of Ockham's thought is provided by Etienne Gilson, "The Road to Scepticism," Chapter Three in *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), pp. 61-91.
24. William Courtenay, "Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Trinkaus and Heiko Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), p. 37-9.
25. Janet Coleman, *Piers Plowman and the Moderni* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letterature, 1981), p. 18.

26. This account of Thomas Bradwardine is indebted to Gordon Leff's *Bradwardine and the Pelagians* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1957).
27. Leff, *Bradwardine*, p. 121.
28. John A. Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools: The Relation of the "Summa de Ente" to Scholastic Debates at Oxford in the Later Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1961), p. 208.
29. Marie Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968), p. 120.
30. E. de Bruyne, *L'esthétique du moyen âge* (Louvain, 1947), p. 93, qtd. in Chenu, *Nature*, pp. 133-4..
31. Chenu, *Nature*, p. 144.
32. "Ful feir flour is þe lillie" is found in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS. 323. It is printed in *English Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, pp. 29-30.
33. Bruce P. Flood, Jr, "The Medieval Herbal Tradition of Macer Floridus," *Pharmacy in History* 18 (1976), p. 62. Macer was the pseudonym for the likely real author, Odo de Meung (Odo Magdunensis), whose name is added to a manuscript containing the herbal in Dresden. Odo was from Meung on the Loire, and lived during the early years of the eleventh century. Speculation holds that he took on the pseudonym "Macer" from the name of a Roman poet and naturalist, Aemilius Licinius Macer (85-15 B.C.), (Flood, "The Medieval," 62-3). Another "biographical" account of Macer is provided by Gösta Frisk in her *A Middle English Translation of Macer Floridus de Viribus Herbarum* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1949), pp. 13-4.
34. Of the nine legitimate translations of *Macer Floridus*, one is of Swedish providence and the remainder are of English provenance. Frisk provides a description of each one. Two 'false' English translations of Macer appear in London, British Museum, MS Sloane 5 and Cambridge, Trinity College, MS 0.1.13. The former does not (apparently) attribute the work to Macer; the Trinity text begins "This booke is drawe be Fesyk that Macer made for hem that been seek" (qtd. from Frisk, *A Middle English*, p. 17). Two books printed in London in the sixteenth century are also erroneously attributed to Macer: *Macer Herball. Practysed by Doctor Lynacro* (1530) and *A Newe Herball of Macer* (1535) (Frisk, *A Middle English*, pp. 16-7).
35. "From the 12th century on [the title 'Mediatrice of all Graces'] is applied to Our Lady with ever-increasing frequency until it became generally accepted in the 17th century," J.B. Carol, "Mary, Blessed Virgin II (in Theology): Mediatrice of all Graces," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1967-79), vol. 9, p. 359.

36. The word “vertu” in this poem is an excellent instance of word-play that extracts the “metaphoric senses” of a word, the kind of word-play in *Piers Plowman* that A.V.C. Schmidt has described, (“*Lele wordes*”).
37. The *MED* heading *fleur-de-lis* n. contains the following account of the folk etymologies of the word: “[AF *flour de lis* lily flower, usually taken as *flour delice* flower of joy, lovely flour (whence AL *flos deliciae*); also as *flour de luce*, flower of light (by assoc. with L *luc-em.*].”
38. Hunter, “The Vernon Lyrics,” p. 373.
39. “*Ave Maris Stella*” is one of the non-refrain lyrics intermixed with the group of refrain lyrics in the Vernon manuscript. It is printed in *Minor Poems*, vol. 2, ed. Furnivall, pp. 735-9.
40. A good general discussion of “seminal reasons” can be found in Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy*, pp. .
41. Gilson, *The Christian*, p. 346.
42. Augustine, *The Trinity*, p. 109.
43. Augustine, *The Trinity*, p. 106.
44. *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, pp. 353, 358.
45. *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, pp. 359, 364.
46. Hunter, “The Vernon Lyrics,” pp. 388, 391.
47. *Religious Lyrics*, ed. Brown, rev. Smithers, p. 363; Hunter, “The Vernon Lyrics,” p. 394.
48. Perhaps, too, “weole” also turns, through word play, to “will”?
49. The manuscripts are listed in: Marcus Porcius Cato, *De Agri Cultura*, trans. William Davis Hooper, rev. ed. Harrison Boyd Ash (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1954), pp. xviii-xx. Georges Duby writes: “[w]e should like to know whether there is evidence of the existence of copies of Cato, Varro and Columella in the libraries of those times, for it is not too wild a guess that improvements in agrarian technique on the progressive ecclesiastical estates were stimulated by a reading of the Roman agriculturalists” (*Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West* [London: Edward Arnold, 1968], p. 23).
50. *Great Cato* is printed in *Minor Poems*, vol. 2, ed. Furnivall, pp. 562-609.
51. The key article to argue for the Christianization of Cato in the later middle ages is Richard Hazelton, “The Christianization of ‘Cato’: the *Disticha Catonis* in the Light of Late Medieval Commentaries,” *Medieval Studies* 19 (1957), pp. 157-73.

52. *Little Cato* is printed in *Minor Poems*, vol. 2, ed. Furnivall, pp. 553-62. The text unfolds as it is presented here. Each verse appears in the original Latin, in a French translation, and in an English translation. The French text, which is Monk Everard's translation of the Latin *Parvus Cato* (Furnivall, p. 553).
53. Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Janet Fairweather, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p. 280.
54. Frisk, *A Middle English*, p. 90.
55. The long version of *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross* exists only in the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts. It is printed in *The Minor Poems*, ed. Furnivall, pp. 612-26.
56. These longer alliterative poems have been illuminated recently by the studies of Susanna Greer Fein and O.S. Pickering, in works from which I will cite through the next several pages.
57. *The Foure Leues of the Trewlufe* appears only in London, British Library, MS Additional 31042. I quote from the following edition: *The Quartrefoil of Love*, ed. Israel Gollancz and Magdalene M. Weale, EETS os 195 (London: Oxford UP, 1935).
58. John V. Fleming, "The Centuple Structure of the *Pearl*," in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University P, 1981), p. 97 (qtd. in Susanna Greer Fein, "Form and Continuity in the Alliterative Tradition: Cruciform Design and Double Birth in Two Stanzaic Poems," *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 [1992], p. 105).
59. Fein, "Form," p. 105.
60. My readings of *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross* and *The Foure Leues of the Trewlufe* are indebted to Susanna Greer Fein. To her analysis I have added a consideration of the personae's self-consciousness (including a rhetorical self-consciousness as exhibited, for example, in identifying the rhetorical "flour[es]" and their allusions to the activity of the "mind," in terms of how those two features creates what I have termed an "Augustinian metaphysical poetics."
61. Susanna Greer Fein, "Why Did Absolon Put a "Trewelove" Under His Tongue? : Herb Paris as a Healing "Grace" in Middle English Literature," *The Chaucer Review* 35.4 (1991), p. 302. The entire paragraph is indebted to this article.
62. Although the herb paris was identified as having medicinal properties in the Renaissance, Fein notes that "[E]xtensive checking of the standard works on medieval English herbals and plantlore has so far turned up no reference to herb paris" (Fein, "Why," p. 315).
63. Fein, "Form," p, 121.

64. Fein, "Form," p. 108.
65. Fein, "Form," p. 108.
66. I have been unable to trace this story to any New Testament Apocrypha. It might be linked in some way to the Anglo-Saxon *The Dream of the Rood*.
67. O.S. Pickering, "A Middle English Poem on the Eucharist and Some Other Poems by the Same Author," *Archiv* 215 (1978), pp. 295-97. *The Foure Leues of the Trewlufe* is more definitely of north or northwestern provenance. Susanna Greer Fein, in her doctoral dissertation, discusses it among four other alliterative poems from the same area and written around the same time: *De Tribus Regibus Mortuis*, *Somer Suneday*, *Death and Liffe*, and *The Parliament of Thre Ages*. She identifies a shared feature of these five poems that would apply to many Vernon lyrics as well: "the prologues serve as allegorical *accessus* to the adventures: they personalize the abstract qualities of the vision, so that the moral refers not only to the general state of things, but to the individual state of the narrator, and by extension, to the condition of the reader as well ("The Allegorical Chanson d'Aventure: A Tradition in Middle English Alliterative Poetry," Diss. [Harvard University, 1985], pp. 7-8).
68. *Whon grein of whete is cast to grounde* has been read as the introduction to the Vernon and Simeon recension of the *Northern Homily Collection*, but, as Pickering notes, given its "quite different style and verse-form it must be very doubtful whether it was written for this purpose" ("A Middle English Poem," p. 293).
69. Kenneth Hunter identifies "buld" as a Western form anomalous in this position ("The Vernon Lyrics," p. 188), and records a sample of the distribution of Eastern and Western forms of OE  $\ddot{y}$  (x-xii).
70. Geoffrey Shepherd, "The Nature of Alliterative Poetry in Late Medieval England," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 56 (1970), p. 69.
71. Shepherd, "The Nature," p. 67.
72. Note, for example, the following excerpt from *Mum and the Sothsegger*. When the persona asks, in a dream, a gardener where he can find the truth-teller he is told:  
 Yn man-is herte his hovsing is, as hooly writte techet,  
 And mynde is his mansion þat made alle þestres.  
 There feoffed hym his fadre feely forto dwelle" (Fragment M, 1224-6)  
*Mum and the Sothsegger*, Edited from the Manuscripts Camb. Univ. Ll.iv.14 and Brit. Mus. Add. 4166, ed. Mabel Day and Robert Steele, EETS os 199 (London, 1936).
73. Shepherd does, however, cite Julian of Norwich as a writer who records her experience of the "inner master" over her twenty years of coming to understand her experience. He also considers Rolle's *Melas Amoris* to be "perhaps the most adventurous treatise on art by any medieval Englishman. Essentially it is an apologia for poetry, for Rolle's extraordinary gift of

song" ("The Nature," p. 70).

