

Delineating the *Gawain*-poet: Myth, Desire, and Visuality

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Abstract

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This thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on literary, art historical and textual sources to examine how the act of looking, images, and artistic and textual creation are both dramatized and problematized in the works of the *Gawain*-poet: *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (with some discussion of *St Erkenwald*, a work often attributed to the same author). Analyzing in detail the texts and illustrations in the *Gawain*-manuscript (British Library, Cotton MS Nero A.x), the thesis argues that the poet weaves together classical and biblical narratives, along with exegetical and iconographic traditions, in shaping his distinctive reflections on the use and making of images, body and performance, in response to late fourteenth-century religious controversies.

The thesis starts by tracing a network of ideas about gaze, sin, body and text through late-medieval biblical and mythographical texts and images. Working text-by-text through the poet's oeuvre, it then discusses the use of Ovidian materials and the motif of metamorphosis in his complex meditation on ethical and specifically gendered practices of reading, writing and looking. It concludes by assessing the poet's idea of poetic creation and his own role as a creative artist. In doing so, it suggests that the poet's self-conscious artistry works together with a consistent emphasis on humility in human's relations with the divine. The thesis contributes to a growing scholarly interest in the *Gawain*-illustrations, and a developing focus on visuality in studies of

late-medieval devotional and literary works. By linking the analysis of classical/biblical intertexts, visual traditions and the manuscript's own illustrated texts, it suggests a fresh area of study for the *Gawain*-poet and his milieu.

Table of Contents

	Page
List of Abbreviations	xi
List of Illustrations	xiii
Chapter I: Contextualizing the <i>Gawain</i>-poet: Gaze, Body, and Text in the Late-medieval Period	1
Introduction	1
Watching Bathsheba and Susanna	7
Bathsheba's Body in Texts	7
Bathsheba's Body in Images	10
The Inscribing Male Gaze	15
Susanna in Early Texts and Images	25
Susanna in Late-medieval Images and Texts	29
Susanna's Textualized Body	36
Watching the Lollards: Bodies in Social Practice	43
The Case of John Belgrave	43
The Case of William Thorpe	46
Reading Images: Late-Medieval Controversies	51
Platonic Dichotomy and Biblical Polemics	51
Christ's Body and "Libri laicorum"	53
Late-medieval Image Debates	56
Re-viewing Ovid in Late-Medieval England	57
Ovid in Monasteries	57
Ovid in Vernacular Literature	60
Metamorphic Forms of Actaeon	62
<i>Confessio Amantis</i> : A Crossover	65
The <i>Gawain</i> -poet and Classical Literature	68
The <i>Gawain</i>-manuscript: Methodology	71
The Poet and the Manuscript	71
The Illustrations	74
Image Theories and Approaches	77
Scope of the Thesis	81

Chapter II:	“I sez byzonde þat myry mere”: Sight, Language, and Crossover in <i>Pearl</i>	86
	At the Ovidian Well	87
	Narcissus’s Fountain	87
	Narcissus’s Gaze	94
	“Perle” in the “Myry Mere”	96
	The Muted Tongue	101
	The Vineyard of “Idel”	105
	The “Forme Fatale”	111
	In the Ovidian “Wod-schawez”	114
	The Dancing Doe	114
	The Narcissistic Union	118
	The Pygmalionesque “World Wode”	122
	The Locked Rose and the Mischosen Tale	125
	The Bitten Apple and Biting Prayers	128
	Looking Across at the Biblical Heaven	132
	The Two Jerusalems	132
	The Silence of the Lamb	134
	Between Drowning Idolatry and Spiritual Dryness	137
	The Ambiguous Redemption	137
	The Eucharist Pearl	139
	When Ovid Meets God	142
Chapter III:	“Luf lokez to luf”: Gaze, Desire and Inscription in <i>Cleanness</i>	146
	Seeing the Creation	147
	The “Gropande” God	147
	The Jealous Maker and Human Counterfeiters	151
	Love-making and Image-making	157
	Looking Back on the Fall	160
	The Self-Regard	161
	The Backward Gaze	169
	Inscribing the Fall	173
	The Law-Perverter	173
	The Heretical Exegetes	175

	The Diabolic Text	182
	The Homosexual Psalmist	187
	The Fool's "Sauteray"	191
	Regarding <i>Cleanness</i>	194
	The Unconventional Ark	194
	The Humbled Daniel	199
	The Legacy of Adam and Eve	202
	The Ovidian "Egge"	204
Chapter IV:	"Fettled in on forme": The Dual Figure of Jonah in <i>Patience</i>	210
	The Kenotic Framing	211
	Jonah the Antagonist	214
	The Mock-heroic Martyrdom	214
	The God-denying Psalm Fool	217
	The Fool's Bauble	222
	Refashioning the Sign of Jonah	225
	The "Typus Christi"	225
	The Word Upside Down	229
	The Word Between the Hands	233
	The Body of Folly	235
	The Passion of Jonah	240
	The Laughing Fool	240
	The Evil Tongue	245
	The Mad God in the Monstrous Church	248
	"His ryche robe he terof"	252
	Dagged Body and Split Morality	252
	The Sewing King	257
	From Dagged Hood to Seamless Robe	259
Chapter V:	"For quat gome so is gorde": Uncovering <i>Sir Gawain</i>	267
	Cross-dressing Knights and Ladies	269
	Guinevere's Canopy	269
	The Green Knight's "Smale Wast"	272

The Folly of the Green Knight	276
Gawain's "Saylande Skyrtez"	282
The Lady's "Gorgor"	288
Opening the Case of Gawain	290
In the Secluded Bower	290
On the Perilous Bed	296
Out of the Ivory Case	302
The Hanging Sleeves and the Missing Purse	309
The Peddling Lady	312
The Penniless Knight	320
Re-covering the Knight	324
The "Bend Abelef"	324
"The Hurt watz Hole"	328
An Ovidian Excursion	331
Chapter VI: Conclusion: Looking, Image, and Word in <i>St Erkenwald</i>	336
Between Image and Word	337
"Of þis Augustynes art"	337
The Poet's Somatic Texts	340
God's "Bodeworde" and Man's Tongue	346
Looking at the Image	349
The Clerical Role	349
The Veiled Marvel	352
The Sin of Adam	354
The Disappearing Body	356
The Introspective Gaze	359
Bibliography	363

List of Abbreviations

<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>BCMA</i>	<i>The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art</i>
BL	London, British Library
BM	London, British Museum
BnF	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France
Bodleian	Oxford, the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford
<i>ChauR</i>	<i>Chaucer Review</i>
<i>ChauY</i>	<i>Chaucer Yearbook</i>
<i>CHRC</i>	<i>Church History and Religious Culture</i>
<i>CL</i>	<i>Christian and Literature</i>
EETS	Early English Text Society
o.s.	Original Series
n.s.	New Series
<i>ELH</i>	<i>English Literary History</i>
<i>ES</i>	<i>English Studies</i>
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>JHI</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
<i>JMRS</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies</i>
<i>JSAH</i>	<i>Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians</i>
<i>JWCI</i>	<i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
<i>MÆ</i>	<i>Medium Æ vum</i>
<i>MED</i>	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
Morgan	N.Y., Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i>
MS	Manuscript
<i>MS</i>	<i>Medieval Studies</i>
<i>NML</i>	<i>New Medieval Literatures</i>
<i>NM</i>	<i>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</i>
<i>N&Q</i>	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
<i>OAJ</i>	<i>Oxford Art Journal</i>
PL	Patrologia cursus completus series latina
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>RES</i>	<i>The Review of English Studies</i>

<i>RMSt</i>	<i>Reading Medieval Studies</i>
<i>RP</i>	<i>Romance Philology</i>
<i>SAC</i>	<i>Studies in the Age of Chaucer</i>
<i>SE</i>	<i>Studies in English</i>
<i>SIcon</i>	<i>Studies in Iconography</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Studi Medievali</i>
<i>SN</i>	<i>Studia Neophilologica</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
<i>Speculum</i>	<i>Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies</i>
<i>StIn</i>	<i>Studi Inglesi</i>
<i>Viator</i>	<i>Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies</i>
<i>YLS</i>	<i>Yearbook of Langland Studies</i>
<i>W&I</i>	<i>Word and Image</i>

List of Illustrations

		Page
Fig. 1	Bathsheba and David cycle N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M. 638, fol. 41v. < http://www.themorgan.org/collection/crusader-bible/82 >	11
Fig. 2	David watching Bathsheba London, British Library. MS Royal II.B.VII, fol. 56v. < http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/SetupViewerHandler.ashx?ref=royal_ms_2_b_vii_f001r >	11
Fig. 3	David sleeps with Bathsheba London, British Library. MS Royal II.B.VII, fol. 57r. < http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/SetupViewerHandler.ashx?ref=royal_ms_2_b_vii_f001r >	11
Fig. 4	David dining with Urias London, British Library. MS Royal II.B.VII, fol. 57r. < http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/SetupViewerHandler.ashx?ref=royal_ms_2_b_vii_f001r >	12
Fig. 5	Bathsheba intercedes for Solomon London, British Library. MS Royal II.B.VII, fol. 63v. < http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/SetupViewerHandler.ashx?ref=royal_ms_2_b_vii_f001r >	12
Fig. 6	David watching Bathsheba © Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. MS 300, fol. 3v.	12
Fig. 7	David passes his throne to Solomon © Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. MS 300, fol. 4.	12
Fig. 8	David watching Bathsheba Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Bodl. 270b, fol. 152r. < http://bodley30.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~34413~119501:Bible-moralisée,-part-I-?qvq=q:bathsheba;lc:ODLodl~29~29,ODLodl~7~7,ODLodl~6~6,ODLodl~14~14,ODLodl~8~8,ODLodl~23~23,ODLodl~1~1,ODLodl~24~24&mi=19&trs=21 >	13
Fig. 9	David and Bathsheba cycle Oxford, Bodleian libraries, University of Oxford. MS Bodl. 270b, fol. 153v. < http://bodley30.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~34414~119502:Bible-moralisée,-part-I- >	14
Fig. 10	Biblical scenes with David London, British Library. MS Royal 6 E. VI, fol. 6. < http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7788&CollID=16&NStart=60506 >	17

- Fig. 11 Initial “B(eatus).” 18
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Latin 10525, fol. 85v.
<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8447877n/f184.image.r=français%2010525.langEN>>
- Fig. 12 Initial “B(eatus).” 18
London, British Library. MS Harley 4664, fol. 133.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=22702>>
- Fig. 13 David watching Bathsheba 21
London, British Library. MS Kings 7, fol. 54.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=2606>>
- Fig. 14 Detail of Amor’s arrow. 22
London, British Library. MS Kings 7, fol. 54.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=2606>>
- Fig. 15 David watching Bathsheba 23
London, British Library. MS Harley 2969, fol. 91.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8430>>
- Fig. 16 The Annunciation 23
London, British Library. MS Harley 2969, fol. 38.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8430>>
- Fig. 17 David watching Bathsheba 24
London, British Library. MS Harley 2863, fol. 71.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=14942>>
- Fig. 18 Susanna as a Lamb between two wolves 27
Rome, Arcosolium of Celerina in the Catacomb of Praetextatus.
Image from New Liturgical Movement.
<<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2011/04/story-of-susanna-in-liturgy-of-lent.html#.VSYk89FDIU>>
- Fig. 19 Lothair Crystal with scenes of Susanna and the elders 28
© London, British Museum. M&ME 1855.12-1.5.
<http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_mla/t/lothair_crystal.aspx>
- Fig. 20 Susanna and the Elders 29
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Douce 211, fol. 227v.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLod1~1~1~40768~128104:Bible-historiale->>>
- Fig. 21 Susanna and the Elders 29
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 156, fol. 231.

- <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90593720/f638.item.r=français%20156>>
- Fig. 22 Susanna and the Elders 33
Cambridge, Master and Fellows of Trinity College Cambridge.
MS B.11.7, fol. 66v.
<<http://sites.trin.cam.ac.uk/james/viewpage.php?index=109>>
- Fig. 23 Susanna and the Elders 33
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 9221, fol.
93r.
<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000795k/f209.image.r=français%209221.langEN>>
- Fig. 24 Fresco of Susanna and the Elders 33
Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale. Inv. 275. Image from Alain R.
Truong. <<https://alaintruong2014.wordpress.com/tag/francesco-di-giorgio-martini/>>
- Fig. 25 Crucifixion of Christ 36
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Douce
381, fol. 160r.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~42876~128202:Book-of-Hours--fragment-->>>
- Fig. 26 Susanna and the Elders 38
London, British Library. MS Egerton 859, fol. 31.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=10194>>
- Fig. 27 Susanna and the Elders 38
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M. 833, fol. 186v.
<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?Search_Arg=m+833+186v&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D+Medieval+Images%7C0&Search_Code=GKEY%5E&PID=wppCqC1zwEE7UueMRsUozYmIG2HE&SEQ=20150421111624&CNT=50&HIST=1>
- Fig. 28 Susanna and the Elders 39
Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas
at Austin, MS HRC 008, fol. 238v.
<http://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/mnemGal/8/HRC_8.pdf>
- Fig. 29 Susanna and the Elders 41
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M. 1166, fol. 48r.
<<http://www.themorgan.org/collection/Prayer-Book-of-Claude-de-France/48>>
- Fig. 30 Narcissus and Actaeon at Fountain 66
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M. 126, fol. 21v.
<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?Search_Arg=m126+21v&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D+Medieval+Images%7C0&Search_Code=GKEY%5E&PID=K-xi3iWPWKXvc4XWaULkmQ9LrOZy&SEQ=20150421113503&CNT=50&HIST=1>
- Fig. 31 The Dreamer sleeping 90

- London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A. x., fol. 37 (41).
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 32 Narcissus at the fountain 90
London, British Library. MS Royal 20 A xvii, fol. 14v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8551&CollID=16&NStart=200117>>
- Fig. 33 Narcissus at the fountain 90
Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. MS 3338, fol. 11v.
<<http://romandelarose.org/#read;Arsenal3338.011v.tif>>
- Fig. 34 Narcissus at the fountain 90
Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. MS 5209, fol. 11v.
<<http://romandelarose.org/#read;Arsenal5209.011v.tif>>
- Fig. 35 Narcissus at the fountain 95
London, British Library. MS Royal 20 A xvii, fol. 14.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8551&CollID=16&NStart=200117>>
- Fig. 36 Amant at the fountain 95
London, British Library. MS Royal 20 A xvii, fol. 15v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8551&CollID=16&NStart=200117>>
- Fig. 37 The Dreamer by the stream 95
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 37v (41v).
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 38 Narcissus at the fountain 95
Paris, Assemblée Nationale. MS 1230, fol. 13r.
<<http://romandelarose.org/#read;AssembleeNationale1230.013r.tif>>
- Fig. 39 Amant at the fountain 97
Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. MS 5226, fol. 13v.
<<http://romandelarose.org/#read;Arsenal5226.013v.tif>>
- Fig. 40 Amant at the fountain 97
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Selden Supra 57, fol. 12v.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~4308~104426:Le-roman-de-la-rose->>>
- Fig. 41 Left: Amant at the fountain; Right: Narcissus at the fountain 98
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 12595, fol. 12v.
<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b60002167/f30.image.r=français%2012595.langEN>>

- Fig. 42 Lady Idleness opens the Garden for Amant 107
Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. MS 5226, fol. 5v.
<<http://romandelarose.org/#read;Arsenal5226.005v.tif>>
- Fig. 43 Lady Idleness opens the Garden for Amant 107
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Selden
Supra 57, fol. 5v.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~49727~111972:Le-roman-de-la-rose->>>
- Fig. 44 Lady Idleness opens the Garden for Amant 107
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 380, fol. 5r.
<<http://romandelarose.org/#read;Francais380.005r.tif>>
- Fig. 45 Lady Idleness opens the Garden for Amant 107
Arras, Bibliothèque municipale d'Arras. MS 897, fol. 4r.
<<http://romandelarose.org/#read;Arras897.004r.tif>>
- Fig. 46 Lady Idleness opens the Garden for Amant 107
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français. 24391, fol.
1r.
<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b60003637/f5.image.r=français%2024391.langEN>>
- Fig. 47 The Dreamer and the Pearl maiden 108
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 38v (42v).
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 48 Narcissus and Echo/Idleness 108
Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. MS 5226, fol. 12r.
<<http://romandelarose.org/#read;Arsenal5226.012r.tif>>
- Fig. 49 Narcissus' gaze and death 112
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. Selden Supra
57, fol. 11v
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~4307~104425:Le-roman-de-la-rose->>>
- Fig. 50 The Dreamer sleeping and the Dreamer by the stream 112
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x. fols. 37 (41)–37v
(41v)
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 51 Narcissus at the fountain 121
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M. 245, fol. 11r
<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?Search_Arg=m+245+11r&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D+Medieval+Images%7C0&Search_Code=GKEY%5E&PID=wppCqC1zwEE7UUEMRsUozYmIG2HE&SEQ=20150421111624&CNT=50&HIST=1>

- Fig. 52 Amor shoots Amant 126
Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art. MS 1945-65-3, fol. 14r.
<www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/49734.html?muIR=1663393157|1#>
- Fig. 53 Amor locks Amant's heart 126
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 380, fol. 14v.
<<http://romandelarose.org/#read;Francais380.014v.tif>>
- Fig. 54 Amant approaching the rose 138
Los Angeles, Elizabeth J. and James E. Ferrell Collection. MS Ferrell Rose, fol. 15r.
<<http://romandelarose.org/#read;Ferrell.012r.tif>>
- Fig. 55 The heavenly Jerusalem 138
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 38v (42v).
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 56 Left: The Garden of Mirth; Right: The park of the Lamb 142
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M. 948, fols. 195v–196r.
<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?Search_Arg=m+948+195v&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D+Medieval+Images%7C0&Search_Code=GKEY%5E&PID=AEEFDyobSV08ymu6QICKvID5pUPQ&SEQ=20150421112653&CNT=50&HIST=1>
- Fig. 57 The creation of Adam 148
London, British Library. MS Egerton 1894, fol. 1v.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Egerton_MS_1894>
- Fig. 58 The creation of Adam 148
London, British Library. MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 3r.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/SetupViewerHandler.ashx?ref=royal_ms_2_b_vii_f001r>
- Fig. 59 The creation of Adam and Eve 148
London, British Library. MS Arundel 120, fol.4v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=4367>>
- Fig. 60 The creation of Adam 148
London, British Library. MS Harley 4381, fol. 7r.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=22269>>
- Fig. 61 The creation of Adam and Eve 148
London, British Library. MS Harley 616, fol. 1r.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=47199>>
- Fig. 62 The creation of Adam 148
London, British Library. MS Harley 4772, fol. 5r.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=39628>>

- Fig. 63 The 1st and 2nd day of the creation 149
 London, British Library. MS Yates Thompson 20, fol. 1r.
 <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=5615>>
- Fig. 64 Left: The benediction; Right: The creation of Adam and Eve 150
 London, British Library. MS Additional 47682, fols. 2v–3r.
 <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_47682>
- Fig. 65 God and the fall of Lucifer 154
 London, British Library. MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 1v.
 <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/SetupViewerHandler.ashx?ref=royal_ms_2_b_vii_f001r>
- Fig. 66 The creation of Eve 161
 N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M.302, fol. 1r.
 <<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v1=1&ti=1,1&Search%5FArg=m302&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D%20Medieval%20Images%7C0&Search%5FCode=GKEY%5E&CNT=50&PID=hSSUoyDIIsii2ZZ8WhwZqItQzn7gi&SEQ=20150421105732&SID=3>>
- Fig. 67 The creation of Eve 161
 London, British Library. MS Yates Thompson 20, fol. 1r.
 <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=5615>>
- Fig. 68 The fall and the creation of Eve 162
 London, British Library. MS Additional 27210, fol. 2v.
 <<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=57101>>
- Fig. 69 The creation of Eve 162
 London, British Library. MS Royal 19 D II, fol. 7v.
 <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=46827>>
- Fig. 70 The Fall 164
 N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M. 302, fol. 1r.
 <<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v1=1&ti=1,1&Search%5FArg=m302&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D%20Medieval%20Images%7C0&Search%5FCode=GKEY%5E&CNT=50&PID=hSSUoyDIIsii2ZZ8WhwZqItQzn7gi&SEQ=20150421105732&SID=3>>
- Fig. 71 The Fall 164
 London, British Library. MS Yates Thompson 20, fol. 1r.
 <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=5615>>
- Fig. 72 Initial A(dam) 164
 London, British Library. MS Royal 6 E. VI, fol. 46v.
 <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7788&CollID=16&NStart=60506>>
- Fig. 73 The Fall 164

- London, British Library. MS Royal 15 D II, fol. 2r.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=34956>>
- Fig. 74 The Fall 165
London, British Library. MS Yates Thompson 13, fol. 20v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8148>>
- Fig. 75 Left: The forbidden fruit; Right: The Fall and the Expulsion 165
London, British Library. MS Additional 47682, fols. 3v–4r.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_47682>
- Fig. 76 Upper left: Christ’s temptation; Upper right: Eve’s Temptation; 166
Lower left: Absalom’s death; Lower right: the Fall
Brussels, Bibliothèque royale Albert 1er. MS M. 9961–62, fol. 25r.
<http://images.kbr.be/multi/KBR_9961-62Viewer/imageViewer.html>
- Fig. 77 The Fall 168
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Bodl. 270b, fol. 7v.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~34158~118458:Bible-moralisée,-part-I->>
- Fig. 78 The Fall 168
Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. MS 2554, fol. 2r.
Image after the facsimile edited by Reiner Haussherr, *Bible moralisée: Codex Vindobonensis 2554 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*. Graz: Akademische Druck, 1992.
- Fig. 79 The Fall 169
Hildesheim. St. Godehard’s Church. MS St. Godehard 1, p. 17.
<<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/translation/trans017.shtml>>
- Fig. 80 The Fall 169
London, British Library. MS Royal 17 E VII, fol. 7v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=42160>>
- Fig. 81 Left: God accusing Adam; Right: God accusing Eve 170
London, British Library. MS Yates Thompson 13, fols. 21r–21v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8148>>
- Fig. 82 The Fall 170
London, British Library. Royal 1 E IV, fol. 12v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=51434>>
- Fig. 83 The Fall 170
London, British Library. MS Royal 6 E VI, fol. 2.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7788&CollID=>

- 16&NStart=60506>
- Fig. 84 The Fall and the Expulsion 171
London, British Library. MS Yates Thompson 14, fol. 7.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Yates_Thompson_MS_14>
- Fig. 85 The Expulsion 172
London, British Library. MS Yates Thompson 13, fol. 23.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8148>>
- Fig. 86 The Expulsion 172
London, British Library. MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 4.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/SetupViewerHandler.ashx?ref=royal_ms_2_b_vii_f001r>
- Fig. 87 The Expulsion 172
London, British Library. MS Royal 17 E VII, fol. 8v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=42162>>
- Fig. 88 The Expulsion 172
London, British Library. MS Royal 19 D III, fol. 9v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=13581>>
- Fig. 89 Upper: Creation of Eve; Lower: The Crucifixion 173
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS. Bodl.
270b, fol. 6r.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~34157~118457:Bible-moralis\u00e9e,-part-I->>>
- Fig. 90 Upper: Christ carrying the cross; Lower: The Blacksmith's wife 173
London, British Library. MS Additional 47682, fol. 31r.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_47682>
- Fig. 91 A grotesque monk sawing books 179
London, British Library. MS Additional 49622, fol. 146r.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=add_ms_49622>
- Fig. 92 The destruction of Sodom 184
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M.638, fol. 4r.
<<http://www.themorgan.org/collection/crusader-bible/7>>
- Fig. 93 The destruction of Sodom 184
Kent, Canterbury Cathedral. Typological window. Photo by
Julian P. Guffogg, Geograph Project Ltd.
<<http://www.geograph.org.uk/more.php?id=3812848>>
- Fig. 94 Lot's wife 184
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Bodl.
270b, fol. 15v.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~34213~115656:Bible->>

- moralisée,-part- I-?qvq=q:bodl%2B270b;lc:ODLodl~29~29,ODLodl~7~7,ODLodl~6~6,ODLodl~14~14,ODLodl~8~8,ODLodl~23~23,ODLodl~1~1,ODLodl~24~24&mi=254&trs=356>
- Fig. 95 The destruction of Sodom 184
Brussels, Bibliothèque royale Albert 1er MS 9961-62, fol. 12r.
<http://images.kbr.be/multi/KBR_9961-62Viewer/imageViewer.html>
- Fig. 96 The destruction of Sodom 185
Baltimore, Walter Art Museum. MS W. 106, fol. 4r.
<http://thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/W106/data/W.106/sap/W106_000007_sap.jpg>
- Fig. 97 The destruction of Sodom 185
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M. 769, fol. 44r.
<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?Search_Arg=m+769+44r&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D+Medieval+Images%7C0&Search_Code=GKEY%5E&PID=wppCqC1zwEE7UUeMRsUozYmIG2HE&SEQ=20150421111624&CNT=50&HIST=1>
- Fig. 98 Christ instructs his disciples 187
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Laud Misc. 165, fol. 366v.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~46812~117848:Commentary-on-the-Gospels->>>
- Fig. 99 The Crucifixion and the pillar of Lot's wife 187
London, British Library. MS Additional 50000, fol. 11v.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_50000>
- Fig. 100 Orpheus and Eurydice 188
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 606, fol. 32v.
<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b60007552/f72.image.r=français%20606.langEN>>
- Fig. 101 Upper: Belshazzar's feast. Lower: Abuse of holy vessels 192
Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. MS 1179, fol. 165v.
Image after Robert Mills, "Seeing Sodomy in the *Bibles Moralisées*," in *Speculum* 87.2 (2012): 413–68, fig. 3.
- Fig. 102 Noah's ark 195
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x. fol. 56v (60v).
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 103 The whale 195
London, British Library. MS Harley 4751, fol. 69r.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=28741>>
- Fig. 104 Building of the Ark 195
London, British Library. MS Additional 47682, fols. 7v–8r.

- <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_47682>
- Fig. 105 Upper: Noah building the ark; Lower: Noah entering the ark 196
London, British Library. MS Royal 19 D II, fols. 12v, 13v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8520>>
- Fig. 106 Noah's ark 196
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M.302, fol. 1v.
<<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v1=2&ti=1,2&Search%5FArg=m302&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D%20Medieval%20Images%7C0&Search%5FCode=GKEY%5E&CNT=50&PID=hSSUoyDIsii2ZZ8WhwZqItQzn7gi&SEQ=20150421105732&SID=3>>
- Fig. 107 Symbol of the Cross 197
Rome, Catacombs of St. Callixtus. Image from JesusWalk.
<<http://www.jesuswalk.com/christian-symbols/>>
- Fig. 108 Christ's crucifixion 198
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M.333 fol. 85r.
<<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v1=7&ti=1,7&Search%5FArg=m333&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D%20Medieval%20Images%7C0&Search%5FCode=GKEY%5E&CNT=50&PID=9QQu3uOf9PP6t2efVOII94HrLwgW&SEQ=20150421110629&SID=4>>
- Fig. 109 Detail of the fish and the trident 198
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M.333 fol. 85r.
<<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v1=7&ti=1,7&Search%5FArg=m333&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D%20Medieval%20Images%7C0&Search%5FCode=GKEY%5E&CNT=50&PID=9QQu3uOf9PP6t2efVOII94HrLwgW&SEQ=20150421110629&SID=4>>
- Fig. 110 Belshazzar's feast 200
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 56r (60r).
<<http://contentdm.ualgary.ca>>
- Fig. 111 Belshazzar's feast 201
London, British Library. MS Yates Thompson 16, fol. 258v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=5635>>
- Fig. 112 Belshazzar's feast 201
London, British Library. Royal 15 D I, fol. 45r.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=51512>>
- Fig. 113 Belshazzar and Daniel 201
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M. 766, fol.62r.
<http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?Search_Arg=m766+62r&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D+Medieval+Images%7C0&Search_Code=GKEY%5E&PID=a2LJYJ5HakMHvplxKgb5uliypvjV&SEQ=20150421103224&CNT=50&HIST=1>
- Fig. 114 Belshazzar and Daniel 201

- N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS M.140, fol. 43r.
 <http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v1=80&ti=51,80&Search%5FArg=m140&SL=Submit%26LOCA%3D%20Medieval%20Images%7C0&Search%5FCode=GKEY%5E&CNT=50&PID=tx18nF6Pg7hrOYQ_kiAK7W8BNzRX&SEQ=20150421111055&SID=54>
- Fig. 115 Creation of God and the Cosmic egg 205
 Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen. MS 1044, fol. 17v.
 © Bridgeman Art Library
- Fig. 116 Left: Creation of the world; Right: Ovid writing 206
 Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen. MS 1044, fol. 16v.
 © Bridgeman Art Library
- Fig. 117 Ovid writing 206
 Copenhagen, Royal Library of Denmark. MS Thott. 399, fol. 26r.
 Image from *Moralizing Ovid*, the *Ovide Moralisé* Project.
 <<https://moralizingovid.wordpress.com/2011/10/>>
- Fig. 118 The patron and the scribe 208
 London, British Library. MS Additional 47682, fol. 1.
 <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_47682>
- Fig. 119 Jonah preaching 218
 London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x. fol. 82v (86v).
 <<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 120 Daniel and King Belshazzar 218
 London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 56v (60v).
 <<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 121 The fool 219
 Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Douce 118, fol. 60v.
 <<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~38876~122004:Psalter->>
- Fig. 122 The fool 219
 Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Bodl. 953, p. 173.
 <<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~35284~122802:Commentary-on-the-Psalter->>
- Fig. 123 The fool and David 219
 Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Ashmole 1523, fol. 66r.
 <<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/view/search;jsessionid=A2427398B29928D39F01DCCD4BF7F010?q=ashmole+1523>>

- Fig. 124 The fool and David 219
 © Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. MS 1-2005, fol. 77r.
- Fig. 125 The fool and David 220
 Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Auct. D.
 2. 2, fol. 60r.
 <[http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~31731~107696:
 Benedictine-choir-Psalter,-of-Galli](http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~31731~107696:Benedictine-choir-Psalter,-of-Galli)>
- Fig. 126 The fool and David 220
 London, British Library. MS Royal 2 B. VIII, fol. 54.
 <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=41009>>
- Fig. 127 God and the fool 220
 London, British Library. MS Royal 1 E. IX, fol. 148.
 <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_1_e_ix>
- Fig. 128 The fool and David 220
 London, British Library. MS Arundel 83, fol. 40v.
 <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Arundel_MS_83>
- Fig. 129 Fools 223
 London, British Library. MS Additional 42130, fol. 167.
 <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_42130_fs001ar>
- Fig. 130 Story of Jonah (Sarcophagus) 226
 Rome, Lateran Museum. Sarcophagus. Image after Robin M.
 Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual,
 and Theological Dimensions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012,
 p. 155, fig. 4.4.
- Fig. 131 Story of Jonah (Sarcophagus) 226
 Rome, Santa Maria Antiqua. Sarcophagus. Image after Fred
 Kleiner, *Gardner's Art through the Ages: The Western
 Perspective, vol. 1*. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2010, p. 213,
 fig. 8-6.
- Fig. 132 Jonah and the whale 227
 Konya, Konya Museum. Roman sarcophagus. Photo from Holy
 Land Photos. <www.HolyLandPhotos.org/browse.asp?s=1,3,8,21,58&img=TCSCKY05>
- Fig. 133 Jonah 227
 London, British Library. MS Additional 14790, fol. 124. Image
 after Gretel Chapman, "The Bible of Floreffe: Redating a
 Romanesque Manuscript," in *Gesta* 10.2 (1971): 49–62, fig. 16.
- Fig. 134 Initial "S" with Jonah 228
 Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Douce

- 131, fol. 54r.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~39124~119744:Psalter->>
- Fig. 135 Initial “S” with Jonah 228
London, British Library. MS Harley 2888, fol. 68.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=20747>>
- Fig. 136 Initial “S” with Jonah 229
London, British Library. MS Lansdowne 346, fol. 33v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=4420>>
- Fig. 137 Initial “S” with Jonah 229
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Liturg. 198, pt. I, fol. 60r.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~47600~110529:Choir-Psalter--Augustinian->>
- Fig. 138 Initial “S” with Jonah 229
London, British Library. MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 168v.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/SetupViewerHandler.ashx?ref=royal_ms_2_b_vii_f001r>
- Fig. 139 Jonah swallowed and cast up 229
London, British Library. MS Yates Thompson 14, fol. 70v.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Yates_Thompson_MS_14>
- Fig. 140 Noah’s ark 230
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 56r (60r).
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 141 Jonah cast into the sea 230
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 82r (86r).
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 142 Initial “S” with Jonah 236
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Auct. D. 2. 2, fol. 75r.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~31738~109902:Benedictine-choir-Psalter,-of-Galli?qvq=q:%3D%22MS.%2BAuct.%2BD.%2B2.%2B2%22;c:ODLodl~29~29,ODLodl~7~7,ODLodl~6~6,ODLodl~14~14,ODLodl~8~8,ODLodl~23~23,ODLodl~1~1,ODLodl~24~24&mi=11&trs=26>>
- Fig. 143 Initial “S” with Jonah 236
London, British Library. MS Arundel 83, fol. 47.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Arundel_MS_83>
- Fig. 144 David praying 236
London, British Library. MS Harley 2897, fol. 50v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=20910>>

- Fig. 145 David praying 236
London, British Library. MS Royal 2 B. VIII, fol. 64.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=41010>>
- Fig. 146 David praying 237
London, British Library. MS Additional 42130, fol. 121v
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_42130_fs001ar>
- Fig. 147 Initial “S” with Jonah 238
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Douce 366, fol. 89r.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~42554~120478:Psalter--known-as-the--Ormesby-Psal>>
- Fig. 148 Initial “S” with Jonah 238
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Douce 366, fol. 89r.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~42554~120478:Psalter--known-as-the--Ormesby-Psal>>
- Fig. 149 The crucifixion 241
London, British Library. MS Additional 47682, fol. 32.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_47682>
- Fig. 150 Christ carrying the cross 242
London, British Library. MS Additional 42130, fol. 93r.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_42130_fs001ar>
- Fig. 151 The Crucifixion 242
London, British Library. MS Arundel 104, fol. 354.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=2748>>
- Fig. 152 Christ being nailed to the cross 243
London, British Library. MS Additional 42130, fol. 93v.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_42130_fs001ar>
- Fig. 153 The Crucifixion 243
London, British Library. MS Additional 42130, fol. 94r.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_42130_fs001ar>
- Fig. 154 The scourging of Christ and the God-denying fool 244
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Laud Lat. 84, fols. 129v–130.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~46643~114853:Psalter--with-calendar->>>
- Fig. 155 A female fool 246
London, British Library. MS Additional 42130, fol. 64.