## Chapter Seven

### The Material Semantics of “Þis world fareþ as a Fantasy”

The textual status of “Þis world fareþ as a Fantasy” has been a matter of debate. In his 1977 edition of the poem, John Burrow moved the last stanza to follow line 48, assuming that a scribe missed it and added it at the end. He repositioned it there because he found that “the exemplum of the tree complements those of the gnat in the previous stanza...and mention of ‘hors and hounde’ links with the following stanza.”<sup>1</sup> In a later study Burrow suggested that stanza five and the last stanza may have been interpolated into the original, and that they may be the work of the same interpolator who added stanzas three and four to “Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent,” and five stanzas to “Ever more thank God of all,” all of which “exhibit a peculiarly learned and curious mind, with an interest in the concrete exemplifying instance.”<sup>2</sup> The fundamental nature of the rhetorical self-consciousness in “Hos seiþ þe soþe he schal be schent,” elucidated in Chapter Two of this dissertation, demonstrates how thoroughly the thought and imagery of stanzas three and four interweave with the rest of the poem, which makes it likely that they form part of the author’s original work, and thereby diminishes the grounds for attributing other apparent anomalies in the Vernon refrain lyrics to a “Vernon interpolator.” There are also stylistic and thematic grounds for arguing that stanza five and the final stanza of “Þis world fareþ as a Fantasy” are authorial, even if, as seems likely, the latter is misplaced. The images in the two stanzas in question conform with the functions of the images, of the poet-persona, and of the formal structure of the poem to create a complex poetic discourse that conveys an all-encompassing view of the ramifications of God's absolute power.

Theories of God’s absolute power were prevalent throughout the fourteenth century, and

the poem's indebtedness to its contemporary philosophical moment has been noted by previous critics. Gerard Sitwell, for example, finds that lines 85-6 refer to fourteenth-century debates about providence and free will, and John Burrow has noted, in reference to lines 103-4:

“Emphasis on the absolute power of God...is characteristic of C14 thought, often leading to the same fideistic conclusion as here.”<sup>3</sup> This characteristic philosophical position, however, enters the poem in ways other than direct statement. The theory of the absolute power of God led to new ways of perceiving natural phenomena, being, and the act of cognition itself: it led to the demise of a metaphysical outlook that saw natural phenomena as indicative of the Creator, and to the emergence of ways of perceiving natural phenomena as purely material. This sense of the base materiality of everything is reflected in the poem in various ways: in its imagery, its form, and its poet-persona. All of these aspects are explicitly presented as being without essence. In this regard, it may be said that the poem reflects, through its poetics, a contemporary philosophical position. It does so, moreover, in a manner that is in some ways more thorough than, say, Donne's “The First Anniversary.” Although “The First Anniversary” takes as its subject the dissolution of the Copernican universe and its attendant analogies and harmonies, the poem nonetheless develops its theme in a metaphysical way: the disjointed universe is shown to be representative of, indeed analogous to, the dissolution of a moral and social order, and the death of a child. The universe still functions as a metaphysical entity, showing underlying similarities throughout the moral, psychological, and social orders. In “This world fareþ as a Fantasy,” however, no such analogies are drawn: the world and everything in it are depicted as being devoid of essence, such that the only commonality they share is material, not ontological. The poem whose poetics presents a more direct contrast to that of “This world fareþ as a Fantasy,” it should become

apparent, is “Be token hit is þe Flourdelys.”

The perception of the absolute power of God and the ramifications of that view on notions of nature and of being can be traced back to the *moderni*. William of Ockham is generally acknowledged as the founder of the school of the *moderni*, and a key creator and practitioner of English logic of the late Middle Ages. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ockham elaborated a theory, relatively unimportant in scholastic thought since the thirteenth century, of the distinction between God’s *potentia absoluta* and His *potentia ordinata*, between God’s absolute power and His power considered in regards to what He has actually made happen. This distinction leads to a belief that God created this world out of a number of possible worlds that He might have created, and that He may intervene in this world in an unpredictable, but not contradictory, manner. Therefore things and operations in this world are contingent and not necessary. William holds that the truths we can know in this world do not carry over to divine truths, and argues that if we hold that they do we effectively limit God’s freedom. His view of the contingency of the world and the absolute power of God fuses with his rejection of universals as metaphysical entities, since the contingency of the created world means that it is not ontologically necessary.<sup>4</sup>

In rejecting the reality of universals, Ockham was specifically rejecting the Christian-platonist theory of divine ideas.<sup>5</sup> Divine ideas are comparable to Platonic forms: according to this theory, before anything in this world comes to be it exists as a pattern or form in the mind of God. Most theologians preceding Ockham considered divine ideas to be one with God’s essence, and Ockham believed this to be a fundamental error of his forebears, and an error that limits God’s freedom.<sup>6</sup> One ramification of the traditional theory of divine ideas is that there is a direct correlation between things found in this world and God’s essence: the created world is a vestige

of God, and knowledge of the order of the world can lead one back to knowledge of divine nature. For Ockham, however, divine ideas are not identical with divine essence, but are “simply the things themselves God knows to be other than himself and creatable by him.”<sup>7</sup> Gilson has phrased Ockham’s definition of a divine idea somewhat differently, in a way that relates its ramifications for human cognition: “[a] divine idea is always an idea of this and that particular individual which God wishes to create.”<sup>8</sup> For Ockham, God does not create through manipulating a finite set (however large) of forms, but every single creation is a free and individual act. Consequently everything in the world is radically individual, and there is no platonic participation between individuals and universals. Things in this ordained world—which includes the physical, created world as well as the moral order ordained by God—cannot tell us anything essential about God: since He could have ordained any other world, this world is not an expression of Him. There are, then, no analogies to be found between the human and the divine realms: “the book of nature” tells us nothing about divine essence.<sup>9</sup>

Ockham’s view of how God creates, and thus of the nature of the created world in relation to God, has ramifications for theories of cognition. As we have seen, he rejects realism, that is, the belief that entities in the world contain real essences and participate in essential universals. From a realist position, every thing in this world (including material phenomena like “tree” and abstract concepts like “justice”) participates in its transcendent form or idea. These forms or ideas cause the particulars, but they are also free of the particulars. They have to be free of particulars, because the particulars exist in time and are subject to corruption. The object of human knowledge, then, is the transcendent universal in which the particular participates. Throughout the Middle Ages it was widely held that “the intellect directly knows only universals; it knows

individuals indirectly by reflecting on their individual images in the interior senses.”<sup>10</sup> Maurer explains that this view was supported by a belief that “as an immaterial power, the intellect could only indirectly know what is immaterial, and that is a universal nature and not a sensible individual.”<sup>11</sup> Ockham rejected this theory. In particular he rejected the “neoplatonized conception of Aristotle of which St. Thomas Aquinas was the outstanding representative.”<sup>12</sup> Aquinas holds that the intellectual aspect of the soul is distinct from, and higher than, the sensory aspect: the intellect is the human element that participates most fully in the divine, since it shares in the divine essence.<sup>13</sup> It is the intellect, divorced from its sensory sheath, that engenders knowledge of the world. The intellect acquires this knowledge by abstracting the innate essence of any individual (thing) beheld: it grasps the universal reality residing in the “occasion” of that reality in an individual (thing). This abstracting process leads to knowledge of the essence of things, of universals.

For Ockham, in contrast, everything in the world is radically individual. A universal, then, is not a real, transcendent entity, but a concept formed within a human mind through apprehending what is similar (not what is identical) among individual things. Ockham rejects the belief that entities in the world are metaphysical, containing ‘real’ essences and participating in essential universals. Though one individual (thing) may be *similar* to another, they do not share some common *identity* of a transcendent essential aspect. Accompanying Ockham’s metaphysics is an empirical theory of cognition. He holds that all knowledge is dependent upon “intuitive cognition.”<sup>14</sup> Intuitive cognition is the knowledge of something existing and present to the knower in the moment of cognition. It is brought about through sensory activity, including but not limited to sight. Intuitive knowledge is experienced by an individual, and it is an experience of

an individual (thing) outside of the mind. For Ockham, individual sensory experience forms the basis of all knowledge.

More general forms of knowledge are gained through abstractive cognition. For Ockham, abstractive cognition does not involve abstracting the universal essence from the individual (thing), as it does for Aquinas, for example. Rather, it involves abstracting from the mental image or likeness of the individual (thing) gained through intuitive cognition. Abstractive cognition involves the mind abstracting from the mental representations of those individuals that were experienced through the senses. It involves apprehending similarities among instances of intuitive cognition—for example, recognizing that this tree I see now is similar to that tree I saw then. This process creates universal concepts: the universal ‘tree’ for example. Since a universal concept is created through recognizing *similarities* among two or more products of intuitive cognition, universals do not have metaphysical status. They are logical entities, simply ‘terms.’ They exist only in the mind, and their existence, insofar as it is existence, follows individual experience rather than precedes it. In abstracting from the likeness known through intuitive cognition one is not, as in Aquinas’s model, abstracting something essential to the object beheld. Whereas for Aquinas a universal denotes the shared *identity* of a number of individuals participating in the essential universal, for Ockham a universal is simply a term denoting a *similarity* recognized among a number of individuals, and nothing essential.

The rejection of the metaphysical outlook of the world is paradigmatically evident in Ockham’s notion of being.<sup>15</sup> As outlined in the previous chapter, realist philosophies hold being to be the fundamental essence of all that is, and to be that which explains the participation of all of creation in divine Being. Ockham, however, considers being logically, as the most general

universal term. Its chief status is, like all universals, as a term that predicates other terms. It is a transcendental term transcending all other Aristotelian categories in having more general applicability as defined by a greater array of predications; as such, it has logical and not a metaphysical status.

Ockham's notions of being and of the nonessential individual as the epistemological foundation of all knowledge translate into new views of matter. Aristotle, and following him the scholastics of the High Middle Ages, did not view matter as a real entity. It was purely potential, and only actualized through the introduction of form. In Aquinas's interpretation, matter alone has no substance; form makes something a substance. The introduction of form into matter, moreover, constituted the realization of a prime essence. The schoolmen believed that, in addition to form and matter, there was a third principle, called "the form of the whole" (*forma totius*) which was the whole essence of the substance. Armand Maurer defines the difference between the *forma totius* and the *forma partis* as it was understood by Aquinas, Giles of Rome, and Duns Scotus:

the *forma totius* of a material substance is the whole nature or essence of a species, including both its substantial form and matter. An example is humanity. The *forma partis* is the formal part of the essence of a material being, uniting with matter to make up the complete essence; for example, the soul of a living being.<sup>16</sup>

According to this view, our apprehension of beings in the world accords with our apprehension of an immaterial essence.

As always, Ockham is critical of realists who subscribe to the tenet that substances are *a priori* essences, and so that a third principle is needed to explain a composite unity. For Ockham,

matter is not pure potentiality, but “a thing (*res*) actually existing in the real world, capable of receiving all substantial forms, but having no one of them necessarily and always existing in it.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus what is, for Aristotle, Aquinas and others, a difference between potentiality and actuality is for Ockham a difference in states of actual existence. From that it follows that privation, which for Aristotle is ontologically distinct, is for Ockham a nominal definition qualifying matter, describing the lack of form in actual matter. Ockham acknowledges what Aquinas did not: that matter cannot be generated or destroyed. This leads to the view that the same material matter is in all things.<sup>18</sup> These views formed the basis of the New Physics, a school of thought stemming from these advances in logic made by Ockham, and by those whom he influenced. The “New Physics” was, like the new logic, practiced throughout the fourteenth century, mostly at the University of Oxford.<sup>19</sup>

“*Pis world fareþ as a Fantasy*” not only states forthrightly the theory of the absolute power of God (103-4), it also presents the implications of that theory, through its images, form, and poet-persona, for the perception of natural phenomena and being. The poem persistently demonstrates that all forms in the world are made not through the impression of a transcendent essence, but from the same matter. Two batches of such images are indebted to Ecclesiastes: lines 13-8 conform to Eccles. 1.4-7, and lines 49-55 conform to Eccles. 3.19.<sup>20</sup> But in the context of the other nature images in the poem these passages signify beyond their typical endorsement of the “vanity is vanity” tradition. John Burrow has pointed out that in one image Aristotle overlaps with Ecclesiastes (lines 15-16 with Eccles. 1.7 and with Aristotle’s *Meteorologica*), and has pointed to other references to Aristotelian science. The Aristotelian references, however, can be specified further as references to the re-interpretation of Aristotle in

the fourteenth century by the *moderni* and practitioners of the “New Physics.” All of the images depict the base materiality of all that exists, in a way that supports the view that the world is contingent and unessential.

Two images that are not indebted to Aristotle demonstrate base materiality, one in terms of the common matter shared by different species, and another in terms of the “principle of the conservation of matter.” At one point the speaker states that the same matter is present in all creatures, in a formulation that Burrow has traced to Aristotle’s *Historium animalium* and medieval encyclopedists:<sup>21</sup>

Whuch is Mon, ho wot and what,  
 Wheper þat he be oust or nouht?  
 Of Erþe & Eyr groweþ vp a gnat,  
 And so doþ Mon whon al his souht. (37-40)

The image of the tree presents a more detailed view of the shared materiality of all phenomena, and it does so with more specific reference to its contemporary philosophical moment, in terms of the scientific “principle of the conservation of matter”:

Bi ensauple men may se,  
 A gret treo grouweþ out of þe grounde;  
 No þing a bated þe eorþe wol be,  
 Þaus hit be huge gret and rounde;  
 Riht þer wol Rooten þe selue tre,  
 Whon elde haþ maad his kuynde aswounde;  
 Þaus þer weore rote suche þre,

þe eorþe wol not encrece a pounde.

þus waxeþ & wanteþ Mon hors & hounde,

From noust to noust þus henne we hiþe,

And her we stunteþ but a stounde,

For þis world is but fantasye.

(121-132)

Of this exemplum Burrow notes: "The notion that soil neither loses weight from plants' growth nor gains it from their decomposition must come from a scientific source. I cannot find it in Aristotle."<sup>22</sup> This image reflects the "principle of the conservation of matter" as it was developed by the fourteenth-century "Oxford Calculators."

The principle of the conservation of matter is the view that "in all physical transformations the amount of matter involved remains the same, or, to put it another way, in physical transformations no amount of matter is ever created or destroyed."<sup>23</sup> Aristotle and the early scholastics also held a principle of the conservation of matter, but for them primary matter remains the same through all changes, with 'same' meaning substantial identity, not equality of quantity. The Oxford Calculators worked out from the change to an empirical view of matter and form initiated by William of Ockham, in particular his view that quantity is not an entity distinct from matter.

For Aristotle, quantity, one of his categories, is a separate *res* (distinct reality) which is added to the pure potentiality of matter. Quantity was thought to be distinct since a body could increase and decrease without substantial change (i.e. change from water to air). As well, quantity was thought to be accidental to a substance, and could be applied to the substance only after it had been generated. Substantial change, the transformation of the substance itself, is

therefore devoid of quantitative change. That is because substantial change arises out of primary matter, and primary matter, for Aristotle, is devoid of quantity and all other accidents.