- <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_42130_fs001ar>
- Fig. 156 **Pride** 254
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Douce 104, fol. 24r.
<<http://bodley30.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~38596~110182:Piers-Plowman---C--text-->>
- Fig. 157 **The poor man** 254
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Douce 104, fol. 51r.
<<http://bodley30.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~38627~118535:Piers-Plowman---C--text-->>
- Fig. 158 **The Fall and the Crucifixion** 260
London, British Library. MS Royal 1 E. IV, fol. 12v.
<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=51434>>
- Fig. 159 **The Expulsion** 263
London, British Library. MS Royal 2 B. VII, fol. 4.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/SetupViewerHandler.ashx?ref=royal_ms_2_b_vii_f001r>
- Fig. 160 **Arthur's feast** 273
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A. x., fol. 90v (94v).
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 161 **The Green Chapel** 274
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A. x., fol. 125v (129v).
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 162 **Lovers' game, Mirror case.** 291
© London, Victoria and Albert Museum. No. 803-1891.
<http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/images/ivory/befd5f37_edfd41a7.html>
- Fig. 163 **The Lover enjoys the Rose** 292
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Douce 195, fol. 155v.
<<http://bodley30.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~40239~108218:Le-roman-de-la-rose>>
- Fig. 164 **A couple in bed** 292
Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek. MS I.3.5.I Aug. 2°, fol. 146r. Image after Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*. London: Lawrence King, 1998, p. 140.
- Fig. 165 **David and Bathsheba** 292
N.Y., The Morgan Library. MS 638, fol. 41v.
<<http://www.themorgan.org/collection/crusader-bible/82>>

- Fig. 166 Lancelot and Guinevere 293
 London, British Library. MS Additional 10293, fol. 325v.
 <<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IID=17685>>
- Fig. 167 Gawain and the Lady 294
 London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.X. fol. 125r (129r).
 <<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 168 Guinevere and Lancelot 295
 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 119, fol. 398v.
 <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84920784/f192.zoom.r=Lancelot>>
- Fig. 169 Guinevere and Lancelot 295
 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 120, fol. 493v.
 <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9058806d/f23.item>>
- Fig. 170 Gawain in bed with a woman 296
 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 12576, fol. 201v.
 <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9060799h/f202.item>>
- Fig. 171 Gawain on the Perilous Bed 296
 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 12577, fol. 45. Image after Sandra Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment: Rereadings of Knighthood in the Illuminated Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994, fig. 103.
- Fig. 172 Gawain on the Perilous Bed 297
 Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Université de Mons-Hainaut. MS 331/206, fol 103. Image after Sandra Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment: Rereadings of Knighthood in the Illuminated Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994, fig. 49.
- Fig. 173 Gawain on the Perilous Bed. Mirror case. 297
 Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale Inv. 697.
 <http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/images/ivory/FA970E7B_c66782d5.html>
- Fig. 174 Gawain on the Perilous Bed. Writing Tablet. 298
 Niort, Musée Bernard d'Agesci. Inv. no. 914.1.143.
 <<http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/search/results.html?qs=writing+tablet+gawain>>
- Fig. 175 Gawain on the Perilous Bed. Ivory casket. 298
 Baltimore, Watler Art Museum. Inv. 71.264.
 <<http://art.thewalters.org/detail/5780>>

- Fig. 176 Gawain on the Perilous Bed. Ivory casket. 299
 © London, British Museum. Inv. no. 1856,0623.166.
 <http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/images/ivory/9606D8FE_2ef03aad.html>
- Fig. 177 The Hunt of Love. Mirror case. 303
 Paris, Musée du Louvre. OA 118.
 <http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/images/ivory/ADBA36CB_dd5d98e6.html>
- Fig. 178 The Hunt of Love. Mirror case. 303
 © London, Victoria and Albert Museum. Inv no. 219-1867.
 <http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/images/ivory/86D3487E_9ae07a15.html>
- Fig. 179 Knights' tournaments. Ivory casket. 304
 © London, British Museum. Inv. no. 1856,0623.166.
 <http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/images/ivory/9606D8FE_2ef03aad.html>
- Fig. 180 Left: A courtly couple; Right: The maiden and the unicorn. Ivory 304
 casket.
 © London, British Museum. Inv. no. 1856,0623.166.
 <http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/images/ivory/9606D8FE_2ef03aad.html>
- Fig. 181 Scenes of a courting couple. Ivory casket. 305
 Berlin, Kunstgewerbe Museum. Inv. no. 1882,608.
 <http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/images/ivory/3328944E_af7016b7.html>
- Fig. 182 Scenes of courtly love. Ivory casket. 305
 Cologne, St Ursula Schatzkammer, Romanische kirchen. Image
 from St Thomas Guild.
 <<http://thomasguild.blogspot.tw/2011/12/kolner-minnekastchen.html>>
- Fig. 183 Bayeux Tapestry 305
 Bayeux, Musée de la Tapisserie. Image from Ken Pennington's
 lectures on Medieval Civilization 1100-1300, Syracuse
 University.
 <<http://classes.maxwell.syr.edu/his311/Lecture%20Four/aelfgyva.jpg>>
- Fig. 184 Lancelot reaches for the rose 305
 Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS.
 Rawlinson. Q. b. 6, fol. 284v.
 <[http://bodley30.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~49338~110612:Romance
 -of-Lancelot-du-Lac--branche](http://bodley30.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~49338~110612:Romance-of-Lancelot-du-Lac--branche)>
- Fig. 185 Dietmar disguised as a peddler 314
 Heidelberg, University of Heidelberg Library. MS Cod. Pal.
 germ. 848, fol. 64.
 <<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg848/0123?sid=70129735f59fd357d0ca20cd8acc9aa5>>
- Fig. 186 Rape of Dinah 315

- London, British Library. MS Egerton 1894, fol. 17r.
<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Egerton_MS_1894>
- Fig. 187 Sacrament of marriage 321
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 376, fol. 6v.
<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84702013/f16.image.r=francais%20376.langEN>>
- Fig. 188 Sacrament of marriage 321
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS NAL 3093, fol. 175v.
<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84496839/f194.image.r=nal%203093.langEN>>
- Fig. 189 Marriage of a couple 321
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS Français 20118, fol. 271r.
<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84557828/f557.image.r=francais%2020118.langEN>>
- Fig. 190 Man offering his purse to a woman 322
Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. MS Bodl. 264, fol. 59r.
<<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~7~7~55606~116469:MS--Bodl--264?sort=Shelfmark>>
- Fig. 191 The Lover's purse 322
Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Urb. 376, fol. 51v.
Image after Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire*. London: Lawrence King, 1998, fig. 52.
- Fig. 192 Gawain returns to Camelot 328
London, British Library. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 126r (130r).
<<http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca>>
- Fig. 193 Christ's would and instrument of the Passion 330
N.Y., Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Cloisters Collection. MS 69.86, fol. 331r.
<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/471883?rpp=30&pg=1&rndkey=20150421&ft=* &what=Psalters&pos=4&imgno=28&tabname=label>

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Chapter One

Contextualizing the *Gawain*-poet: Gaze, Body, and Text in the Late-medieval Period

Introduction

This thesis explores the importance of connections between gaze and the desire to see, the act of looking and the making of narrative and text in the *Gawain*-poet's works, contained in London, British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x (hereafter referred to as the *Gawain*-manuscript). I suggest that the poet, despite his immense reliance on biblical sources, is deeply concerned with the Ovidian concept of metamorphosis, and shares a keen mythographic imagination which has been associated more often with other Ricardian authors such as Chaucer and Gower. The poet interweaves Ovidian myths with scriptural materials, combining two distinct narrative traditions of desire to shape his own discourse in his exploration of image-making and looking. Through his thoroughgoing engagement with classical mythology, the poet mingles imagery of desire with the problematic desire for images. I place this ambiguous relationship with images in the context of late fourteenth-century religious controversies in which artistic objects were a focus both of devotion and rejection, and the role of images, image-making, and image-use were closely debated.

I concentrate here on the *Gawain*-poet because he explicitly engages with stories about desire, vision, and image-making. The four poems in the *Gawain*-manuscript are all thematically centered around human desire: the Dreamer's longing for the Pearl-maiden in *Pearl*, the homosexual lust of the Sodomites in *Cleanness*, Jonah's

desire for life in *Patience*, as well as the feudal and courtly love in the Arthurian court in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The poet explores various forms of human desire, both spiritual and physical, sacred and profane, romantic and social, by mingling scriptural allegory with the hermeneutics of Ovidian metamorphosis to visualize the intangible flow of desire and lines of sight into the tangible reality of vividly described landscapes, artworks, and costumes. His conscious use of visual, graphic details echoes the poems' thematic concern with gaze and looking, seeing and being seen: the Dreamer's vision of the Pearl-maiden and Jerusalem in *Pearl*, the preoccupation with the "fayre forme" of cleanness as prerequisites for the sight of God in *Cleanness*, the blinding folly of Jonah in contrast to the omniscient and foreseeing God in *Patience*, and the intense exchanges of gazes between Camelot and the Green Knight, Gawain and the Lady in *Sir Gawain*. At the end of the thesis, I consider the poem *St Erkenwald*, which has often been ascribed to the *Gawain*-poet, and whose narrative of conversion relies on the deciphering of signs and the sacramental power of Erkenwald's tears. Through his descriptive art and complicated interplay between classical and biblical imagery, the *Gawain*-poet dramatizes the act of looking and various forms of gaze in different emotional, religious, social, and romantic contexts to explore the desire, anxieties and consequences of looking, and by analogy, poetic making.

Late fourteenth-century England witnessed an unparalleled growth of visual art, which is embodied by its highly image-conscious monarch, Richard II, and his extravagant, visually flamboyant courtly culture.¹ On the other hand, a growing voice against devotional images and their worship was raised by people such as John Wyclif

¹ Nigel Saul describes Richard II as "one of the most highly image-conscious rulers in his day," and suggests that his Westminster portrait is the first portrait of monarch that is a real likeness, rather than an ideal image of the abstract idea of kingship. See *The Three Richards* (London, 2006), p. 126.

and subsequent Lollard commentators, who critiqued the unwarranted and irrational power of images over people and their faith. The fourteenth-century image controversy affected the poet's society so profoundly that it would be reasonable to suppose that he was both aware of and found his way of engaging with it. The *Gawain*-poet's interest in and concern with the visual and sight therefore has an urgent contemporary context and may have risen out of a sense of personal desire to respond to one of the major religious issues of his time.

The fact that *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* appear in a single manuscript with its own set of illustrations also provides another good reason to discuss these poems in such a visual context. The pictures, composed in the early fifteenth century when numerous discourses both for and against the use of religious images were produced and circulated, have their own context and contemporary impetus. Their significance and connection with the image debate are enhanced by the consistent lack of images of deities or divine symbols in the twelve miniatures.² These images, although previously considered as crude and incompetent in contrast to the refined language and style of the texts which they illustrate, draw on various long-standing iconographic traditions, as I will suggest, in their attempt to visualize and represent the critical moments in each of the four poems. This visual and iconographical interplay brings meaning to the textual environment and enriches our understanding of the poems and the poet's descriptive art.

In the below sections in this chapter, I will first contextualize my discussions of sight, body, image and writing in the *Gawain*-poet's works by tracing these ideas through

² As noted by Maidie Hilmo in Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson, *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches* (London, 2012), p. 172.

late-medieval biblical, exegetical and iconographical traditions. I will then sketches late-medieval religious controversy over the use of images in devotions, and the reception of classical materials, especially Ovid, in late fourteenth-century clerical circle in England. Having provided the social, intellectual, and religious context in which the poet may have worked in, I, then, discuss my methodology through reviewing extant scholarships on the poet and issues discussed in this thesis.

In Chapter 2, I discuss *Pearl* in the context of image debate, showing how the poet expresses his concerns with the visual aspect of faith and the use of devotional images by veiling a desire for worshipping images in an unceasing longing for an objectified female body. The poet explores the gap between men's predisposed desire to see and their often confined perceptions through textual and iconographical allusions to Ovidian texts, *Metamorphoses*, *Le Roman de la Rose* and the Middle English *Romaunt of the Rose*. I look into how these texts are interwoven into the poem's biblical narrative to shape the poet's complex meditation on seeing, interpreting, and writing, and to freight the poem's surface experience of divine effusion with a latent anxiety about the efficacy of human language as a means of communicating meanings.

Chapter 3 on *Cleanness* examines the issue of image-making by showing how the poet retells the biblical stories of Lucifer, Adam and Eve, Noah, the Sodomites and Belshazzar as different examples of creative acts to illustrate the elusive fine line between appropriate image-making and idolatry. The Ovidian theme of metamorphosis is interwoven into these biblical narratives to create an interplay between sexuality and creativity, procreation and creation, and to explore the ambiguous status of man both as an image created and a creator of images. The poet

shows how the idea of self-effacing serves as a key attribute which helps man steer clearly from idolatry without overstepping into the divine business of making.

Chapter 4 on *Patience* pronounces the importance of the kenotic virtue of humility which *Cleanness* implies through biblical examples. The poet gravitates from the idea of patience as fortitude and an active ability to persevere to its implied willingness to subjugate and become the vessel of divine will. The poet plays with the exegetical tradition of seeing Jonah as a Christ figure, representing him as an anti-hero and a fool to draw attention to the dual nature of Christ with an emphasis on his humanity in contrast to man's. Through his polarized characterization of Jonah as both sacred and profane, the poet explores the metamorphosis of Jonah as a sign, and a set of conflicting and complementary ideas yoked on his figure. In doing so, the poet vests the conventional "Sign of Jonah" with a new meaning for his own generation, and engages his audience in a reflection on looking and interpreting of signs and images, reaffirming the importance of humility in man's relations with God.

In Chapter 5, I show how the poet shifts his focus from the religious to the secular in his exploration of gender, identity, and performance through the lens of contemporary material culture in *Sir Gawain*. The poet stages various forms of gaze and desire in the games between Gawain, the Green Knight and the Lady, demonstrating how Gawain transforms from a hero to a fool-like figure, whose metamorphosis is represented by his sartorial body changed throughout the poem. The poem's almost fetishistic attraction to the fashion style of the protagonists and their dressed and undressed bodies shows how a person's identity is defined and changed by what he or she wears, and how fallible and instable clothes as a sign are. The poet provides Gawain's wounded, baldric-clad body as the concluding image to the poem, and

allows the characters to explain the moral significance of them. But instead of reaffirming their didactic messages, the poem ends with the enigmatic motto of the Garter to challenge its readers to ponder on these images and to question the meanings attributed to them in the poem.

In the final chapter, I look back on the poet's ideas of the relationship between image and text, and his understanding of poetic making and the role of the creative artist by discussing another short poem, *St Erkenwald*, which has been claimed by a number of scholars as part of the *Gawain*-poet's oeuvre. The poem displays a rich interplay between the classical and the biblical, the profane and the sacred, and the past and present, to demonstrate various ways of looking and to engage its readers in a contemplation on the difference between the visual and the verbal, the tangible signs and intangible meaning in its narrative of uncovering the mysterious identity of the dead body. I show how the poem serves as a treatise and a self-reflexive critique of the use of image as seen through the eyes of Bishop Erkenwald, who was himself a focus of religious worship in late fourteenth-century England. At the end of the thesis, I suggest how this introspective gaze can benefit our reading of the *Gawain*-poems and cast light on our understanding of the obscurity and anonymity of the poet and the manuscript.

Before moving on to sketch some of the context and history to the poet and to place my own methodology, I would like to spend some time examining biblical and exegetical narratives of sight and desire by exploring two specific stories in the Old Testament—those of Bathsheba and Susanna—through the lens of medieval understandings of sight, gaze and desire. I do this in order to crystalize some of the central issues at stake in the thesis, and to provide examples of the kind of exegetical

reading of gaze, gender and desire with which I believe the *Gawain*-poet was deeply familiar.

Watching Bathsheba and Susanna

Bathsheba's Body in Text

The story of David and Bathsheba has been a popular subject of literature and art throughout Christian history. The story is narrated in 2 Samuel 11 and 12: One day when David was walking upon the roof, he saw Bathsheba, the wife of Urias, bathing herself. He sent a messenger to bring her to his house and slept with her. Bathsheba then became pregnant. Knowing about her pregnancy, David sent Urias to a battle for him to be killed. When he died, David married Bathsheba, and a son was born for him. God was displeased with David's adultery. He sent Prophet Nathan to reproach David and took the life of his newborn son as a punishment. David repented and was forgiven by God, who gave him another son, Solomon, as a reward.

Bathsheba has since been remembered and invoked as an "occasion of great sin."³

Embarrassed by her naked body which brings David low, early Christian fathers moralized the story. St Augustine allegorizes the story through the etymologies of the names of David and Bathsheba:

David means, strong of hand, or desirable; and what can be stronger than the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who has

³ As noted by David Lyle Jeffrey in "Bathsheba in the Eye of the Beholder: Artistic Depiction from the Late Middle Ages to Rembrandt" in *Sacred and Profane in Chaucer and Late Medieval Literature: Essays in Honour of John V. Fleming*, eds. Robert Epstein and William Robins (Toronto, 2010), pp. 30–45, esp. pp. 30–4. In this essay, Jeffery usefully summarizes early Christian interpretations of David and Bathsheba.

conquered the world, or more desirable than He of whom the prophet says, “The desire of all nations shall come?”
 Bersabee means, well of satisfaction, or seventh well [...] So, in the Song of Songs, the spouse, who is the Church, is called a well of living water; [...] for it is in her a fountain of living water springing up unto everlasting life, and he who has it shall never thirst.⁴ (B.XXII. 87)

In his interpretation, which became the standard Christian reading of the story throughout the medieval period, David is configured as Christ who removes Urias, the devil, from Bathsheba, the Church. Her bathing water becomes the baptismal water through which the *Ecclesia* is cleansed before she can be joined to Christ in perpetual union.

Throughout the narrative in 2 Samuel 11–12,⁵ Bathsheba’s body is constantly associated with a house (“domus”) being entered (“ingredior”) by men: first by David’s strolling (“deambulet”) on the roof, then by David’s order for Urias to “go back into his own house” as an implicit metaphor for sexual intercourse. The sexual connotation in David’s offer is made clear by Urias’ outright rejection: “Shall I go into my house, to eat and to drink, and to sleep with my wife?” (11:11). When the prophet Nathan reproaches David for having committed the sin secretly (“fecisti abscondite”) and wants to punish him in the sight of all Israel (12:12), he is fashioning Bathsheba’s body into an illegal, obscure object, and a privy space surveyed by David’s illicit gaze, as opposed to the well-defined, collective body of Israel that can endure public

⁴ Quoted from *Reply to Faustus, The Manichaeon* (OrthodoxEbooks), p. 542. For the Latin text, see *Sancti Aureli Augustini De utilitate credendi [...]; Contra Faustum*, ed. Joseph Zycha, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 25 (Vienna, 1891), pp. 691–2.

⁵ The Latin texts of the Bible are quoted from The Holy Bible: Latin Vulgate Translation. Christian Classics Ethereal Library <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/vul.html>>. English texts of the Bible are quoted from the Douay-Rheims Bible. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. <<http://www.ccel.org/c/challoner/douayrheims/dr.html>>.

examination.

Bathsheba's silent submissive role takes a dramatic change in her subsequent appearance in 1 Kings 1–2, which describes David's death and the enthronement of Solomon. Here Bathsheba not only speaks but sees as a subject: She "went unto the king into the chamber" and asked for her son's right: "And now, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are upon thee, that thou shouldst tell them, who shall sit on thy throne, my lord the king, after thee" (1:20). The spectator-spectacle relationship between David and Bathsheba is reversed in this scene. The old, dying David replaced Bathsheba to become the object of gaze and to be intruded upon. In her solicitation, Bathsheba actively demanded and engaged the collective gaze of Israel into the private domain of the chamber, where David had secretly accommodated and concealed her body, and by doing so, she succeeded in putting her son Solomon on the throne. Solomon's kingdom was thus "translatum" and "factum" (2:15). Bathsheba's obscured ("abscondita") body on the roof ("super solarium") was transformed into the political body of Israel represented by her son's body on the throne ("super solium"). The formerly privy female body of sin became a body of authority and law.

The parallel between the voyeuristic scene and the deathbed scene is seen more clearly in David's dying words to the future king, Solomon:

Ego ingredior viam universae terrae confortare et esto vir. Et observa custodias Domini Dei tui ut ambules in viis eius et custodias caerimonias eius et praecepta eius et iudicia et testimonia sicut scriptum est in lege Mosi ut intellegas universa quae facis et quocumque te verteris. (1 Kings 2:2–3)

[I am going the way of all flesh: take thou courage and shew thyself a man. And keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and observe his ceremonies, and his precepts, and judgments, and testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses: that thou mayst understand all thou dost, and whithersoever thou shalt turn thyself].

David's entering into the "universae terrae" recalls his sexual penetration ("ingredior") into Bathsheba's body as a "terra abscondita," connecting her naked body with perishable flesh and death. The acts of observing ("observa") and walking ("ambules") here parallel David's former seeing ("vidit") and walking ("deambulare") on the roof. But now it is God, rather than a woman, that should be seen, and the divine way, rather than the "solarium," that should be trodden on. In David's deathbed words, Bathsheba's body transforms from a symbol of sin to an occasion for regime transfer, and a locus of advice, a surface on which David writes down his *memento mori* and the Law of God for his son.

Bathsheba's Body in Image

Having demonstrated how Bathsheba's body undergoes a series of transformations in the scripture and commentaries, I will now look at her metamorphic body in medieval images.⁶ Early and high medieval depictions tend to represent the story of David and Bathsheba with a series of narrative scenes (figs. 1–9). These images often display a sense of propriety either by showing Bathsheba's naked body only minimally (figs. 1, 3, 8), or by fully covering it, such as figs. 2, 5 and 7, where she appears more like David's equal and a queen addressing him.

⁶ Discussions of the iconography of David and Bathsheba usually focus on images after late fifteenth century. An exception is Wayne Craven, "The Iconography of the David and Bathsheba Cycle at the Cathedral of Auxerre." *JSAH* 34.3 (1975): 226–37. He focuses on manuscript images produced between 1200–1400 and makes stylistic comparisons between the Auxerre reliefs and these images. See below p. 22, n. 16 for compositional change and discussions of later medieval images of Bathsheba.



Fig. 1. Bathsheba and David cycle. France, 1240; Crusader Bible. Morgan. MS M. 638, fol. 41v.



Fig. 2. David watching Bathsheba. England, 1310; The Queen Mary Psalter. BL. MS Royal II.B.VII, fol. 56v.



Fig. 3. David sleeps with Bathsheba. England, 1310; The Queen Mary Psalter. BL. MS Royal II.B.VII, fol. 57r.



Fig. 4. David dining with Urias. England, 1310; The Queen Mary Psalter. BL. MS Royal II.B.VII, fol. 57r.



Fig.5. Bathsheba intercedes for Solomon. England, 1310; The Queen Mary Psalter. BL. MS Royal II.B.VII, fol.63v.

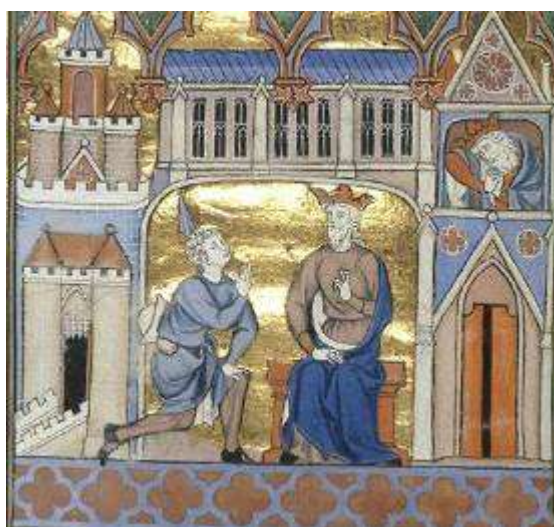


Fig. 6. David watching Bathsheba. France, 1255; The Psalter and Hours of Isabelle of France. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Museum. MS 300, fol. 3v.



Fig. 7. David passes his throne to Solomon. France, 1255; The Psalter and Hours of Isabelle of France. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. MS 300, fol. 4.

In some radical examples, the artists conceal Bathsheba's naked body by not representing it at all, as fig. 6 shows. In this image, David is shown peeping at an empty solarium on the opposite side. Bathsheba's body is visually absent and conflated with the building whose open door suggests David's violation. Her vanishing body appears on the adjoining recto folio as a fully adorned queen-suppliant in the scene of Solomon's enthronement with her body standing erect in parallel with the now closely shut palace building symbolizing her son's secured "regnum." In a late thirteenth-century manuscript of *Bible moralisée*, the orthodox interpretation of

the story is represented pictorially (fig. 8).



Fig. 8. David watching Bathsheba. France, 13th century;
Bible moralisée. Bodleian. MS Bodl. 270b, fol. 152r.

In this image, the upper roundel shows David watching Bathsheba through a frame, while the roundel beneath it depicts the baptism of the Ecclesia, with the caption describing that Christ sees Holy Church washing the stains of sinners. Bathsheba's body becomes a collective body of the Church and all Christian people while David's carnal desire configured into sacred love. His downward, circumscribed gaze and voyeuristic posture in the upper roundel are translated into Christ's upward-looking, all-seeing eyes and hands raised in benediction below. This moralization is pursued on the following folio (fig. 9).



Fig. 9. David and Bathsheba cycle. France, 13th century; *Bible moralisée*. Bodleian. MS Bodl. 270b, fol. 153v.

The top left roundel portrays David sending for Bathsheba and her conception of Solomon, which is moralized in the roundel beneath it: “David, who begot a son of Bathsheba, is Jesus who called His church to Himself in love and faith and many were her sons.” The Bathsheba in white dress is replaced by a man in baptism, symbolizing her son. Bathsheba’s womb metaphorically transforms into the baptismal basin and her amniotic fluid the holy water in which man is reborn. The top right roundel depicts David ordering Uriah, who would not sleep with Bathsheba in his own house, to deliver sealed letters (“sigillo clausas littera”) to Joab.⁷ Here in this image, David’s letters are visually depicted as a white round ball. This unusual depiction might have been an inarticulate depiction of “sigillum,” a seal, a statuette or a diminutive “signum.”

⁷ The caption to this image is wrongly translated as “David sends food to Uriah, which he rejects. He is recalled by David.” The original Latin caption (transcribed from the image with original spellings retained) is “Et misit D[avi]d ad Ioab p[er] manum urie litt[er]as sigillo clausas et sic mandavit et ponite Uriam ex adu[er]so belli ubi fortissimum e[ra]t p[ro] elium et derelinq[ui]te eum ut p[er]cussus i[n]tereat.” (David sent letters enclosed with a seal to Joab by the hand of Uriah, which command him to put Uriah in the front of the battle, where the fight was strongest, and to abandon him so that he would be wounded and killed.)

This image recalls David's sexual offer to Urias while paralleling the image of David sending for Bathsheba in the top left roundel, inviting the viewer to connect Bathsheba's body dressed in white with this white round "sigillum." This scene of delivering a letter is moralized in the roundel beneath it, which shows God giving laws to Moses while other people worship the golden calf and make sacrifice to it. The caption to this image reads: "Thus Jesus gave the Jews the old law and they understood it not. For this lack of understanding they stand condemned." Urias becomes the evil Jews who reject the laws of David the Christ, and Bathsheba is conflated with the stone tablets which God passes to Moses. Her naked body transforms from an object of sinful worship into a stone tablet of divine laws, appearing simultaneously as a fountain of both idolatry and redemption, and a source of sin and knowledge. David's downward, voyeuristic gaze becomes God's benevolent, all-seeing eyes looking down from heaven. His gaze not only penetrates Bathsheba's body as the phallic candle suggests in fig. 1, but inscribes like a stylus on her body, filling it with texts which are to be read and seen as a message of God.

The Inscribing Male Gaze

This association of Bathsheba with the law also exists in literary works. In his thirteenth-century verse translation of the Bible, Peter of Riga (1140–1209) describes Bathsheba as a naked law:

Designat Christum Daud, Vrias synagogam,
Bethabee legem, si bene queque notes.
Nuda placet regi species, in corpore nudo,
Non in uestito regius heret amor:
Nuda placet Christo lex, non uestita figuris;
Candida scriptorium lilia Christus amat.⁸ (1: 278)

⁸ Quoted in Jeffrey (2010) p. 43, n. 8. Translation mine.

[David signifies Christ, Urias the synagogue,
 And Bathsheba the law, if you mark all well.
 The naked sight (of Bathsheba) pleases the king with her naked body,
 Which the king's love does not cover with clothes:
 The naked law pleases Christ, unclothed with forms;
 The white lilies of texts which Christ loves.]

Bathsheba's naked, unbound body is compared to a law free of worldly encumbrances.⁹ It then becomes a blank *scriptum*, waits to be defined, ruled and inscribed by divine love. The "nuda species" invoke medieval visual theory in which eyes send particles ("spicies") to the objects in the process of seeing, and recall David's gaze, emphasizing the agency of eyes in this textualization of Bathsheba's body. The poet not only invokes David's gaze on Bathsheba but endows it with a fixating ("heret, (haereo)") power of defining and giving shape, like the gaze of Medusa, which fixes men in an eternal form. Bathsheba's body is petrified into a lifeless "corpus/corpse" by David's gaze which then strips and transforms it into a parchment to be written with divine law. The female skin is scraped of its original sexuality and sin, and re-inscribed with divinity and salvation. Her former obscure body is now defined with the words of God.

This image of David's gaze as an inscribing stylus corresponds to his role as the author of the Psalms, which were sometimes believed to be written as a repentance for his adultery with Bathsheba.¹⁰ This association can also be seen in manuscript

⁹ Jeffrey (2010), p. 33.

¹⁰ For the development of the Penitential Psalms in late-medieval England, see Clare L. Costley King'oo, "David's "Fruytfull Saynges": The Penitential Psalms in Late-Medieval and Early Modern England." Diss. U of Pennsylvania, 2005, pp. 19–20, in which she provides two Middle English texts, including *The Northern Passion*, which link David's "sunne of lecherie" to his composition of the whole "salter buke." See also Charles A. Huttar, "Frail Grass and Firm Tree: David as a Model of Repentance in Middle Ages and Early Renaissance," in *The David Myth in Western Literature*, eds. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Jan Wojcik (West Lafayette, 1980), pp. 38–54.

images. In the late fourteenth-century English manuscript of *Omne Bonum*, David is shown to point to his harp, the marker of his role as the Psalm writer, when he sleeps with Bathsheba (fig. 10).¹¹

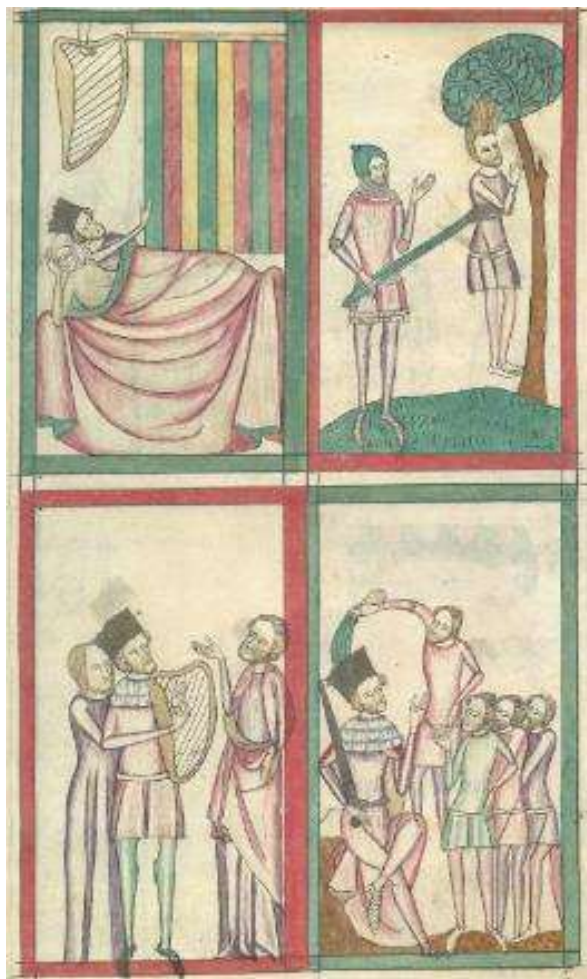


Fig. 10. Biblical scenes with David. England, 1360-75; *Omne Bonum*.
BL. MS Royal 6 E. VI, fol. 6.

The harp replaces the phallic candle in fig. 1 as symbolic of their sexual union in

¹¹ The image is captioned as David sleeping with Abisag, the virgin who attends to David in his old age and sleeps with him to keep him warm, but whom the king does not “know (cognovits)” (3 Kings 1:1–5). It is generally held that no sexual relationship exists between Abisag and David, especially given the sexual overtone of the verb “to know” in the Bible. This would contradict with the apparently naked body of the woman beside David in this image. Moreover, this bed scene is juxtaposed with the image of Nathan reproaching David and Bathsheba in the lower left corner. Considering these two images together, I am inclined to the opinion that the woman in bed should be identified as Bathsheba rather than Abisag. For an extensive survey of the images and symbolism of David’s harp, see Martin van Schaik, *The Harp in the Middle Ages: The Symbolism of a Musical Instrument* (Amsterdam, 2005).

upper left corner, and is then portrayed in the image below where the Prophet Nathan reproaches David and Bathsheba on God's behalf. Instead of holding Bathsheba as in figs. 1 (lower left) and 3, here the harp replaces her body to be embraced by David. These two images are accompanied by the death of Absalom (upper right) and the anointment of Solomon (lower right). The four images together connect sexuality not only with sin and death, but also with poetry making, and endorse it not only as a means of procreation and artistic creation, but of dynastic regeneration.

This conflation of Bathsheba's body and text is more clearly portrayed in the thirteenth-century St. Louise Psalter (fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Initial "B(eatus)." France, 1260; St. Louise Psalter. BnF. MS Latin 10525, fol. 85v.



Fig. 12. Initial "B(eatus)." England, 1270–80; *Breviary*. BL. MS Harley 4664, fol. 133.

The decorated initial "B" begins the text of Psalm 1:

Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum et in via

peccatorum non stetit in cathedra derisorum non sedit. sed in lege Domini voluntas eius et in lege eius meditabitur die ac nocte.

[Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful: But his pleasure is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he shall meditate day and night.] (1:1–2)

Instead of a conventional image of David playing his harp as a self-referential reminder of the composition of the texts as in fig. 12,¹² this initial “B” unusually juxtaposes the image of David seeing Bathsheba bathing with that of him repenting. David’s carnal gaze at the naked, sitting Bathsheba is paralleled with his spiritual meditation on the stately figure of God, who sits in a mandorla and replaces Bathsheba as the focal point of David’s desire (“voluntas eius”) and eyes, demanding to be seen and meditated on day and night. The brown, earth-like water on which the naked Bathsheba sits in the upper loop of “B” is reminiscent of David’s deathbed advice to Solomon in which Bathsheba’s body is compared to “viam universae terrae”—the way of flesh here becomes the way of sin (“via peccatorum”).¹³ Like her body over the solarium, which is translated into the throne on which Solomon sits in the Bible, Bathsheba here first appears as the “cathedra derisorum,” the bodily seat of worldly lust and power, and is further connected with the throne of God. The white orb in God’s left hand recalls the white round “sigillum” David gives to Urias in fig. 9, invoking simultaneously carnal pleasure, and divine law. Through David’s gaze, the

¹² Conventional pictorial subjects for late-medieval decorated initials of Psalms include David playing his harp, his anointment and enthronement, and his other heroic adventures (most often David killing Goliath). See for example, N.Y., Morgan MS 43, fol. 27v (England, 1200); Oxford, Bodleian MS Douce 381, fol. 126r (England, 1400). For a discussion of the decorated initials with David in the Book of Psalms, see van Schaik (2005), pp. 91–115.

¹³ This representation of Bathsheba is highly similar to the image of the Creation of Adam and Eve, in which they are drawn as being pulled out by God from the ground of earth or stone. I discuss the iconography of Adam and Eve in below Ch. 3, pp. 161–72, figs. 66–89.

worldly “cathedra” conflates with the spiritual *ecclesia* symbolized by God’s orb. Bathsheba’s body transforms into the collective Christian body in God’s hand, with her “nuda corpore” now vested, inscribed with “lege Domini,” fixed eternally in the divine text of the Psalm.

This juxtaposition of David’s corporeal gaze and spiritual contemplation could serve as a visual representation of Isidore’s theories of three kinds of looking in his

Etymologies:

Others have said that there are three kinds of visions. One, according to the eyes of the body [oculos corporis], as Abraham saw three men under the holm-oak of Mambre, and Moses saw the fire in the bush, and the disciples saw the transfigured Lord on the mountain between Moses and Elijah [...] A second, according to the spirit [spiritum], in which we imagine what we sense through the body, as Peter saw the dish sent down from heaven with the various animals, and as Isaiah saw God on the highest seat, not bodily but spiritually [...] Then there is a third kind of vision, which is neither by bodily senses nor by that part of the soul where images of corporeal things are grasped, but by insight (intuitus) of the mind where intellectual truth is contemplated, as the gifted Daniel saw with his mind what Belshazzar had seen with his body. Without this kind of vision the other two are either fruitless or positively lead into error.¹⁴ (B.7.8: 37–40)

To comprehend the truth of God, body and soul, the literal and the figurative, need to function together.¹⁵ David’s bodily gaze on Bathsheba with his spiritual sight of God

¹⁴ References of Latin text is from W. M. Lindsay, ed. *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarvm sive originvm libri XX* (Oxford, 1911). Translation is quoted from *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney (Cambridge, 2006).

¹⁵ For studies on medieval visual theories, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge, 2008); idem. *The Craft of Thought* (Cambridge, 2006); Herbert Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing* (Philadelphia, 2000); Barbara Newman, “What Did It Mean to Say ‘I Saw’? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture.” *Speculum* 80 (2005): 1–43; idem. *God and the*

in the mandorla together enable and guide the reader to see with their mind what David has seen with his body, and to gain an “insight” through Bathsheba’s body into the meaning of the divine message albeit this diverts attention from, rather than solves, the issues of gender and power inherent in the literal level of the narrative.

In order to show how persistent and pervasive in the idea of textualizing the female looked-upon body, especially that of Bathsheba, it is worth noting some late-medieval images that develop this process.

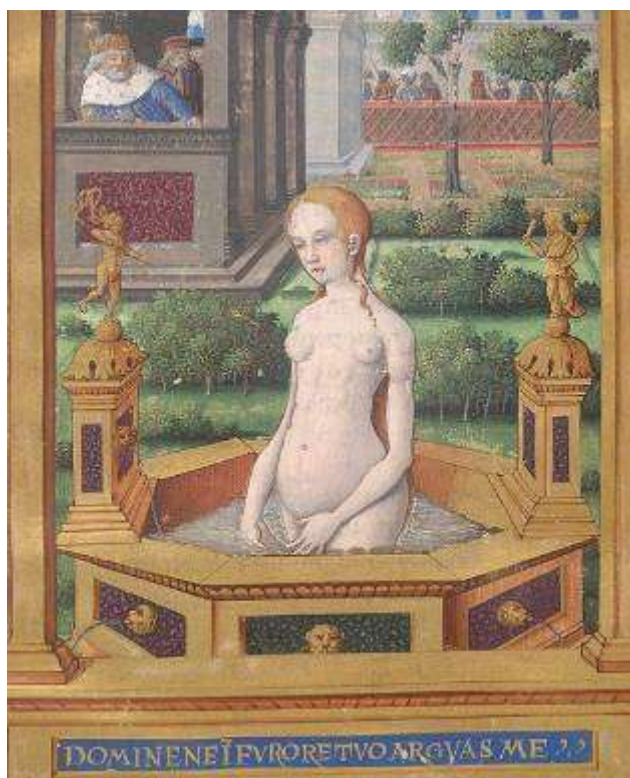


Fig. 13. David watching Bathsheba. France, late 15th century; Book of Hours. BL. MS Kings 7, fol. 54.