Ockham, however, in his reduction of what counts as real in Aristotle's categories to only substance and a limited amount of quality, does not accept quantity is a separate *res*. Rather, he holds that matter has, in its unformed state, undefined quantity. Like the other elements of Aristotle's *Categories*, for Ockham quantity is a nominal term which is used in definitions of matter and form. He argues this by pointing out that in condensation and rarefaction no amount of matter is lost or acquired. This proves that no absolute thing is being generated or corrupted, and therefore quantity cannot be a distinct reality. Quantity is therefore a nominal term used to designate really existing matter when its parts are more or less not all together.<sup>24</sup>

Ockham's views of quantity as a nominal term rather than an ontological essence helped to give rise to a theory of mass (a fore-runner of modern-day 'inertial mass') by the Oxford Calculators. The impetus to decipher mass as a mixture of density and magnitude was initiated by Thomas Bradwardine's 1328 treatise on the proportion of velocities in moving bodies. He showed that velocity is increased "by a geometrical, not an arithmetical increase in the proportion of moving force to resistance."<sup>25</sup> Bradwardine's successors extended his findings to all types of motion, including changes of quality, condensation, rarefaction. Their investigations involved a consideration of quantity. Many views were offered, with the most 'modern' being that of Richard Swineshead, known to later generations as "the Calculator." Swineshead points out that rarity and density cannot be defined simply by magnitude (volume), noting that there is more matter in a cubic foot of earth than there is in the same measure of air. Therefore "rarity and density must depend upon the proportion between magnitude (volume) and the amount of

matter.”<sup>26</sup> As Weisheipl notes, the Calculator’s notion of quantity “is not the simple magnitude belonging to the Aristotelian category of quantity. Rather, it is a complex quantity derived from magnitude and density conjointly” (168).<sup>27</sup>

Resonating with this principle of the conservation of matter, the tree is pictured as a shifting volume with a certain amount of matter, so as to elaborate how although the volume of the tree changes constantly there is never any change in the net weight of the earth, never any change, that is, in the quantity of matter. The account creates a sense of the tree as a form bare of essence. It is unable to signify beyond its materiality: the only analogies drawn are those participating in the same physical course of events, and this formulation of “Mon hors and hounde” levels humans and animals through their shared materiality. This natural creation does not, as the flourdelys does, offer insight into its ontological dimension as a participant in a symbolic universe filled with the presence of the Creator, or at least indicative of Him through analogy. While the image does convey transience very well, it signifies more than that. It signifies the unessential nature of all that is, and it is this view of inessentiality, in addition to the view of transience, that is used to prove an epistemological point and to prompt humility.

Other images likewise present a view of the base “Material Mortualite” (93) of all existence in the light of the ultimate contingency of the world and the absolute power of God. The unattainability of transcendent knowledge is registered with theological resonances in terms of the common “Incarnacioun” of species:

Dyep mon and beestes dye,

And al is on Ocasion,

And alle o dep hos bope drye

**And han on Incarnacion (49-52)**

Again, a parallel is drawn between humans and animals that refutes any claim that humans possess an essence uncommon with animals: they share the same process of becoming flesh. The reduction of human nature to the same material process and substance as other creatures is made all the more striking through the theological denotation of the word “Incarnacion” resonating in this context: God’s taking on flesh in Christ, in order to reveal Himself in and among humans and to act as a mediator guiding humans to Himself. By using the term in a purely material sense, the stanza casts a shadow on the possibility of revelation and the consequent capacity of humans to know Truth.

The view of the basic reduction of all being to formless matter, and of the unessential nature of all form, is also, it hardly needs saying, reflected in the structure of the poem. Each stanza enacts the expansion and remission of forms; its thought develops out only to be reduced by the paradoxical refrain. The refrain is the one element that recurs predictably throughout, and so provides an axiomatic constant. The substance of that refrain, however, belies its structural status: it states that all is fantasy. The constantly recurring element, then, is a statement that everything is fantasy, and the irony of this fact only serves to demonstrate the truth of the statement. At the same time, the ironic refrain develops an analogy between forms from nature and from art.

While the ironic refrain prompts the audience to view each stanza as a form with properties similar to that of the “gret treo”—something that grows out only to be final reduced to its base substance that it shares with all other phenomena—, the speaker’s self-characterization prompts the audience to view the whole poem in a similar way. The speaker refers to himself in a

phrase that enriches the theme, perhaps with ambiguity.

Summe leueþ on him, sum leueþ on hit,

As children leorneþ for to spele,

But non seop non þat a bit,

Whon stilly deþ wol on hym stele;

For he þat hext in heuene sit,

His is þe help and hope of hele,

For wo is ende of worldes wele—

Vche lyf loke wher þat I lye—

Pis world is fals, fikel and frele,

And fareþ but as a fantasye.

(75-84)

Previous editors have interpreted “wher þat” (82) as “whether” and “lye” (82) as “to tell a lie, speak falsely” or “to be mistaken, misjudge” (*MED* s.v. liēn v(2) 1a. (a), 3.). That meaning promotes the reading of John Burrow’s translation: “Let every person judge whether I am lying.”<sup>28</sup> As such the speaker offers a fitting rejection of authority. The many direct citations from Ecclesiastes align the speaker’s authority with Biblical authority. However, those very texts from the Biblical wisdom book encourage if not agnosticism at least a position of skeptical fideism, and the way they are elaborated in light of the New Physics fuels that encouragement. The speaker finally suspends his own authority along with Biblical authority and calls upon members of the audience to seek knowledge from their individual experience.

The other way of reading “Vche lyf loke wher þat I lye” further suspends the speaker’s authority in a more unconventional and suggestive way. It seems at least as possible, and more

likely preferable, to read “wher þat” as “where” and “lye” as “to adopt a recumbent position” (*MED* s.v. *liēn* v.(1) 1a. (a)). Accumulated evidence, moreover, supports reading “wher þat” as “where.” “Wher” often signifies, and more often with an accompanying “þat,” “as subordinating conjunction introducing locative adv. clauses: with reference to a physical place” (*MED* s.v. *whēr* adv. & conj. 6.). In the two other instances of the phrase “wher þat” among the Vernon lyrics it always means “where” (3.13, 16,116).<sup>29</sup> It is difficult to be certain that the poet-persona is projecting himself into a future state, but given the frequency of that meaning among other lyrics, the reference to death a few lines before, and the themes of transience and of the materiality of all phenomena and the theme of the poem, it likely is.

The poet-persona's self-identification thereby summons the audience to imagine his corpse after death, in a moment of eeriness similar to that experienced in reading Keats' “These living hands.” Moreover, this gesture points up a temporal distance separating the present audience from the poet's composition of the poem, and thereby shows the effect of transience on how the discourse as a whole signifies. Insofar as the poem was recited aloud, the poet-persona's self-reference foregrounds a radical disjuncture between the persona enacting the poem and the poet. Anyone hearing the poem would be made aware of the fact that these words are not issuing from the mind of the present speaker: the text is a material statement divorced from the reality of a living, thinking author. The speaker is merely a conduit repeating, perhaps mindlessly, a former thought. The reference foregrounds the fact that the authorial presence of the text is irretrievably lost. This gives the poem a different kind of signifying power: the text itself becomes inflected as a disembodied form, and like that of the tree, devoid of any living essence.

This implicit reduction of mind to matter made through the poet's interjection occurs

elsewhere, in a more overt manner. Any belief that metaphysical inferences can be discovered through intellectual activity is denied in a subsequent reference to Augustine's trinitarian theory of divine illumination.

Of Material Mortualite

Medle we & of no more Maistrie

þe more we trace þe Trinite

þe more we falle in fantasye (93-6)

The reference to tracing the Trinity resonates as a reference to the act of recognizing the Divine image mirrored in the cognitive trio of memory, intellect, and will. The poet-persona does more, then, than simply dismiss theological speculation: he rejects the theory of the revelatory process that was thought to issue from such speculation, of the sort identified in the poet's reference to his "mynde" in "Be token hit is þe Flourdelys." This rejection augments the perceived fantastical nature of the world: just as the material world cannot provide any knowledge of divine reality, so too the working of the faculties in apprehending the world through image-making does not manifest Divine essence within the knower. Not only is being without essence, but the experiential proof that attests to that essence—a human's recognition of the essence of his or her own being in the very act of cognition—is dismissed.

In "þis world fareþ as a Fantasy," warnings against attempts to know Divine truths are grounded in a comprehensive view of the limits of knowledge, one that has its roots in the recognition of the rift between God's *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta*. The poem's images, formal structure, and persona together form a multi-dimensional discursive structure that presents an all-encompassing view of God's absolute power and the ramifications of that view on

**the perception of phenomena, of being, and of cognition. The result is a poetics that can be called material semantics, and that can be defined as a constant attention to the physicality of all phenomena, often in quantitative terms, and hence to the lack of essences in the world.**

## Notes to Chapter Seven

1. John Burrow, ed. "This World Fares as a Fantasy," in *English Verse 1300-1500* (London: Longmans, 1977), p. 250.
2. Burrow, "The Shape," p. 199.
3. Dom Gerard Sitwell, "A Fourteenth-Century English Poem on Ecclesiastes," *Dominican Studies* 3 (1950), p. 290; Burrow, ed. "This World," p. 256.
4. Ockham's most direct treatment of universals is found in his *Ordinatio*, Book I, Dist. 2, questions 4-7. Part of the text is translated in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages, the Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions*, ed. Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1973), pp. 618-35.
5. For a more detailed discussion of the theories of divine ideas that Ockham knew, and of his argument in rejecting those theories, see Maurer, *The Philosophy*, pp. 212-28.
6. Maurer, *The Philosophy*, p. 213-4.
7. Maurer, *The Philosophy*, p. 218.
8. Gilson, "The Road," p. 74.
9. The principle of the created world as the manifestation of divine ideas informs Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In *Paradiso*, as Dante ascends through the heavens he is instructed in fundamental tenets of science, and his increase in this knowledge corresponds to his increase in knowledge of God. In the final canto of the poem, Dante comes to see God as the unity of which creation is a divided image. He conveys this, tellingly, through an analogy of a book:  
     In its profundity I saw—ingathered  
     and bound by love into one single volume—  
     what, in the universe, seems separate, scattered  
 (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Paradiso*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum [Toronto: Bantam Books, 1984] 33.86-7.)
10. Maurer, *The Philosophy*, p.491.
11. Maurer, *The Philosophy*, p. 491.
12. Leff, *William*, p. 4.
13. The divine quality of the human mind is often described by Aquinas as a "natural inborn light." He conflates an Aristotelian and a Christian understanding of the intellect: "But the words of the Philosopher [Aristotle] in *On the Soul* 3.5 seem rather to mean that the agent intellect is a power of the soul, something in harmony as well with the authority of Sacred Scripture which

professes that we are signed with an intelligible light (Psalm 4.7), with which the Philosopher's agent intellect agrees" (*Theology, Faith and Reason. On Boethius On the Trinity*, 1-2, in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, trans. Ralph McInerny (London: Penguin, 1998), p.112.

14. Good accounts of Ockham's theory of intuitive cognition and abstractive cognition can be found in Leff, *William*, pp. 2-77; and Maurer, *The Philosophy*, pp. 473-78.

15. This summary of Ockham's understanding of "being" is indebted to William Leff's discussion, *William*, pp. 164-77.

16. Maurer, *The Philosophy*, 392-3.

17. I quote the translation provided by Armand Maurer (*The Philosophy*, p. 388) of William of Ockham's *Summa philosophiae naturalis* 1.9 (William of Ockham, *Summa philosophiae naturalis*, in *Opera Philosophica*, ed. Philotheus Boehner et al. [St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute, 1974-88], vol. 6, 179.5-8).

18. Leff points out how Ockham, in claiming that matter is "ingenerable and incorruptible," is "sailing close to the theological wind" (*William*, pp. 572-4).

19. William J. Courtenay provides a good overview of the Oxford school of New Physics (*Schools*, pp. 240-9).

20. Apart from those already mentioned, other echoes of Ecclesiastes occur: Eccl. 1.4 at lines 25-6; Eccl. 1.11 at line 29-30; Eccl. 2.24 at lines 109-14. Two previous studies that have considered how the poet uses Ecclesiastes as a source have pointed out that, in contrast to twelfth- and thirteenth-century interpretations of Ecclesiastes, all of which attempted to integrate its unorthodox eschatological positions into orthodox theological doctrine, this poem adopts a "similar indifference to the afterlife" (Matsuda, "Death," p.103) or exhibits an "apparent [though "tempered"] agnosticism" (Sitwell, "A Fourteenth-Century," p. 287).

21. Burrow notes: "Gnats were held to originate by spontaneous generation in slimy places: Aristotle *Historia animalium* 5.19, followed by medieval encyclopedists" ("This World," p. 252).

22. Burrow, "This World," p. 253.

23. James A. Weisheipl, "The Concept of Matter in Fourteenth Century Science," in *The Concept of Matter in Greek and Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Ernan McMullin (Notre Dame, Indiana: U of Notre Dame P, 1965), p. 147.

24. Weisheipl, "The Concept," p. 161.

25. Weisheipl, "The Concept," p. 163.

26. Weisheipl, "The Concept," p. 166.

27. Weisheipl also notes that the Calculator's predate Newton's formulation of *quantitas materiae* as "the measure of the same arising from its density and magnitude conjointly" ("The Concept," p. 168).
28. Burrow, "This World," p. 255.
29. In Chaucer's works, "wher that" usually, if not always, means "where."

## Conclusions

The six Vernon refrain lyrics discussed herein, like the five others discussed in my “Six Vernon Refrain Lyrics,” may not differ from the remaining twelve in the group in terms of their practical aim to persuade an audience to certain points of view. They do differ in the way they use forthright literary means to accomplish their rhetorical aims. The technical aspects of those means are obvious though hitherto under-explored features that cohere to form holistic rhetorical art: word-play, imagery, refrain, framing devices, and speaking voice. The manipulation of these technical features shows some commonality with lyrics written earlier, but also manifests developments in English lyric. The recovery of the rhetorical art of the Vernon lyrics therefore should add to other studies about the currency of these techniques and the role they play in Middle English lyrics. The recovery should also continue to alter the profile of what defines English lyric from the Middle Ages through to the Renaissance. As well as the generic revaluations prompted by a consideration of the poems as “works,” other revaluations are prompted when the poems are considered as “texts” existing in the Vernon manuscript. Qualities of certain lyrics, namely the implied courtly audience and the attention to the English language, support current theories about the motives for compiling and the provenance of the Vernon manuscript.

The poetic techniques used in the Vernon lyrics, and the way they cohere to create multi-dimensional discursive structures, have precedents in Middle English lyrics, but on the whole they attest singular strides in the history of the genre, considered from both technical and theoretical vantage points. Previous histories of lyric forms and techniques that have considered the Vernon lyrics at length have been based on technical innovations: notably Helen Cohen’s *The Ballade*,

Helen Sandison's *The Chanson d'Aventure*, and Susanna Greer Fein's "Twelve-Line Stanza Forms in Middle English and the Date of *Pearl*." These have contributed much to our understanding of the development of certain formal features that define the lyrics. But much room remains to probe the aesthetic and philosophical possibilities those forms enable. The Vernon lyrics also figure in thematic histories of the religious lyric, and in this context they have been dismissed, on the whole, as staid and commonplace.<sup>1</sup> Given the accomplishment of the Vernon lyrics discussed here, and of lyrics that I have discussed from other manuscripts, many of which have been illuminated by previous critics, the Vernon lyrics' marginal position within historical narratives indicates that a comprehensive, theoretically informed history of Middle English lyric remains a desideratum. The foregoing observations about the Vernon lyrics could well be situated relative to earlier and later lyrics to trace a history of Middle English lyric along a more theoretical axis, one that transcends the traditional stylistic or secular/religious divisions and instead focuses on the aesthetic, philosophical, and social import of features such as the speaking persona or the consciousness about language and about modes of signification. The beginnings of such a history are sketched cursorily here.

One area where revaluations might proceed is in the definition of the status of the lyric's speaking voice. For the secular lyric, although no definitive statement exists as it does for the religious lyric, it is generally acknowledged that the "I" is usually a consciously-created persona. Stephen Manning, for example, speaking to the issue of sincerity in Middle English and Provençal love lyrics, points out that these poems, in varying ways, do not "reveal subjective feeling" or "minimize it out of existence," but instead use their rhetorical skill to create an effect of emotion.<sup>2</sup> Andrew Howell's study of the Harley lyrics, and Carter Revard's of "confessional satires" also

draw attention to how personae-characters are used in Middle English lyrics. Moreover, speaking personae are manipulated for rhetorical effects in “Heil seinte Michael” from Harley 913, and in the brief dramatic speech beginning “I think al dai,” from the Merton College manuscript. The three more clearly secular Vernon refrain lyrics discussed in chapters two through four of this dissertation share some traits in common with the rhetorical self-consciousness of these earlier lyrics, but they also step away from these earlier developments in dramatic speakers. The dramatic oratorical addresses use embodied characters, but their effect is extended through their incorporation of a phenomenological view of how language can effect meanings by involving their implied audience in particular roles. Given that the dramatic oratorical addresses of the Vernon lyrics include certain devotional lyrics (e.g. “*Mane Nobiscum Domine!*”), the drama of the persona should present one way of describing Middle English lyric without recourse to the traditional secular/religious divide.

More particularly, these dramatic devotional lyrics provide instances where the “I” in a religious lyric is not necessarily that of everyman, as previous critics have posited it to be.<sup>3</sup> The Vernon lyrics also present other ways in which the speaking voice works as a character, distinguished by its interiority rather than by its public dramatic function. “Be token hit is þe Flouredelys” presents a poet-persona trying to incorporate an awareness of his own mental activity, and “Mercy Passeþ alle þinge” presents a character questioning the sign that he uses to ground the theory of mercy. In both poems the speakers are not the objective conduits to doctrine; rather, the subjectivity of each one inflects the poem’s message.