While in the previous images, David’s gaze as an inscribing pen is inferred only through some interplay between literary and iconographical traditions, figs. 13 and 14

Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages (Philadelphia, 2002); Ruth H. Cline, “Heart and Eyes.” *RP* 25.3 (1972): 263–97; Susanna Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2002); Dallas G. Denery, *Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Medieval World* (Cambridge, 2005).

visualize David's penetrating gaze into a vivid arrow.¹⁶

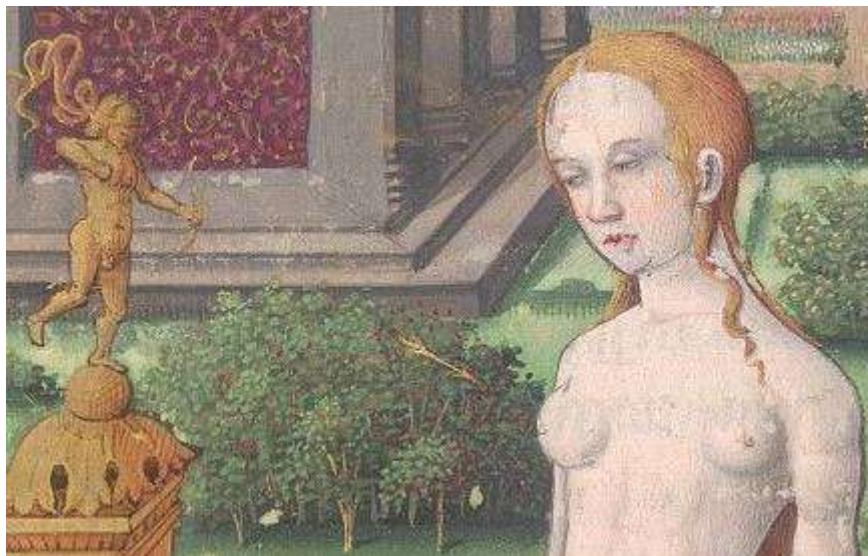


Fig. 14. Detail. Amor's arrow.

The image shows Bathsheba bathing in a fountain decorated with two statues of Amor and Abundance. This unconventional detail is further complemented by another easily overlooked addition of an arrow shot by Amor at Bathsheba's breast (fig. 14). The arrow is depicted in motion, embodying and showing the direction of David's penetrating gaze from far behind the fountain. The reader's gaze thus moves from David in the background, through the pointing arrow to the naked body of Bathsheba and finally to the text of the psalm inscribed on the fountain beneath her: "Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me." The blindfold covering Amor's eyes suggests the blinding power of love and David's unseeing carnal eyes which nevertheless redirect the

¹⁶ In late-medieval images of Bathsheba, her fully or half covered body gave way to a tendency to depict her in frontal nudity. Also, unlike early medieval tradition which portrays the figures of David and Bathsheba in equal size and in many narrative scenes, late medieval images of the story began to focalize on the naked body of Bathsheba while putting David into the background, and to use a single image of the naked Bathsheba as representative of the whole story. For studies focusing on the images produced later than the late fifteenth century, see Jeffrey (2010) and Monica Ann Walker Vallido, *Bathsheba in Late Medieval French Manuscript Illumination: Innocent Object of Desire or Agent of Sin?* (Lampeter, 2008); King'oo (2005). Scattered discussions of images of Bathsheba's body can also be found in Susan L. Smith, *The Power of Women: A Topos in Medieval Art and Literature* (Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 138–9, 151, 193–5; Mieke Bal, *Double Exposure: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (NY, 1996), pp. 112–6, and *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 168–9, 224–46.

reader's sight to the divine message communicated jointly by the textual inscription and by Bathsheba's meaningful body.

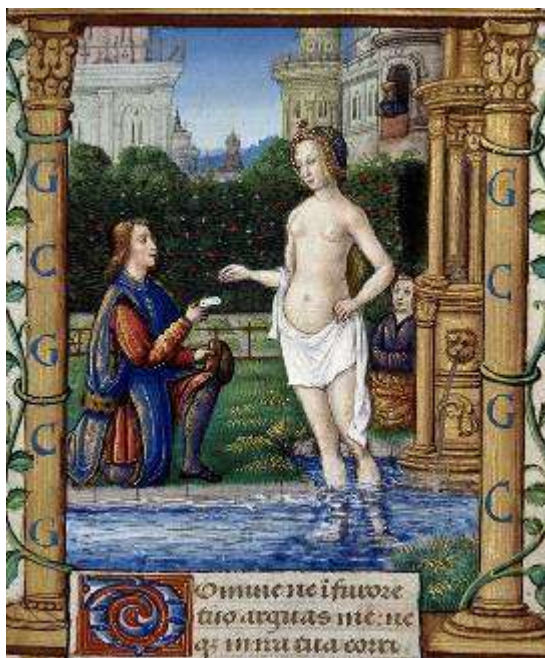


Fig. 15. David watching Bathsheba. France, early 16th century; Book of Hours. BL. MS Harley 2969, fol. 91.



Fig. 16. The Annunciation. France, early 16th century; Book of Hours. BL. MS Harley 2969, fol. 38.

In fig. 15, David's inscribing gaze is complemented by the presence of a missive being delivered to Bathsheba, which varies from the iconographical tradition of showing the messenger as delivering an oral message rather than a written one (such as figs. 1, 6, upper left roundel of 9). The image is comparable to the image of the Annunciation (fig. 16) in the same manuscript. The analogical compositions of the two images encourage the reader to identify Bathsheba's body inscribed by David with that of the Virgin Mary. David's carnal gaze is replaced by the divine rays which visually enter Mary's body and impregnate her with Christ the Word.



Fig. 17. David watching Bathsheba. France, 1485; Book of Hours. BL. MS Harley 2863, fol. 71.

In another fifteenth-century hours, a similar image of David watching Bathsheba (fig. 17) illustrates the text of the antiphon of the Penitential Psalms: “Ne reminiscaris [Domine delicta nostra, vel parentum nostrorum]” (“Remember not, [Lord, our offenses, nor the offenses of our forefathers]”). David’s voyeuristic gaze is paired with his playing a harp. The harp, like that which replaces Bathsheba’s naked body as the object of David’s desire in fig. 10, now appears as a visual parallel to it. Seeing is here connected with composing, and the sinful, perishable body of Bathsheba juxtaposed with the immortal, divine corpus of Psalms. David’s gaze inscribes a *memento mori* on Bathsheba’s naked skin which paradoxically seeks not to be remembered—a desire for oblivion written down, and to be memorized, recalled, and ruminated repetitively on a parchment leaf, a piece of mortal flesh preserved and

immortalized in textuality. Bathsheba's body serves as a means of both memory and forgetting, and becomes an object of meditation and a monument of both sin and salvation.

Susanna in Early Texts and Images

The tradition of female body-text in the stories of Bathsheba cannot be fully understood without considering another set of images and narratives of gaze, body and text—ones that provoked significant responses in England during the late fourteenth century: the apocryphal story of Susanna and the elders, which appears in Daniel 13. Susanna is the wife of a Babylonian man Joakim. Two judges, who frequented her husband's house, were attracted to her beauty. They spied on her and assaulted her when she was bathing alone in the garden. Failing to seduce Susanna, the judges then falsely accused her of adultery, put her on trial and sentenced her to death. On the day of her execution, the young Daniel, sent by God, stood out and asked to re-examine the case. He separated the two judges and asked them individually where they saw Susanna's adulterous act. The two judges answered differently and so were proved to have lied. They were subsequently executed and Susanna's reputation was restored.

Susanna's story, embedded in the Book of Daniel, which describes his prophetic visions, is essentially a sub-narrative about the desire of seeing and how to see properly. The whole chapter uses different verbs of "looking," from general acts of seeing such as "video" and "suspicio" ("look up"), to gazing intensely like "observo" and "comtemplo," and different vocabulary relating to sight such as "oculos" and "conspectus," to present different forms of gaze. The book begins with Daniel as a child who refuses to eat the food offered to him by the emperor Jockim so that he

would not be contaminated by it (1:8). He practices fasting and prays constantly that God would show his face to him and all the people of Israel. His wish is answered by Gabriel, who reveals himself to Daniel on behalf of God, and endows him with the ability to see: “quia vir desideriorum es tu ergo animadvertes sermonem et intellege visionem.” (“Because thou art a man of desires: therefore, do thou mark the word, and understand the vision”) (9:23).

In his *Etymologies*, Isidore of Seville associates Daniel’s fasting with his visionary power: “Hic et desideriorum vir appellatus est, quia panem desiderii non manducavit et vinum concupiscentiae non bibit.” (“And he was called a man of desires because he did not eat the bread of desire, nor drink the wine of concupiscence.”) (B.7.8:9).

Daniel’s dietary abstinence transfers into a spiritual appetite, an oral desire fulfilled by visual meditation, which recalls medieval clerical trope of “ruminatio” as a reading activity which seeks to channel bodily hunger for meat into an intellectual appetite for parchments.¹⁷

Daniel’s “desiderium,” which turns his eyes inward to his soul (“anima advert”), contrasts with the elders’ “concupiscentia” which expels their perception (“everterunt sensum suum”) and deflects (“declinaverunt”) their eyes from heaven (13:9–11).

Throughout the story, Daniel is never once mentioned as casting his eyes on Susanna,¹⁸ not even when she was made the central spectacle at her trial and

¹⁷Michael Camille discusses some medieval church reliefs which depict violent images of animals biting each other or devouring men, which, as he argues, serve both as a constant reminder of clerical abstinence, and a talisman keeping devils away. See “Mouth and Meanings: Toward an Anti-iconography of Medieval Art,” in *Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. Brendan Cassidy (Princeton, 1993), pp. 43–58.

¹⁸As noted by Jennifer A. Glancy in “The Accused: Susanna and Her Readers,” in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (London, 1995), pp. 287–302. R. Dunn discusses Daniel’s disinterested attitude and suggests that he might have “felt something of the elders’ desire in the detailed descriptions of their voyeurism” in “Discriminations in the Comic Spirit in the Story of Susanna.” *CL* 31 (1981): 19–31, p. 27.

execution, which we can reasonably assume Daniel has watched as one of the onlookers. His unseeing eyes contrast with the elders' idolatrous "contemplation" on Susanna's body (13:16). This juxtaposition of bodily and spiritual gaze recalls David's gaze at Bathsheba and his meditation on God. The elders' voyeuristic gazes, which appear as Isidore's bodily vision generated by "oculos corporis," is complemented by the spiritual vision of Daniel. Together they lead the sight of the community, and that of the reader, from the body of Susanna to God, as they bless God and praise him for delivering truth. At the end of the story, Daniel, the agent of God, literally replaces Susanna's now forgotten body and becomes the spectacle of the community: "And Daniel became great in the sight of the people from that day, and thence forward. And king Astyages was gathered to his fathers; and Cyrus, the Persian, received his kingdom" (13:64-5). The female body with its stirring sensuality is substituted by a male figure symbolic of divinity; her private body disappears and is re-integrated into the community, and is replaced, like that of Bathsheba, by the political body of a "regnum."



Fig. 18. Susanna as a Lamb between two wolves. Rome, mid-4th century; Arcosolium of Celerina in the Catacomb of Praetextatus. Image from New Liturgical Movement.

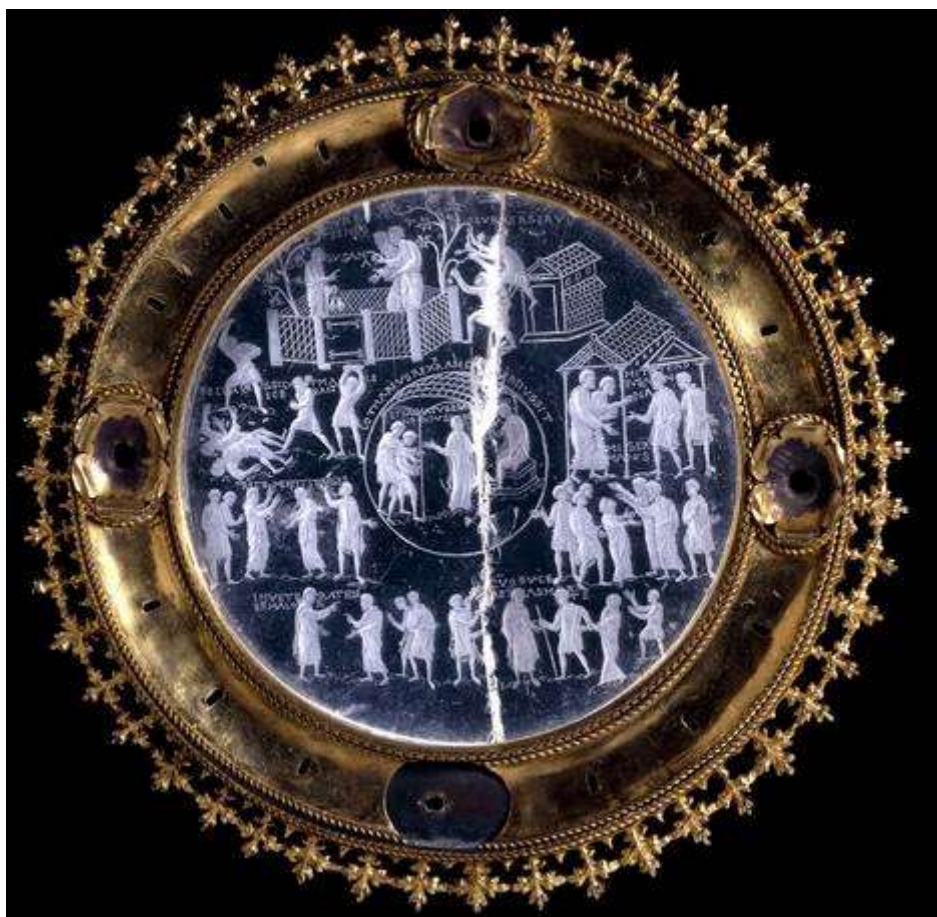


Fig. 19. Lothair Crystal. Lotharingia, 855-69; BM. M&ME 1855.12-1.5.

The story of Susanna was frequently illustrated and interpreted in different ways, both theologically, socially, and politically. In early Christian art, she is often depicted as a lamb attacked by two wolves, symbolizing the Church besieged by Jews and pagans (fig. 18).¹⁹ Susanna also stands for a humble soul desiring salvation by God. Her bathing water becomes baptismal water from which the soul is saved. Her submission to unjust treatments and trust in God was likened to Christ on the Cross. The story was also appropriated as an example of social and political justice, as on the ninth-century Lothair Crystal (fig. 19), which depicts the narrative scenes of Susanna's story and was hung on the wall of the court of Lothair II to emphasize the importance of justice in the king's rule.²⁰ In these moralistic interpretations, focus is placed on the

¹⁹ For early images of Susanna, see Kathryn A. Smith, "Inventing Marital Chastity: The Iconography of Susanna and the Elders in Early Christian Art." *OAJ* 16.1 (1993): 3–24.

²⁰ The crystal is now preserved in London, British Museum. For its image and explanation, see "The

judges' abuse of legal power, rather than their voyeuristic gaze, and Susanna's body is often objectified, generalized into a social, political body devoid of its inherent sexuality and privacy.

Susanna in Late-medieval Images and Texts

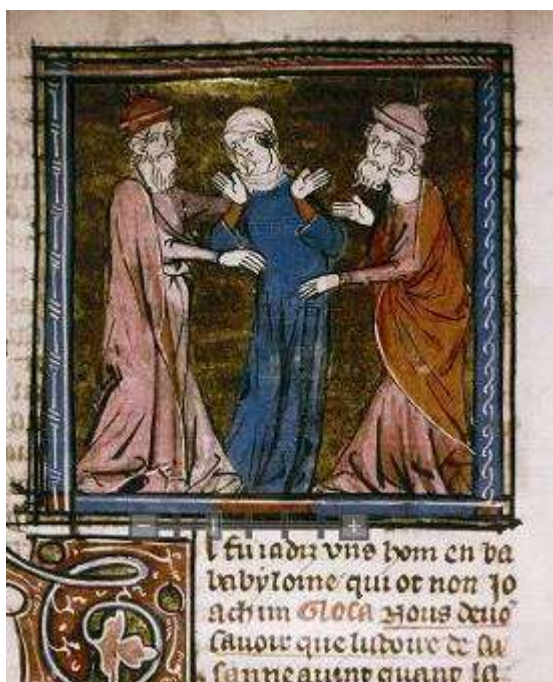


Fig. 20. Susanna and the Elders. France, 1300–50; *Bible historiale*. Bodleian. MS Douce 211, fol. 227v.



Fig. 21. Susanna and the Elders. France, 14th century; *Bible historiale*. BnF. MS Français 156, fol. 231.

The story of Susanna remained a popular literary subject well into the Middle Ages.²¹

The story was seldom illustrated extensively during this period,²² and was often

Lothair Crystal.” British Museum online catalogue:

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=59031&partId=1>

²¹ Retellings of the story include Latin verses, “Rithmi de Susanna,” “Versus de Susanna,” and “Tractatus metricus de Susanna” by Alan of Meaux, and the Middle English alliterative poem, *The Pistill of Susan*. The story also appears in Petrus de Riga’s *Aurora*. Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan comment on Susanna respectively in *Famous Women* (42.17) and *The Book of the City of Ladies* (II.37.1).

²² One of the few exceptions is the thirteenth-century *De Brailes Hours* made for a lay woman named Susanna. The book devotes eight decorated initials to the depictions of Susanna’s story probably because of her namesake. See Claire Donovan, *The De Brailes Hours: Shaping the Book of Hours in Thirteenth-Century Oxford* (Toronto, 1991), esp. pp. 24–5, 116–21; Henrietta Leyser discusses this

represented in a single bathing scene in which a clothed Susanna was shown besieged by the two judges in a garden (figs. 20, 21), as if to visualize her moral dilemma of being “straitened on every side” (Daniel 13:22). This iconographical convention did not vary greatly from early image of Susanna as a lamb attacked by two wolves in its composition, but it was more explicit in depicting the desire of the judges by portraying their hands as touching, or even caressing Susanna’s body. This representational change, which does not seem to have aroused many art historians’ attention, is an additional element not present in either the scriptural description or earlier art.²³ In both images, the elders look intensely at Susanna. In fig. 20 the elders’ gesturing hands, which indicate their conversation with Susanna, are accompanied with their other hands touching Susanna’s waist and lower body to suggest the amorous nature of their talk. In fig. 21, the two elders are shown as leaning towards Susanna, leaving hardly any space between their bodies and hers. Their sexual desire is portrayed even more blatantly by their hands boldly holding her hand and touching her breast and waist.

This shift of iconographical interest concerning the story of Susanna might have reflected an increasing focus on the amorous aspect of the story and its themes of desire, body and gaze in the late medieval period.²⁴ This interest in Susanna’s body

Hours as a “new and adventurous devotional aid” in *Medieval Women: Social History of Women in England 450-1500* (London, 1995), pp. 234–6.

²³ A possible scriptural source for this representation is Susanna’s painful outburst: “for if I do this thing, it is death to me: and if I do it not, I shall not escape *your hands*” (“*manus vestras*”: Daniel 13:22, italics mine). See figs. 2 and 5 in K. A. Smith (1993) for an early Christian image of the besieged Susanna in human form. This image shows the two judges as placing their hands on her head, which looks more like a gesture of benediction than sexual harassment.

²⁴ The body of Susanna, like that of Bathsheba, began to be eroticized from the late fifteenth century. This trend of sexualizing the scene and focalizing on the naked body of Susanna flourished throughout the Renaissance and reached its peak in the Baroque. In these images, Susanna is depicted as completely naked to give the impression that she is actively soliciting gazes from both the elders and the viewers of the image. Most of the studies on Susanna’s iconography focus on early modern images. See for example, Dan W. Clanton, *The Good, the Bold, and the Beautiful: The Story of Susanna and Its Renaissance Interpretation*, (NY: 2006); Mary D. Garrard, “Artemisia and

and sensuality also appeared in the medieval texts of the story. Many critics have noted the garden as a metaphor for Susanna's body, being trespassed on by the two elders.²⁵ This conflation of the garden and the body is most clear in the thirteenth-century "Tractatus metricus de Susanna," in which Susanna is compared to her husband's wealth and property:

Diues erat Joachim, cuius preciosa supellex,
 Purpura, bissus erant signa potentis eri.
 Ampla domus multo decorate cliente fremebat
 Ornatus thalami plurimus uxor erat.
 Porticus egregiam spaciosa patebat ad aulam
 Qua sibi qua reliquos consuluere senes.²⁶ (135-40)

[Joakim was rich, whose precious furniture,
 Purple and made of silk, is a sign of a powerful master.
 His decorated house roared with many guests,
 His wife was the best apparel of the bedroom.
 The gallery opened onto a spacious courtyard,
 Where the old men had often stayed to meet and discuss things.]

This medieval rendition of the story supplies concrete, bodily details to the succinct biblical text: "Now Joakim was very rich, and had an orchard near his house: and the Jews resorted to him" (Daniel 13:4). Susanna appears with expensive furniture and the large house as a sign of Joakim's power, and becomes a piece of domestic decoration ("ornatus"). Both Susanna's and Bathsheba's bodies are compared to a space accommodated by its male owner. But while Susanna as a wife is publicly the

Susanna," in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Boulder, 1982), pp. 147–71; Bal (1991), pp. 138–76. For a comprehensive survey of images of Susanna, see Gail A. Bonjione, "Shifting Images: Susanna through the Ages." Diss. Florida State U, 1997. She includes a number of pre-early modern images of Susanna in carvings and frescos but no manuscript images produced before the fifteenth century.

²⁵ For example, Glancy (1995), p. 292. Amy-Jill Levine "'Hemmed in on Every Side': Jews and Women in the Book of Susanna," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (London, 1995), pp.303–23.

²⁶ Quoted in J. H. Mozley, "Susanna and the Elders: Three Medieval Poems." *SM* n.s. 3 (1930): 27–52, pp. 41–50. Translation mine.

“plurimus” and “ampla” house of Joakim, Bathsheba first appears only as an obscure space secretly fashioned by David (“fecisti abscondite”). This architectural metaphor of Susanna’s body is further developed by the following image of “porticus,” a private, covered walk which leads to Joakim’s garden, and is now “open” (“patebat”) for the elders to walk on. In the scripture, their lust for Susanna does not result from one voyeuristic moment, but from consistently and consecutively watching her going in and around the garden (Daniel 13:7–8). Their acts of looking are paralleled at the same time with Susanna’s movement of going in (“ingrediebatur”) and walking (deambulantem) around the garden, as if she herself completed the penetration of the men’s gaze into her body. This metaphor of the female body as a portal to be penetrated is also seen in fig. 21, in which Susanna’s violated body is metaphorically represented by the half-open gate of the garden on the left, which is again, a pictorial variation from the locked-up gate in the scriptural description of the story.

Another iconographical convention of Susanna developed towards the late fourteenth century, in which the elders’ erotic desire was not conveyed through bodily contact, but shown by dwelling on the voyeuristic moment of the story (figs. 22–24, 26, 27, 29).



Fig. 22. Susanna and the Elders. England, late 14th century; Hours. Master and Fellows of Trinity College Cambridge. MS B.11.7, fol. 66v.



Fig. 23. Susanna and the Elders. France, 14th century; *Oeuvres Narratives et Lyriques*. BnF. MS Français 9221, fol. 93r.



Fig. 24. Fresco of Susanna and the Elders by Francesco di Giorgio Martini. Sienna, 1458. Pinacoteca Nazionale. Inv. no. 275. Image from Alain R. Truong.

The sense of sexuality is even more explicitly represented in these images by Susanna's frontal nudity, as figs. 22–4, 26, 27 show. The elders appear as gazing intently at her body either from the side or from behind. In these late-medieval images, Susanna also starts to return the elders' gazes. Instead of being seen, she is sometimes shown openly looking back at the elders or the readers as if she were aware of their gazes, if not actively soliciting and inviting them (figs. 22–4, 27). This

fearless and confrontational Susanna also appears in the late-medieval texts of the story. Unlike the submissive, silenced Susanna in the scripture, the Susanna in the fourteenth-century *The Pistill of Susan* voices her defense loudly and bravely.²⁷ Having besieged Susanna in the garden, the judges attempt to seduce her on the pretext of teaching her a lesson of law: ““Wolt thu, ladi, for love on ure lay lerne, / And under this lorere ben ur lemmone?” (135–6).²⁸ In their metaphor, the judges equate human bodies with a scriptural text, and sexual intercourse with scriptural learning.²⁹ In an apparent invitation to conform herself to the law (“lay”), the judges are in fact perverting that law into an illicit text of lust. In demanding that she conform her body to the lustful script they have imagined, her body, like that of Bathsheba, becomes a textual object to be inscribed with the judges’ carnal law.

Refusing to comply with them, Susanna was put into a dungeon (174) and brought out for her trial:

Hir hed was yolow as wyre
Of gold fyned with fyre,
Hire scholdres schaply and schire,
That bureliche was bare. (192–5)

Whereas Susanna is only stripped of her head veil in the scripture, the Middle English poet describes Susanna’s noble posture (“bare”) with a wordplay which explicitly invokes her nudity, as if to visualize her unprotected and vulnerable situation and to recall her naked body which the elders have tried to inscribe. However, not waiting

²⁷ For the circulation of this text in late-medieval England, see Juan Manuel Castro Carracedo, “Eschatological Meaning in *The Pistill of Swete Susan*.” *ES* 89.2 (2008): 125–40, in which he discusses this story in relation to the Passion of Christ and the Last Judgment.

²⁸ References to the Middle English text are from “*The Pistil of Swete Susan*,” in *Heroic Women from the Old Testament in Middle English Verse*, ed. Russell A. Peck (Kalamazoo, 1991), pp. 73–108.

²⁹ See *MED*. “lei (n.),” 1–3, “the body of God’s commandments or teachings.”

for Daniel to speak for her, the Middle English *Susanna* voices her own innocence: “I am sakeles of syn” (240) and openly and actively demands male gaze by asking God to see and hear her:

“Lord hertelich tak hede and herkne my stevene
 So fre.
 Seththe thou maight not be sene
 With no fleschliche eyene,
 Thou wost wel that I am clene.
 Have merci nou on me.” (268–73)

The text follows the scriptural emphases on the contrast between the visible and the invisible, the carnal eyes and the spiritual gaze. The “fleshly eyes” here not only recall the judge’s voyeuristic gaze, but also the examining eyes of the onlookers of her trial, which fail to see the truth. They also suggest *Susanna*’s acute awareness of being looked at, like the *Susanna* in figs. 22–4, and 27, who is not only fearless of but actively returns the gazes placed upon her. She rejects the inscription by men’s carnal gaze, but asks for penetration by God’s watchful eyes and knowledge (“wost”) of her.³⁰

This bold, fearless *Susanna* also finds her way into the pictorial representation during the late-medieval period. Instead of a scared and timid expression when harassed by the elders, as figs. 20 and 21 show, *Susanna*’s face appears calm and displays a sense of ease about being looked at in late-medieval images (figs. 22–7, 29). The sense of calmness is sometimes complemented by her praying hands and the halo on her head, which might have resulted from the conflation of this *Susanna* with the Roman Catholic martyr Saint *Susanna* who was beheaded by the emperor because she refused

³⁰ See *MED*, “witen (v.1),” 9 “to penetrate to the true nature of things.”

to marry his son-in-law. The halo around Susanna's head and her praying hands both counter the overly sexual connotation of her nude body by sanctifying and objectifying it, and in a way authorizes and invites the viewers to look at her, as religious images ask to be seen.

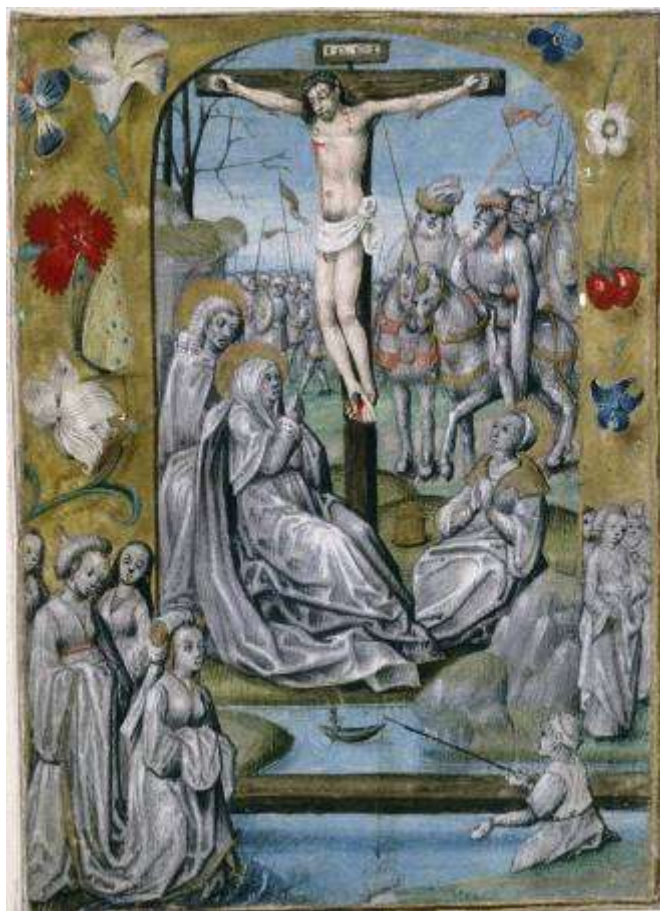


Fig. 25. Crucifixion of Christ. Flemish, mid-15th century; Book of Hours. Bodleian. MS Douce 381, fol. 160r.

Susanna's Textualized Body

This active invitation of gazes likens Susanna's body with Christ's naked body on the cross, and through the popular vernacular trope of the Charters of Christ, connects her

body with text, and links desire and sexuality with artistic creation.³¹ A fifteenth-century hours (fig. 25) provides a pictorial example of this association between Susanna and Christ. The crucified Christ, with the Virgin Mary and St John, is accompanied by a group of soldiers led by two elder men on horses in the background. The central image of Christ is framed by a historiated border which depicts the Queen of Sheba wading across the water to visit King Solomon in Jerusalem in the lower left corner, and Susanna with her maids above the fishing boy on the right. The body of Christ is painted in lively, realistic colors with all the other people, both in the central image and the border, reduced to grayish, stone-like figures. This color difference creates a sense of contrast between motion and stasis, living reality and history, as if to emphasize that the crucifixion of Christ is happening in the present, rather than as a distant historical event. One of the leading elders on horses looks in the direction of Susanna in the border, while the other is shown looking at the crucified Christ. Their gazes connect the central image of the Christ with the scenes depicted in the border, linking two different times and spaces as if to suggest to the readers a way of seeing by demonstrating how the Old Testament prefigures the New, and how the literal and the figurative, the bodily and the spiritual function together to provide an insight into the meaning of the image.

³¹ For a brief discussion of the association between Susanna's exhibited body and Christ's passion in the poem, see Carracedo (2008), pp. 131–4. See below pp. 53–6 where I sketch the status of and controversy over Christ's body in late-medieval England.



Fig. 26. Susanna and the Elders. Germany, 1420–5; Prayers to Saints. BL. MS Egerton 859, fol. 31.



Fig. 27. Susanna and the Elders..Prage, 1391; Biblia Bohemia. Morgan. MS. M. 833, fol. 186v.

This conflation of Susanna's body with text can also be seen in other medieval decorated initials. In fig. 26, the image of the naked Susanna and the spying men are juxtaposed with the text of the prayer to St Susanna, who is here represented as sitting naked in a fountain with a conduit leading diagonally to the lower left corner of the image where the first letter of the text "O" begins. Her lower body is immersed in the blue fountain water with her legs stretched into the conduit and merged with it. Her bathing water flows along the conduit into the textual pool of the letter "O," filling it with a blue color. The gaze of the voyeurs behind Susanna directs readers' eyes to the body of Susanna, which further transfer their gaze to the text. Her bathing water pictorially and metaphorically forms the divine text, which recalls Bathsheba's body construed as a source of life and knowledge and Christ's blood as ink with which the spear of passion writes down the words of God. In this image, the elders' gaze on Susanna's body, like David's arrow of sight shot at Bathsheba in fig. 9, functions as the spear of passion to complete the divine message.

In fig. 27, the blue water and the fountain in which Susanna sits actually form the shape of the initial “a.” Her body and bathing water become a part of the text which the two elders, now reduced to the mere presence of their faces dominated by big eyes, watch closely. Through the elders’ illicit gaze, a reader who is alert to the layers of meaning surrounding the iconographic images of Susanna will be able to see how a desirable scrutiny of holy text is veiled by a debased voyeurism of the flesh, and that the flesh is only a means through which the divine is achieved. Carnal gaze is revised and appropriated as a gateway to spiritual vision. This juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane, the bodily and the spiritual gazes is visually represented in the image of Susanna in an early fifteenth-century hours (fig. 28).



Fig. 28. Susanna and the Elders. France, 1425–50. University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center. MS HRC 008, fol. 238v.

The image conflates several scenes of the story: Susanna is shown at her trial in a garden-like setting in the foreground of the image. The elders appear being burnt in the lower right corner, and also peeping at Susanna and pointing their fingers from a hillside to the rear of the picture. Above the heads of the peeping elders, golden rays shine down from heaven onto the people inside the garden (as indicated by the yellow light reflections on their clothes). The golden rays recall Susanna's prayer for God to see her, and thus suggesting the invisible eyes of God, whose line of sight joins that of the elders, looking together at Susanna. The elders' voyeuristic gaze is here contrasted and conflated with the divine gaze, just as persecution and justice, sin and salvation, are juxtaposed at the same time in this image to deliver the truth of the scriptural text.



Fig. 29. Susanna and the Elders. France, 1517; Prayer Book of Queen Claude de France. Morgan. MS M.1166, fol. 48r.

The conflation of body with text and the juxtaposition of the profane and the divine can be seen most obviously in fig. 29. In this image Susanna appears twice. One Susanna is sitting in the fountain bathing, and being watched from behind by the two elders leaning on the wall of the garden. One of the old men looks at the bathing Susanna, while the other, instead of spying on Susanna as he is supposed to, unusually turns his face away from her body to the text written beside her, which recalls the two elders who look respectively at the crucified Christ and the Susanna in the border in fig. 25. These two men's gazes connect Susanna's body with the text written beside the image, as if to demonstrate the process of textualizing Susanna's body, recalling

the two judges' attempt to re-inscribe Susanna into an illicit text in Middle-English *Susan*. This body–text conflation is further made explicit by the self-referential act of Saint Susanna who appears to be reading in the textual column, as if to suggest that Susanna's body is read as a text both by the elders and readers of the manuscript.

The image of Susanna as a holy woman begins the text which reads:

et liberasti me secundum multitudinem misericordie nominis
tui a rugientibus preparatis ad escam de manibus
quaerentium animam meam et de multis tribulationibus que
circumdederunt me. (Ecclesiasticus 51:4–5)

[And thou hast delivered me, according to the multitude of
the mercy of thy name, from them that did roar, prepared to
devour. Out of the hands of them that sought my life, and
from the many afflictions, which compassed me about.]

The text echoes the scene of Susanna and the elders in the border by voicing out her plight and her prayer for deliverance from the looking (“quaerentium”) eyes and hands of the elders. Their sexual assault is further associated here with eating (“paratis ad escam”), which is reminiscent of David's sexual offer to Urias to “eat and drink” in his own house. The circumscribed situation reflects closely back on the Susanna depicted in the border, who is fixated eternally in the moment of being looked at in a marginal space with nowhere to run. The only way to escape is through the text which opens in front of her, leading to the realm of God and deliverance. The judges' gazes transform Susanna's flesh into a textual space of spirituality on a parchment leaf to be ruminated by readers. This enclosed textual space decorated with the image of Susanna reading forms a small sanctuary in contrast to the sensual world depicted in the border. Susanna's penetrated body visually and metaphorically becomes a

“penetralia,” an inner sanctum, where both the readers and herself see and look for deliverance from the fallen world.

Watching the Lollards: Bodies in Social Practice

The Case of John Belgrave

Moving from the literary and iconographic realms, I would like to examine briefly how this body-text trope and its latent sexual politics was employed in real life for political and religious campaigns in late-medieval England by looking at two texts: a Chancery document from 1395 and *The Testimony of William Thorpe*, both of which alluded to the story of Susanna. I will demonstrate how the Church and its dissenters had found the story’s rich interplay of gender, power and desire a fertile occasion to fashion their political rhetoric against each other.

In 1395, John Belgrave, a Lollard based in Leicester, was put on trial for blasphemy. Before this, he had been engaged in a series of anti-clerical activities which the Church failed to curb effectively. John Belgrave was said to have placed a slanderous pamphlet on the door of St Martin’s Church, comparing the archdeacon to the unjust judges who falsely accuse Susanna.³² This became the last straw which led to the Church’s formal restraint of John Belgrave and his followers. Many critics have

³² This case is recorded in W. P. Baildon, ed. *Select Cases in Chancery*. *Selden Society* 10 (1896): 106, case 108. The original document was written in French. This historical incident is also mentioned by James Crompton, “Leicestershire Lollards,” *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society* 44 (1968-69): 11–44, pp. 25, 29–30; Anne Hudson, “Lollard Society,” in *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), pp.120–73; Lynn Staley Johnson, “Susanna’s Voice,” in *Sacred and Profane in Chaucer and Late Medieval Literature: Essays in Honor of John V. Fleming* (Toronto, 2010), pp. 46–67. For late medieval appropriation of the Book of Daniel by heretics, see Bracy V. Hill II, “Apocalyptic Lollards? The Conservative Use of the Book of Daniel in the English Wycliffite Sermons.” *CHRC* 90 (2010): 1–23.

mentioned this case only as one of the many Lollard activities, or as a simple example of late-medieval appropriation of the story of Susanna without looking further into the rhetoric employed by the Church and the Lollards in this incident, as officially recorded in the Chancery document, dated 1395–6:

Beseecheth John de Elnet, Archdeacon of Leicester, that whereas Walter Barnake, clerk, Official of the said Archdeacon, had fixed a day to sit and do what belonged to his office in the church of S. Martin, in the town of Leicester, one John Belgrave the night before or early the same morning privily and maliciously caused to be placed in the said Church, below where the said Official ought to sit, a bill written in text hand, alleging [?] that the said Official might well compare with the judges who condemned Susannah, giving unrighteous judgments, oppressing the innocent, and suffering the evil-doers, and also [comparing him] to a judge of the devil in iniquity, with many other blameworthy words, and further made censure generally on the said Official, of the Holy Church and of all those putting the said bill in reproof, to the slander and vilifying of the laws of Holy Church. The said John Belgrave openly and proudly defended that the said censures were published a long time before, knowing what he had done, and that he would fully avow it; whereby all evil-doers in those parts are so emboldened and comforted to do evil and to sustain their errors, and the said Archdeacon and his officers are so affrighted, not daring to do what belongs to their office, that the laws, privileges and liberties of Holy Church cannot, on account of so evil an example, be executed, maintained or performed.³³

The original contents of John Belgrave's slanderous "bill" are lost to us, and therefore, can only be inferred from this contemporary official account of the Church.

³³ Quoted from Baildon (ed.), p. 106.

In his comparison of the Church official to the unrighteous judges, Belgrave apparently likened himself and the other Lollards to Susanna, who is abused and falsely accused by an unjust authority. While drawing on the traditional image of Susanna as a victim, Belgrave guiltlessly owned up to his acts like the confrontational Susanna who bravely voices out her innocence in the Middle English *Susan*. His slanderous “bill,” in which the injustice bestowed on him and his fellows was laid out, was analogous to his violated body, which he voluntarily exhibited to the public. Belgrave actively demanded gazes like some late-medieval images of the naked Susanna, which seek attention through her sensuality and then transfer it to a higher purpose.

However, an irony lies in the Church’s accusation of Belgrave, who in their own account, was claimed to have “privily and maliciously” sneaked into St Martin’s as the evil judges steal into Susanna’s garden, and posted a slanderous text about the Church that was laid out for all to see in a similar way as the judges make Susanna remove her veil for public examination at her trial. In his defense, Belgrave admitted that the text had been written and prepared long before it was posted, as the judges have conspired for some time before they assault Susanna. In the Church’s account, this self-assuming Lollard Susanna turns out to be the unrighteous judges, the wrongly accused becomes the unjust accuser. Belgrave’s text, like the judges’ gaze, becomes a public violation of the body of the *Ecclesia*. The “affrighted” Church, like the scriptural Susanna who is “straightened on every side,” lost its normal bodily functions. It was unable to perform and react properly, and had to wait for a formal restraint from a higher authority as their deliverance.

Whereas John Belgrave explicitly compares himself to Susanna, the Church

authorities never once mentioned her name in their account of this incident. But they played along with Belgrave's simile and playfully reversed it. The slanderous text was at the same time appropriated as a violated body and a violating gaze by the two parties. The case of John Belgrave provides a glimpse of how the body-text trope extended beyond literary sphere into real-life politics. If this case has only indirectly and implicitly shown the relation between body and text, the case of William Thorpe and his autobiographical work *The Testimony of William Thorpe* provides a direct, first-hand example of how the body and text, sexuality and artistic creation were often linked together in late-medieval appropriation of the story of Susanna.

The Case of William Thorpe

The Testimony was written in 1407 by William Thorpe, a follower of Wyclif and an active preacher of his belief. He was put in prison for heresy and underwent a five-day interrogation by Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury. In this work, Thorpe records the proceedings of the interrogation in the form of dialogues between the Archbishop and himself. Thorpe alludes to the story of Susanna early in his text. As the Middle English Susanna who is put into a dungeon and brought forth for trial, Thorpe said he was put "in þe prisoun in þe castel of Saltwode, [and] was brouȝt before Tomas of Arnedel" (169–70). In the interrogation, the Archbishop questioned Thorpe and debated with him on his Lollard beliefs, trying to persuade him to convert to the right religion. Thorpe took the Archbishop's questions politely while firmly insisting on his own beliefs and telling the former how his other family and friends have similarly tried to persuade him in vain:

[A]nd herfore my freendis weren ofte riȝt heuy towardis me.
 And þanne me þouȝte her grucchynges azens me was so disesi
 to me þat I purposide herfore to haue laft her companye. And

whanne þei perseyueden þis in me þei spaken sumtyme ful
 fair and plesyng wordis to me; but forþi þat þei myzten not
 make me to consente of good herte for to be preest þei
 spaken to me feele tymes ful rowz wordis and greuou,
 þretynge and manassyng me in dyuerse maners, schewynge
 to me ofte ful heuy cheere. [...] but eiþir I schulde consente
 to hem eiþir I schulde bere euere her indignacioun, zhe, ser,
 her curse, as þei leten[.] (441–53).³⁴

Thorpe's friends tried to make him "consent" to their wish first by sweet talking and then by importuning, as the judges who first declare their love to Susanna and then threaten to accuse her falsely when they see that sweet talk does not work. Thorpe was offered only two choices of either doing as his friends asked or bearing their curses, as Susanna is left with only two options of either committing real adultery or being framed by an invented one, both of which lead her to death. Besieged by his family and friends and now by the Archbishop, Thorpe then invoked Susanna:

And I heerynge þese wordis þouzte in myn herte þat þis was
 an vnleeful askyng, and I demed mysilf cursid of God if I
 consentid herto; and I þouzte how Susanne seide
 'Angwysschis ben to me on euery side', and forþi þat I stood
 stille musynge and spak not. (365–8)

This is the only occasion in the text where Thorpe explicitly mentioned the name of Susanna and linked her directly to his own situation. Thorpe's orthodox family and friends, and the Archbishop together represented the body of the Church, which was then configured as the importunate judges. Thorpe refused to take the post of a priest and to become part of this orthodox body. In his resistance to their offer, he could but transform himself into a female body which the other orthodox body constantly sought to indoctrinate with their "unleeful askyng." When the Archbishop saw that

³⁴ References to the text are from Anne Hudson, *Two Wycliffite Texts* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 24–93.

Thorpe would not accept his advice, he denounced him and his Lollard companions as a “fals harlot” (552) and their heretical beliefs a “contagious doctrine” (521). Thorpe was falsely condemned as an unclean body because of its impenetrability. But instead of remaining silent as the scriptural Susanna, Thorpe firmly and eloquently defended himself and his people against the Archbishop’s charges:

‘Ser, I gesse wel þat þese men and such opere [...] schulden haue deserued myche grace of God [...] if þei hadden perseyuered feiþfulli in wilful pouert and in opir symple and vertues lyuyng, and speciali if wiþ þese forseid vertues þei hadden contynewid in her bisie and frutuou sowinge of Goodis word, as to many mennes knowynge þei occupieden panne alle her wittis ful bisily to knowe þe plesinge wille of God, traueilynge alle her membris ful blessidli for to doon þeraftir pureli and cheeffli to þe preisynge of þe moost holi name of God, and for grace of edificacioun and saluacioun of alle cristen peple. (522–34)

Thorpe claimed that he himself and his people deserved the grace of God because of their (re)productive (“frutuous”) business of “sowing God’s word.” In his metaphor, the false “harlots” become busy sowers with their nonsensical, heretical belief transformed into the seeds of God, and their potentially lustful and immoral practice changes into a holy career of (pro)creation.³⁵

Thorpe’s unabashed acknowledgement of his filthy body recalls the Middle English Susanna’s bold and confident assertion of her “bureliche bare,” both being fully aware of and unembarrassed by the gazes seeking to penetrate them, and redirecting the misplaced gazes to the divine message through their sexuality. Later when Thorpe debated with the Archbishop about the worship of images, Thorpe again employed

³⁵ See *MED*, “harlot (n),” which can mean idler, jester, lecher, and female prostitute.

this body rhetoric in his view of men as the best images of God:

For certis, ser, if þe woundirful worching of God, and þe holi lyuyng and techyng of Crist and of hise apostlis and profetis weren maade knowen to þe peple by holi lyuyng, and trewe and bisie techyng of preestis, þese þingis weren sufficient bokis an kalenders to knowe God bi and his seintis, wiþouten ony ymage maade wiþ mannes hond. (1133–8)

In Thorpe's view, the righteous life of a priest is the best image of God's teaching.

The bodily acts of ecclesiastical members are themselves living books which common people read as the words of God. This idea of bodily text is present in the very beginning of Thorpe's *Testimony*. In the prologue Thorpe stated the reasons why he wrote about his interrogation:

[C]omaunding to me [...] diuerse frendis, whiche haue herde þat I haue ben examyned bifore þe Erchebischoþ [...] coueitynge greetli þat I schulde [...] write oute and make knowen boþe myn apposynge and myn answering, [...] And so þanne I, ymagynyng þe greet desire of þese sondir and diuerse frendis [...], I occupiede me [...] so bisili [in] my wittis þat þoruȝ Goddis grace I perseyued, bi her good mouyng and of her cheritable desir, sum profit þat myȝt come of þis writing. (24–45)

Thorpe's writing was motivated by his friend's desire and "great coveting" to know the contents of the interrogation which they themselves could not see in person—a "cheritable" curiosity which borders on a voyeuristic desire despite its well-meaning concern about truth and innocence. Thorpe responded to these desiring eyes by representing his interrogation, and by so doing, he willingly exhibited his own whorish body in the form of a written text in the hope of delivering truth and profiting other people:

And þus sumdel by þis wrytyng mai be perseyued þoruȝ
 Goddis grace how þat enemyes of truþe, perseuerynge boldli
 in her malice, enforſen hem for to wiþſtonde þe fredom of
 Cristis gospel, for which fredom Crist bicam man and
 ſchedde oute his hert blood. (52–5)

Thorpe invoked the image of Christ on the Cross and the Gospel books, connecting Christ's crucified body directly with texts, thereby endorsing and providing his own violated body as another corporeal text, which, like that of Christ and Susanna, draws on people's voyeuristic desire and then channels this erotic interest to a spiritual curiosity.

The story of David and Bathsheba, of course, lurks in poet's allusion to Psalms in *Pearl* and *Patience*, and forms one of the examples of men led astray by women that Gawain cites in his self-pitying outburst towards the end of *Sir Gawain*. However, my intention in discussing Bathsheba and Susanna here is not to develop direct textual connections with the *Gawain*-poet, but to show how this network of ideas about looking, sin, textualization, body and poetic making is embedded in biblical stories, and at the core of medieval exegetical traditions, both orthodox and heterodox. Such ideas were hotly debated in the period when the *Gawain*-poet was writing, and when the *Gawain*-manuscript was being copied and illustrated. They constitute a context of thinking and reading in which, I argue, the *Gawain*-poet worked, and to which he made original contributions. I now wish to outline some of the characteristic elements of that debate over reading images with which the poet's writings engage.

Reading Images: Late-Medieval Controversies

W. J. T. Mitchell describes the history of culture as in part the story of a protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs.³⁶ The problem of image and text, their function, status and relationship have been discussed and debated throughout the centuries by classical philosophers, early Church fathers, medieval scholars, and have been the topic of many critical investigations.³⁷ Due to space limitations, I will briefly review the ideas of image and image-making from classical to late medieval period by highlighting a number of key concepts pertinent to my discussions of the *Gawain*-poems before sketching the late medieval image debates.

Platonic Dichotomy and Biblical Polemics

For Plato, men's desire to unite with God is manifested in their natural propensity to imitate the perfect Forms by making images. These man-made images nevertheless deteriorate in the process of copying and are therefore not capable of attaining truth but confine men in the sensible world.³⁸ The reunion with the divine can only be achieved by a spiritual imitation through a pure vision in which men see God, contemplate the Good, aspire to its moral height and ultimately assimilate and integrate themselves into the divine. Man-made images for Plato are useful as far as intermediary means in the process of contemplation and should be abandoned once

³⁶ *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1986), p. 43.

³⁷ For a comprehensive sketch of debates and ideas about images throughout history, see Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago, 2000); for the image debate in late Antiquity, see Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 83–150; Milton V. Anastos, "The Ethical Theory of Images Formulated by the Iconoclasts in 754 and 815." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 151–60. For late medieval image debate, see below p. 56, n. 50.

³⁸ See Besançon (2000), pp. 18–42 for a critique of Plato and Aristotle's ideas of image.

they are transcended. Aristotle modifies Plato's theory of Forms by lifting material matters, which Plato renounces because of their mimetic nature, to the same spiritual altitude. He sees form and matter as two opposite but complementary forces of actuality and potentiality which must be joined by God, the prime mover, to create things. Everything, including an artwork, is created out of this process from potentiality to actuality. Human artists thus can assume a similar role to the Demiurge, with their souls being the Form that imprints itself on the material to produce an individual artwork with no less reality in it than any other naturally made thing. In later debates on the use of images, both sides would continue coming back to the Platonic dichotomies of the image's corruptibility and usefulness for their arguments.

Another tradition which contributed to shape the medieval ideas of image is the Bible. The whole Christian understanding of art derives from the different interpretations of the second Commandment in which God forbids all kinds of manmade images. However, God's instructions on image-making in the Bible are often as ambiguous and elusive as the form of himself.³⁹ In the Bible, God usually assumes the abstract forms of light and flame with his human shape inferred only from the fact that he has created man in his own likeness. But even when God's human form is suggested, it is always veiled like the Holy of Holies or visible only from his back (Exodus 33:23).⁴⁰ His rules on image-making are equally evasive. Images are strictly forbidden because of their idolatrous nature whilst temples are constantly ordered by God to be made for him. Aaron is condemned for making a golden calf (Exodus 32) while artistic activities are celebrated in the Book of Wisdom in which wisdom is personified as

³⁹ My sketch and understanding of biblical ideas of image are indebted to Besançon (2000), pp. 63–108; Camille, *Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 27–72.

⁴⁰ I discuss the image and idea of Holy of Holies in below Ch. 6 p. 357–8.

“the artisan who makes all things (omnium enim artifex)” (7:22). These two contradictory biblical discourses of images seem to me to have joined in and been embodied by the stone tablets which God gives to Moses, for it is an engraved text/image of the Laws which fundamentally prohibit the making of itself.

Christ’s Body and the “Libri laicorum”

The Bible’s ambiguous attitude towards images yields plenty of room for interpretations and different understandings of the use of images. In these discussions of the nature, status, and eligibility of man-made images, Christ’s body is often the focus of debate due to his dual nature as a man and the Incarnate Word. Those who approve of the use of images argue that through the human figure of Christ and his likeness to the Word, men are made similar to the invisible Father and thus are able to partake of his divine quality. The human form of Christ is therefore, like other man-made forms, the ultimate example of many intermediary images which guide people to God’s realm. Dissenters, on the other hand, argue that Christ is the image of God only by virtue of his divinity as the Word, and so degrades into an inferior, mortal image when he becomes flesh. This belief in turn leads these iconoclasts to insist that the Eucharist is the only eligible image of Christ while the iconophiles argue that the Eucharist *is* Christ, and not an image of him.

The body of Christ became a focus of both devotion and debates in late-medieval England.⁴¹ This growing anxiety about the image of Christ paralleled the controversy

⁴¹ My sketch of late medieval vernacular incarnational theology and debates on the image of Christ’s body in relation to the rise of the vernacular is indebted to Nicholas Watson’s “Conception of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God.” *NML* 1 (1997): 85–124. Watson looks into the authority, power and status of vernacular texts by analyzing a number of vernacular authors to show that the vernacular is “equal, or superior, to Latin as an instrument of revelation, and [...] their readers [are] equal, or superior, to the learned in their capacity to receive such revelation” (102). See also David Aers, “Figuring Forth the Body of Christ: Devotion and Politics.” *Essays in Medieval*

over the rise of the vernacular. Significant translations and adaptations of scripture were made for non-Latinate audiences in the late fourteenth century. Wyclif and his followers began this project of vernacularizing of Latinate texts but their opponents soon engaged themselves in the same tasks. The orthodox and the heretics competed to provide more approachable texts for the majority of the faithful who knew no Latin. These vernacular texts offer the “mylke of lyghte doctrine” as an alternative to the “sadde mete of grete clargye and of hye contemplacion” presented by Latinate scriptures.⁴² In their search for appropriate materials for readers who cannot “thenke but bodyes or bodily thinges”⁴³ and who have to rely on the sensual affection for their religious devotion, the vernacular authors found the suffering humanity of Christ a fleshy and vivid image for the unlettered to remember and contemplate. The dual nature of Christ as both divine and human, his “Godhed” and “monhede” hence become an analogy of binaries such as Latin and vernacular, clerics and laity, spiritual and carnal, intellect and simplicity.⁴⁴

Despite their different attitudes towards the nature of images, early Christian fathers do not reject them completely. Instead, they often allow these images to perform a didactic and instructional function. Saint Augustine believes in line with Aristotle that God creates forms to bring the material world back to its divine realm. Man progresses towards God, the true Image, through the ladder made of numerous intermediary images under the guidance of the image of the Incarnate Word. Augustine echoes Plato’s view of human art by seeing material images as a necessary means to achieve the highest truth. Saint Basil (330–379) endorses the usefulness of

Studies 2 (1995): 1–14; Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London, 2005).

⁴² Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, quoted in Watson (1997), p. 94.

⁴³ Watson (1997), p. 94.

⁴⁴ Watson (1997), p. 94–5.

images by the comment that “what the sermon shows of the story through hearing, the silent picture puts before the eyes by imitation.”⁴⁵ Images are seen as a replica, a copy of book which is equally capable of delivering meanings. This view anticipated the famous dictum of Pope Gregory the Great recorded in his letter to the iconoclastic Bishop Serenus: “Images are the books of the illiterate.” In Gregory’s formula, images are not only an imitation of texts, but themselves are a kind text to be read as a book.⁴⁶ This concept of pictures as surrogate texts flourished with the revival of Aristotelianism in the twelfth century, which grounds the understanding and learning of the metaphysical in the world perceptible to the senses. The human body is given a textual status and considered as “a form of commentary on the divine, on scripture, and [...] on reading books.”⁴⁷ The idea of the bodily book finds its ultimate embodiment in the late-medieval vernacular topos of the Charters of Christ, in which Christ’s crucified body becomes the parchment on which the spear as a pen inscribes the message of God with Christ’s blood.⁴⁸ The conflicting ideas and controversy surrounding the image of Christ’s body, which, as Peter Brown notes, confers sanctity

⁴⁵ Quoted in Lawrence G. Duggan, “Was Art really the ‘book of the illiterate’?” *W&I* 5.1 (1989): 227–51, p. 228. For discussions of Pope Gregory’s dictum, and whether images can communicate meanings to untrained viewers, see Cynthia Hahn, “Purification, Sacred Action, and the Vision of God: Viewing Medieval Narrative.” *W&I* 5.1 (1989): 71–84; Kessler, “Diction in the ‘Bibles of the Illiterate,’” in *World Art: Themes of Unity and Diversity*, ed. Irving Lavin (University Park, 1989), pp. 297–308; Celia M. Chazelle, “Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I’s Letters to Serenus of Marseilles.” *W&I* 6.2 (1990): 138–53; Camille, “Word, Text, Image and the Early Church Father in the Egino Codex,” in *Testo e Immagine nell’alto Medioevo: 15–21 aprile 1993* (Spoleto, 1994), pp. 65–92.

⁴⁶ I discuss the significance of this historical event in the narrative structure of *St Erkenwald* in below Ch. 6, p. 337–40.

⁴⁷ Katie Walter, “Books and Bodies: Ethics, Exemplarity, and the ‘Boistous’ in Medieval English Writings.” *NML* 14 (2012): 95–125, p. 100.

⁴⁸ For Christ’s body as a book, see Mary Caroline Spalding, *Middle English Charters of Christ* (Pennsylvania, 1914); Walter (2012); Andrea Denny-Brown and Lisa H. Cooper discuss Christ’s body as an imagetext in *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture: With a Critical Edition of ‘O Vernicle’* (Farnham, 2013). Ruth Evans talks about Christ’s body as a site of spiritual authority and mentions how Richard II employed this rhetorical device in his articles of deposition in 1399. See “Body Politics: Engendering Medieval Cycle Drama” in her and Leslie Johnson, *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect* (London, 2005), pp. 112–39, pp. 126–7.

on the material world,⁴⁹ are an important context, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, for the *Gawain*-poet's works.

Late-medieval Image Debates

Pope Gregory's defense of images is repeatedly quoted and debated in the late-medieval image controversy. The religious images which had survived the first iconoclastic period were faced with another wave of criticism and destruction in the late fourteenth century. Different from the first period of iconoclasm, which focused on philosophical and theological ideas of images, late-medieval iconoclasm introduced a social aspect into their concern over the idolatrous use of images and the phenomena of extravagance, waste, and unequal distribution of wealth as a result of the increasing popularity and demand for luxurious devotional images. The Church's corruption and reliance on extravagant images as a means of faith and control propelled reformers such as Wyclif to question the use of such images. Despite his doubts, Wyclif maintained a belief in the pedagogical value of images. But his radical followers, the Lollards, fiercely denounced the use of images in their iconic declaration, "The Twelve Conclusions," and launched attacks on church images.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture C.1350–C.1500* (Oxford, 2007), p. 318.

⁵⁰ Our understanding of late medieval religious has been significantly facilitated by critical discussions, including: Margaret Aston, "Iconoclasm in England: Rites of Destruction by Fire," in Robert W. Scribner, *Bilder und Bildersturm im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1990), pp. 175–202; idem. *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London, 1984); Eamon Duffy, "Devotion to the Crucifix and Related Image in England on the Eve of the Reformation," in Scribner (1990), pp. 21–36; W. R. Jones, "Lollards and Images: The Defense of Religious Art in Later Medieval England." *JHI* 34 (1973): 27–50; Hudson (1988); idem. *Lollards and Their Books* (London, 1985); idem. *Selections From English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge, 1981); Hudson and Peter Biller, eds., *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530* (Cambridge, 1994); Hudson and Michael Wilks, *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice* (Oxford, 2000); Helen Barr, *Text and Controversy From Wyclif to Bale: Essays in Honour of Anne Hudson* (Turnhout, 2005); Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens and Derrick G. Pitar, *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2003); James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2002); Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2008); Gillespie, "Images and Idols: Pastoral Adaptations of The Scale of Perfection," in Langland, *The Mystics, and the Medieval Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S. S. Hussey*, ed. Helen Philips (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 97–123; Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson and Nicolette Zeeman, eds. *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and*

The iconoclasts insist on the fact that images can only remind one of what one already knows and cannot inform any new meanings, while those who argue for the usefulness of images often cannot go beyond reiterating their pedagogical value. But under these two incompatible views of the image lie the same awareness and recognition of its power, just as Mitchell points out that “[i]conophilia and iconophobia only make sense to people who think images are alive” and have power, whether warranted or unwarranted, rational or irrational, over man.⁵¹ If there is one thing they both testify to, it is the never-ceasing human desire to see and re-unite with God in the postlapsarian world through their endless quest for the sight of God.

Up to now, I have focused on biblical and Christian exegetical narratives and debates. However, another set of stories and hermeneutic traditions—those of classical mythology—interact with these. The *Gawain*-poet was clearly familiar with such classical traditions, often refracted through the lens of iconographic representations, exegetical adaptations such as the *Ovide moralisé*, or complex, ironizing productions such as the *Roman de la Rose*.

Re-viewing Ovid in Late-medieval England

Ovid in Monasteries

The syncretism of the Classical and Christian traditions is as old as Christian history. The reception of classical materials in the Middle Ages has been amply surveyed by

the Visual Image (Oxford, 2002); Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350–1500* (N.Y., 2002).

⁵¹ *What do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, 2006), p. 93.

scholars.⁵² Ovid rose from his status as a secondary classical author to the preeminent *auctor* for amorous and philosophical poetry with the revival of Aristotelianism starting from the twelfth century. The Aristotelians moved away from the binary opposition between soul and body which dominates Christian doctrines and disengaged the Neoplatonic focus on the soul and concerned themselves more with the *materia*. Ovid's works, with their preoccupations with the material world and body, regained popularity in this philosophical trend and became a fertile source and veils for scholars and clerics to express and explore new ideas.⁵³

The traditions and influences of Ovid were preserved and spread both through the circulation of his original works and by the well-established mode of moralizing exegeses and commentaries of his works by mythographers from late Antiquity to the thirteenth century, including Fulgentius, Isidore of Seville, Theodulf, William of Conches, Bernard Silvestris, John of Garland, and Alan of Lille. The tradition of Ovidian commentary reached its peak in the fourteenth century. Writing under the guise of "Ovidius ethicus," an anonymous French poet translated the *Metamorphoses* into the *Ovide moralisé* in the early fourteenth century, interpreting the fables into various moral allegories and exempla under the captions of "exposicion," "comment"

⁵² See for example Winthrop Wetherbee, "From Late Antiquity to the Twelfth Century," and Vincent Gillespie, "From the Twelfth Century to c. 1450," in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Middle Ages*, eds. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 99–144 and pp. 145–236; James G. Clark "Introduction," in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*. Eds. Clark et al. (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 1–25; Frances Young "Classical Genres in Christian Guise; Christian Genres in Classical Guise," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, eds. Frances Young et al. (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 251–8; Charles Martindale, ed., *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1988); Dimmick, "Ovid in the Middle Ages: Authority and Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip R. Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2002), pp. 264–87.

⁵³ Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography, Vol. 2: From the School of Chartres to the Court at Avignon, 1177–1350* (Gainesville, 2000), p. 18–20. For medieval mythographic traditions, see also Theresa Tinkle, "Saturn of the Several Faces: A Survey of the Medieval Mythographic Traditions." *Viator* 18 (1987): 287–307; idem. *Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, and English Poetry* (Stanford, 1996).

and “sens.” The poem combined different genres of mythography, commentary and encyclopedia, and drew on satirical, scientific and iconographical style into one work.⁵⁴ Its comprehensive scale was to be paralleled by Pierre Bersuire’s *Ovidius moralizatus*, whose popularity eclipsed the former to become the most influential source text of Ovidian myths for late-medieval vernacular authors.

These commentaries on Ovidian myths were first intended for literate and educated audiences including both courtly and clerical ones. A survey of the use of Ovidian materials, especially the *Metamorphoses*, in English sermons between 1350 and 1450 shows that late-medieval English preachers cited as frequently from the original works of Ovid as from secondary sources by other mythographic authors. Through clerical preachers, these idolatrous classical stories and their “veiled truth” were exposed and made known to the unlearned ears of a lay audience.⁵⁵ The popularity of Ovid in clerical circles attracted criticism from contemporary religious reformers including Wyclif, who openly denounced the use of pagan fables in preaching. But these disapproving voices did not seem to affect the reading and use of Ovidian materials in the clerical environment. An increasing collection of Latin classics in monastic libraries in late-medieval England reveals an intense interest in Ovidian materials which achieved their widest circulation between 1350 and 1400 in England, especially among English monks. These monks were perhaps the first readers of *Ovidius moralizatus*, which was often read as the surrogate of the original text of *Metamorphoses* and became the main critical apparatus used in fourteenth-century

⁵⁴ Ana Pairet, “Recasting the *Metamorphoses* in Fourteenth-century France: The Challenges of the *Ovide moralisé*,” in Clark (ed.), pp. 83–107. For the development of commentaries of Ovid in late-medieval France, see Frank T. Coulson, “Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the School Tradition of France, 1180–1400,” in Clark et al. (eds.), pp. 48–82; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Reading Myth: Classical Mythology and Its Interpretations in Medieval French Literature* (Stanford, 1997).

⁵⁵ Siegfried Wenzel, “Ovid from the Pulpit” in Clark et al. (eds.), pp. 160–76.

English cloisters.⁵⁶ Late-medieval English monks were so obsessively interested in Ovid that “Ovidian exempla may have become a marker of monastic sermon for English audiences” by the early fifteenth century.⁵⁷ In other words, late medieval English audiences and readers of religious works would not only have been familiar with Ovidian materials, but would even have expected them in the works they heard or read.

Ovid in Vernacular Literature

Late fourteenth-century England also witnessed the blurring of the distinction between poetry and commentary, poet and mythographer.⁵⁸ The theme of courtly love is united with mythographic traditions in vernacular literary works such as Guillaume de Lorris’ and Jean de Meun’s *Le roman de la Rose* (*The Rose*), Dante’s *Commedia*, Boccaccio’s *Genealogia deorum gentilium libri*, and Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre d’Othéa*. These vernacular authors often fuse the classical, the biblical, and the courtly traditions to raise poignant and disturbing questions, doubts, or criticisms in their wider probing of social, political, philosophical and theological issues.

Critics generally believe that it was through these extra-clerical works that Ovidian mythography gained its greatest popularity in the late medieval period. Among many medieval Ovidian literary works from this period, *The Rose* remains one of the most ambiguous and debatable works, always resisting a critical consensus on its historical, literary and cultural significance, both amongst contemporaries and in the modern

⁵⁶ J. G. Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries: The Evidence from late Medieval England,” in Clark et al. (eds.), pp. 177–96.

⁵⁷ Clark et al. (eds.), p. 193.

⁵⁸ Chance, *The Mythographic Art: Classical Fables and the Rise of the Vernacular in Early France and England* (Gainesville, 1990), p. 17.

era.⁵⁹ The work, which “mixes together so many different *matières*, so many different genres (with all their various formulae, maneuvers, and expectations), that no clear route through the text is visible or perhaps even possible,”⁶⁰ provided an exuberant multiplicity of interpretation and a touchstone for important philosophical debates in the fourteenth century. As one of the most frequently and lavishly illustrated late-medieval literary works, *The Rose* survives in an immense number of 320 manuscripts (compared with the 83 copies of the popular *Canterbury Tales*) produced for both clerical and secular readers between the thirteenth and the sixteenth century.⁶¹ The poem thus became perhaps the most influential secular sourcebook for both the textual and iconographical traditions of Ovidian mythography, helping to carry Ovidian materials out of their Latin milieu and transmitted them to “an audience which ranged far beyond the clerical, to people who had life-choices, aspirations, and tastes which differed markedly from those of clerics.”⁶²

Late-medieval English vernacular authors are known to draw on their continental colleagues for their works. Among the major Ricardian poets, Chaucer and Gower are perhaps the ones most explicitly influenced by Ovidian traditions. Chaucer’s

⁵⁹ The work aroused a literary debate known as the “querelle de la Rose” over the poem’s immoral and misogynistic sentiments at the beginning of the fifteenth century. On the reception of *Rose* and its controversies, see Alastair Minnis, *Magister amoris’: The “Roman de la Rose” and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 209–56; *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, eds. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia, 1992); Helen Swift, “Splitting Heirs: Wrestling with the *Rose* in the *querelle des femmes*,” in *Essays in Later Medieval French Literature: The Legacy of Jane H. M. Taylor*, ed. Rebecca Dixon (Manchester, 2010), pp. 3–19.

⁶⁰ Minnis (2001), p. 25.

⁶¹ Among which about 150 were produced in France and 50 in England. A detailed list of extant manuscripts of the *Rose* can be found on the website of “The Roman de la Rose Digital Library” of Sheridan Libraries of Johns Hopkins University and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. <<http://romandelarose.org/#corpus>>. For discussions of the poem’s manuscripts and readership, see Alcuin Blamires, *The Romance of Rose Illuminated: Manuscripts at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth* (Holian, 2002); Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and Its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* (Cambridge, 2007); *De la Rose: Texte, Image, Fortune*, eds. Catherine Bel and Herman Braet (Dudley, 2006). Further evidence of reading and response to the *Rose* in England is being gathered and analyzed in current Oxford doctoral research by Philip Knox.

⁶² Minnis (2001), p. 80.

knowledge and extensive use of Ovidian materials were acknowledged by his reputation as “England’s Ovid” from Gower’s praise of him as the “disciple and poet of Venus” in *Confessio Amantis* (B.8: 2942–3). Chaucer’s use of classical materials has been substantially examined by scholars. One of the most systematic and comprehensive studies is provided by Jane Chance, who shows how Chaucer appropriates and manipulates Ovidian fables and uses them to veil ideas and opinions that are often sexual-political in nature and inconvenient to be espoused and expounded publicly.⁶³ Like Chaucer, who has found Ovid a rich source for oblique criticism of contemporary politics, Gower reflects on the idea of kingship in *Confessio Amantis* by retelling Ovidian myths and organizing them into eight books, seven of which illustrate the seven deadly sins and one of which more explicitly focuses on advice to rulers about their own conduct.⁶⁴

The Metamorphic Form of Actaeon

In order to better understand late-medieval use of classical myths, in the following I will briefly analyze the example of Actaeon and Diana to show how this Ovidian story of looking was received by late-medieval commentary and literary authors who

⁶³ *Mythographic Chaucer* (Minneapolis, 1995). See also Meg Twycross, *The Medieval Anadyomene: A Study in Chaucer's Mythography* (Oxford, 1972); John M. Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven, 1979); Jill Mann, “The Planetary Gods in Chaucer and Henryson,” in *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, eds. Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 91–106; Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1982); John P. McCall, *Chaucer Among the Gods: The Poetic of Classical Myth* (University Park, 1979).

⁶⁴ For Gower’s use of Ovid, see Christopher Ricks, “Metamorphoses in Other Words,” in *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 1–33; James Simpson, “Ovidian Disunity in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*,” in *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille’s “Anticlaudianus” and John Gower’s “Confessio Amantis”* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 134–66; Conrad Mainzer, “John Gower’s Use of the ‘Mediaeval Ovid’ in *Confessio Amantis*,” *ME* 41 (1972): 215–22; T. Matthew N. McCabe, *Gower’s Vulgar Tongue: Ovid, Lay Religion, and English Poetry in the “Confessio Amantis”* (Cambridge, 2011); Bruce Harbert, “Lessons from the Great Clerk: Ovid and John Gower,” in Martindale (ed.), pp. 83–97. Kathryn L. McKinley, “Gower and Chaucer: Readings of Ovid and Late Medieval England,” in Clark et al. (eds.), pp. 197–30.

euemerized, moralized, and appropriated it, and by doing so, provided the tale with multiple layers of meanings. The story of Actaeon and Diana appears in Book 3 of *Metamorphoses*, which tells stories about Cadmus, the founder of Thebes, and his descendants, including Actaeon, Semele and Pentheus, each of whom commits or suffers from an act of unmannerly looking. Cadmus, after slaughtering the giant serpent, looked victoriously at the dead corpses (“corpora vidit”) but a voice warned him that “Are you looking at the serpent? You too will be a serpent and looked at.” (“serpentem spectas? Et tu spectabere serpens”) (3.98). The consequence of Cadmus’s inappropriate gaze is to be suffered by his grandson Actaeon, who repeats his ancestor’s “error” by wandering into the forest during his hunting trip and inadvertently seeing Diana and her nymphs bathing in a fountain:

qui simul intravit rorantia fontibus antra,
sicut errant, nudaе viso sua pectora numphae
percussere viro. (B. 3: 177–9)⁶⁵

[As soon as he entered the grotto bedewed with fountain
spray, the naked nymphs smote upon their breasts at the sight
of the man.]

For fear that Actaeon would tell other people what he saw, Diana takes away his ability to speak by transforming him into a stag, which is then miserably dismembered by his own hounds.

The prophecy given to Cadmus suggests the kind of transformation which yokes the stories of metamorphoses in this Theban narratives: from a viewer to being viewed.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ References to Ovid’s works in this thesis are from the Leob edition, *Ovid in Six Volumes*, ed. G. P. Goold. (Cambridge, 1912–29). *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller. 2 vol. (Cambridge, 1976).

⁶⁶ As noted by Andrew Feldherr in “Metamorphosis and Sacrifice in Ovid’s Theban Narrative.” *Materiali e discussioni per L’analisi dei testi classici* 38 (1997): 25–55. For discussions of the story

Ovid allows Actaeon to fulfill this prophecy by avoiding representing him as actively looking. Throughout the story, Actaeon's transgressive gaze can only be inferred from the naked look of Diana ("visae sine veste Dianae") (185). Even in the most crucial moment of intrusion into the bathing scene, Actaeon appears as an object of the nymphs' gaze ("viso [...] viro") (178–9) rather than a viewer. He is seen consistently passive from the very beginning to the moment of his transformation into a stag by Diana's back-looking gaze (*retro/ flexit et*) (187–8) until his last wish before death: "velletque videre, / non etiam sentire canum fera facta suorum." ("And well might he wish to see, not to feel, the fierce doings of his own hounds.") (247–8). Ovid deliberately downplays the error of Actaeon's wandering eyes to illustrate the central theme of the cruelty of gods and goddesses in Book 3.