The foregoing analyses should also show that the extent of word-play, and the resulting poetics of subtle indirection, is larger than previously assumed in Middle English lyric. The

Vernon refrain lyrics exhibit the same qualities evident in other Middle English texts, including the use of puns and metaphoric senses of words found in Chaucer, *Piers Plowman*, and other alliterative religious texts. Although these kinds of word-play have been noted before in certain Middle English lyrics, it is still generally held that the Middle English lyrics, especially the devotional lyrics, employ only prosaic, descriptive, and explanatory uses of language. Moreover, although some attempts have been made to read word-play in certain secular lyrics, most notably the Harley lyrics, these attempts have not gained universal acceptance.<sup>4</sup> Evidence that a fascination with equivocation in language existed in Middle English lyric, however, continues to mount. For example, play with the sounds of language appears in the eight 'art lyrics' recently discovered by O.S. Pickering in London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 499, a manuscript that was compiled at Stanlow Abbey, Cheshire, likely in the 1270s. In three of the eight, every word begins with the same letter, and others exhibit concerted efforts to extend alliteration to the limits. One example should demonstrate the effect:

busken bernes boues brytnen blithe burdes botes beden

brothli brestes brouli bleden beuien berdes braches beden

brockes burken bowes baren broune bores bolde bređen

biches burken bores buten brithe blosmes brode bređen.<sup>5</sup>

The focus here is on how language can signify in more than a strictly discursive manner, on how the purely sonic features of language can represent certain phenomena. While the excessive alliteration in this poem forms a kind of playful exercise, in other lyrics word-play permits a richness of statement, often in ways that manifest a profound ontological understanding about the thematic matter. Much mapping of the extent of word-play in Middle English lyric

remains to be done.

As well as prompting inflections in current accounts of the role of the speaking voice and word-play in Middle English lyric, the foregoing analysis should also challenge current narratives describing the historical development of English lyric from the Middle Ages through to the Renaissance. Although no such thorough narrative exists, certain accounts of Renaissance lyrics are built on assumptions about the Middle English lyrics. For instance, Rosemary Woolf differentiates Middle English religious lyric from the metaphysical school of Herbert and Donne, remarking that: “whereas the seventeenth-century poets show the poet meditating, the medieval writers provide versified meditations which others may use: in the one the meditator is the poet; in the other the meditator is the reader.”<sup>6</sup> This difference in theme results in a difference in style: “[s]ince it is the poet who meditates, it is fitting in the seventeenth century that a poem should be highly wrought and imaginatively inventive, but when it is the reader who meditates, any technical or imaginative flourish is likely to intrude between the reader and the meditation.”<sup>7</sup> From the other side of the spectrum, Barbara Lewlaski has developed a theory of “Protestant poetics” which tends, given its historically-grounded definition, to mark off the kind of poetics found in the seventeenth-century poets from that of the medieval era. A thorough study of the continuities and differences between medieval and Renaissance English lyric awaits, and can not be undertaken properly without a deeper excavation of the visible tradition of Middle English lyric. But it seems worthwhile to point out how the Vernon lyrics, and other lyrics discussed in this dissertation, challenge the theory of a protestant poetics as a particular seventeenth-century phenomenon.

Before proceeding to describe the “proto-protestant” elements of certain Vernon lyrics, however, it is worth pointing out that it is unlikely that many Middle English lyrics were known in

the Early Modern period. As Julia Boffey has shown, only a small proportion of Middle English lyrics were transmitted from manuscript to print before at least the nineteenth-century.<sup>8</sup> The few printed by early English printers were selected because their author's longer works were being published, mostly Chaucer's or Lydgate's; because they were applied as epilogues, prologues, epitaphs; or because they were the right size to fill up spaces which would otherwise be left blank.<sup>9</sup> The dearth of attention to English lyric, which stands in contrast, for example, to the relatively early compilations of French lyrics, has been attributed to the fact that English audiences preferred French and other continental lyrics to those written in English.<sup>10</sup>

The evidence indicates that no Vernon lyric was transmitted from manuscript to print before the nineteenth century. The first Vernon lyric known to have been printed is "Azeyn mi wille I take mi leue," printed by Joseph Ritson, in his *Ancient Songs from the Time of King Henry III to the Revolution*, in 1790.<sup>11</sup> J.J. Conybere edited "Pat selden I seize Is sone forȝete" and "Pat bei ne haue warnyng to be ware" for *Archaeologia: of Miscellaneous Tracts relating to Antiquity*, published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, in 1817.<sup>12</sup> All 23 lyrics were printed together first by Furnivall.<sup>13</sup> There is little question, then, of the Vernon refrain lyrics influencing Renaissance ones.

In most cases, the "Protestant poetics" that Barbara Lewalski so thoroughly describes does distinguish later religious lyrics from Middle English ones. The majority of Middle English religious lyrics vividly portray Christ at a moment when His humanity is most evident—in the Nativity and the Passion—or focus on Mary's sorrows or joys. Language is used to elicit an emotional response, by assisting the audience's imaginative participation in a ritual event, and the subjective, spiritual experience of the speaker's affective response is generally not reflected on

within the lyric utterance. On the other hand, as Barbara Lewalski argues, Protestant poetics manifests a new depth and psychological insight, and reveal the symbolic significance of the individual.<sup>14</sup> The Reformation's increased focus on scripture led to a new understanding of typology as a means of exploring the personal spiritual life: a person meditating comes to understand himself as the embodiment of the subject meditated upon, such that the Word is made flesh in his person. The Calvinist paradigm of salvation also lends a particular understanding of authority and agency in these lyrics: the belief that a person can in no way prepare himself for the reception of grace or merit grace through good acts manifests itself in the poet's self-consciousness about the Divine Author working through him.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence of this Protestant poetics in certain Vernon lyrics should not be surprising considering the proto-protestant elements in Lollardy and in other scholastic discourses, which inspired a "premature reformation" in the late fourteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Ideas propelling this premature reformation include a belief that the single source of authority is the Bible, a proto-Calvinist determinism, a denial of the transubstantiation of the Eucharist, and a rejection of religious icons. As the authority of the clergy was questioned, the capacity for unmediated understanding of scripture empowered the lay reader, ennobled vernacular language, and put increased emphasis on the Word of God in a person's spiritual life.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, even apart from Lollardy, many of the theological positions current in the late fourteenth century were similar to those of the Reformation. As mentioned in Chapter Six, there was a lively debate over the relative extent of free will and grace in the scheme of salvation: Bradwardine and, to a lesser extent Wyclif, can be considered precursors to Calvin in their position in this debate. Apparent in this debate over free will, and indeed in the psychological transformation created through acts of

spiritual hermeneutics, is a persistent Augustinianism found in certain poems. It may finally be possible to attribute the similarities between the Vernon lyrics and a Protestant poetics more to the longevity of Augustinian thought than to a medieval premature reformation.

Proto-protestant elements are evident in Middle English lyrics that present a persona meditating on scripture in a way that incorporates his discovery of the Word's power and immanence within his own person. These poems exhibit a type of metaphysical wit in which, as A.J. Smith defines it, "[t]here is a concern to demonstrate an essential relationship between spiritual and secular being...a spiritual presence in secular life."<sup>18</sup> In most Middle English lyrics where this wit is present the relationship between the secular and the spiritual is always revealed in phenomena outside of the person speaking, for example in the morning dew in the well-known lyric "I Sing of a Maiden" (*JMEV* 1367). What differentiates the proto-protestant element in the Vernon lyrics including "Be token hit is þe Flouredelys" and "*Mane Nobiscum Domine*," is the presence of self-conscious personae who apprehend divine presence in and through their own acts of utterance. Moreover, the poems explore how divine immanence relates to issues of the freedom of the will and the relative power of merit and grace in salvation. Lengthy comparisons could be drawn, for example, between "Be token hit is þe Flouredelys" and George Herbert's "The Flower." Some qualities, however, do differentiate these Vernon lyrics from later protestant poetics, most notably their tendency to situate metaphysical apprehension in acts of prayer associated with the liturgy rather than the Bible, their devotion to Mary, and the fact that speaker is not 'personal,' given the anonymity of the lyrics. Nevertheless, the poetics of the Vernon lyrics prompts further unfolding of the historically-specific notion of a post-Reformation, "Protestant" poetics.

As well as inflecting generic definitions of Middle English lyric and challenging narratives that trace the development of English lyric through to the Renaissance, a view of the rhetorical art of the Vernon lyrics can also contribute to our understanding of the Vernon manuscript.

Considering the lyrics in terms of the Vernon manuscript requires a shift from viewing them as “works” to viewing them as “texts,” and an accompanying shift from a phenomenological notion of “implied audience” to a more completely historical conception of the actual audience. The lyrics can help to situate the manuscript’s audience, and may also indicate political and ideological motives that could have prompted the compilation of such a thoroughly English anthology.

Four of the poems discussed herein have an implied courtly or upper gentry audience:

“Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent,” “Þat selden I seize Is sone forzete,” “Truth is Best,” and “Mercy Passeþ alle þinge.” That audience can be inferred through references to social practices that would have been known to those classes (e.g. the use of a “sacraterie”), through the particular linguistic register (e.g. the term “lustiness”), through literary references (e.g. the allegory of the sparrowhawk), and through references to political events (e.g. the relevance of “Spayne, Brutayne” and the meaning of “feute and homage”).