In late-medieval mythographic commentary, Actaeon sheds his Ovidian role as a victim of merciless gods and become the God himself. *Ovide moralisé* plays on the pun of "cerf" (stag) and "serf" (servant) and equates Actaeon with Christ, interpreting the story as an allegory of the Trinity in which Actaeon, the son of God, is blessed with the sight of the naked Diana who symbolizes the Trinity unencumbered by human nature.⁶⁷ *Ovidius moralizatus* allegorizes Actaeon as the Son of God, who comes upon Diana in bath as the Blessed Virgin in the fountain of mercy and thus becomes incarnated, and whose human form is unrecognized by his own companions and hounds, who, like the foolish prophets and Jewish people, kill their master.⁶⁸

of Actaeon and Book 3 of *Metamorphoses*, see also Patricia B. Salzman-Mitchell, *A Web of Fantasie: Gaze, Image, and Gender in Ovid's "Metamorphoses"* (Columbus, 2005), pp. 45–59.

⁶⁷ *Ovide moralisé, Tome I*, ed. C. de Boer (Amsterdam, 1915), B.3. 604–69. Marilyn Desmond also mentioned this passage in "The Goddess Diana and the Ethics of Reading in the *Ovide moralisé*," in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds Alison Keith and Stephen Rupp (Toronto, 2005), pp. 61–75.

⁶⁸ William Donald Reynolds, "The Ovidius Moralizatus of Petrus Berchorius: An Introduction and Translation." PhD. Dissertation, U of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1971, p. 186. Bersuire also provided other interpretations including a man brought low by Fortune, or by the sin of avarice.

Christine de Pizan's *Othéa* sees Actaeon's death as a moral lesson of indulging oneself in the idleness of hunting and the "delyte off his body."⁶⁹ These examples show us how freely and opportunely late-medieval commentary authors used and appropriated the story of Diana and Actaeon to serve their religious or moral purposes, often to the point of totally disengaging it from the theme of looking that is central to the original work.

Confessio Amantis: A Crossover

Moving out of the commentary works into the literary realm, in Book 1 of *Confessio Amantis*, Gower retells the story of Actaeon (333–78) as a warning of the misuse of the five senses, especially the faculty of sight as the gateway through which love and lust enter the heart. Gower reduced the story to its most essential theme of looking, using Actaeon as the first "ensample touchende of mislok" (334).⁷⁰ To do so he made Actaeon more guilty than his Ovidian counterpart by restoring his capacity as a viewer who not only initiates ("And ther withinne he caste his yhe") (360) but also holds ("his yhe away ne swerveth") (366) his gaze on the goddess.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Stephen Scrope, *The Epistle of Othea to Hector or The Boke of Knyghthode*, ed. George F. Warner (London, 1904), B. LXIX, p. 70. This middle-English text was edited from Warminster, Marquess of Bath's Library at Longleat House MS. 253, which was dated at around 1440.

⁷⁰ The text is quoted from *The complete works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay (Oxford, 1899–1902).

⁷¹ For discussion of the story in *Confessio Amantis*, see J. A. Burrow, "Old and Middle English," in *Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford, 1987), pp. 1–58; Julia Cresswell, "The Tales of Acteon and Narcissus in the *Confessio Amantis*," *RMS* 7 (1981): 32–40; Greta Hawes, "Metamorphosis and Metamorphic Identity: The Myth of Actaeon in Works of Ovid, Dante and John Gower," *Iris* 21 (2009): 21–42.



Fig. 30. Actaeon and Narcissus at Fountain. England, 1450–75; *Confessio Amantis*. Morgan. MS M. 126, fol. 21v.

In a fifteenth-century English manuscript of *Confessio Amantis* (NY, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M. 126),⁷² we find in an unusual image in which the figures of Narcissus and Actaeon appear together in one fountain scene (fig. 30) which captures the moments of their self-examination and realization. Narcissus stands in the middle of the image and looks at his own reflection in the water while Actaeon appears as a stag staring both in the direction of Narcissus and into the water of the fountain. A fully clothed Narcissus replaces the naked Diana to become the focal point of both

⁷² This is one of the only two extant manuscripts with a fully developed picture cycle. The other one is Oxford, New College MS. 266. Most medieval manuscripts of *Confessio Amantis* have only one or two miniatures depicting the Lover confessing to Genius or/and Nebuchadnezzar's dream of precious metal in the prologue. For a discussion of the production, readership, and illustrations of Morgan MS M. 126, see Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1390–1490*, Vol.2 (London, 1996), pp. 322–3; Martha Driver, "Women Readers and Pierpont Morgan MS M. 126," in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. Malte Urban (Turnhout, 2009), pp.71–107; Derek Pearsall, "The Manuscripts and Illustrations of Gower's Works," in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Sian Echard (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 86–90; Jeremy Griffiths, "*Confessio Amantis*: The Poem and Its Pictures," in *Gower's "Confessio Amantis"*, ed. Minnis (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 163–77; Peter C. Braeger, "The Illustrations in New College MS. 266 for Gower's Conversion Tales," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Kalamazoo, 1989), pp. 275–76; Patricia Eberle, "Miniatures as Evidence of Reading in a Manuscript of the *Confessio Amantis* (Pierpont Morgan MS M. 126)," in Yeager (1989), pp. 311–64.

Actaeon's and the reader's gaze. His lavish clothes and crown are probably indicative of him as a surrogate figure of the goddess Diana in this image while suggesting the princely and aristocratic readers for whom the poem and this manuscript were originally intended.

This image represents multiple levels of mirror images. On the literal level, Actaeon sees himself as a stag in the pool and Narcissus stares at his own reflection in the fountain; on the allegorical level, Actaeon and Narcissus/Diana mirror each other both in their acts of mislooking and in their identities as hunters, which recalls the inherently competitive and antagonistic relationship between Diana and Actaeon in the *Metamorphoses*, which Gower also implicitly suggests by introducing Actaeon as the best and most enthusiastic hunter at the beginning of the tale (340-48). Patricia Eberle points out that the miniatures in this manuscript “display a degree of faithfulness to the tales they illustrate which could only have been achieved on the basis of a reading of the text, either by the painter, or, more likely, by someone who devised the program of miniatures as a whole.”⁷³ The unusual addition of a unicorn to this image, however, indicates that the painter or author drew not only from Gower's texts for the subject of these pictures. As a common symbol of Christ in medieval bestiaries, the unicorn invokes the commentary traditions which allegorize Actaeon as the Son of God, showing that mythographic commentaries might have been so widely known that they became a sort of background knowledge of the tale and were thus freely incorporated into the image both to explicate and extend the meanings of the text it illustrates. The unicorn links the image and the text to extra-textual sources. The fountain becomes the visual point of conjunction where the textual meets the

⁷³ Eberle (1989), pp. 316–7.

iconographical, the classical fused with the biblical, and life intersects with death.

The combination of Christian and classical themes in this Actaeon image is not a unique case, but a frequently seen medieval practice of “crossover” which Barbara Newman defines as “intentional borrowing and adaptation of courtly themes in devotional art and vice versa.”⁷⁴ A similar “crossover” can be seen in the frontispiece of Bodleian, MS Fairfax 16, in which the iconography of Christ was assimilated into the image of Venus for Chaucer’s *Complaint of Mars*.⁷⁵ This borrowing shows how text and image, the classical and the Christian are often intertwined and mutually dependent on each other to produce meaning in medieval mythographical works, and how these iconographical crossovers enrich the text’s meanings even though they were not always planned for.⁷⁶

The *Gawain*-poet and Classical Literature

It is within the same intellectual environment of Ovidianism and mythographic commentaries that the *Gawain*-poet may have worked. Scholars have not failed to identify the biblical sources for the works of the *Gawain*-poet.⁷⁷ Classical and secular sources are also acknowledged such as Virgil, Boethius, *The Rose*, French romances

⁷⁴ “Love’s Arrows: Christ as Cupid in Late Medieval Art and Devotion,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Ann-Marie Bouché (New Jersey, 2006), pp. 263–86, p. 263. See also her *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (Notre Dame, 2013).

⁷⁵ As demonstrated by Jessica Brantley in “Venus and Christ in Chaucer’s *Complaint of Mars*: The Fairfax 16 Frontispiece.” *SAC* 30 (2008): 171–204.

⁷⁶ Brantley (2008), p. 173.

⁷⁷ For a latest summary and discussion of the sources of the *Gawain*-poet, see Bowers “Survey of Sources and Influences,” in *An Introduction to the “Gawain”-poet* (Gainesville, 2013), pp.147–62. Other useful discussions include Ad Putter, *An Introduction to the “Gawain”-poet* (London, 1996), pp. 1–37; idem. “*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” and *French Arthurian Romance* (Oxford, 1995); Charles Moorman, *The Works of the “Gawain”-poet* (Jackson, 1977), pp. 13–27; C. O. Chapman, “Virgil and the *Gawain*-poet.” *PMLA* 60 (1945): 16-23; Richard Newhauser, “Sources II: Scriptural and Devotional Sources,” in *A Companion to the “Gawain”-poet*, eds. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 257–75; Elizabeth Brewer, “Sources I: The Sources of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” in Brewer and Gibson (eds.), pp. 243–55; A. C. Spearing, *The “Gawain”-poet* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 12–8.

and the poet's contemporaries such as Dante and Boccaccio. These authors and works all had their important roles in preserving, transmitting and shaping medieval mythographic traditions. It is only reasonable to assume the poet was familiar with these traditions and incorporated them into his works. But their bearings on the poet are generally eclipsed by the poet's overt use of biblical exempla, and his didactic and homiletic style, and have thus been under-discussed.

While the mythographic elements in Chaucer and Gower have been well explored by scholars, a full-length study of the mythographic tradition in the *Gawain*-poet has not yet appeared. Critical studies of the poet's indebtedness to classical sources concentrate on Virgil's *Aeneid* and its influences on the poet's figures of speech and mannerisms while Ovid, whose works lie profoundly behind so many late medieval religious and literary works, is left almost completely unconsidered. Among the few exceptions, Ad Putter suggests that Ovid's account of the deluge in *Metamorphoses* influenced medieval flood literature including the scene of Noah's Flood in *Cleanness*, and discusses briefly the poet's eccentric appropriation of *The Rose*.⁷⁸ In his recent study, Bowers suggests a number of analogies between the *Gawain*-poems and *Metamorphoses* but at the same time dismisses the poet's invocation of Aristotle in *Pearl* as only superficial.⁷⁹

If we consider the poet's clerical background, his homiletic style, and the immense popularity of Ovid in late-medieval English academic and monastic circles, it would

⁷⁸ "Sources and Backgrounds for Descriptions of the Flood in Medieval and Renaissance Literature." *SP* 94.2 (1997): 137–59; Putter (1996), pp. 11–4, pp. 153–6.

⁷⁹ Bowers (2013), p. 148. In a similar dismissive way, Charles G. Osgood claimed that "conspicuously absent is any sign of interest in classical lore" in *The "Pearl": A Middle English Poem* (Boston, 1906), p. 28. Stanley P. Chase concurs by noting that the poet's works "had probably been in the directions of theology, homiletics, and mysticism rather than of secular literature, classical or modern" in *The "Pearl": The Text of the Fourteenth-Century English Poem* (Boston, 1932), p. 21.

not be difficult to imagine that the poet may have used these Ovidian fables as a convenient means of conveying moral concerns as Gower, or found them a fertile ground for exploring human suffering, frailties, and inability to live up to divine standards in a fallen world as Chaucer. It would thus be natural to assume that Ovidian materials may have found their way into his works. And they did, as the poet's references to the names of *The Rose*, Clopyngnel, Aristotle, and Pygmalion suggest. The question, then, lies in how deep these Ovidian sources influence his works. The *Gawain*-poet is not known as a name-dropper,⁸⁰ and in fact, his sources are so fully absorbed and integrated that they are often hardly detectable and identifiable.⁸¹ His generally silent way of treating his sources should alert us all the more, as it seems to me, to the traditions lying behind these names that he cares enough to mention, rather than take them at their face value and dismiss them as perfunctory. The poet's explicit mention of Jean de Meun and his *Rose* also invites us to place the *Gawain*-poems in the medieval tradition of allegoresis.⁸² This thesis, therefore, attempts to make good this lack of critical studies about the *Gawain*-poet's Ovidian influences by examining the mythographic dimensions of his works, both textually and iconographically, to suggest that the poet is indebted to Ovidian materials and concepts in a much more profound and significant way than has previously been thought.

⁸⁰ Bowers (2013), p. 148

⁸¹ Putter (1996), p. 12.

⁸² I am indebted to Professor Vincent Gillespie for the idea of allegoresis and the poet as allegorizing his sources in his reworkings, which to a great extent describes appositely the thesis' central argument of the poet's handling and mingling of biblical and classical materials.

The Gawain-manuscript: Methodology

Having sketched the context for the my discussion of the *Gawain*-poet, which shows how biblical and mythographic traditions and the revived Aristotelian idea of body were intertwined in late-medieval literary, pictorial works and religious controversies, I will now discuss the status of the manuscript and the poet, and a number of ideas which shape my methodology, along with their problems.

The Poet and the Manuscript

The authorship of the *Gawain*-manuscript has remained an unresolved problem in studies of the poems. The total lack of internal evidence such as incipits, rubrics, and colophons makes it difficult to provide any fact-based arguments regarding the manuscript's authorship and its compositional date. The texts themselves also provide little reference to contemporary people and events to cast light on this issue.⁸³ But the assumption of single authorship is generally accepted based on the four poems' shared alliterative style, Cheshire dialect, and their similar thematic concerns with human suffering and salvation. Critics have identified various historical persons as the author and patron of the *Gawain* manuscript, but none of these suggestions has gained wide acceptance.⁸⁴ The poems' overtly religious themes and orthodox tone demonstrate the poet's deep knowledge of the scriptures, which strongly places him in a clerical milieu. The poet's identity as a cleric is reinforced by the poems' lack of fierce criticism against friars, which was a commonplace in other contemporary authors.⁸⁵ The poet's explicit references to *The Rose* and his French vocabulary indicate a

⁸³ For a succinct overview of the historical background and status of the manuscript, see J. J. Anderson, *Language and Imagination in the Gawain-poet* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 1–16.

⁸⁴ For the manuscript's authorship, see Malcolm Andrew, "Theories of Authorship" in Brewer and Gibson (eds), pp. 23-33; Bowers (2013), pp. 1–13.

⁸⁵ Bowers (2013), p. 6.

certain level of familiarity with French culture and literary traditions for which Richard II's court was known.⁸⁶ These pieces of evidence add up to the generally accepted image of the *Gawain*-poet as a poet closely associated with Richard II or a well-connected aristocratic or gentry patron,⁸⁷ and a doctrinally orthodox cleric who does not have the kind of detailed knowledge of academic theology and philosophy that a university theologian would possess.⁸⁸

The *Gawain*-manuscript is the only known late-medieval manuscript that contains only alliterative verses (if *Pearl*, which is highly but inconsistently alliterative, is accepted as one).⁸⁹ The manuscript does not come with any headings or captions. The poems were given their present titles by modern editors. It is accepted that an author composed these poems in the last two quarters of the fourteenth century, and a scribe copied them into the manuscript in the period c. 1400. Twelve full-page illustrations were then added by an anonymous artist into the manuscript in the early years of the fifteenth century by inserting extra bifolia to the manuscript or using existing blank pages left by the scribe.⁹⁰ The texts were written in an awkward and anomalous Bastard hand and the images considered by early scholars to be “inartistic” and

⁸⁶ Putter (1995) places *Sir Gawain* in the Old French tradition of *roman courtois*. The poet's knowledge of French culture is sometimes seen as a possible link between him and Richard II's court. See Michael J. Bennett, “*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Literary Achievement of the North-West Midlands: The Historical Background.” *JMH* 5 (1979): 63–88; idem. *Community, Class, and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”* (Cambridge, 1983); idem. “The Court of Richard II and the Promotion of Literature,” in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt, (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 3–20; “The Historical Background,” in Brewer and Gibson (eds.), pp. 71–90. A recent attempt to place the manuscript and its texts in their historical context is Bowers (2013) in which he sees many analogies between the poems' stories and contemporary political or social incidents.

⁸⁷ Putter (1996), p. 17.

⁸⁸ Bowers (2013), p. 150.

⁸⁹ As noted by A. I. Doyle in “The Manuscripts,” in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background*, ed. David Lawson (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 88–199, p. 93..

⁹⁰ For a detailed description of the *Gawain*-manuscript's layout, contents, and production, see “London, British Library MS Cotton Nero A. X, Art. 3,” in Scott (1996), *vol. 1*, pp. 66–8. See also Doyle (1982) in which he compares and contrasts the *Gawain*-manuscript with other manuscripts of alliterative verses.

“crude.”⁹¹ It has been speculated that the pictures might have been executed by two people: a draftsman, the main artist who sketched the scenes in competent detail, and an amateur painter who colored the images negligently.⁹² But this view gave way to the assumption that the artist worked under the instructions of the owner or patron of the manuscript who might have decided on the insertion of the images and their subjects as well.⁹³ The overall unpolished appearance of the *Gawain*-manuscript has led to the speculation that it might have been copied from another luxury manuscript which served as a repertory book or a presentation copy for a wealthy magnate who commissioned the work.⁹⁴

The poems in the *Gawain*-manuscript have received extensive and substantial scholarly attention over the last few decades.⁹⁵ One important trait that marks the poet’s poetic achievement is his idiosyncratic style⁹⁶ characterized by a “zestful enthusiasm for stretching language, [and] coining new words.”⁹⁷ His inventive use of alliterative poetic language and regional vocabulary often result in a multiplicity and ambiguity of meaning, and are sometimes seen as creating barriers of understanding for his audience and as a main reason of the manuscript’s limited circulation and reception in its own time.⁹⁸ Another notable trait of the *Gawain*-poet is his highly

⁹¹ *Pearl*, ed. E. V. Gordon (Oxford, 1953), p. x and *Sir Gawain*, eds. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon. (Oxford, 1960), p. xiii. Similar views were shared by W. W. Greg, who dismissed the images as works of an artist using his child’s paintbox in “Review of EETS. Facsimile Edition of MS. Cotton Nero A. x.” *MLR* 19 (1924): 223–8, pp. 227–8. R. S. and Laura H. Loomis saw the images as “infantile daubs” in *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art* (Oxford, 1938), p. 138.

⁹² Jennifer A. Lee, “The Illuminating Critic: The Illustrator of Cotton Nero A.x.” *SIcon* 3 (1977): 17–46, p. 19.

⁹³ Scott (1996), vol.1, p. 67.

⁹⁴ See Gervase Matthew, “Ideals of Knighthood in Late Fourteenth-Century England,” in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*, eds. R. W. Hunt et al. (Oxford, 1948), pp. 354–62, p. 356; Spearing (1970), p. 5; Bennett (1979), p. 76; Sarah M. Horrall, “Notes on British Library, MS Cotton Nero A x,” *Manuscripta* 30 (1986): 191–8, p. 198; Scott (1996), p. 67; Bowers (2013), p. 12.

⁹⁵ Studies on each poem will be summarized respectively in the following chapters.

⁹⁶ Anderson (2005), p. 3

⁹⁷ Bowers (2013), p. 9.

⁹⁸ Anderson (2005), p. 12.

graphic and visual language in describing details of landscape, costume, and characters. On account of these two most distinctive achievements of the *Gawain*-manuscript, the thesis pays close attention to the poet's rich word play in its analyses of the poem's imagery, both textual and pictorial, in a way to allow these context-less texts⁹⁹ to speak for themselves through a close reading when few extratextual historical realities are available to cast light on their meanings.

The Illustrations

Compared to the much studied texts of the *Gawain*-manuscript, the illustrations have received scant critical attention. This is partly due to the dismissive opinion of the early editors of the manuscript, and partly to the lack of available reproductions.¹⁰⁰ The earlier view of the *Gawain*-illustrations as crude and insignificant has been countered by a number of discussions which call for more attention to these images.¹⁰¹ Lee argues for both the decorative and illustrative value of these images, drawing on the function of medieval illuminations to "illuminate" the texts they accompany through the different and complex relationship of co-operation, competition or antagonism between words and pictures in a manuscript.¹⁰² She goes as far as to claiming the artist as an "illuminating critic" of the text whose "purpose was not to create an original work of art, but to interpret and recreate an existing one in a new

⁹⁹ Anderson (2005), p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ As noted in Lee (1977), p. 17. High-quality digital photographs of the entire manuscript are now available on the website of The Cotton Nero A. x. Project <<http://gawain-ms.ca/>>.

¹⁰¹ See Lee (1977); Doyle (1982); Horrall (1986); Paul R. Reichardt, "Paninal Eyes: Faces Among the Ornamented Capitals of MS Cotton Nero A.x, Art. 3." *Manuscripta* 36 (1992): 22–36, and "'Several Illuminations, Coarsely Executed': The Illustrations of the *Pearl* Manuscript." *Sicon* 18.2 (1997): 119–42; A. S. G. Edwards, "The Manuscripts: British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x," in Brewer and Gibson (eds.), pp. 197–219; Hilmo, "Creating a Visual Narrative of the Spiritual Journey to the New Jerusalem in the *Pearl* Manuscript," in *Medieval Images, Icons, and Illustrated English Literary Texts: From the Ruthwell Cross to the Ellesmere Chaucer* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 138–59; "The *Pearl* Manuscript," in Kerby-Fulton, Hilmo and Olson, pp. 172–89; Muriel A. Whitaker, "*Pearl* and Some Illustrated Apocalypse Manuscripts." *Viator* 12 (1981): 183–96.

¹⁰² See above n. 45 and below pp. 77–81 for discussions of the relationship between images and words.

form,” and who in order to do so, “had to make certain critical and artistic judgments based on his interpretation of the text” (18).

Scott rejects Lee’s view of the *Gawain*-artist as the first critic of the text on the grounds of his failure to “reproduc[e] a close reading of the poems” and his “proven lack of attention” to them, while recognizing that the artist was a professional who was “capable of making illustrations which clearly depicted the subject, some in complex compositions, with substantial detail, good observation and [...] subtle use of colour” (67). A. S. G. Edwards considers these illustrations as “conscientious attempts to reflect the texts and significant moments within them” and suggests in line with Lee that the *Gawain*-artist is unusual in his “quite careful series of responses to vernacular poetic texts” (219). A similar view is shared by Paul F. Reichardt, who sees the artist as “working to achieve a purpose of his own, a purpose generally consistent with the texts he was portraying, but with different nuances,” and argues that these illustrations draw together the *Gawain*-texts through parallels and repetitions among the twelve images which constitute a series of linked visual panels that derived from the texts but developed its own emphases and perspectives.¹⁰³ In a similar attempt to read the *Gawain*-illustrations as a whole, Hilmo proposes that the *Gawain*-illustrations together constitute a Dreamer’s spiritual pilgrimage to the New Jerusalem.¹⁰⁴

Not everyone will accept each of these critical attempts to explain the meaning of the *Gawain*-illustrations. But we have to admit that, for an anonymous, and “context-less” manuscript like MS Cotton Nero A.x, these images, whether crude or sophisticated,

¹⁰³ Reichardt (1997), p. 139.

¹⁰⁴ Hilmo (2004), p. 198.

conceived by an artist who worked according to his own judgment or under the instructions of a patron, are the only occasion inside the manuscript itself where we can glimpse into “the relationship of the poems to the world in which they were conceived, [... and] a response effected by the poems in a member of the poet’s audience.”¹⁰⁵ To acknowledge the interpretive significance of the illustrations is, of course, not to ignore the time gap and compositional hierarchy between the patron, author, scribe, and artist, and the unresolvable question concerning author’s intentions due to the manuscript’s anonymity. However, medieval manuscripts were never shaped by individual opinions and work, but were a collective cultural product, as Stephen G. Nichols succinctly puts it:

The medieval folio was not raw material for text editors and art historians working separately. It contained the work of different artists or artisans—poet, scribe, illuminator, rubricator, commentator—who projected collective social attitudes as well as interartistic revelries onto the parchments. The manuscript folio contains different systems of representation: poetic or narrative text, the highly individual and distinctive scribal hand(s) that inscribe the text, illuminated pages, colored rubrications, and not infrequently glosses or commentaries in the margins or interpolated in the text. Each system is a unit independent of the others and yet calls attention to them; each tries to convey something about the other while to some extent substituting for it.¹⁰⁶

An illuminated manuscript is an amalgam of different systems, like a hypertext, as Vincent Gillespie notes, containing “different hierarchies of material [that] can be

¹⁰⁵ Lee (1977), p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ “Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture.” *Speculum* 65 (1990): 1–10, p. 8, qtd. in Reichardt (1997), p. 138.

accessed in various ways.”¹⁰⁷ The *Gawain*-manuscript, too, assimilated different levels of opinions, conventions and works, which both compete and complement each other. Hence, to cling to the idea that these images are not first-hand products of the author/artist, or that the manuscript is possibly at least once removed from its model, and for these reasons to deny the *Gawain*-illustrations of their interpretive connection to the texts does not seem to me to be a particularly useful position to take, especially when evidence of contemporary response to the poems is already scarce enough.

Image Theories and Approaches

My reading of the illustrations in the *Gawain*-manuscript and their relationship with the texts is grounded in the methodology shaped and employed by a number of theorists, literary critics and art historians. Due to limits of length, I will highlight only a few which bear significantly on this thesis. Many theoretical ideas have been proposed to bridge the gap between words and images. Meyer Shapiro breaks down the dichotomy between the forms of meaning and representation by looking into the image of Moses at the battle with the Amalekites as a “word-bound image,” in which Moses’ posture can be read as a prayer and the Word of God.¹⁰⁸ Schapiro’s concept is akin to Michel Foucault’s idea of the “calligram” and the concept of “imagetext” proposed by Mitchell. Foucault discusses Magritte’s painting “La Trahison des Images” as an example of a “calligram”¹⁰⁹ in which verbal signs and visual representation are knitted together in a way that the schematic division between the

¹⁰⁷ “Medieval Hypertext: Image and Text from York Minster,” in *Of the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, their Scribes and Readers: Essays presented to M. B. Parkes*, ed. P. R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 206–29, p. 208, n. 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text* (Hague and Paris, 1973).

¹⁰⁹ *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. and ed. James Harkness (Los Angeles, 1982). Foucault’s self-reflexive “calligram” is similar to Mitchell’s “metapicture,” which is “a place where pictures reveal and know themselves, where they reflect on the intersections of visibility, language, and similitude, where they engage in speculation and theorizing on their own nature and history.” *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, 1994), p. 82.

words and images is dissolved into a space where the image escapes its traditional subordination to the word and undermines the word's authority. For Foucault, the image–text relation is no longer just a site of conflict and antagonism, but a place, as Michael Kelly notes, where the two are “free to relate to one another as equals and in different ways.”¹¹⁰ Mitchell sees the twenty-first century as experiencing a “postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institution, discourse, bodies and figurality.”¹¹¹ For Mitchell, an image is not only a representation which mirrors things we see, but a “social collective that has a parallel existence to the social life of the human hosts, and to the world of objects that they represent.”¹¹² He points out the inseparable nature of words and images, and proposes to view the binary system of words and images as dialectic and capable of different relationships which can be further denoted by using typographical signs such as “image-text,” or “image/text.” He argues that writing, “in its physical graphic form, is an inseparable suturing of the visual and the verbal, the imagetext incarnate,” and that any attempt to bifurcate image and word is thus a prejudicial, purist desire and “an ideology, a complex of desire and fear, power and interest.”¹¹³ Mitchell's idea of man's conflicting desire for and fear of images in a way appositely describes the different attitudes towards images in the late-medieval controversy over the use of religious images.

Concurrent with these theories proposed to justify and encourage a composite relationship between word and image, many art historians have sought ways to revise and overcome the old schematic hierarchy between image and text in medieval

¹¹⁰ “Foucault on Critical Agency in Painting and the Aesthetics of Existence,” in *A Companion to Foucault*, eds. Christopher Falzon et al. (Malden, 2013), pp. 243–63, p.254.

¹¹¹ Mitchell (1994), p. 16. For his ideas of “imagetext,” see Mitchell (1986).

¹¹² Mitchell (2005), p. 93.

¹¹³ Mitchell (1994), p. 95 and p. 86.

manuscripts to promote a juxtaposed reading of them. Lilian M. C. Randall shows how one can bring meanings to seemingly unintelligible Gothic marginalia through knowledge of their historical backgrounds and the texts to which they accompany.¹¹⁴ Michael Camille also discussed Gothic marginalia by focusing on medieval material culture, arguing that medieval art was rooted in medieval life which consisted of constant antagonism between conflicting systems and values such as the sacred and the profane, the religious and the absurd. He countered Émile Mâle's view of images as simply reflective of texts, and argued for their ability to transform and subvert the meaning of texts.¹¹⁵ Camille's emphasis on polarity and medieval material culture is especially beneficial to my reading of the *Gawain*-poems. Madeline H. Caviness brings a feminist and queer perspective into her reading of medieval visual art.¹¹⁶ Her engagements with Freudian and Lacanian theories of gaze and her discussion of female gaze and its consequence has inspired and shaped a part of this thesis.

While art historians began to employ a more textual and narrative approach in their reading of medieval images, some literary critics, too, seek to understand medieval texts through their visual contexts. D. W. Robertson, as a pioneer of this iconographical method, interprets Chaucer's works by what Robertson took to be the aesthetic beliefs of the period, and draws attention to the usefulness of contemporary

¹¹⁴ *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts* (Berkeley, 1966).

¹¹⁵ See Camille (1989) and Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dora Nussey (N.Y., 1958). For Camille's other discussions on the relations between word and image, see "Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy." *Art History* 43 (1985): 26–49; "Visual Signs of the Sacred Page: Books in the *Bible Moralisée*." *W&I* 5 (1989): 111–30; *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London, 1992); *Master of Death: The Lifeless Art of Pierre Remiet, Illuminator* (New Haven, 1996); *Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England* (London, 1998). Camille's provocative arguments on medieval marginalia instigated many critical reviews and responses. For a useful summary and bibliography of these discussions, see Domenic Leo, *Images, Texts, and Marginalia in a "Vows of the Peacock" Manuscript* (Leiden, 2013), p. 77, n. 11 and the biography of Michael Camille in the Dictionary of Art Historians <<https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/camillem.htm>>.

¹¹⁶ *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy* (Philadelphia, 2001).

images of manuscripts, ivory carving, and cathedrals in shedding light on literary texts.¹¹⁷ John V. Fleming in his analysis of *The Rose* draws on its extensive iconography, whose varying significations might sometimes, as he himself admits, pose a danger of reading the text through illustrations which are at least one remove from the original, but which produces a suggestive reading of the poem.¹¹⁸ Robertson's iconographical reading of Chaucer is expanded and nuanced by V. A. Kolve in a series of attempts to show how "a knowledge of the symbolic traditions current in the visual arts of the later Middle Ages can clarify and deepen our response to [Chaucer's] narrative poems."¹¹⁹ His comprehensive and insightful reading is sometimes questioned for being grounded on the "assumptions about shared experience of image and icon in the Middle Ages and on the relative 'continuity' of such representations over five centuries and as many cultures."¹²⁰ Kolve's reliance on images is also potentially problematic because Chaucer's poetry was never extensively illustrated in manuscripts except the portraits of the pilgrims and the tantalizingly incomplete program planned for *Troilus and Criseyde* in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 61. However, Jessica Brantley shows that even a seemingly irrelevant image and a "perfunctory conjunction of image and text" such as the Fairfax frontispiece can bring meanings to the text it illustrates through its interplay with the iconographical conventions lying behind.¹²¹

Besides Chaucer, the image and text relationship in other major Ricardian poets has also been regularly discussed. For example, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Denise L.

¹¹⁷ *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, 1962).

¹¹⁸ "*The Roman de la Rose*": *A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton, 1969), pp. ix–x.

¹¹⁹ Kolve (1984), p.1. See also its sequel, *Telling images: Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative II* (Stanford, 2009).

¹²⁰ Seth Lerer, "Review of *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*." *MP* 84.1 (1986): 64–7, p. 65.

¹²¹ Brantley (2008), p. 172

Despres analyze extensively the relations of the text to the marginal illustrations and annotations in an illustrated manuscript of *Piers Plowman* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 104) to explore its visual politics and heuristics.¹²² Jeremy Griffith and Richard K. Emmerson consider the illustrations of *Confessio Amantis* and its text in manuscript culture.¹²³ Peter C. Braeger examines an early fourteenth-century illustrated manuscript of *Confessio Amantis* (Oxford, New College MS 266) and suggests that its illustrations often depict moments of self-examination and insight and provide its readers with a model for interpreting the poem.¹²⁴ Whereas, then, the visuality and imagery of the works of the the *Gawain*-poet's major contemporaries have often received comprehensive or substantial discussion in their manuscript context, the visual aspect of the *Gawain*-manuscript has not been adequately investigated. Sarah Stanbury's book on the descriptive art of the poet remains to date the only comprehensive study of visuality in his works.¹²⁵ She examines how the poet dramatizes the confrontation between seeing and knowing, the desire to see and the limit of human perception by considering his ocular hermeneutics and use of language to represent that which is seen by the eyes. Despite her insightful analyses, Stanbury's focus remains in the verbal art of the *Gawain*-manuscript.

Scope of the Thesis

Chaucer's poetry is rarely illustrated; by contrast, the *Gawain*-poems receive twelve full-page pictures: a scale of illustration scarcely seen in Middle-English manuscripts. If the lack of contemporary visual responses has not prevented critics from reading

¹²² *Iconography and the Professional Reader: The Politics of Book Production in the Douce Piers Plowman* (Minnesota, 1998).

¹²³ Griffith (1983); R. K. Emmerson, "Reading Gower in a Manuscript Culture: Latin and English in Illustrated Manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*." *SAC* 21 (1999):143–86.

¹²⁴ Braeger (1989). See also Eberle (1989).

¹²⁵ *Seeing the "Gawain"-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception*. (Philadelphia, 1991).

Chaucer's texts through images, the unique presence of the *Gawain*-illustrations should certainly merit a comprehensive discussion in their contemporary visual context. We are now at the point where the previous characterization of the *Gawain*-illustrations as crudely executed is being revised, and more complex and interesting ideas in the motivation and the link between the images and texts are being suggested. Therefore, rather than another analytical attempt concentrated solely on the texts, this thesis steps into the void created by a lack of discussion of the models for the *Gawain*-illustrations,¹²⁶ and explores how the nuanced relationship between the *Gawain*-texts and the illustrations, as well as between the illustrations and their possible models, can facilitate our understanding of the poems. This critical lacuna surrounding pictorial models for the *Gawain*-illustrations has begun to be made good by Muriel A. Whitaker, who discusses the possible influences of late-medieval images of the Apocalypse on the text of *Pearl*,¹²⁷ and most recently by Hilmo, who proposes a range of biblical iconographies as possible models for the images of *Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain*.¹²⁸ This thesis complements and expands these observations by exploring both classical and biblical iconographical traditions in its discussion of plausible pictorial models for the *Gawain*-illustrations, and exploring how these images reflect, respond to, or even reject the texts.

My reading of the *Gawain*-illustrations is grounded on Reichardt's and Hilmo's insightful interpretations of them as a unity, but departs from their implied belief in an intended scheme of the manuscript's composition in which the four poems and the illustrations were collected together, copied, and illustrated in their current sequence in order to be read in a certain order to make meaning out of them. Although this way

¹²⁶ As noted in Edwards (1997), pp. 218–9.

¹²⁷ See Whitaker (1981).

¹²⁸ Kerby-Fulton, Hilmo and Olson, pp. 172–89.

of reading is convenient, intuitive, and useful, it nevertheless does not take sufficient account of medieval reading experience and the nature of manuscripts, which were often not meant to be read throughout in one sitting, and whose format and binding allowed convenient access to and retrieval of a certain page. The readers could easily open a manuscript at any page at any time and read on without necessarily having to begin strictly from the very beginning and continue to the end. Moreover, a reading like Reichardt's and Hilmo's unavoidably risks stretching the connections between individual poems and images in the manuscript by reading too much into their order. Therefore, although this thesis conveniently discusses each of the poems and its accompanying illustrations in four independent chapters following the order in which the four poems appear in the manuscript, it constantly compares and contrasts the poems and illustrations with one another across chapters, and sees them as thematically interrelated and inter-referential, but not necessarily sequential.

The images discussed in this thesis are not limited to manuscript illuminations, but also include artistic objects such as architectural buildings, ivory carvings, and clothing, which constitute the material culture and daily life of the poet's time. In the selection of images, unless earlier periods are discussed, in which case, images from those periods will be used, I focus on images produced in the fourteenth century, but allow a more elastic time frame of thirteenth century to late fifteenth century (and in some rare cases, stretched to the early years of sixteenth century), both to provide a sense of history and context and to accommodate more images into my discussion. For the geographical origin of the images, England and France are chosen to reflect the historical context and background of the *Gawain*-poet and the manuscript. In some rare instances, images from Spain, Prague, Germany, the Netherlands or Italy are used, but they often demonstrably belong to a wider, universal convention that

transcends regional difference. My discussion of images does not rely on believing that the *Gawain*-illustrations were authorized by the poet or scribe himself, or that the poet, scribe, or artist actually saw the images brought together in this thesis. But my reading nevertheless operates on the assumption that these images and conventions would not have been foreign to the poet and the artist, who with their professional knowledge and skills, should not have found it difficult to represent, visualize and communicate the symbolic meanings of these images and conventions to their audience and readers.

I frame my discussions of the texts and images in the *Gawain*-manuscript in the context of late medieval anti-clericalism with a specific emphasis on its concern with the use of devotional images. Religious controversy in late-medieval England has become the focus of critical interest over the last two decades.¹²⁹ However, there have been few critical works which associate the *Gawain*-manuscript and its poems with this anti-clerical tradition in late fourteenth-century England. Two exceptions are Hilmo, who notes the plainness of the *Gawain*-illustrations and the absence of divine figures in them, and associates this with the iconoclastic sentiments prevalent in the poet's time.¹³⁰ Monica Brzezinski Potkay discusses *Cleanness* as treating the danger of images.¹³¹ Shannon Gayk investigates a number of fifteenth-century authors' theorizations of the relationship between image and word, and offers an unillustrated discussion of their ideas about the image.¹³²

¹²⁹ See above n. 50 for studies on late-medieval religious controversy.

¹³⁰ Hilmo (2004) p. 140. This idea is mentioned again in Hilmo (2012), p. 172.

¹³¹ "Cleanness on the Question of Images." *Viator* 26 (1995): 181–93. See also Bowers (2013), in which he places the poet in contemporary religious and political context, including the Lollards controversy.

¹³² *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 2010).

This thesis builds on and expands the research of Hilmo, Potkay, and Gayk by discussing how late-medieval iconoclasm as a religious, social and intellectual context bears on the *Gawain*-manuscript and its texts and images in a way that has not been adequately explored. However, departing from Gayk's focus on the ideas and ideologies about the image rather than the image *per se*, this thesis concerns itself less with theoretical and theological understanding of the image and its use, and takes a greater interest in the material culture, physical objects and resources available during the poet's time, and how they were employed by the poet to create his unique warning about the danger of images mingled with a patent awareness of and fascination with their power. The thesis juxtaposes close textual analyses with visual images, but it is not only a study of the manuscript as an illustrated text to show how the miniatures match or differ from the writing itself. Instead, the thesis looks in a more holistic way at the visual and imaginative culture in which the poet worked, and shows how the literary and the iconographical, the classical and the biblical interact with each other to shape the poet's response to contemporary concerns about the use of images. By bringing together these different traditions, the thesis hopes to suggest and draw attention to a less explored area of study for a much-studied corpus within its extant established scholarship.

Chapter Two

“I sez byzonde þat myry mere”: Sight, Language, and Crossover in *Pearl*

Pearl has received a great deal of interpretive comment, which reads the poem as an elegy for the loss of a beloved one, a religious treatise, or a social critique of contemporary culture and politics.¹³³ Despite its diverse interpretations, *Pearl* is seen as fundamentally biblical in its style, sources, and themes. Although scholars have noted the generic influence of *The Romance of Rose* (*The Rose*) on the poem as a dream-vision and its garden setting, few have analyzed the two poems closely for their intertextual and thematic connections.¹³⁴ In this chapter, I will fill this critical gap by examining the poem’s allusions to *The Rose* and other Ovidian texts and demonstrate how the poet reshapes the meanings of the biblical parables of the

¹³³ For overviews of earlier *Pearl* criticism, see Lawrence Eldredge, “The State of *Pearl* Studies since 1933.” *Viator* 6 (1975): 171–94; Robert J. Blanch, “The Current State of *Pearl* Criticism.” *ChauY* 3 (1996): 21–33. For the poem’s elegiac convention, see Angela Carson, “Aspects of Elegy in the Middle English *Pearl*.” *SP* 62.1 (1965): 17–27; Ann Chalmers Watts, “*Pearl*, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss.” *PMLA* 99 (1984): 26–40. Bowers reads the poem as expressing a collective grief for the death of Queen Anne in *The Politics of “Pearl”: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 151–86 and Bowers (2013), pp. 103–46. Discussions of the poem’s theological ideas often surround the symbol of “pearl,” see for example: A. R. Heiserman, “The Plot of *Pearl*.” *PMLA* 80.3 (1965): 164–71; J. Allen Mitchell, “The Middle English *Pearl*: Figuring the Unfigurable.” *ChauR* 35.1 (2000): 86–111; Chance, “Allegory and Structure in *Pearl*: The Four Senses of the ‘Ars praedicandi’ and Fourteenth Century Homiletic Poetry,” in *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the “Pearl”-poet*, eds. Robert J. Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller, and Julian N. Wasserman (Troy, 1991), pp. 31–59; Stanbury (1991), pp. 12–41; Spearing, “Symbolic and Dramatic Development in *Pearl*.” *MP* 60.1 (1962): 1–12; Louis Blenkner, “The Theological Structure of *Pearl*,” in *Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays*, ed. John Conley (Notre Dame, 1970), pp. 220–71; Robertson, *Essays in Medieval Culture* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 209–14 and 215–7; Nikki Stiller, “The Transformation of the Physical in the Middle English *Pearl*.” *ES* 63 (1982): 402–9; María Bullón-Fernández, “Byzonde þe Water: Courtly and Religious Desire in *Pearl*.” *SP* 91.1 (1994): 35–49. For studies on the social aspect of the poet’s works and his possible association with heterodoxy, see below p. 109, n. 165.

¹³⁴ For discussions of *Pearl* and *The Rose*, see Putter (1996), pp. 12–4, 153–6; Julie Fifelski, “Two *Loci Amoeni* in *Pearl* and the *Roman de la Rose*.” *N&Q* 55.1 (2008): 17–9. Herbert Pilch provides a more systematic comparison between *Pearl* and *The Rose* but concludes that *Pearl* is an “anti-*Rose*” (180) and that its influence from *Rose* is “neither clear nor extensive” (182) in “The Middle English *Pearl*: Its relation to the *Roman de la Rose*,” in Conley (ed.), pp. 163–84.

Vineyard and the Pearl of Great Price by interweaving them with Ovidian stories of mis-looking to explore the gap between appearance and truth, men's desire to see and their capability to say, all of which are contained in the polysemous image of the "perle."

At the Ovidian Well

Narcissus' Fountain

The poem begins with the Dreamer mourning for his lost pearl alone in an "erbere." The enclosed space constitutes a private world detached from outside reality. Critics have associated this "erbere" with both heavenly and worldly paradises, reading it in biblical tradition of "hortus conclusus" or as a classical "locus amoenus."¹³⁵ But what is often overlooked about this "erbere" is its watery nature. Although there is no literal mention of any river inside this "erbere," the imagery of water is implied by the way in which the pearl becomes lost to the dreamer:

Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;
 Pru3 gresse to grounde hit fro me yot.
 I dewyne, fordolke of luf-daungere
 Of þat pryuy perle withouten spot. (9–12)¹³⁶

Most editors of the text have glossed the word "yot" as the past tense of "yede" (to

¹³⁵ For the garden in medieval literature, Arlyn Diamond, "Meeting Grounds: Gardens in Middle English Romance," in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, eds. Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević, and Judith Weiss (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 125–38.

¹³⁶ References to the *Gawain*-poems in this thesis are from *The Poems of the "Pearl" Manuscript: "Pearl", "Cleanness", "Patience", "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"*, eds. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter, 2007). A new edition by Ad Putter and Myra Stokes was published in 2014, but too late for me to take it into account in this thesis.

slip away) as derived from Old English “gon” (to go).¹³⁷ But the word can also be read as the past tense of “yeten” (to flow).¹³⁸ This watery imagery is sustained and reinforced when the Dreamer reiterates his loss of the pearl in the following stanza:

Syþen in þat spote hit fro me sprange,
Ofte haf I wayted, wyschande þat wele
Pat wont watz whyle deuoyde my wrange
And heuen my happe and al my hele— (13–6)

The pearl which “sprange” away evokes the image of a spring with its water gushing forth, which points directly to another meaning of “perle” as a rush of water.¹³⁹ Inside this watery “erbere,” sensual perceptions are represented as a flux that seeks to enter the Dreamer’s body—songs “flete” to the ear (21), fragrance “flot” from the beautiful flowers (46) and “schot” (to well up, to flow) to the brain (58), filling him with longings for the pearl that he “leste/lyste”—the pearl that is both lost and desired.¹⁴⁰

This word play of “leste/lyste” not only places the Dreamer in the courtly love tradition in which a lover desires for an unattainable lady, but may also possibly invokes in this fluid context the well-known archetypal image of an unrequited lover:

¹³⁷ See Andrew and Waldron (eds.), p. 54, note to line 10. Moorman (ed.) provides a summary of different editorial opinions regarding the difficulty of this word in p. 200, note to line 10.

¹³⁸ See *MED*, “yeten (v.3).” My reading of the word is anteceded by Marie P. Hamilton, “The Pearl-poet” in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, Vol. 2*, ed. J. Burke Severs (New Haven, 1967), pp. 339–53, 503–16. Her association of “yot” with Latin “fundere” (to pour) via “geoton,” although not gaining much critical attention, echoes my reading of the watery “erbere” as an Ovidian fountain and works better with the poem’s overarching imagery of the effusion of the divine (and the erotic, as I argue) than the meaning of “slipping away” opted by other editors.

¹³⁹ *MED*, “springen (v.),” 1(a) and 7, note especially in 7 the word’s theological and medical connotation related to the Holy water and its healing power. The word “perle (n.1)” as a surge of water is etymologically connected to “prill,” “pirl,” and “purl,” which derive from Old Norse “purla,” “the babbling of water.” Although the earliest example cited in *MED* for this meaning is later than the poem, the poet’s extensive use of words borrowed from Old Norse and French, and his particular attention to rhymes and sound effects would have allowed the possibility of this nominal sense of “perle.” See James I. Wimsatt, “Rhyme, the Icons of Sound, and the Middle English *Pearl*,” *Style* 30.2 (1996): 189–220, in which he demonstrates through examining the etymologies of the poet’s vocabulary that the poet in his choice of words was often centered on “a lexicon of sound” (195–6).

¹⁴⁰ See *MED*, “lesen (v.4),” “to lose” and “listen (v.1),” to desire.

Narcissus at the fountain.¹⁴¹ Through a series of wordplays, the poet seems to pinpoint his “erbere” down to an Ovidian pool, transferring the Dreamer from a generic garden of pleasure to a specific site of desire where he repeats the experience of Narcissus by craving for sights of his lost pearl and pining away. The image of Narcissus at the fountain is reinforced by the Dreamer’s watching (wayted) and longing for “the wele” (wealth/happiness) in the spot where it sprang away (13–4).¹⁴² Beautiful flowers grow out of the place where the pearl sank down:

Pat spot of spysez mot nedez sprede,
 Per such rychez to rot is runne;
 Blomez blayke and blwe and rede
 Per schynez ful schyr agayn þe sunne.
 Flor and fryte may not be fede
 Per hit doun drof in moldez dunne[.] (25–30)

Spices and flowers which rot and bloom recall Narcissus’ death and transformation into a flower, which echoes the Dreamer who “dewyne” as a flower withers up.¹⁴³ The image of the pearl sinking down into the earth suggests a sense of fixation and evokes Narcissus’ dead body, which, in the form of a flower, remains perpetually

¹⁴¹ Narcissus’ story is narrated in Book 3 of *Metamorphoses* (346–510) together with the story of Actaeon, and as a sub-narrative of the story of Tiresias. For medieval reception of the Narcissus story in literature and art, see Louise Vinge, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Lund, 1967), esp. pp. 189–90, 245–9; Tracy Adams, “The Ambiguous Narcissus Figure of *Le Lai de Narcisus* and ‘Can Vei la Lauzeta Mover.’” *French Studies* 54.4 (2000): 427–38; Rabun M. Taylor, “Mirrors Mortal and Morbid: Narcissus and Hermaphroditus,” in *The Moral Mirror of Roman Art* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 56–89. Julia Kristeva sees the popularity of the Narcissus myth throughout western history as stemming from a profoundly ambivalent attitude toward images which involves fascination, anxiety and fear. See *Tales of Love (Histoires d’amour)*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (N.Y., 1987), pp. 103–21, 122–36. In her discussion of the temporal cycle in *Pearl*, Johnson mentions the “artificial spring” and Dreamer/Lover’s “self-involved grief” at the very end of the essay but does not explicitly identify him as Narcissus and examine this association in depth. See “The *Pearl* Dreamer and the Eleventh Hour,” in Blanch, Miller, and Wasserman (eds.), pp. 1–15, p. 15.

¹⁴² The image of well later appear as an important imagery in the poet’s original description of the bleeding Lamb, whose wound appears as a “welle” from which blood springs, and in the Dreamer’s description of his own heart which is flooded with remorse like a surging “welle” See below pp. 133–4 and p. 128

¹⁴³ See *MED*, “dwinen (v.),” (b).

rooted and fixated at the site of desire by his own gaze.

The textual allusion to Narcissus seems to have also been noticed by the *Gawain*-artist, for the miniature of the sleeping Dreamer (fig. 31) shows a remarkable resemblance to the pictorial tradition of Narcissus at the fountain (figs. 32–4).



Fig. 31. The Dreamer sleeping. England, c.1400; *Pearl*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A. x., fol. 37 (41).



Fig. 32. Narcissus at the fountain. France, 1340; *Roman de la Rose*. BL. MS Royal 20 A xvii, fol. 14v.



Fig. 33. Narcissus at the fountain. France, 14th century; *Roman de la Rose*. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. MS 3338, fol. 11v.



Fig. 34. Narcissus at the fountain. France, 14th century; *Roman de la Rose*. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. MS 5209, fol. 11v.

Among the critics who have discussed the miniature of the sleeping Dreamer,¹⁴⁴ no one seems to have observed its pictorial connection with the images of Narcissus, which are frequently seen in manuscripts of *The Rose* and other mythographic works such as Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (see fig. 30) and Christine de Pizan's *Othéa*. Given the tremendous popularity and wide circulation of these works, it would not be improbable for the *Gawain*-artist to have seen such images, or even had a copy of them at hand when he executed this image.¹⁴⁵ Both the Dreamer in *Pearl* and Narcissus in *The Rose* lie diagonally in the middle register of the image by a prominent spot amid meadows with trees behind. This identification of the Dreamer with Narcissus would appear even more intentional if we consider the fact that the dark green spot by which the Dreamer lies is the result of a blue paint applied later on top of the yellow meadow underneath it, which invites one to see it as an attempt to re-create the fountain in Narcissus images.¹⁴⁶

In the miniature of the sleeping Dreamer (fig. 31), flowers are drawn in a hyperbolic round shape and painted consistently in white rather than in other colors as the text describes, which might have meant to represent the lost pearl. These white pearl-like flowers spread into the water, echoing the textual implication of the pearl's flowing movement. The Dreamer stretches his hands toward the water as if reaching for these pearls, like Narcissus lying and reaching out for his own reflection in the water.

¹⁴⁴ After this chapter was drafted in 2009, Hilmo suggests that this miniature is adapted from the images of the sleeping Adam in Hilmo (2012), p. 173. Her observation does not clash with my reading of the Dreamer as Narcissus, but complements my discussion of the Dreamer in relation to Adam's sin later in this chapter, pp. 128–31, and in below Ch 3, pp. 160–75, where I discuss the medieval iconography of the creation of Adam and Eve in relation to image-making.

¹⁴⁵ For a brief account of medieval manuscripts of *The Rose*, see above Ch. 1, p. 61, n. 61.

¹⁴⁶ As pointed out in Hilmo (2004), pp. 148–9. In a rhetorical question about what this spot is, Hilmo asks if this layer of blue paint means water among other possibilities, but does not pursue this idea and provide any answer. She suggests that this added spot echoes the multi-layered signification of the "erbere" both as the spot where the Pearl got lost, the hilltop where the Dreamer sleeps, and his internal landscape.

Through a series of word plays, the poet creates a hybrid textual space in which the physical “erbere” conflates with a visionary landscape; a biblical garden of eternal life and fountain of grace fuses with a graveyard and an Ovidian pool where nourishing spices becomes idolatrous flowers. The “erbere/wele” becomes a memorial site which contains both personal and mythic memories for the Dreamer to commemorate his pearl by re-enacting Narcissus’ gaze at the fountain.

The poem’s allusion to the Narcissus story is also suggested by the Dreamer’s desire as “luf-daungere,” which conveys a double sense of longings and separation¹⁴⁷ that echoes the word play of “leste/lyste.” The phrase “luf-daungere,” found only in *Pearl*, may have been coined by the poet to serve as an intertextual cue, for the word not only evokes the memories of the longing/separation frequently described in *The Rose*, but was actually used in the Middle English *Romaunt of the Rose* (*Romaunt*) to describe how Narcissus falls prey to Love’s power.¹⁴⁸

Narcisus was a bachelor
 That Love had caught in his danger,
 And in his net gan hym so strayne,
 And dyd him so to wepe and playne,
 That nede him must his lyf forgo. (1469–73)

Narcisus fu uns damoisiaus
 Que Amors tint en ses roisiaus,

¹⁴⁷ As noted by W. J. Barron in “Love-daungere,” in *Medieval Miscellany: Presented to Eugène Vinaver by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, eds. F. Whitehead, A. H. Diverres, and F. E. Sutcliffe (Manchester, 1965), pp. 1–18.

¹⁴⁸ This work is a partial translation of *The Rose*. It was dated no later than 1372 and disputably attributed to Chaucer based on his mention of translating *The Rose* in *The Legend of Good Women* (328–9). The work survives in three fragments: A (lines 1–1705), B (lines 1706–5810), and C (5811–7696), which are preserved in a single vernacular manuscript, Glasgow University Library MS Hunter 409, copied around 1440–50. Another fragment of *Romaunt* is discussed by Simon Horobin in “A New C-fragment of Chaucer’s *Romaunt of Rose*.” *SAC* 18 (2006): 205–15. References to *Romaunt* are from *Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 685–768. Corresponding French texts are quoted from Walter W. Skeat, *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1899).

Et tant le sot Amors destraindre,
 Et tant le fist plorer et plaindre,
 Que li estuet à render l'ame. (1447–51)

In *The Rose*, Love simply holds Narcissus back (“destraindre”), but the Middle English translator supplied the imagery of the net to reinforce the sense of captivity and deception.¹⁴⁹ This idea of deception is also detectable in *Pearl* through another nominal sense of “wele” as a “trap.”¹⁵⁰ The nature of the pearl as both precious and dangerous is further suggested by the poet’s repeated description of it as “dere” (dear/deadly). The ambiguous nature of the “wele” draws attention to the difference between appearance and reality, and the issue of seeing correctly, which lies at the core of the Narcissus story.¹⁵¹

The theme of sight, reality, and appearance is set out at the very beginning of

Romaunt:

Many men sayn that in sweveninges
 Ther nys but fables and lesynges;
 But men may somme sweven[es] sen,
 Whiche hardely ne false ne ben,
 But afterward ben apparaunt. (1–5)

The narrator refutes the dismissive view of dream visions as pure fictions and credits them with the potentiality of delivering truth. The juxtaposition of “fables,” “lesynges,” “(ne) false” and “apparaunt” locates dreams as spaces in which the well-defined lines between seeing and unseeing, the visible and the invisible are blurred and problematized. Man starts to see only when his physical eyes stop functioning,

¹⁴⁹ *MED*, “net (n.1).”

¹⁵⁰ *MED*, “wele (n.2),” (a).

¹⁵¹ See above Ch. 1, pp. 59–61 for the theme of looking in B.3 of *Metamorphoses*.

and only through this insight will that which is intangible become “apparaunt” to see. A similar contrast between physical and spiritual sight can also be seen at the beginning of the Dreamer’s vision in *Pearl*. The Dreamer’s vision is initiated by his spirit being separated from his body. The contrast between his static body (“in sweuen”) and his moving spirit (“goste...gon”) suggests that spiritual sight is activated with the cessation of the physical senses.¹⁵²

In the brief discourse on dreams in *Romaunt*, claims to truth increase as the action changes from saying (“sayn”) to seeing (“sen”) to emphasize the gap between seeing and describing what one sees, and the difference of hierarchy between what is reported and what is actually experienced. The whole project of describing experience in words is by definition subsequent to the event itself. Attempts at (re)creation through human language are therefore, to a degree doomed to fail because they are at best a copy which is at least once removed from immediate experience, and so can never be perfect. The *Gawain*-poet transfers *The Rose*’s concern with language into his poem and makes it explicit early in the text by making the Dreamer “explain his vision in words” (“in speche expoun”) (37), and by doing so, to suggest that the following account of the Dreamer’s vision is not only about what and how he sees, but is also about how he retells what is seen.

Narcissus’ Gaze

The Dreamer’s entrance into the visionary world is marked by his act of turning his face toward the other side of the “floty valez” (66-7). By drawing attention to the Dreamer’s face, the poet signifies the start of his reenactment of Narcissus’ gaze,

¹⁵² See above Ch. 1, pp. 20–21 for Isidore’s theories of three kinds of looking, and the representations of physical and spiritual gaze in medieval texts and images in relation to the experience of manuscript reading.

which is repeatedly implied by the recurrent word “down” until he finally “bowed” down into this “floty valez” (61–132). The Dreamer’s journey down into this watery valley may, I would argue, metaphorically be construed as Narcissus’ gaze into the fountain, which the Dreamer re-enacts by looking before himself across the river as if through a liminal frame similar to a fountain.



Fig. 35. Narcissus at the fountain. France, 1340; *Roman de la Rose*. BL. MS Royal 20 A xvii, fol. 14.



Fig. 36. Amant at the fountain. France, 1340; *Roman de la Rose*. BL. MS Royal 20 A xvii, fol. 15v.



Fig. 37. The Dreamer by the stream. England, c.1400; *Pearl*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 37v (41v).



Fig. 38. Narcissus at the fountain. France, 14th century; *Roman de la Rose*. Assemblée Nationale. MS 1230, fol. 13r.

The association of the Dreamer's vision with Narcissus' gaze may also be detected in the image of the Dreamer by the stream (fig. 37) through its comparison with another iconographical cycle of Narcissus at the fountain (figs. 35–6, 38). In a fourteenth-century manuscript of *The Rose* (figs. 35–6), the images of Narcissus and Amant appear close to one another. Both Narcissus and Amant stand by a fountain and gesture toward it, which invites immediate identification of the two with each other. In the image of Narcissus (fig. 35), trees in the background are painted as a continuation of the meadow where the fountain lies, as if to suggest that this is an image of a real site where Narcissus commits his gaze.

In the image of Amant (fig. 36), however, this sense of reality is lost in its background, which now appears as a mixture of abstract check patterns and rose vines. Amant's body marks the abrupt change of the background pattern, which indicates the transition from the real, literal world into a visionary and allegorical one. The image of the Dreamer by the stream in *Pearl* (fig. 37) shares its composition with the previous two images. In fig. 38, Narcissus is shown wearing an almost identical robe as the Dreamer's, standing in front of the water and making a similar gesture. The pictorial resemblance between the Dreamer and the Narcissus/Amant at the fountain invites the association of the Dreamer with these two figures, which seems to echo the poem's allusion to Narcissus.

“Perle” in the “Myry Mere”

The things which Narcissus, Amant, and the Dreamer see in the water are also significant. While Narcissus' reflection is almost always drawn in his fountain (figs. 32–4, 38, 41), Amant's fountain is often depicted as plain water with nothing in it (figs. 36, 41). But in another minor iconographical cycle, Amant's fountain is

decorated with more detail, such as the white, round spots in fig. 39, or the colorful forms in fig. 40.



Fig. 39. Amant at the fountain. France, 14th century. *Roman de la Rose* Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal. MS 5226, fol. 13v.



Fig. 40. Amant at the fountain. France, 1438; *Roman de la Rose*. Bodleian. MS Selden Supra 57, fol. 12v.



Fig. 41 Top left: Amant at the fountain. Lower right: Narcissus at the fountain. France, 15th century, *Roman de la Rose*. BnF. MS Français 12595, fol. 12v.

These little forms might have been meant to represent the crystals which Amant sees inside the fountain in *Romaunt*:

Down at the botme set saw I
 Two cristall stonys craftely
 In thilke freshe and faire welle. (1567–9)
 ...
 For whanne the sonne, cler in sighte,
 Cast in that well his bemys brighte,
 And that the heete descendid is,
 Thanne taketh the cristall stoon, ywis,
 Agayn the sonne an hundrid hewis,
 Blewe, yelow, and red, that fresh and newe is. (1573–8)

The two crystal stones reflect sunlight with colorful beams from the bottom of the fountain. This is reminiscent of the moment when the Dreamer, having come to a

“water” (107), sees glistering stones in the bottom of this “floty valez”:¹⁵³

In þe founce þer stoden stonez stepe,
 As glente þurȝ glas þat glowed and glyȝt—
 As stremande sternez, quen stroþe-men slepe,
 Staren in welkyn in wynter nyȝt;
 For vche a pobbel in pole þer pyȝt
 Watz emerad, saffer, oþer gemme gente,
 Pat alle þe loȝe lemed of lyȝt,
 So dere watz hit adubbement. (113–20)

The star-like stones shine at the bottom of this “pole.” Their radiance is conveyed by metaphors of glass and stars. The resemblance of these stones with the crystals in Narcissus’ fountain is further echoed by a radiating cliff inside this “myre mere:”

More meruayle con my dom adaunt.
 I saȝ byȝonde þat myry mere
 A crystal cliff ful relusaunt:
 Mony ryal ray con fro hit rere. (157–60)

The light-reflecting qualities of the crystal stones in *The Rose* and the stones and cliff in *Pearl* are both associated with the ability to see. The poet of *Romaunt* uses a mirror metaphor to illustrate the reflecting ability of the crystal stones:

Ryght as a myrroure openly
 Shewith all thing that stonðith therby,
 As well the colour as the figure,
 Withouten ony coverture,

¹⁵³Andrew and Waldron (eds.) note that this “exotic river with jewels on its bed” is a medieval commonplace. See p. 59, note to lines 113–16. They provide a number of examples, including Dante, Mandeville and *Floire et Blancheflor*, only to miss *The Rose*, which is perhaps the most direct source for this section in the poem. Another interesting text to read against the imagery of stars, net and flowers in this section is Richard Rolle’s “Meditatio de Passioni Domini” in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and His Followers*, ed. Carl Horstmann, vol. 1 (London, 1895), pp. 83–103, p. 86. Rolle describes Christ’s body and his wounds as a heaven full of stars, a net full of holes, and a meadow strewn with flowers and herbs. His mystic imagery is strikingly reminiscent of the *Gawain*-poet’s depiction of the “erbere” and the “myry mere” in *Pearl*.

Right so the cristall stoon shynyng
 Withouten ony dissevyng (1585–90)
 [...]

 This is the mirroure perilous. (1601)

The crystal stones are like the two eyes of the fountain and Narcissus' reflection, which are capable of looking back and fixing him by his own gaze.¹⁵⁴ The Dreamer's "myry mere," too, "glente" with glistening stones. Its gaze penetrates like light shining through the glass (113–4). This "glas" of "myry mere" in *Pearl* seems to invite association with the perilous mirror in *Romaunt*. Whereas Amant's mirror reflects with "coverture" and "disseyvyng," the Dreamer's "mere" reflects with "adubmente." In contrast to what its name suggests, the Dreamer's "myry mere" is a perilous one.

The crystal stones in Amant's fountain may also help to explain the pearly substances which fill the water spot in the image of the sleeping Dreamer (fig.31). If we allow the possible iconographical influence from *The Rose*, these pearly forms covered by the blue water applied on top of them may well have been meant to evoke the crystal stones which can see, and which are seen by the Dreamer in his "mere" and by Amant in the fountain as a perilous mirror. These pearls seem to simultaneously represent the flowers in the "ebere," the lost pearl, Narcissus' flowers, and the eyes of the Dreamer/Narcissus. Their ambiguous meaning echoes the elusive nature of the "erbere" and "myry mere," whose "addubments" presents a "meruayle" that both entices and endangers the looker, escaping the Dreamer's comprehension and interpretation (157).

¹⁵⁴ The crystal stones has been associated with Narcissus' eyes. See, for example, Norman Klassen, *Chaucer on Love, Knowledge, and Sight* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 87–8

Through this possible allusion to the perilous mirror in *The Rose*, the “perlez” in this visionary “myry mere” are associated with deception and peril. The theme of the danger of looking is invoked by another important meaning of “perle” as an eye disease, which was prominently used in medieval medical and scriptural texts, but which does not seem to have been considered by other critics.¹⁵⁵ In the Wycliffite Bible (1380s–90s), “perle” is used to render the Latin word “albugo”: “Offre he not bred to his god, ne go he to þe seruyce of hym zif wyyt perle hauynge in þe y3e” (Lev. 21:20).¹⁵⁶ Here “perle” becomes a synonym for an eye disease caused by white spots on the eyeball, and is likened to spiritual blindness to God. The sense of blindness that “perle” evokes is interestingly echoed by the closed eyes of the sleeping Dreamer in fig. 31, whose earthbound preoccupation with his material loss prevents him from seeing his pearl correctly.

The Muted Tongue

The marvel of “myry mere” constantly baffles the Dreamer’s perception (“dom”). He tries to articulate the splendor of the sight but falls short of verbal descriptions: “þe derþe þerof for to deuyse / nis no wy3 worþe þat tonge berez” (99–100)—no man that has a tongue can properly describe what he sees. His speechlessness echoes his daunted “dom” which through its near homonym with “domb,” suggests a muted perception. This indescribable sight, however, fills him with increasing longings expressed through the concatenation phrase of “more and more.” This monotonous expression produces an echoic effect which seems to answer to the subtext of Narcissus at work here by evoking the memory of the nymph, Echo, who cannot effectively express her love for Narcissus due to her loss of speech as a result of

¹⁵⁵ *MED*, “perl(e) (n.2),” 3.

¹⁵⁶ Qtd. in *MED*, “perl(e) (n.2),” 3(C).

acting against Juno:

“huius” ait “linguae, qua sum delusa, potestas
parva tibi dabitur vocisque brevissimus usus,”
reque minas firmat. tantum haec in fine loquendi
ingeminat voces auditaque verba reportat. (365–9)

[“That tongue of yours,” she [Juno] said, “by which I have
been tricked, shall have its power curtailed and enjoy the
briefest use of speech.” The event confirmed her threat. She
[Echo] merely repeats the concluding phrases of a speech
and returns the words she hears.]

Echo loses the ability to initiate or render any meaningful speech, and can only repeat what she hears. Her minimalized ability to speak contrasts with her growing desire aroused by her sight of Narcissus, and her longings to approach him with smooth tongues and words (“voluit blandis accedere dictis”). The gap between seeing and saying, and her verbal deficiency finally leads her to death.

The Dreamer is caught in a similar dilemma between his growing desire to “see þe broke” and his deteriorating verbal capability to describe what he sees that is signified by his reiterative expression of “longing more and more.” He sets out a series of attempts to describe the sight he sees in lines 65–130, with each of the attempts divided neatly by the concatenation phrase “dere adubbement.” The echoic and recurrent “dere adubbement” shows the Dreamer’s tautological reiteration of his longings and suggests the autoerotic and unproductive nature of such desire. His verbal deficiency is compared to musical instruments which cannot imitate the sound of nature (91–2). Through the Dreamer’s insufficient “tonge” which, like the strings of a gittern and Echo’s “lingua,” is reduced to its minimal ability and briefest use, the poet illustrates the ineffability of the divine which constantly disables human

language, and in classical tradition, leads to punishment for those seers as challenging the god by rivaling their creative or verbal powers.¹⁵⁷

The references to man-made musical instruments and the “adubgements” show the artistic and materialistic aspect in the Dreamer’s account of his vision of the “floty valez.” The glory of the landscape is repeatedly compared with human creations. Even the water itself is referred to as a “device,” which seems to reinforce the connection between this “myre mere” and Amant’s fountain.¹⁵⁸

More of wele watz in þat wyse
 Þen I cowþe telle þaz I tom hade,
 For vrþely herte myzt not suffyse
 To þe tenþe dole of þo gladnez glade.
 Forþe I þozt þat paradyse
 Watz þer ouer gayn þo bonkez brade;
 I hoped þe water were a deuyse
 Bytwene myrþez by merez made; (133–40)

The word “deuyse” is consistently used both as a verb and a noun throughout the poem by the Dreamer to describe his vision. The word in this line is usually glossed as “division,” or “a device of division” such as a conduit.¹⁵⁹ While “deuyse” connotes a division, it also draws attention to artistic creation through its multiple meanings as

¹⁵⁷ For discussions of the ineffability of God and apophatic theology, which believes that God is ineffable and can only be described by what he is not, and that any attempted description of God in words is hence ultimately false, see Gillespie and Maggie Ross, “Apophatic Image: The Poetics of Effacement in Julian of Norwich,” in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Exeter Symposium V*, ed. M. Glasscoe (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 53–77; Anne Howland Schotter, “Vernacular Style and the Word of God: The Incarnational Art of *Pearl*,” in *Ineffability: Naming the Unnamable from Dante to Beckett* (N.Y., 1984), pp. 23–34.

¹⁵⁸ This passage invites comparison with Amant’s words that he has no time to describe all the beauty in the Garden, and his subsequent reasoning in front of the Narcissus’ fountain before he dares look into it in *The Rose* ll. 1411–38.

¹⁵⁹ Hillmann, Osgood, and Andrew and Waldron gloss the word as “division.” Gollancz renders it as “device,” which Gordon complements by suggesting that the word evokes an “artificial conduit” similar to those in the Garden of Deduit. David C. Fowler sees “deuyse” as “deception” and a “trick of the eye” in “On the Meaning of *Pearl*, 139–40.” *MLQ* 21.1 (1960): 27–9. For a summary of editorial glosses of this word, see Moorman (ed.), p. 212–3, note to line 140.

a verb, which include “to divide,” “to look,” “to comprehend,” “to form” and “to compose.”¹⁶⁰ This word both accentuates the tangible quality of this watery visionary landscape, and likens the Dreamer who sees it to an image-maker like Narcissus.¹⁶¹ This barrier of water recalls Narcissus’ lamentation in *Metamorphoses* that he is prohibited by a thin water (“exigua prohibemur aqua”) (450). The Dreamer’s inability to comprehend is also reminiscent of Ovid’s account of Narcissus’ confusion about his own situation: “What he sees he knows not; but that which he sees he burns for, and the same delusion mocks and allures his eyes” (430). When the poet makes the Dreamer admit that his earthly tongue cannot describe one tenth of what he sees, he is again suggesting the fallibility of human language and that any artistic attempts to “devise” what one sees automatically “divide” themselves from the things seen, hence an unbridgeable gap always exists between seeing and telling, the divinity of God and human understanding of it.

The poet brings up the theme of artistic composition by likening the richly adorned landscape to a tapestry: “Pe glemande glory þat of hem glent, / For wern neuer

¹⁶⁰ *MED*, “devis (v.),” 1, 4 and 5. “devisen (v.),” 2(a) and 5.

¹⁶¹ Narcissus is generally regarded as an example of pride and worldly obsession with appearance in medieval commentaries. An explicit association of Narcissus with artistic creation appeared in Leon Battista Alberti’s famous treatise *Della pittura* (1435), in which he saw Narcissus as the prototypical painter:

[T]he inventor of painting, according to the poets, was Narcissus, who was turned into a flower, for...[w]hat is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?

The text is quoted from *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London, 1991), p. 61. Although this work is slightly later than the *Gawain*-poems, association of Narcissus with artistic creation may have existed well before Alberti’s epoch-making theory, for medieval images of Narcissus at the fountain show great resemblance with the images of God’s creation of Adam, who is an image of His own likeness. Both pictorial traditions illustrate God/Narcissus standing at or inclining to a ground/water and reaching for, or talking to, the human figure lying on/in it. Erwin Panofsky also points out the resemblance between the dying Narcissus and the Dead Christ in fifteenth-century art. See “Imago Pietatis: Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des ‘Schmerzensmanns’ und der ‘Maria Mediatrix,’” in *Festschrift für Max J. Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig, 1927), p. 296, n. 5. For association of Narcissus with God in later literary works, see Vinge (1967). For a later image which juxtaposes God with Narcissus, see below fig. 56.

webbez þat wygez weuen / Of half so dere adubbenente” (70–72). These “webbez” recall the Dreamer’s “wele” and Narcissus’ “net,” suggesting their potentially deceptive nature, which is emphasized through the concatenation word “adubbenente” and the recurrent word “dubbed,” “to adorn,” “to disguise,” and “to adulterate.”¹⁶² The word also reinforces the imagery of weaving through its other meaning, “to renovate old cloths.” The clothing imagery is, as I argue later in Chapter 4 and 5, central to the poet’s language and theology. The imagery of weaving both evokes the conventional trope of nature versus human craftsmanship and serves as a self-reference to the poet’s own weaving of various texts and traditions into the poem. The word “dubbed” draws attention to the act of poetic making but at the same time calls into question its truth, suggesting that the vision which the Dreamer “in speche expound” is potentially fabricated with deception. The Dreamer’s frame of reference is consistently limited to man-made artistic works. Through his richly adorned language and highly interwoven sources, the poet is allowing the form of the text itself as a highly wrought art object to suggest the challenges of any linguistic attempt to describe the visual, and to show how rich language is but also how limited and bounded it is.

The Vineyard of “Idel”

Overwhelmed by the visionary landscape, the Dreamer looks beyond the “myry mere” and finds the Pearl-maiden at the bottom of the cliff in it:

More meruayle con my dom adaunt.
I sez bezonde þat myry mere
A crystal clyffe ful relusaunt:
Mony ryal ray con fro hit rere.

¹⁶² See *MED*, “dubben (v.)” 1, 2, 3.