Some of the Vernon refrain lyrics not discussed herein also have an implied courtly audience. One is “And make no tarijng til to Morn,” which urges immediate moral reform through reminders of imminent death. Part of the advice given is to be generous with riches, and it is specifically directed towards wealthy landowners. The second stanza is addressed to “lords” who might have “hundredus” under the control, hundreds being territorial and administrative units made up of one hundred households. The poem also implies a noble or gentry audience when the practical advice of arranging how one’s goods will be distributed before death is specified in terms

of trusting ones “seketur” (37, 41), that is, one’s “executor of a will” (*MED* s.v. secūtōur n. (a)).

The implied courtly audience of these lyrics support other, codicological reasons to suppose that the intended audience of the Vernon manuscript was in some part courtly. For one, the first leaf of Part II of the Vernon manuscript, f.105, contains a blank shield, which may indicate that it was originally intended for armigerous owners.<sup>19</sup> As well, on f.91v of the Simeon manuscript a vague script, which may be early fifteenth-century, reads what has been surmised as “Joan Bohun.”<sup>20</sup> Joan Bohun was the wife of Humphrey Bohun, Earl of Hereford, Essex and Northampton (1342-73). Their first daughter married Thomas Duke of Gloucester, the youngest son of Edward III, who left a considerable bequest of books at his death. Their second daughter, Mary, was the first wife of Henry IV and mother of Henry V. Doyle, however, maintains that the writing is too vague to confirm this identification; although the report was given by Miss Allen et al. in 1932, before the script had been exposed to chemical reagent, Doyle maintains the words may just as easily read “verbum bonum.” (It looks more like “Joan Bohun” to me.)

Moreover, manuscripts other than the Simeon that resemble the Vernon in textual affiliation are associated with the gentry. Turville-Petre shows that the early fifteenth-century Clopton manuscript (London, University Library, MS V.17), also from north Worcestershire, shares with Vernon an affiliated text of *La Estorie del Euangelie* and is comprised of similar kinds of work.<sup>21</sup> Three heraldic devices exist in the Clopton manuscript: the main one indicates that it belonged to Sir William Clopton, though there are also arms for Crewe and Throckmorton.<sup>22</sup> As Turville-Petre notes, these three families were closely linked by marriage and by allegiance to Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, the source of power in Worcestershire and Warwickshire.<sup>23</sup> Another related manuscript has connections with the Beauchamp family. Oxford,

University College, MS. 97, which has ten works that are in Simeon, was apparently owned by William Countour, priest of Pirton, Worcestershire, and clerk of Sir William Beauchamp, the brother of Thomas, Earl of Warwick, and thus the uncle of Richard Beauchamp.<sup>24</sup> The manuscript resembling Vernon most next to the Simeon manuscript, however, has clear affiliations with a religious order: the Cistercians. London, British Library, MS. Additional 37787.<sup>25</sup> This manuscript shares fourteen of its twenty English texts with Vernon and was compiled at roughly the same time. It was likely written in Bordesley Abbey, a Cistercian house in the same Worcestershire/Warwickshire dialect area.<sup>26</sup> The Vernon lyrics' evidence of an intended courtly audience, taken in the context of other codicological evidence, would support a theory that the manuscript was compiled in a Cistercian monastery with the financial support of local gentry. It is not unlikely that the patron was the great Beauchamp family itself. Its destined audience could well have been some mix of religious and lay folk; perhaps it accommodated the usual circumstances in which large monastic houses hosted travelling lay guests or lay relatives of members in the orders. The Vernon lyrics, in any case, enable us to be more certain that some part of the intended audience was secular and from the upper classes.

The Vernon lyrics might also provide some clues about the ideological motivations governing the compilation of the manuscript. If the reference to the "pore prechour" in "Hos seip þe soþe he schal be schent" is not condoning Lollards, the lyrics, as a whole, do not challenge the theory that the manuscript was compiled as a bulwark against Lollardy.<sup>27</sup> Thorlac Turville-Petre grounds his speculation in socio-historical evidence: he points out that Lollards were a problem in the diocese of Worcester, and that in the 1380s "Bishop Wakefield of Worcester issued condemnations of the preaching of heretics such as William Swynderby."<sup>28</sup> Moreover, it may not

be the only such anti-Lollard bulwark created at that time in that area: as Alan J. Fletcher has suggested, John Mirk's compilation of the *Festival* in the 1380s in nearby Shropshire may have been inspired by anti-Lollard sentiments.<sup>29</sup>

More generally, the Vernon lyrics help to inflect current perceptions of the Vernon manuscript by virtue of their consciousness about the English language. That consciousness is realized indirectly, through the strides the lyrics make aesthetically, most notably in word-play, which demonstrate a confidence in the ability of the English language to sustain complexity of thought. Such consciousness and confidence evidently qualify the compilers of the manuscript as well: the manuscript presents a deliberate effort to bring together English, and only English, texts.<sup>30</sup> Latin and French also appear in the manuscript, but when they do they are always accompanied by an English translation or paraphrase. These are as follows:

#142 *Hours of the Cross* (IMEV 701) Latin and English

#143 "Veni creator spiritus" (IMEV 639) Latin and English

#146 *Psalterium Beatae Mariae* by Albertus Magnus (IMEV 1060) Latin and English

#151 *Psalterium Beatae Mariae* by Thomas Aquinas (IMEV 1057) Latin and English

#325 *Pater noster in in a table ypeynted* Latin and English

#349 Proverbs of prophets (N. Bozon) (IMEV 3501) Latin and English

#350 *Parvus & Magnus Cato* (IMEV 247 & 820) Latin, French, English

The one exception is parts of the *Disticha Catonis*, where spaces are left for the English translation which has not been included. A.I. Doyle notes that

the blanks for some stanzas of the English version of the *Disticha* in both Vernon and Simeon, and the obviously darker ink and sharper pen of some of the [*Proverbes*], ff.

311rb, 312 vb, suggests that the translations may have been in course of composition or completion for these very manuscripts.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that the English does not occur with any other extant version of the Latin or French *Disticha* supports Doyle's theory. Moreover, it indicates how important it was to the compilers of the Vernon manuscript to have English texts.

What prompted this consolidation of purely English texts is another question. Some have suggested that it was done for pragmatic reasons, to provide reading material for an audience of lay religious women or nuns who would not have known Latin.<sup>32</sup> There are firm grounds for assuming, however, that nuns would have been able to read at least French, and so one would wonder why, if an audience of religious women was intended, French texts were not included. Chaucer's Prioress, for example, knew French, and Tony Hunt has recently provided evidence showing that French was used in nunneries throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>33</sup> It seems more likely that the thoroughly English nature of this manuscript stems from ideological rather than pragmatic motives. The acuteness of this ideological stance is heightened when we consider that, although the use of French was rapidly dwindling through the later fourteenth century, the language in England throughout the Middle Ages is more properly described as trilingual than monolingual.<sup>34</sup> Considering the linguistic diversity, the preponderance and even celebration of the English language evident in the Vernon manuscript is perhaps best viewed as a polemical statement.

The statement would have been less polemic in the West Midlands. This area of England maintained a long history of interest in English writings, and so English likely possessed more cultural prestige than it did in other parts of the country.<sup>35</sup> Doyle suggests this when he notes:

it is relevant to [the *Disticha Catonis*'] function, the linguistic changes, and the locality,

that the only other known copy of the English version of Bozon, without the French, and with Benedict Burgh's English *Disticha*, is BL MS Harley 4733, of the middle or third quarter of the fifteenth century, which belonged at an early date to a schoolmaster of Worcester.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, the earliest and one of the most ambitious programmes of vernacular translation was undertaken in this area around the time the Vernon manuscript was being assembled. John Trevisa translated two encyclopaedic works, Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* and Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*, as well as Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* for a provincial lord, Lord Berkeley. He thereby introduced "a new genre of English writing, the prose of historical and scientific information."<sup>37</sup> The Englishness of the manuscript may be viewed partly as a provincial phenomenon; but however much tempered by the West-Midland rather than metropolitan setting, the Englishness of the manuscript is at least as much polemic as pragmatic. It is not too surprising to find English lyrics with a consciousness about language, and often about the English language, in a manuscript similarly preoccupied.