At þe fote þerof þer sete a faunt,
 A mayden of menske, ful debonere;
 Blysnande whyt watz hyr bleaunt;
 I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere. (157–64)

The Pearl-maiden's ambiguous identity as a two-year old "faunt" or a young maiden is one of the unresolved riddles in the *Gawain*-poems. While this ambiguity might be the result of the poem's generic fusion of elegy and courtly love romance, it might also be a trace of influence from Ovid's portrayal of Narcissus as either a boy or a young man ("puer iuvenisque videri") (B.3: 352). This age ambiguity is also retained in *The Rose*, which first refers to Narcissus as "uns damoisiaus" ("bachelor" in *Romaunt*), but later on describes his reflection in the water as a form of an "enfant" ("child" in *Romaunt*).¹⁶³ However, a more thematically significant explanation for this "faunt/mayden" ambiguity in *Pearl* may be that the poet was perhaps playing with the pun of "faunt/font" (fountain) to echo the poem's overarching allusion to Narcissus at the fountain. The Pearl-maiden is not only an image the Dreamer sees in this "mere," but is herself the fountain where he see the image. The Dreamer's mixed feelings of familiarity and strangeness at the sight of the maiden (164–75) also recalls the Ovidian Narcissus' confusion when he tries to figure out what he sees in the water (B.3: 463–7).

The textual implication of the Pearl-maiden both as a mirror image of the Dreamer, and the "myry mere" where he sees her, is rooted in the pictorial tradition of Amant entering the Garden of Deduit (figs. 42–6).

¹⁶³ *The Rose*, lines 1447 and 1496; *Romaunt*, lines 1469 and 1522.



Fig. 42. Lady Idleness opens the Garden for Amant. France, 14th century; *Roman de la Rose*. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. MS 5226, fol. 5v.



Fig. 43. Lady Idleness opens the Garden for Amant. France, 14th Century; *Roman de la Rose*. Bodleian. MS Selden Supra 57, fol. 5v.



Fig. 44. Lady Idleness opens the Garden for Amant, France, 14th century; *Roman de la Rose*. BnF. MS Français 380, fol. 5r.



Fig. 45. Lady Idleness opens the Garden for Amant. France, 14th century; *Roman de la Rose*. Bibliothèque municipale d'Arras. MS 897, fol. 4r.



Fig. 46. Lady Idleness opens the Garden for Amant. France, 14th century; *Roman de la Rose*. BnF. MS Français. 24391, fol. 1r.

In these images, Lady Idleness is shown opening the gate of the Garden for Amant. In some images such as fig. 42, she is depicted as holding a key to the gate. But more often than not, she appears to hold a round mirror in front of Amant, as in figs. 43–5, as if inviting him to look into it. The act of looking replaces the actual movement of entering into the Garden. The mirror not only foreshadows the fountain of Narcissus which Amant is about to see, but visually embodies the whole Garden of Deduit. In fig. 46, Amant's vision is paralleled with the image of Lady Idleness sitting inside a crenellated structure and looking at her own reflection in the mirror while combing her hair. The round shape of the structure itself becomes another mirror in which the Garden, Lady Idleness and her mirror are conflated and contained, as if to suggest that Amant's vision is a gaze into the perilous mirror. This mirror within a mirror connects Amant's gaze with lust, vanity, and idolatry while reminding the readers that they are also looking at a deceptive mirror as the story unfolds itself to them on the manuscript pages.



Fig. 47. The Dreamer and the Pearl-maiden. England, c. 1400; *Pearl*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 38v (42v).



Fig. 48. Narcissus and Echo/Idleness. France, 14th Century. *Roman de la Rose*. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. MS 5226, fol. 12r.

This association of sight with idolatry and idleness may also be felt in the image of the Dreamer and the Pearl-maiden (fig. 47), which has similar composition to the image of Narcissus and Echo/Lady Idleness at the fountain (fig. 48).¹⁶⁴ The image of the Dreamer, however, conveys a different message through the Pearl-maiden's gesture. Whereas Lady Idleness invites Amant to enter the Garden, the Pearl-maiden raises her hands in a prohibitive, disapproving manner in contrast to the Dreamer's eagerness, as if to warn him of the danger that lies in his idle desire for her and in this "myry mere."

When the Dreamer expresses his wish to cross the river to be with the maiden, she discourages him by explaining to him the prerequisites for entering her world through the parable of the vineyard. This parable is often seen as illustrating the poet's orthodox belief in salvation through mercy rather than through good works.¹⁶⁵ But

¹⁶⁴ The caption to this image does not identify the female figure. Most images of Narcissus at the fountain represents him as alone without any human company. In some rare cases, a horse is drawn perhaps to remind the viewer that he was engaged in hunting before he looks into the water. This image of Narcissus with a female figure is not unique but is rarely seen. Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS O.4, fol. 80r offers an image of Narcissus chased by Echo. London, BL, MS Harley 4431, fol. 134r provides a similar image of Narcissus and Echo at the Fountain. It should, then, leave little doubt to identify this female figure as Echo. But earlier in the same manuscript, an identical female figure in the same clothes and hair style appears as Lady Idleness who opens the gate for Amant (see fols. 6v and 5r). As Narcissus and Amant are often pictorially interchangeable in *The Rose* manuscripts, it would be reasonable to say that this female form is representative or evocative of the figure of Lady Idleness. This identification would also correspond to the medieval Ovidian commentary tradition of seeing Narcissus as an example of sins of idleness, vanity and lust.

¹⁶⁵For some critics, it also portrays the labor politics in late fourteenth-century England. Lollards often used this parable to emphasize the contribution of the lower orders of society in contrast to the corruption of the higher members in feudal and ecclesiastical institutions. See Barr, "Pearl—or 'The Jeweller's Tale.'" *ME* 69.1 (2000): 59-79; idem. "Wycliffite Representations of the Third Estate," in Somerset, Havens, and Pitard (eds.), pp. 197-216; idem. *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2001); Mary Raschko, "Rendering the Word: Vernacular Accounts of the Parables in Late Medieval England." Diss. U of North Carolina, 2009, pp. 73-121; Robert W. Ackerman, "The Pearl-maiden and the Penny." *RP* 17 (1964): 615-23. Some critics have associated the *Gawain*-poet with heterodoxy and Wycliffite sentiment. See for example, Carleton Brown, "The Author of *The Pearl*, Considered in Light of his Theological Opinions." *PMLA* 19 (1904): 115-53; Jefferson B. Fletcher, "The Allegory of the *Pearl*." *JEGP* 20 (1921): 1-21; René Wellek, "The *Pearl*." *SE* 4 (1933): 5-33. This line of argument appeared early in the studies of the poet but met with little critical approval, and was often dismissed as unfounded. But with a great amount of studies produced over the last two decades on late-medieval anticlericalism and its profound impact on every aspect of life in the poet's time, the old view of the poet as a conservative orthodox should be reconsidered.

here I would like to examine the idea of idleness evoked through repeated mentions of the word “ydel” in this section in relation to the poem’s context of gaze and desire.

A medieval lover is often portrayed as being shot into his eyes by his love as the result of his sight of the Lady (see, for example below fig. 52). The belief that love finds its way into the lover through idleness is frequently found in medieval literature as a legacy of the classical literary tradition. Christine de Pizan, for example, sees the death of Actaeon as the result of his excessive indulgence in idleness and bodily delight. In *Ovide Moralisé*, the poet warns directly that “idleness leads to lust” (“Quar d’oiseuse entra en luxure”) (B.X: 3732) when he comments on the story of Adonis and Venus. Gullaume de Lorris makes this idea of lust through idleness most explicit by allowing Lady Idleness to open the gate of the Garden of Dedit for Amant (figs. 42–6). In *Sir Gawain*, the crisis of Gawain’s knightly career, too, arises from his idleness in the bedroom scene. In *Remedia Amoris*, the first counsel Ovid provides to heart-broken lovers is to “shun leisure” (“fugias otia prima meis”) (136).¹⁶⁶ The relationship between love, gaze, and idleness is captured in his famous counsel: “Take away leisure and the Cupid’s bow is broken” (“Otia si tollas, periere Cupidinis arcus”) (139).

With these Ovidian texts about idleness in mind, the *Gawain*-poet’s vivid portrayal of the laborers’ toil and emphases on their physical labor in the vineyard might well be seen to evoke Ovid’s counsel to keep oneself busy in *Remedia Amoris*:

You who seek an end of love, love yields to business: be
busy, and you will be safe.[...] Where sloth is, that Boy

¹⁶⁶ References to *Remedia Amoris* are from the Leob edition, Goodle, ed. *The Art of Love, and Other Poems* (Cambridge, 1985).

[Cupid] is wont to follow; he hates the busy: give the empty mind some business to occupy it. There are the courts (“fora,” market places), there are the laws, there are friends for you to protect [...] and the pursuit of husbandry: no care is there but must yield to this. [...] At fixed seasons the countryman picks the ripened grapes, and the vintage flows beneath his naked foot [...] You yourself can plant a shoot in a well-watered garden, you yourself can guide the runnels of gentle water. [...] When once this pleasure begins to charm the mind, on maimed wings Love flutters hopelessly away. (143–200)

With the same elements of the market place, physical labor in the vineyard and the watery garden, the biblical parable about seeking divine love can potentially be reconfigured into a counsel of avoiding erotic love caused by Amor’s fatal bow through re-directing and channeling the lover’s misplaced energy from idle looking to fruitful physical labor. In the Pearl-maiden’s retelling of the parable, the classical garden fuses with the biblical vineyard to create a place of counsel where idleness becomes a portal to idolatrous gaze which must be transcended to reach the well-watered garden where one shuns the worldly idol/idle(ness) of Amor and embraces the divine Love of God.¹⁶⁷

The “Forme Fatale”

The danger and deadly nature of the “myry mere,” which possibly alludes to the “perilous mirror” in *The Rose*, are visually depicted in an image of the Death of Narcissus in a fourteenth-century manuscript of *The Rose*. The *Rose*-artist unconventionally provides a pictorial representation of Narcissus’ death in addition to the image of him looking into the fountain (fig. 49). Instead of transforming into a

¹⁶⁷ The two words are both rendered “idel” in Middle English. See *MED*, “idel, (n).”

flower, Narcissus is depicted as actively embracing the water of the fountain and getting drowned in it. His posture and closed eyes resemble the sleeping Dreamer in fig. 50. The two images of the Dreamer in fig. 50 share their composition with the images in fig. 49, but with the sequence reversed.

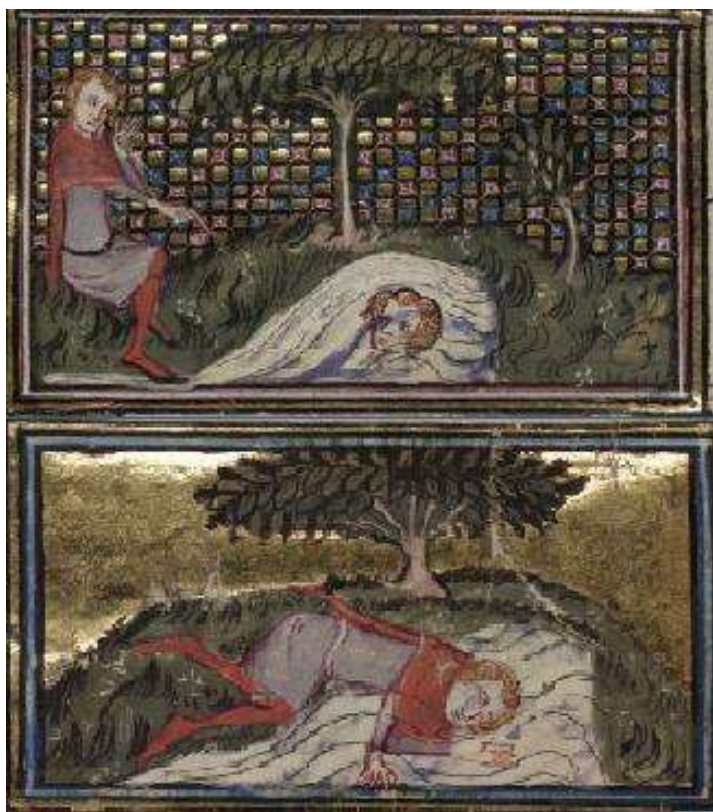


Fig. 49. Narcissus' gaze and death. France, 1348; *Roman de la Rose*. Bodleian. MS Selden Supra 57, fol. 11v.



Fig. 50 Dreamer sleeping and the Dreamer by the stream.

The images of beauty, death, and the fountain are yoked together in the texts of the *Rose* through the word “fin”:

De la fontaine m'apressai,
 Quant ge fui près, si m'abessai
 Por véoir l'iaue qui coroit,
 Et la gravele qui paroît
 Au fons plus clere qu'argens fins,
 De la fontaine c'est la fins,
 Et tout le monde n'ot si bele. (*Rose*, 1531–7)

And doun I loutede for to see
 The clere water in the stoon,
 And eek the gravell, which that shoon
 Down in the botme as silver fyn,
 For of the well this is the fyn:
 In world is noon so cler of hewe. (*Romaunt*, 1554–9)

Both *Rose* and *Romaunt* use word “fin/fyn” to describe the fine quality of silver and the beauty of this fountain as the ultimate example of its kind. The same use of “fin/fyn” also occurs in the Dreamer’s description of his sight of the Pearl-maiden in the “myry mere”:

The more I frayste hyr fayre face,
 Her fygure fyn quen I had fonte,
 Suche gladande glory con to me glace
 As lyttel byfore þerto watz wonte. (169–72)

But the *Gawain*-poet plays with the idea of finality in this “ultimate” fountain and turns its beauty into horror of death. When the Dreamer utters his reluctance to let go of the pearl he has regained—“Now haf I fonte þat I forlete, / Schal I efte forgo hit er euer I fyne?” (327–8)—the maiden’s fine form, his finding her (“fonte”) and death (“fyne”) are associated together to suggest the deadly nature of this beautiful “faunt/fonte,” as well as the consequence of the Dreamer’s Narcissistic gaze. The f-rhymed “word-knot” (fyn/fyfigure/forlete/forgo) echoes another set of f-rhymed words (“flete,” “flote”) in the “erbere” scene to evoke the Dreamer’s flowing desire, but at the same time confines this flow within a form, as if to suggest the self-directed, inward movement of the Dreamer’s erotic flow in this Narcissistic fountain, where man can only find a backwater of death rather than the living water of life.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Gillespie and Ross (1992) provide an insightful reading of the “theological force of th[e] fluid word-knot (fill, fulfill, flow, overflow, beflow, overpass, passover)” (75) in Julian of Norwich’s meditation on the flowing water and Christ’s blood in *Revelation*. Julian of Norwich’s descriptions of

In the Ovidian “Wod-schawez”

The Dancing Doe

The poet’s allusion to Ovid may also be detected in his representation of the Dreamer’s vision as a series of poetic metamorphosis. The theme of transformation is suggested at the beginning of the Dreamer’s vision:

Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;
My body on balke þer bod in sweuen.
My goste is gon in Godez grace,
In auenture þer meruaylez meuen. (61–4)

The separation of his body and soul not only shows the relationship between physical eyes and spiritual insight, but also denotes a process of transformation of his consciousness. This intangible transformation is suggested by the word “meuen” (to occur, to change),¹⁶⁹ which seems to foreshadow how the marvels experienced by the Dreamer are to change him, as suggested by the repeated mentions of his affected heart as he casts his eyes on the “myry mere.” The Dreamer is shown as “caught” by sorrow and grief (“dele,” also pain and torture) which lurk (“denned”) in his heart (49–51). The imagery of a seized heart seems to allude to the well-used Ovidian motif of “the Hunt of Love” in which the hunter becomes the hunted.¹⁷⁰ This Ovidian allusion becomes more palpable when the Dreamer ventures into the visionary land:

So al watz dubbet on dere asyse

divine effusion is an interesting contrast to the poet’s mingling of it with the flow of a debased carnal desire.

¹⁶⁹ See *MED*, “meven (v.).

¹⁷⁰ One relevant example is Chaucer’s *The Book of the Duchess*, in which, having lamented the loss of his Lady White, the melancholy Black Knight is described as “hert-huntyng” (1313) by the dreamer. See Susan Schibanoff, *Chaucer’s Queer Poetics* (Toronto, 2006), pp. 81–2; David Luici, “The Hunt Motif in *The Book of the Duchess*,” *ES* 52 (1971): 309–11. See also below Ch. 5, pp. 302–9 for medieval images of the Hunt of Love, and Gawain’s metamorphosis from the hunting knight in quest of the Green Knight to the hunted in the Bedroom Scene.

þat fryth þer Fortwne forth me ferez
 þe derþe þerof for to deuyse
 Nis no wyȝ worþé þat tone berez. (97–100)

He describes himself as being taken by Fortune into the woods which is “arrayed so entirely splendid a fashion” that he cannot describe it with his tongue. The indescribable beauty of this divine landscape appears as unbearable to his earthly heart:

More of wele watz in þat wyse
 þen I cowþe telle þaȝ I tom hade,
 For vrþely herte myȝt not suffyse
 To þe tenþe dole of þo gladnez glade. (133–6)

The atmosphere of danger, the Dreamer’s fear of the risk of discovery, and his state of mind as an inferior intruding a forbidden space, as noted by Andrew and Waldron in this passage, seem to reinforce a sense of transgression also central to the Ovidian motif of hunting, in which a hunter inadvertently violates the sacred realms of gods and goddesses and suffers for the consequence.¹⁷¹ In this Ovidian atmosphere, something suddenly comes to the Dreamer’s attention, increases his longings, and changes (“meued”) his mind (155–6), as if foreshadowing the metamorphosis he is about to experience in his direct encounter with the divine.

The Dreamer then sees the Pearl-maiden. In contrast to his overflowing longings to see, the Dreamer’s speaking ability is remarkably curtailed at the sight of her:

To calle hyr lyste con me enchace,
 Bot baysment gef myn hert a brunt.
 I sez hyr in so strange a place—

¹⁷¹Andrew and Waldron (eds.), p. 61, note to line 149–54. They see the Dreamer as “a social inferior trespassing in the grounds of a castle.” The difference of social class which they observe in this stanza would also account for the hierarchy between gods and human beings.

Such a burre myze make myn herte blunt. (173–6)

He is urged on by a desire to speak (the literal meaning of “enchace” is, of course, to engage in hunting), but his heart is attacked (“brunt”) by an overwhelming feeling of “baysment” (confusion) resulting from his sight of the maiden, which appears as a “burre” (assault) that stuns him.¹⁷² Attention is immediately drawn to the maiden’s beautiful shape, firstly her face (“vysayge”):

Penne verez ho vp her fayre frount,
 Hyr vysayge whyt as playn yuore:
 Pat stonge myn hert ful stray atount
 And euer þe lenger, þe more and more. (177–80)

The maiden’s “visage” implicitly invoke the act of looking (“visage”, to stare), as if suggesting the stunning sight of her. Her impeccable body is then described:

Bot a wonder perle withouten wemme
 Inmyddez hyr breste watz sette so sure;
 A mannez dom mozt dryzly demme
 Er mynde mozt malte in hit mesure.
 I hope no tong mozt endure
 No saverly saghe say of þat syzt. (221–6)

The pure, virgin-like (withouten wemme) body of the maiden seems to reinforce the transgressive nature of the Dreamer’s sight. The motif of Fortune, the beautifully adorned woods, and a sacred female body violated by male gaze together seem to associate the Dreamer with one of the Ovidian hunters, Actaeon, who, having wandered into the woods, inadvertently sees the chaste goddess, Diana, bathing, and

¹⁷² The word “baysment” is coined by the poet and strongly recalls the word “bai (n.1),” which is closely related to hunting. For the poet’s vocabulary of hunting, see Putter, “The ways and Words of the Hunt: Notes on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Master of Game*, *Sir Tristrem*, *Pearl*, and *Saint Erkenwald*.” *ChauR* 40.4 (2006): 354–85.

is transformed into a hart as a punishment. In *Pearl*, the consequence of such a sight is described as a loss of speech. The imagery of an incapable tongue (no tong mozt endure) echoes the Dreamer's closed mouth when he ventures into the wood:

More þen me lyste my drede aros:
I stod ful styлле and dorste not calle;
Wyth yʒen open and mouth ful clos
I stod as hende as hauk in halle. (181–4)

The mixed feeling of desire and dread renders the Dreamer as quiet as a hawk. His loss of speech is represented as an insufficient tongue, and here as a mouth closed. The emphasis on the linguistic disability seems to recall the reason why Diana transforms Actaeon into a hart—to deprive him of his ability to speak: “Nunc tibi me posito visam velamine nares, sit poteris narrare, licet!” (“Now you are free to tell that you have seen me all unrobed—if you can tell.”) (B.3: 192–3). Actaeon's punishment results from Diana's concern over her own naked image being “narrated,” or transformed into text.¹⁷³ Through the Ovidian motif of hunting and this possible allusion to Actaeon, the poet incorporates Ovid's concern with language and poetry-making into the poem, but rather than admitting their ability to uncover truth as Ovid/Diana does, the poet cites Ovid only to subvert him and to deny language and writing as an effective means of communication. Later, in the Dreamer's debates with the Pearl-maiden, similar concerns with speaking are also keenly felt through the former's fear of speaking wrongly and his repeated apology for his “spornand in spell” (363). In the maiden's account, the Dreamer's obsessive reiterations of his “lesse” grief and anger prevent him from seeing the “mo” (greater) (339–40), and

¹⁷³ Salzman-Mitchell discusses the meta-poetic sense of the verb “narrare,” suggesting that Ovid's description of Diana's fear of her image being put down in words, and the subsequent punishment of Actaeon are an implicit self-reference to the cause of his own exile. See Salzman-Mitchell (2005), p. 50.

reduce him into a “dancing doe” (345), which struggles and brays out in vain and has nowhere to run (346–7), trapped by his own misplaced desire and misuse of the tongue.¹⁷⁴

The Narcissistic Union

The attention drawn to the Pearl-maiden’s facial features (“fayre frount,” “vysayge,”) also seems to invite comparison with Narcissus’ sight of his own image in *The Rose*:

Si vit en l’iaue clere et nete
 Son vis, son nes, et son bouchete
 Et cis maintenant s’esbahi. (1491–3)

[Seen in the clear and fresh water were his face, his nose, and his mouth, he was thereof astounded.]

In *Romaunt*, however, the things Narcissus sees in the water undergo a slight but significant change of emphasis: “And in the water anoon was seene / his nose, his mouth, his yen sheene” (1517–8). Instead of his countenance (“vis”), our attention is drawn specifically to Narcissus’ eyes, as if to imply this mirror image’s ability to look back and its petrifying power. In a similar emphasis, the *Gawain*-poet draws attention to the maiden’s “vysayge” and through the word’s meaning as a verb, “to stare,”¹⁷⁵ suggests her eyes which penetrate the Dreamer’s heart (179). The Pearl-maiden’s ivory white image recalls Ovid’s description of Narcissus as an artistic form made of Parian marble (“ut e Pario formatum marmore signum”) when he looks at his own reflection in the water. When he looks at the image, he himself is transformed into one. Both Narcissus and the Dreamer are petrified by their own gaze, which ricochets

¹⁷⁴ Reichardt discusses the simile of “doe” and its biblical significance, seeing it as a sign of “the Dreamer’s misunderstanding of adverse fortune” and “maladjustment to the experience of loss” in “Animal Similes,” in Blanch, Miller, and Wasserman (eds.), pp.17–29, p. 21.

¹⁷⁵ When used as a verb, it means to look intensively, to stare. See *MED*, “visagen (v).”

off the object they see and becomes a self-inflicted wound on the looker.¹⁷⁶

The Dreamer's obsessive desire to be with the maiden, which is first expressed through the anxiety in his poignant complaint against their separation: "Fro we in twynne wern towen and twayned, / I haf ben a joylez juelere" (250–51). The twinning word-knot reinforces the Narcissus subtext by implying the dreamer and the Pearl-maiden as two/twin, inviting the reader to see her as a mirror image of the Dreamer, while at the same time rebuffing such an identification through the image of separation. The Dreamer's complaint also recalls Narcissus' speech to his own reflection: "Why, O peerless youth, do you elude me? Or whither do you go when I strive to reach you?" (B.3:454–5). Narcissus' question to his own image is followed by the painful realization of his situation:

When I have smiled, you smile back; and I have often seen
tears, when I weep, on your cheeks. My becks you answer
with your nod; and, as I suspect from the movement of your
sweet lips, you answer my words as well, but words which
do not reach my ear.—oh, I am he! I have felt it, I know now
my own image. I burn with love of my own self. [...] Shall I
be wooed, or woo? Why woo at all? What I desire, I have;
the very abundance of my riches beggars me. Oh, that I
might be parted from my own body! And, strange prayer for
a lover, I would that what I love were absent from me!

(B.3.446–65)

The oneness of Narcissus and his image becomes the ultimate barrier of the consummation of his desire. Contrary to Narcissus' realization of the need to separate, the Dreamer continues to seek harmony between himself and the maiden when she contradicts his words in their debate: "And quen we departed, we wern at on; / God

¹⁷⁶ I am indebted to Dr Nicholas Perkins for the idea of ricocheting.

forbade we be now wrothe. / We meten so selden by stok or ston.” (378–80). The Dreamer points out that when they were separated, they did not have the chance to argue, and therefore enjoyed a harmony of opinions. His remarks reveal an ironical insight that the oneness between him and the Pearl-maiden exists only on account of her absence. Physical separation here becomes a prerequisite for spiritual union. The Dreamer, however, expresses this insight only unwittingly, for he immediately grounds his union with the Pearl-maiden in strictly physical locations evoked by the images of “stok” and stone.¹⁷⁷ The phrase “stok or ston” was also frequently used as a derogatory term by late-medieval iconoclasts, especially in Lollard texts, to refer to man-made devotional images and to point out their lack of significance.

An early fifteenth-century image of Narcissus (fig. 51) provides a visual comparison to the Dreamer’s union with the maiden. In this unusual image, rather than looking at himself in the water, Narcissus is shown embracing a female figure by a tree in which the bust of Amor is depicted. It is Amor, not Narcissus, who is looking at his own reflection in the fountain.

¹⁷⁷ The word “stok” as a noun can mean “a tree” or a “location.” See *MED*, “stok (n.),” “stok(e) (n.)”



Fig. 51. Narcissus at the fountain. France, c. 1405; *Roman de la Rose*. Morgan. MS M. 245, fol. 11r

Amor's gaze at himself parallels the intensive gaze between the couple, as if to suggest the auto-erotic nature of their desire. The embracing couple by the tree in the woods interestingly recalls the Dreamer's wishful union with the maiden by the tree and stock, with this idolatrous desire finding its powerful visualization in Love's self-regard in this image.

In contrast to Narcissus' painful realization, the Dreamer's longing for oneness does not come with an epiphany of the need to separate and differentiate, but develops into a rigid desire to be physically with the maiden inside this "myry mere":

Now haf I fonde hyt, I schal ma feste,

And wony with hyt in schyr wod-schawez,
 And loue my Lorde and al His lawez
 Pat hatz me brozt þys blys ner. (283–6)

The fixation of desire is conveyed through the Dreamer's attempt to solidify the watery world into tangible "wod-schawez," which is implicitly grounded in Ovidian woods and groves. Inside the "wod-schawez," the maiden's physical presence becomes a prerequisite for divine bliss, and access to God is through the possession of a tangible image. The Pearl-maiden immediately points out that the Dreamer's wish to live with her is unrealistic:

Pou says þou trawez me in þis dene
 Bycawse þou may with yzen me se;
 Anoper, þou says in þys countré
 Pysself schal won with me ryzt here[.] (295–8)

When she reproaches the Dreamer for believing that she actually exists in the "wod-schawez" where he sees her, she is not only accusing him of his foolish trust in his eyes, but perhaps also his reliance on tangible forms.

The Pygmalionesque "World Wode"

The Dreamer's idolatrous obsession with forms in this "worlde wode" (743) is suggested by his comparison of the maiden to the work of Pygmalion. The Dreamer claims that her figure surpasses Nature, and that Aristotle would not be able to describe her "propertez" in words (747–53). The maiden's "property" suggests her ambiguity as an object of gaze by drawing attention simultaneously to her outward physicality and inward significance through the word's overlapping sense of "worldly possession," "nature," and "meaning."¹⁷⁸ The Dreamer's gaze is here explicitly

¹⁷⁸ See *MED*, "proprete (n.)," esp. 2(c), "a thing belonging or pertaining to an individual and thus

identified with Pygmalion, echoing his description of the maiden with a piece of cut gold (165). His delight in regaining the Pearl-maiden in the overarching context of Narcissus recalls Pygmalion's self-comparison with Narcissus in *The Rose*:

“But I do not love too foolishly, for, if writing does not lie, many have loved more dementedly. Didn't Narcissus, long ago in the branched forest, [...] fall in love with his own face [...] in the clear, pure fountain? [...] according to the story, which is still well-remembered [...]. Thus I am in any case less of a fool, for, when I wish, I go to this image and take it, embrace it, and kiss it; I can thus better endure my torment. But Narcissus could not possess what he saw in the fountain.¹⁷⁹ (20859–88)

In a similar way as the Dreamer concentrates his attention on the maiden's physical form and appearance, and derives his comfort solely from her actual presence, Pygmalion delights and takes pride in the tangibility of the image he creates. His complacency and lack of self-awareness reflects the Dreamer's foolish belief in what he sees in this deceptive “myry mere.” The poet's subsequent mention of Aristotle not only points out the elusive nature of the Pearl-maiden, and the vainness of language in describing it, but may have served as an intertextual reference to Nature's explanation of the properties of mirrors and glasses in *The Rose* (18153–298). She points out that mirrors can reverse, stretch or multiply the images in them according to the rays absorbed by the objects reflected, and so can deceive the observer. Nature then cites Aristotle to support her view:

“Aristotle himself bears witness. [...] A certain man, he tells, was sick, and his disease had very much weakened his sight. The atmosphere was dark and troubled, and because of these

separating him from God.”

¹⁷⁹ Modern English translations are from Charles Dahlberg, trans. *The Romance of the Rose* (Hanover, 1986).

two conditions he saw his face in the air in front of him, going from place to place. [...] [T]hings that are far apart from each other seem to be closely joined; [...] one thing seem[s] to be two, or three six, or four eight, if one wants to amuse himself with such sights. (18197–230)

Aristotle is cited as an authority on medieval optical theories. His report of a clinical case of diseased eyes which cause one to constantly see the illusion of oneself is interestingly reminiscent of the Dreamer's Narcissistic gaze at the maiden as a kind of self-reflection. The syndrome of seeing multiplying images or mistaking separated images for one also provides a comic parallel to the Dreamer's sight of multiple maidens in the heavenly procession, and his obsessive thinking of whether he and the maiden are united or separated in one, twin, or two. Contrary to what some critics have believed, the poet's references to Pygmalion and Aristotle may be more than instances of casual name-droppings. They may have operated on a deeper and more significant level as important intertextual links to bring in various literary conventions and scientific theories to illustrate the Dreamer's faulty perception of his own situation, and the inherent danger in this "myry mere."

The Dreamer's idolatrous, Ovidian "wod-schawez" reveal the self-confining and auto-directed nature of his Narcissistic desire through its imagery of enclosure. Later, when the maiden advises the Dreamer to forsake the "worlde wode" (mad world) (743) before he can cross the river, the "wod-schawez" are explicitly equated with a world of encumbrance in which desire is eternally fixated by an unmediated gaze on the literal and the tangible. When the poet makes the Dreamer mourn for his locked pearl at the beginning of the poem:

A deuely dele in my hert denned,

Þaʒ resound sette myseluen saʒt.
 I playned my perle þat þer watz panned,
 Wyth fyrce skyllez þat faste faʒt.
 Þaʒ kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned,
 My wreched wylle in wo ay wraʒte. (51–6)

The poet is perhaps also mourning for man's foolish endeavor to give shape to the ineffable by trying to locate it within human "skyllez" (reason, knowledge). Such attempts at figuring out the divine through what one sees inevitably end up in confining oneself to the things seen.

The Locked Rose and the Mischosen Tale

The theme of seeing, writing, and the efficacy of language is further explored in the metaphor of a rose when the maiden reproaches the Dreamer for his grief over the lost and buried pearl:

‘Sir, ʒe haf your tale mysetente,
 To say your perle is al awaye,
 Þat is in cofer so comly clente
 As in þis gardyn gracios gaye,
 Hereinne to lenge for euer and play, (257–61)
 [...]

Me þynk þe put in a mad porpose,
 And busyez þe aboute a raysoun bref;
 For þat þou lestez watz bot a rose
 Þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef;
 Now þruʒ kynde of þe kyste þat hyt con close
 To a perle of prys hit is put in pref. (267–72)

The maiden points out that in his account of the lost pearl, the Dreamer has "mysetente" (misunderstood, distorted, mischosen) his "tale," telling him that what he has lost is simply a rose wrongly treasured as a precious pearl in a casket. In her

metaphor of a locked rose, the maiden seems to implicitly compare the Dreamer's fixated desire for the pearl with Amant's obsession with the rose enclosed in the garden, as if suggesting the Dreamer's desire as a similarly foolish and idolatrous enshrinement of her.



Fig. 52. Amor shoots Amant. France, c.1440; *Roman de la Rose*. Philadelphia Museum of Art. MS 1945-65-3, fol. 14r.

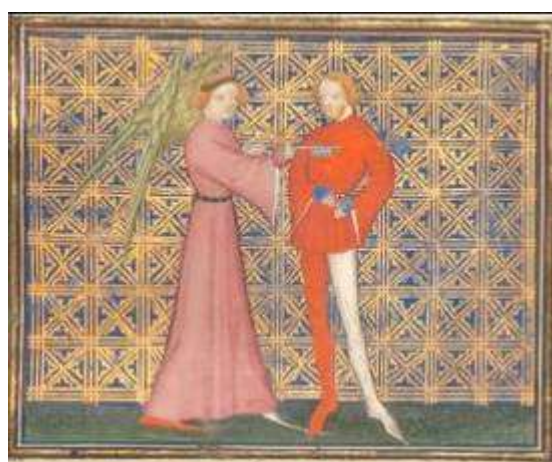


Fig. 53. Amor locks Amant's heart. France, c. 1400; *Roman de la Rose*. BnF. MS Français 380, fol. 14v.

The locked rose echoes the earlier image of the “penned” pearl which shows man's propensity to give shape to their desire and the vainness of such attempts. This explicit mention of a rose in the poem's context of jewelry and enclosure invites comparison with Amor locking Amant's heart in *Romaunt* (1681–2100). Amant sees a rosebud which pleases him more than any other rose. Right at this same moment, Amor shoots him with five arrows, including “Beaute” and “Swete-lokyng”:

The stronge bowe that was so tough,
 And shet att me so wondir smerte
 That thorough myn ye unto myn herte
 The takel smot, and depe it wente. (1726–9)

Amant's desire for the rose is represented as an arrow piercing through his eyes into his heart, suggesting the self-inflicted pain of his "swete-lokyng" (fig. 52). At first Amant tries to flee, but the pain caused by these arrows is so great that he finally submits himself to Amor in a ceremonial gesture of letting him lock his heart with a key (fig. 53):

Thanne of his awmener he drough
 A litell key, fetys ynowgh,
 Which was of gold polissed clere,
 And seide to me, "With this key heere
 Thyn herte to me now wole I shette.
 For all my jowelles, loke and knette,
 I bynde undir this litel keye,
 That no wight may carie aweye.
 This keye is full of gret poeste."
 With which anoon he touchide me
 Undir the side full softely,
 That he myn herte sodeynly
 Without anoy hadde spered,
 That yit right nought it hath me dered. (2087–100)

Both in the text and the image, the key becomes a metaphorical extension of the arrow, piercing into Amant's heart to complete the journey of love from his eyes into his body. His total surrender to Amor is depicted as being locked into Amor's jewelry box. Amant's idolatrous gaze petrifies himself into a lifeless jewel. His body visually becomes a coffer in which his pierced heart is locked by his self-inflicted gaze, and is transformed into a site where desire is perpetually fixated on the tangible "beaute" and "swete-lokyng."

The *Gawain*-poet visualizes the Dreamer's heart fixated on his worldly care in a

similar image of enclosure through the simile of a dancing doe, which is trapped in his own sorrow and agony, and loses sight of greater things (345–7). Through repeated imagery of locking in the Dreamer’s vision, the poet shows that his gaze upon the Pearl-maiden and his corporeal perspective cannot transcend her form. The maiden’s “property” is thus buried and “so clad in clot” of the Dreamer’s literal understanding. In her allusion to *The Rose*, the maiden seems to suggest that the Dreamer’s excessive longings and mourning for the enclosed pearl constitute a foolish engagement with the wrong kind of texts and a “mad” misreading of the “perle of prys” (267–72), which at this point still remains a worldly jewel to the Dreamer. Having pointed out his mischosen “tale,” the maiden, then, tries to direct his misplaced eyes from the idolatrous “rose” and buried pearl to the scriptural Pearl of Great Price through a lengthy retelling of biblical parables and psalms, in which the importance of reading rightly (709–10) is emphasized.

The Bitten Apple and Biting Prayers

The allusion to the stories of Narcissus and Actaeon suggests that representing the ineffable is not only impossible, but also fundamentally transgressive. The poet makes this concept of transgression explicit in describing the Dreamer’s loss as a “myss”:

Thenne demed I to þat damyselle:
 ‘Ne worþe no wrathþe vnto my Lorde,
 If rapely I raue, spornande in spelle:
 My herte watz al wyth mysse remorde,
 As wallande water gotz out of welle.
 I do me ay in Hys myserecorde.
 Rebuke me neuer with wordez felle,
 Þaʒ I forloyne, my dere endorde.’ (362–8).