## Notes to Conclusions

1. For an overview of the literature on the Vernon refrain lyrics, see further page 16 of this dissertation, and the relevant footnotes.
2. Stephen Manning, "Game and Earnest in Middle English and Provençal Love Lyrics," *Comparative Literature* 18 (1966), 225-41, repr. in *Middle English Lyrics*, ed. Maxwell Luria and Richard Hoffman (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 268.
3. Again, see Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious*, p. 6; and Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images*, p. 60.
4. For example, Michael Franklin, in a recent close reading of certain Harley lyrics does not even acknowledge the possibility of word-play ("Fyngres heo hæp feir to folde": Trothplight in Some of the Love Lyrics of MS Harley 2253," *Medium Aevum* 55.2 [1986], pp. 176-87).
5. The poem was recently edited by O.S. Pickering, "Newly Discovered Secular Lyrics from Latter Thirteenth-Century Cheshire," *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 43.170 (1992), p. 163.
6. Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, p. 6
7. Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, p. 8.
8. Julia Boffey, "Early Printers and English Lyrics: Sources, Selection, and Presentation of Texts," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 85.1 (1991), pp. 11-26.
9. Boffey, "Early Printers," pp. 17-21.
10. Boffey, "Early Printers," p. 25.
11. Joseph Ritson, *Ancient Songs From the Time of King Henry III to the Revolution* (London: J. Jonson, 1790), vol. 1, pp. 76-8.
12. J.S. Conybeare, "IV. Two English Poems of the Time of Richard II. Communicated by the Rev. J.J. Conybeare," *Archaeologia: of Miscellaneous Tracts relating to Antiquity* 18 (1817), pp. 21-8
13. For subsequent editions, see endnote 1 of the Introduction to this dissertation.
14. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, p. 149.
15. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, p. 15.
16. The phrase "premature reformation" was coined by Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1988).

17. Marie Aston's chapter "Devotional Literacy" in her *Lollards and Reformers* presents a cogent account of how the increased focus on reading the scripture presented a greater opportunity for the lay members of society to achieve direct communication with God without the need of the clergy. She also considers the social ramifications of this development.
18. A.J. Smith, *Metaphysical Wit* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), p. 69.
19. Doyle, "Introduction," p. 8.
20. A.I. Doyle provides a description of this inscription, a history of its interpretation, and an account of Joan Bohun, "Introduction," pp. 15-16.
21. Thorlac Turville-Petre, "The Relationship of the Vernon and Clopton Manuscripts," in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 29-35.
22. Turville-Petre, "The Relationship," p. 36.
23. Turville-Petre, "The Relationship," pp. 36-8.
24. Doyle, "Introduction," p. 15.
25. Nita Scudder Baugh discusses the relation between the Vernon manuscript and Addit. 37787 on pages 37-39 of her *A Worcestershire Miscellany Compiled by John Northwood, c. 1400* (Philadelphia, 1956).
26. Doyle, "Introduction," p. 14.
27. This suggestion has been made by Norman Blake ("Vernon Manuscript," pp. 57-9), Derek Pearsall ("Introduction," pp. ix-x), and Thorlac Turville-Petre ("The Relationship," pp. 43-4).
28. Turville-Petre, "The Relationship," p. 43.
29. Alan J. Fletcher, "John Mirk and the Lollards," *Medium Aevum* 56.2 (1987), pp. 216-24.
30. Norman Blake has also noted that "the amount of material in Latin and French [in the Vernon manuscript] is very small, and it only appears in the manuscript if it has some reference to an English text," ("Vernon Manuscript," p. 46).
31. Doyle, "Introduction," p. 15.
32. Pearsall, "Introduction," p. x; Doyle, "Introduction," p. 14.
33. Tony Hunt, "An Anglo-Norman Treatise on Female Religious," *Medium Aevum* 64.2 (1995), pp. 205-31.

34. William Rothwell is willing to give credence to a trilingual England extending right through the Middle Ages, as he argues in many recent articles (e.g. "Sugar and Spice and All Things Nice: From Oriental Bazaar to English Cloister in Anglo-French," *Modern Language Review* 94.3 [1999], pp. 647-59). Some scholars, however, stress the gradual but certain decay of French (e.g. Douglas Kibbee, *For to speke Frenche trewely: the French language in England, 1000-1600* [Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Pub. Co., 1991]).

35. See Turville-Petre, *England*, pp. 182-3; and Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval English*, ed. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1988), p. 69.

36. Doyle, "Introduction," p. 15.

37. Ronald Waldron, "John Trevisa and the Use of Language," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 (1988), p. 171.

## Appendix One

A list of the group of twenty-eight lyrics in which the twenty-three refrain lyrics are found in the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts follows. The titles of the refrain lyrics are derived from the refrain as it occurs in the first stanza. For each lyric without a refrain, the title is the first line of the poem. The lyrics are numbered in their order of occurrence in the manuscripts. For those lyrics that are also attested in later manuscripts, the sigla of the manuscripts follow the title. Those sigla are identified in Appendix Two. Each title is accompanied by its *IMEV* number, and the page reference to its edition in *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth-Century*, ed. Carleton Brown, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev. G.V. Smithers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1957) except for the poem “Pat selden I seize Is sone for 3ete,” where the page reference is to *Historical Poems of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia UP, 1959), and the poems “*Ave Maris Stella*,” and “*Sit laus deo patri*,” where the page references are to *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript*, Vol. 2, ed. F.J. Furnivall (London, 1901).

1. “Merçi passeþ alle þinge” (Ad), *IMEV* 583, *Religious Lyrics*, pp. 125-31.
2. “*Deo Gracias I*,” *IMEV* 1448, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.131-34
3. “A3eyn mi wille I take mi leue,” *IMEV* 2302, *Religious Lyrics*, pp. 134-36.
4. “*Deus caritas est*” (not a refrain lyric), *IMEV* 678, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.136-37.
5. “*Deo Gracias II*,” *IMEV* 2280, *Religious Lyrics*, pp. 138-9.
6. “Vche mon ou3te him self to knowe,” *IMEV* 1455, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.139-42.
7. “Sum tyme þenk on 3uster day,” *IMEV* 3996, *Religious Lyrics*, pp. 143-48.
8. “Kepe wel Christes Comaundement” (P, H, L, W), *IMEV* 1379, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.148-51.
9. “Hos seiþ þe soþe, he schal be schent” (T), *IMEV* 3420, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.152-54.
10. “Fy on a feynt frend,” *IMEV* 872, *Religious Lyrics*, pp. 155-57.
11. “Euere to þonke god of al” (B, T, C, Sl, G), *IMEV* 562, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.157-60.
12. “Þis world fareþ as a Fantasy,” *IMEV* 1402, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.160-64.
13. “Ay Merçi God And graunt Merçi” (Ba, A), *IMEV* 374, *Religious Lyrics*, pp. 164-67.
14. “Troupe is best,” *IMEV* 4158, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.168-70.
15. “Charite is no lengor cheere,” *IMEV* 4157, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.170-73.

16. "Of wimmen comeþ þis worldes welle," *IMEV* 1596, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.174-77.
17. "Of alle floures feirest fall on" (not a refrain lyric), *IMEV* 2607, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.178-81.
18. "Be token hit is þe Flouredelys," *IMEV* 2108, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.181-85.
19. "Þat selden I seize Is sone for ȝete," *IMEV* 5, *Historical Poems*, 102-106.
20. "Warnyng to be ware" (Pe), *IMEV* 4268, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.186-88.
21. "Crist ȝiue vs grace to loue wel holichirch" (not a refrain lyric), *IMEV* 606, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.189-91.
22. "And fond euermore to seye þe best" (C, G), *IMEV* 2790, *Religious Lyrics*, pp. 191-93.
23. "And make no tariing til to Morn," *IMEV* 1443, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.194-96.
24. "For þi sunnes a Mendes make" (C, G), *IMEV* 563, *Religious Lyrics*, pp.196-99.
25. "Suffre in tyme and þat is best," *IMEV* 3925, *Religious Lyrics*, pp. 200-202.
26. "*Mane Nobiscum Domine*," *IMEV* 1532, *Religious Lyrics*, pp. 202-205.
27. "*Ave Maris Stella*" (not a refrain lyric), *IMEV* 1081, *Minor Poems*, vol. 2, pp. 735-39.
28. "*Sit laus deo patri*," listed but unnumbered in *IMEV*, after 1489  
*Minor Poems*, vol. 2, p. 740.

## Appendix II

### Other witnesses of the Vernon refrain lyrics

The following is a list of the manuscripts that contain Vernon refrain lyrics. Each manuscript is preceded by its siglum, and followed by the lyric(s) it contains, as indicated by the numbers assigned in Appendix One.

- Ad London, British Library, Additional 31042 (1)
- A Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS. Advocates 19.3.1 (2,13)
- P Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys 1584 (8)
- H London, British Library, MS. Harley 78 (8)
- L London, Lambeth Palace, MS. 853 (8)
- W London, Windsor Castle, St. George's Chapel, MS. E.1.1 (8)
- T Cambridge, Trinity College, MS. 0.9.38 (9,11)
- B Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 6692 (11)
- C London, British Library, MS. Cotton Caligula, A.ii (11,22,24)
- Sl London, British Library, MS. Sloane 2593 (11)
- G Princeton, Princeton University Library, MS. Garrett 143 (11, 22, 24)
- Ba Oxford, Balliol College, MS. 354 (13)
- Pe Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS. Peniarth 395 (20)

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