The word “myss” is often read as “a sense of loss” at the expense of its religious

meanings of “sin,” “misdeed,” “offence,”¹⁸⁰ which is suggested by the Dreamer’s apology to the maiden for his rash and stuttered attempt at speaking in front of such a semi-divine figure. His heart is depicted as a fountain brimful with regrets for transgression, echoing his springing desire for the pearl at the beginning of the poem. The poet describes the Dreamer’s mistake as one of going astray (“forloyne”).¹⁸¹ The hunting imagery recalls the poem’s implicit allusion to Actaeon and his “error” of wandering eyes in *Metamorphoses*. The Dreamer’s sinful, idolatrous gaze may have been suggested by his reference to the Pearl-maiden as his “dere endorde.”¹⁸² The gold-adorned shape of this “dere” one not only suggests the beautiful form of the maiden, but may have also implicitly associated her with the biblical golden calf which Aaron makes for the Israelites to be worshipped as a surrogate image of the invisible God, echoing the Dreamer’s self-comparison to Pygmalion. Images of classical and biblical idolaters are yoked together in the Dreamer, whose heart, too, becomes both a site of conflicting desires and a victim of them.

The Pearl-maiden rebukes the Dreamer for believing nothing but what he sees, and points out this is a sin of pride (“sorquydryze”), which will cause his flesh to die (301–9). This unguarded gaze is further linked to man’s fall:

For hit watz forgarte at Paradys greue;
Oure 3orefader hit con myssezeme.
Pur3 drwry deth boz vch man dreue. (321–4).

¹⁸⁰ See *MED*, “mis (n.)” Andrew and Waldron did not give a note to this line.

¹⁸¹ As a noun, “forloine” refers to “the signal which a hunter blows upon his horn when he has become separated from the hounds, or from the rest of the hunt.” For poet’s idiosyncratic use of this word and the hunting image of the verb “rebuke,” see Putter (2006), pp. 372–3.

¹⁸² The phrase is usually glossed as “adored one.” But Gert Rønberg has convincingly argued that the word “endorde” derives from Old French “endorer,” which means “to invest with gold, or a gold-like quality.” See “A Note on Endorde in *Pearl*.” *ES* 57 (1976): 198–9; Andrew and Waldron (eds.), p. 72, note to 368. The maiden as gold adorned echoes her figure as a piece of cut gold in line 165.

Paradise was lost to mankind because of Adam's neglect and oversight ("myssezeme").¹⁸³ The maiden later provides another brief account of the fall of man in which the sin is visualized as apple-eating:

'Inoze is knawnen þat maykyn grete
 Fyrste watz wrozt to blysse parfyt.
 Oure forme fader hit con forfete
 Þurȝ an apple þat he vpon con byte;
 Al wer we dampned for þat mete
 To dyze in doel out of delyt
 And syþen wende to helle hete,
 Perinne to won withoute respyt. (637–44)

In the Pearl-maiden's account, men's sin appears as the result of their failure to guard and use their tongue properly.¹⁸⁴ Adam's bodily transgression, then, condemns ("damped") and drowns mankind. The imagery of apple-biting recalls the maiden's advice to the Dreamer as a trapped doe that he should seek divine salvation through prayers, which will "Hys pyté byte" ("penetrate His mercy") (355), and deliver him out of his plight. Adam's bite of the apple is to be remedied by a bite of the Lamb through prayer and Mass. When the maiden later advises the Dreamer to "look on book" and "read correctly" (709–10) so as to be reminded of Christ as the source of happiness and bliss (711–3), she is recommending him to channel his idolatrous and gluttonous desire into a spiritual appetite, and offering him, through intellectual consumption of the vellum sheets of scriptures, the nourishing meat of the Lamb as an alternative to his lost Pearl and the poisonous "mete" of the apple (641).

¹⁸³ Andrew and Waldron translate "myssezeme" as "fail to guard" based on the meanings of the verb "yemen," which include "to reserve," "to guard," and also "to pay attention," and "to look carefully."

¹⁸⁴ The autoerotic nature of idolatry and looking is discussed in more detail in below Ch. 3, pp. 160–94.

Through the metaphor of drowning, the images of Adam and Narcissus are yoked together on the figure of the Dreamer. The poem's implicit allusion to Actaeon, whose mislooking is represented by Ovid as an outcome of his grandfather's unmannered gaze,¹⁸⁵ not only suggests the Dreamer's gaze as transgressive, but links it with the original sin as the result of man's failure to guard their bodily senses and their overbearing desire to know and to see that which is beyond their reach. Mankind thus falls from the Paradise. And their fallen state is constantly suggested by the poet through the Dreamer's metaphoric transformation into different kinds of animals in his encounter with the divine: a hawk (184), a doe (345), and a quail (1085). It is worth noting that, as the poem's narrative develops, the animals to which the Dreamer is compared gradually move downward on the moral scale: from a meek hawk that is often a symbol of Christ, to a dancing, and potentially idolatrous deer, finally to a gullible, feeble-minded quail, which is often contrasted with a hawk in medieval bestiaries,¹⁸⁶ as if to suggest that the Dreamer's body is increasingly disfigured by his waxing idolatrous longings as man's body is disfigured by sin, and to show men's automatically lower state in comparison to God's, and the inevitable need of (self-)debasement in the face of the divine to avoid repeating Adam's error of "sorqudryze."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ See above Ch. 1, p. 64–65.

¹⁸⁶ In medieval bestiaries, quails are known as inedible meat because they like to eat poisonous seeds. They are easily caught by traps and so are often allegorized as Christians who are easily tempted by sins. See Reichardt (1991), p. 22. The quail's susceptibility to worldly attractions and poisoned meat is an apposite image for the earthbound Dreamer.

¹⁸⁷ I am grateful to Professor Ad Putter for the point that metamorphoses in the poet's works are potentially relevant to the thesis' discussion of the poet's overarching concept of sin and humility.

Looking Across at the Biblical Heaven

The Two Jerusalems

Having created a hybrid vineyard of salvation, the Pearl-maiden directs the Dreamer's gaze to the heavenly city and explains to him how to see rightly with the example of the two Jerusalems:

‘That mote þou menez in Judy londe,’
 Pat specyal spyce þen to me spakk,
 ‘Þat is þe cyté þat þe Lombe con fonde
 To soffer inne sor for manez sake,
 Þe olde Jerusalem to vnderstonde,
 For þere þe olde gulte watz don to slake.
 Bot þe nwe, þat lyzt of Godez sonde,
 Þe apostel in Apocalyppce in theme con take.
 Þe Lompe þer wythouten spottez blake
 Hatz feryed þyder Hys fayre flote;
 And as Hys flok is wythouten flake,
 So is Hys mote wythouten moote.’ (937–48)

The Old Jerusalem is evoked as a physical place, a “mote,” filled with memory of the past. Its witness of Christ's suffering and man's guilt pinpoints the city's historicity and physicality. Contrary to the Old Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem is as pure as its dweller, the Lamb without “mote,” and so is itself “a mote wythouten moote:” not only a spotless city, but also a city without being a city, and so a city free of any worldly encumbrances. The word “mote” draws attention to the tangible form of the city and its intangible quality at the same time, which reminds readers of Christ's dual nature by being a human and the Word Incarnate, and associates him with the “motelez” Pear-maiden (961), who also possesses a dual nature by being a worldly pearl and the spiritual Pearl of Great Price. The Pearl-maiden further emphasizes the

importance of distinguishing between the two Jerusalems:

‘Of motez two to carpe clene,
 And Jerusalem hyze boþe nawþeles—
 Pat nys to yow no more to mene
 Bot “ceté of God” oþer “syzt of pes”—
 In þat on oure pes watz mad at ene;
 With payne to suffer þe Lombe hit chese;
 In þat oþer is nozt bot pes to glene
 Pat ay schal laste wythouten reles.
 Pat is þe borz þat we to pres
 Fro þat oure flesh be layd to rote,
 Per glory and blysse schal euer ences
 To þe meyny þat is wythouten mote.’ (949–60)

The Old Jerusalem exists with a vivid memory of sin and suffering. The city and its concrete form becomes a tangible commemoration of the peace that was “made” by Christ’s suffering. The New Jerusalem, however, is “nozt bot pes.” Its essential abstractness contrasts with the corporeality commemorated in the Old Jerusalem. Its intangibility is represented as a see-through transparency: “Þurz woze and won my lokyng zede / For sotyle cler nozt lette no syzt” (1049–50). This vision of the New Jerusalem happens at the same time with the quiet disappearance of the Pearl-maiden in the Dreamer’s sight, replacing the latter to become the focus of his eyes. The poet seems to suggest the mediatory form of the maiden must be transcended so that Christ the Lamb can be seen through this “motelez may” (maiden) so meek and mild (961).¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ In the manuscript, the word “Motelez” receives a decorated initial, which Andrew and Waldron see as the result of the scribe mistaking this stanza for the beginning of a new section, p. 100, note to line 961. It is notable, however, that this scribal emphasis on “motelez” maiden coincides with her disappearance in the Dreamer’s vision. The Dreamer’s (unknowing) recognition of the “moteless” quality of the maiden at this point indicates a change in his formerly earthbound perspective which corresponds with his subsequent ability to see the heavenly city.

The Silence of the Lamb

Instead of the peaceful Lamb described in the Revelation, a wounded lamb appears in the Dreamer's vision:

His lokez symple, Hymself so gent.
 Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse
 Anende Hys hert, þurȝ hyde torente.
 Of His quyte side His blod outsprent. (1134–7)

The lamb's wound is described in vivid detail, wet with blood gushing forth from his heart and visually conflated with the images of Narcissus' fountain and the Dreamer's "myry mere." This image of the wounded Lamb parallels the bleeding rood which the Pearl-maiden describes as the remedy for Adam's sin, which drowned mankind:

Ryche blod ran on rode so roghe,
 And wynne water; þen, at þat plyt,
 Þe grace of God wex gret innoghe.
 'Innoghe þer wax out of þat welle,
 Blod and water of brode wounde.
 Þe blod vus boȝt fro bale of hell,
 And delyuered vus of þe deth secounde;
 Þe water is baptem, þe soþe to telle,
 Þat folȝed þe glayue so grimly grounde,
 Þat waschez away þe gyltez felle
 Þat Adam wyth inne deth vus drounde. (646–56)

The bleeding rood appears as a "welle" where water flows from the wound caused by the shaft. Through the penetrating, idolatrous gaze of Adam, men are dampened and drowned in the Stygian pool of Narcissus. But by the spear endured by Christ on the rood, men are cleansed and arise from God's water of baptism. The maiden retells Isaiah's account of the Lamb's death in lines 795–804:

‘My Lombe, my Lorde, my dere Jeulle,
 My Joy, my Blys, my Lemman fre—
 Þe profete Ysaye of Hym con melle
 Pitously of Hys debonerté:
 “Þat glorious Gyltlez þat mon con quelle
 Withouten any sake of felonye,
 As a schep to þe slaze þer lad watz He,
 And, as lombe þat clypper in hande nem,
 So closed He Hys mouth fro vch query,
 Quen Juez Hym jugged in Jerusalem.”

Out of meekness, the Lamb meets his death submissively with his mouth closed, silent of any complaints. The lamb’s closed mouth echoes the Dreamer’s pierced heart and “mouth ful clos” in front of the maiden, whilst contrasting with him as a doe bray out its agony. The allusion to Actaeon seems to lurk behind the Dreamer’s vision of the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem (1045–150). The poet draws on the scripture’s passing mention of the moon in Revelation 21 and develops it into the overarching imagery in this section through the concatenation word, “mone,” transforming the planetary symbol of the pagan Goddess Diana into a sign of divine glory which bedazzles the Dreamer:

Anvnder mone so gret merwayle
 No fleschly hert ne myzt endeure
 As quen I blusched vpon þat baly,
 So ferly þerof watz þe fasure.
 I stod as style as dased qayle
 For ferly of þat frech fygure[.] (1081–6)

The Dreamer again appears as a fleshly heart which is overwhelmed and petrified by the sight of the “frelich fygure” (1086) and the “bone” (1090) of the heavenly city, and subsequently loses his life under the moon (1092). The poet then describes the

Dreamer's divine enrapture through the concatenation word of lines 1093–164, “delyt,” whose double sense of delight and desire also seems to echo the allegorical reading of Actaeon's death as a consequence of idolatrous indulgence in bodily delights.¹⁸⁹

The Dreamer's “delyt” culminates in his sight of the bleeding Lamb which appears as “simple” and “gentle” (1134). The idle pleasure inside the idolatrous woods which kills the hart is transformed into an idyllic delight of salvation flowing out of the wounds of the Lamb. The Lamb's bleeding heart contrasts with the Dreamer's swollen, suppurating breast (“breste in bale”) (18) pierced by “luf-daungere” at the beginning of the poem. The flowing “sange” (song) (19) that lulls the Dreamer into the visionary landscape of the idolatrous woods now becomes the sanguine fluid flowing out of the sacred wound. The Ovidian hart which is stunned and penetrated by his own overbearing, transgressive gaze is now replaced by the meek, salvific Lamb of God, the sight of which redeems the former and releases (“delyuered”) (652) his locked heart from the idolatrous well of death into the baptismal fountain of life inside the Lamb's bleeding heart. The classical hart's inability to speak as a result of foolish pride is remedied by the biblical Lamb's voluntary silence stemming from humility. The dimmed eyes of the Dreamer/Narcissus are enlightened by the light of the Lamb/lamp (1050).

¹⁸⁹ See above Ch. 1, pp. 64–5.

Between Drowning Idolatry and Spiritual Dryness

The Ambiguous Redemption

The Dreamer's heavenly "delyt," which starts with the visual disappearance of the Pearl-maiden, falls back into a carnal desire when the figure of the Pearl-maiden reappears in his sight. The Dreamer sees her in the crowd of the Lamb and suddenly recalls his "little queen" who he believes ("I wende") had stood beside him in the "myry mere" (1145–8). The maiden is again evoked by her physicality. The multiple images of maidens which the Dreamer sees recall Aristotle's account of a syndrome caused by eyes dimmed by disease. When the Pearl-maiden again transforms from the spiritual Pearl of Great Price back into the physical pearl in his sight, the Dreamer embarks on a process of Narcissistic regression. His flooding desire fills his eyes and ear. The formerly mind-blowing ("blonten") sight now becomes mind-dissolving ("malte") and causes the Dreamer to plunge into the "myry mere" (1159–60) and embrace his death as Narcissus in fig. 49 does.

It is at this moment that the Dreamer is awakened from his dream ("out of þat caste I watz becalt") (1161), and reflects on his own act of straying ("astraye"). In his self-reflection (1189–200), he regrets having yearned for more than he was given, and not having yielded ("bente") himself to the will of God. The poet explicitly attributes the Dreamer's straying to his overweening desire to see, associating him with the sin of pride that yokes biblical forefathers and Ovidian idolaters alike under the category of "mad strivers" (1200), who are condemned for their desire to "proferen" (reach) beyond God's pleasure. The poet draws attention to the theme of poetic making through the verb's overlapping sense of "to utter a speech, prayer" and "to publish a narrative" to imply that representing the divine in words is itself a rivalry with God.

When he represents the Dreamer's rash embrace of water as a kind of artistic creation resulting from one's pride, he is perhaps also making a meta-poetic comment on his own "rhetorical arrogance" in attempting to express the divine in words.¹⁹⁰

The *Gawain*-poet allows the Dreamer to repeat, but not transcend the experience of Narcissus. However, he does not condemn him eternally to the Stygian pool as Ovid has. Instead, the poet offers the Dreamer a way out by awakening him from the dream just at the moment when he is going to lock himself and drown in the petrifying "mere."



Fig. 54. Amant approaching the Rose. France, 14th century; *Roman de la Rose*. Elizabeth J. and James E. Ferrell Collection. MS Ferrell Rose, fol.15r.



Fig. 55. The Heavenly Jerusalem. *Pearl*. England, c. 1400. *Pearl*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 38v (42v).

The poet's sympathetic attitude may also be detected in the miniature of the New

¹⁹⁰ In her discussion of the use of language in *Pearl*, Schotter argues that the maiden's account of the vineyard parable shows the insignificance of linguistic facility from a divine perspective, and that the Dreamer's insistence on the "efficacy of language is very like the young Augustine in rhetorical arrogance." See Schotter (1984), p. 32.

Jerusalem (fig. 55) through its comparison to the image of Amant approaching the rose (fig. 54). In both images, Amant and Fair Welcoming, the Dreamer and the Pearl-maiden are shown as standing on the opposite sides of a boundary between them, the former separated by the wall of the garden and the latter by a river. Both Fair Welcoming and the Pearl-maiden appear as wearing a similar white robe girded by a yellow belt with draping sleeves, which reflect contemporary fashion style. However, whereas Fair Welcoming holds Amant's hand to help him join with the rose in the garden, the Pearl-maiden stretches out her hand more as a gesture of explanation and differentiation than of welcome. The maiden points one hand to herself and the other hand to the river and the Dreamer, as if to draw attention to her connection with him and the river, while suggesting the distance and difference between them.

Whereas Amant is shown as crossing the wall and half inside the enclosed garden in the image, and ultimately makes his way into the Castle to pluck his rose in the text of *The Rose*, the Dreamer stays clear of the crenellated structure on the other side of the "myry mere" in the miniature, and remains throughout the poem as an outsider to the maiden's world. The *Gawain*-artist chooses to visually conclude the poem with the image of the Dreamer looking at the maiden in Jerusalem, sustaining the reader's gaze in the ambiguous textual moment when divine delight and carnal desire, fiction and reality, physical life and spiritual death intersect with each other. The Dreamer is visually held in an ambiguous state regarding his salvation. Although he never crosses the line as Amant does, his sight of the Pearl-maiden in the heavenly city always reminds viewers of his Narcissistic recapitulation at the end of the text.

The Eucharist Pearl

Having woken up from his dream in great dismay for losing his pearl again, the

Dreamer reflects on his own “straying” and commits his pearl to Christ through a prayer:

In Krystez dere blessyng and myn,
 Pat in þe forme of bred and wyn
 Þe preste vus schewez vch a daye.
 He gef vus to be Hys homly hyne
 And precious perlez vnto His pay.

Amen. Amen. (1208–13)

The Eucharist image of bread and wine invokes the theological image of pearl as the particle of the consecrated bread in spiritual sacraments.¹⁹¹ Through the multiple images of “perle” as a piece of jewel, a “faunt/fonte,” an eye disease, and a symbol of erotic and divine love, the poet draws attention both to the richness of language and its obscurity as a means of communicating and conveying meaning. But he leaves a glimpse of hope by offering the pearl as an alternative food for thought to Adam’s apple, and concluding the poem with the image of pearl as evocative of Christ’s Eucharist body. This recalls the maiden’s description of the Pearl of Great Price which she urges the Dreamer to seek:

For hit is wemlez, clene, and clere,
 And endelez rounde, and blyþe of mode,
 And commune to alle þat ryztwys were.
 Lo, euen inmyddez my breste hit stode:
 My Lord þe Lombe, þat schede Hys blode,
 He pyzt hit þere in token of pes.
 I rede þe forsake þe worlde wode
 And porchace þy perle maskelles. (737–42)

The Pearl-maiden draws the Dreamer’s attention to the real, physical presence of this

¹⁹¹ For discussions of “pearl” as the Eucharist, see Robert Max Garrett, *The “Pearl”: An Interpretation* (Washington, 1918); T. D. Kelly and John T. Irwin, “The Meaning of *Cleanness*: Parable as Effective Sign.” *MS 35* (1973): 232–60.

flawless pearl set on her body while transcending its single physical form by revealing the pearl's spiritual, universal presence as a memorial of the Lamb's sacrifice with its power to "commune to" all people. The dual quality of the pearl reflects Christ's dual nature as a human and the Word. When the "perle" is understood and possessed as a worldly jewel, it becomes a spot in the eyes that prevent the Dreamer from seeing its spiritual meaning. It is only at the end of the poem that the Dreamer resignedly realizes the truth he has uttered unwittingly earlier—that he is at one with the maiden when she is physically separated from him, for only when the pearl is "betazte" to God (1207), and has transcended its physical form into the realm of memory and spirituality will it become its true nature—an intermediary to Heaven, and the pearl to God's pleasure.

As the poet leaves a glimpse of salvation through the image of Christ's body invoked in the Dreamer's prayer, the *Gawain*-artist buries a clue of salvation under the idolatrous river, and draws the attention of the Dreamer and the reader to it through the Pearl-maiden's pointing hand (fig. 55). Whilst Amant's fountain is either empty or contains dead stones in it (figs. 36, 39, 40, 41), the Dreamer's "myry mere" contains living fish. In this image (fig. 55), the fish as a symbol of Christ replaces the idolatrous pearls in the Dreamer's Narcissistic fountain in the "erbere" (fig. 31), taking up nearly all the space of the river and yet lying inconspicuously under the ripples. The maiden points one hand to herself and the other to the fish in the stream, as if to suggest that that is what the Dreamer should see in her.

Instead of offering the Dreamer an idolatrous rose as Fair Welcoming to Amant (fig. 54), the Pearl-maiden offers him fish, the symbol of Christ and a frequently seen food substitute for meat in medieval monasteries. The *Gawain*-artist echoes the Eucharist

pearl offered by the poet at the end of the poem by providing the fish as an alternative food for thought to the poisonous meat of Adam's apple. When the Dreamer points his one hand to the river (fig. 37), he is perhaps warning readers of the danger of looking into this ambiguous "mere," and reminding them that divine salvation lies inconspicuously in the simple, almost crude, form of the fish in the very same water, and is available for those "spotless" eyes which can transcend the blinding "perlez" that cover the fountain of grace, and see through the other distracting forms in the same image that shadow and obscure the fish.

When Ovid Meets God

At the end of the chapter, I want to visualize the poet's complicated textual interweaving and juxtaposition of the classical and the biblical by looking at a late-medieval image.



Fig. 56. Left: The Garden of Mirth. Right: The Park of the Lamb. France, c. 1520; *Roman de la Rose*. Morgan. MS M. 948, fols. 195v–196r.

An early sixteenth-century *Rose*-artist offers us a pictorial proximity of the poet's textual conflation of the sinful world of the perilous "mere" and the divine realm of God (fig. 56). The vision of Amant is depicted as an enclosing garden where Lady Idleness opens the gate with her key in the upper right corner while Amant is shown watching the rose bush on the other side of the gate and Narcissus is looking into the fountain from which black goats drink. The deadly nature of this watery world is suggested by the figure of the devil who comes out of a pit that resembles conventional images of hell, and who leads a group of hounds while holding a spear in the other hand as if engaged in a hunt. The consequence of the gaze of Narcissus and Amant is embodied by the dead corpses lying in front of the hounds. The crenellated wall of this watery vineyard resembles that of the heavenly Jerusalem depicted in the last miniature of *Pearl* (fig. 55). This round, starry heavenly world recalls the "endlez rounde" world of the Pearl of Great Price which the maiden urges the Dreamer to seek. It also recalls the poem's description of the vineyard where God summons all laborers to give them their due pay/pleasure at the end of the day.

Inside this heaven, the outflowing baptismal water replaces the backwater of the fountain of Narcissus, and white lambs replace black goats. The idolatrous gaze of Narcissus is transformed into a collective, devoted gaze upon God, whose body replaces the gate of the fallen garden, and his scepter replaces Lady Idleness's key to open the door to salvation. The divine water is shown as effusing from God's body into the fountain of grace below him, and then flowing out to the outside world. The fallen world of the perilous mirror and the divine realm of God are not represented as two completely detached spaces. Instead, these two worlds are connected by a narrow,

inconspicuous space run through by the river of life from inside the heaven with some straying black goats facing towards the wall of the heaven, as if wanting to enter it.

What is more interesting is the color of these straying black goats between the two worlds of the perilous mirror and of God. The closer they are to the gate of the heaven, the less black they become. For the three goats that are shown to be drinking from the river of life just outside the heaven's gate above the left column of text on the right folio, the farthest one has a dark grey color to it, but is obviously much less black than the other goats in the back of this image, while the goat to its right is shown as half grey and half white, and the one nearest to the gate of heaven appears as white as the other lambs inside the heaven. The artist visualizes the transformation from a stray goat to a lamb through a color change, which echoes *Pearl's* metamorphic narrative imagery from an Ovidian deer to the Lamb of God. This image shows that there is only a thin line between the perilous mirror and the divine realm, which the *Gawain*-poet repeatedly suggests through his textual conflation of these two worlds in *Pearl*.

Just as in these striking illustrations from Morgan MS M. 948, made for King Francis I of France, which mingle the dangers and pleasures of erotic and divine vision so suggestively, so the poet in *Pearl* absorbs Ovidian stories of Narcissus and Actaeon to create a hybrid garden in which the love for the divine is expressed through an erotic desire to see. The poet examines the nature of such gazes and shows the ineffable divinity which eludes, disables, and frustrates men's autoerotic and unproductive attempts at verbal (re)creation. In this respect, the poem's labored circular structure

and its intermittent falling-offs from it¹⁹² may have been a meta-poetic message on the inescapable fallibility of human language. The Dreamer's ambiguous salvation shows the poet's sympathetic attitude toward the human condition, which can be further detected in *Cleanness*, the subject of the next chapter, where he explores the idea of man as a demiurge by examining various kinds of human endeavors to "form" their desire, showing how people can engage themselves in creation without overstepping the divine boundary.

¹⁹² As noted by Sandra Pierson Prior in *The Fayre Formez of the "Pearl" poet* (East Lansing, 1996), p. 16.

Chapter Three

“Luf lokez to luf”: Gaze, Desire and Inscription in *Cleanness*

In *Pearl*, the poet looks into men’s predisposed desire for looking and calls into question their use of language and images to represent what they see. This chapter demonstrates how *Cleanness*, in spite of its overshadowing biblical structure, draws on Alan of Lille’s *De planctu Naturae* (*De planctu*) and Ovidian themes of metamorphosis and rivalry with gods to discuss the nature of human image-making and the complex interplay of desire and gaze involved in the process. In his discussion of human makers, the poet explores writing as a specific kind of artistic making and reflects on the role of the writer as a messenger of God.

A number of scholars have concerned themselves directly with images in *Cleanness*. Donna Crawford shows the poet’s concern with numerical structure and his “golden proportion” in the poem.¹⁹³ Sarah Stanbury sees the poem as describing the process of how mankind learns to see worldly signs to achieve salvation.¹⁹⁴ In a similar vein, Sandra Pierson Prior discusses the “forms” in the poem which progress from direct spoken speeches into written words and the poet’s use of the word “form” in his works.¹⁹⁵ Monica Brzezinski Potkay disagrees with Stanbury’s pro-image interpretation of the poem, arguing that the poet is less optimistic about the role of images in faith, and reads *Cleanness* as a discourse on the danger of images, which

¹⁹³ “Architectonics of *Cleanness*.” *SP* 90.1 (1993): 29–45.

¹⁹⁴ Stanbury (1991), pp. 42–70.

¹⁹⁵ Prior (1996), pp. 68–79, 119–43

echoes my discussion of *Pearl* in the previous chapter.¹⁹⁶ Sharing a similar belief in the poet's dubious attitude toward images, this chapter further qualifies Potkay's argument by showing that, rather than discussing the general use of images, the poet is concerned specifically with the issue of image-making, which is manifested by the repetitive mentions of forms, hands and craftsmanship in the poem.

Seeing the Creation

The “Gropande” God

Cleanness foregrounds the issue of image-making by directly invoking God as “þe Wy3 that wro3t alle þinges” (5) at the beginning of the poem. This image of the divine Demiurge is reinforced by the description of “God and His gere” (16). God is the primal craftsman, the Creator of the world. Man is his artistic production: the “werk þat He made” (198) and the “flesch þat He formed” (560). The trope of God the Demiurge is a medieval commonplace rooted in the Bible.¹⁹⁷ In Genesis 2:7, God is said to form mankind out of clay. He is directly invoked as an artist in Isaiah 64:8: “O Lord, thou art our father, and we are clay: and thou art our maker, and we all are the works of thy hands.”

God is also visualized as a craftsman in medieval images. Some images (figs. 57–60) depict God as a potter who is fashioning Adam out of a lump of clay with bare hands, while some (figs. 61–2) show God using tools to create Adam like a sculptor.

¹⁹⁶ See Potkay (1995).

¹⁹⁷ For the topos of “deus artifex” in art and literature, see Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (New Haven, 1981); M. Meiss, “The First Fully Illustrated Decameron,” in *Essays in the History of Art Presented to Rudolph Wittkower* (London, 1967), pp. 56–61; Camille (1989), pp. 27–38.



Fig. 57. The Creation of Adam. England, 1375; Egerton Genesis. BL. MS Egerton 1894, fol. 1v.



Fig. 58. The Creation of Adam and Eve. England, 1310-20; Queen Mary Psalter. BL. MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 3r.



Fig. 59. The Creation of Adam and Eve. Germany, 1325-50; *Speculum humanae salvationis*. BL. MS Arundel 120, fol. 4v.



Fig. 60. The Creation of Adam. Paris, c.1403; *Bible historiale*. BL. MS Harley 4381, fol. 7r.

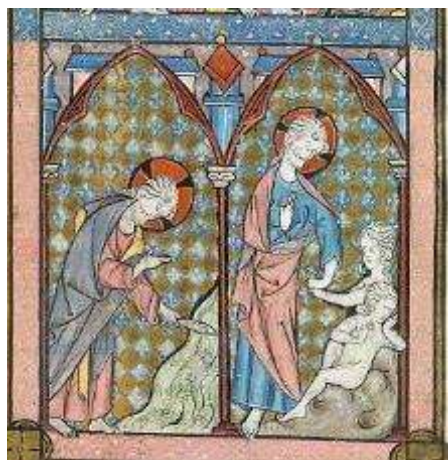


Fig. 61. The Creation of Adam and Eve. Paris, 1300; Bible. BL. MS Harley 616, fol. 1r.



Fig. 62. The Creation of Adam. France 1125, The Montpellier Bible. BL. MS Harley 4772, fol. 5r.

The image of God the Demiurge is most explicitly represented in the creation scene in a fourteenth-century manuscript of *Bible historiale* (fig. 63). In the miniature, God is represented as first dividing the chaos with a compass and then creating light by forging a sun with a hammer.



Fig. 63. The 1st and 2nd day of Creation. France, 1320–40; *Bible historiale*. BL. MS Yates Thompson 20, fol. 1r.

The theme of God the Demiurge is not unusual in medieval art and literature. But in *Cleanness*, God’s role and power as a craftsman is explored to the extreme that his “fayre honde” (1106) becomes the synecdoche of his power—God holds everything in his hand (734), and withdraws his hand to spare mankind (740). Similar emphasis on the divine hand is also keenly felt in the contemporary Holkham Bible commissioned for clerical use (fig. 64).¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ The Holkham Bible (London, BL MS Additional 47682) was produced in London around the second quarter of the fourteenth century. It was possibly commissioned by a Dominican friar to be used as an aid for preaching. The text was written in Norman French, which suggests that the manuscript might have been intended as an instructional tool for the aristocracy. The text and images in this manuscript display, as I will demonstrate, some similar thematic concerns with those of the *Gawain*-poet, and thus would serve as an apposite visual context for his works.



Fig. 64. Left: The Benediction. Right: The Creation of Adam and Eve. England, 1327–35; Holkham Bible. BL. MS Additional 47682, fols. 2v–3r.

On the left folio God is shown as sitting in the created world with a dramatic gesture. His hands stretch out as if to contain the whole space into his grasp. In the adjoining folio, His hands are shown to be vividly “gropyng” the body of Adam and Eve. This visual emphasis on God’s hand is complemented by the inscription to the image, which explains that “Ryen ne fyit de sa meyn” (nothing escaped his hand), and echoes the prefatory text which explicitly states the theme of the book: “In ceo livere est purtret / *Meyn* dé miracle que deux a fet.” (In this book are portrayed / Many miracles that God made.) The “meyn (many)” of miracles, as Michelle P. Brown suggests, may linguistically allude to the hand of God.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ *The Holkham Bible Picture Book: Commentary* (London, 2007); p. 30. Texts and images of this Bible book are quoted from this facsimile edition. For discussions of God’s touch as animating and a marker of hierarchy in the skin-sensitive Christian tradition, see Mark Michael Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley, 2007), pp. 94–116; Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, 2012), esp. “A Touchable God,” pp. 27–46. For a general discussion of late medieval senses, especially in England, see C. Nordenfalk, “The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art.” *JWCI* 48 (1985): 1–22; C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven, 2006).

Cleanness, too, foregrounds the “meyn de miracle” of God by reducing the one and only physical appearance of God in the poem to the presence of his single hand:

per apered a paume, with poyntel in fynGRES,
 pat watz grysly and gret, and grymly he wrytes;
 Non oþer forme bot a fust faylande þe wryste
 Pared on þe parget, purtrayed lettres. (1533–6)

There is no face, no body, but a single hand with every constituent part of it emphasized—the fingers, the palm, the fist and the wrist.²⁰⁰ And all that the hand does is “portraying”:

Ay biholdand þe honde til hit hade al grauen
 And rasped on þe roȝ woȝe runisch sauez.
 When hit þe scrypture hade scraped wyth a scrof penne,
 As a coltour in clay cerues þe forȝes,
 þenne hit vanist verayly and voyded of syȝt; (1544–8)

The hand “purtrayed,” “grauen” and “scraped” like a knife carving clay. By reducing God’s figure into a carving hand with the entirety of his power condensed into three forms, the poem presents artistic creativity as the essence of God whose hand skills become the measure against which all human makers are to be judged, for “he is the gropande God,” whose handling is “the grounde of alle dedez” (591).²⁰¹

The Jealous Maker and Human Counterfeiters

However, the poet discourages man from such artistic contest with God by suggesting

²⁰⁰ Blanch and Wasserman note the prominence of hands and gestures in the *Gawain*-manuscript, and discusses the theological concept of *dextra domini* in “Tools of the Trade” in *From “Pearl” to “Gawain”: Forme to Fynishment* (Gainesville, 1995), pp. 65–110.

²⁰¹ Allen J. Frantzen discusses the word “gropen” with homosexuality in “The Disclosure of Sodomy in *Cleanness*.” *PMLA* 111.3 (1996): 451–64.

that “no wyze in his werk so war” (589) and “no segge vnder sunne so seme of his craftez / If he be sulped in synne þat syttez unclene” (549–50). Human crafts are implicitly associated with sin which arouses God’s wary eyes. This disapproval of human making is rooted in tʒcond commandment which condemns images:

Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth. (Exodus 20:4)

Adoration of such works is further forbidden: “Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them” (20:5). Artistic creation is exclusive to the divine hand because God is “the Lord, thy God, mighty [and] jealous” (20:5). This jealous Creator forbids competition and allows no tampering with his skill. The only advisable way to make images is to erase any trace of human handiwork in them.²⁰² Thus when Aaron is condemned by Moses for making the golden calf, he defends himself by claiming that he only threw gold into fire, and the calf just came out on its own (Exodus 32:24).²⁰³ When human handiwork is demonstrably inevitable, as in the case of Beseleel building the Tabernacle, the man-made quality is reduced, if not altogether erased.

And I (God) have filled him (Beseleel) with the spirit of God, with wisdom and understanding, and knowledge in all manner of work, to devise whatsoever may be artificially made [...]. And I have given him for his companion Ooliab [...]. And I have put wisdom in the heart of every skilful man, that they may make all things

²⁰² As noted in Camille (1989), pp. 27–57. I am indebted to Camille for the following biblical examples of Aaron and Beseleel, which I expand and discuss in relation to the ideas of artist/artisan and vessels in *Cleanness*.

²⁰³ For self-produced works (“acheiropoietai”), see Edwyn Bevan, “Lecture II (Image Not Made by Hands),” in *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image-worship in Ancient Paganism and in Christianity* (London, 1940), pp. 46–83. Camille argues that images not made by hand mystify the holy by placing it outside human experience” in Camille (1989), p. 30.

which I have commanded thee. (Exodus 31:3–6)

Beseleel, the physical maker of the Tabernacle, appears not so much as an artist, but an artisan, a workman of God, to whom God gives Ooliab as a tool to facilitate the work according to His order. Human artisans make things but the divine artist takes the credit for the work. It is God's spirit, knowledge and invisible hands that work through the body of Beseleel, who, by building the tabernacle according to God's instruction, becomes another vessel to bear the divine will.

The scriptural emphasis on the self-effacement of human artisans is also employed by the *Gawain*-poet as a criterion of distinguishing appropriate artistic creations and idolatrous ones in *Cleanness*. Having invoked God the Demiurge, the poet describes his wrath incurred by man: "For wonder wroth is þe Wyȝ þat wroȝt alle þinges / Wyth þe freke þat in fylþe folȝes Hym after" (5–6). These followers of God refer both literally to those who believe in him, and more specifically here, to those who imitate him.²⁰⁴ Their mimicking of God is represented as a sin of "conterfeiting his crafte," which fills these imitators with filth and defiles both God's "gere" and their own bodies as vessels of him (13–6).

A series of biblical parables are then retold to illustrate the thin line between divine creation and satanic creation. The Fall of Lucifer serves as the first example of the "counterfeiter": "For þe fyrste felonye þe falce fende wroȝt / Whyl he watz hyȝe in þe heuen houen vpon lofte, / Of alle þyse aþel aungelez attled þe fayrest" (205–7). "Designed" as the fairest among the angels, Lucifer himself is a work of God. Nevertheless he aspires to rise above his status as the created and build his own

²⁰⁴ See *MED* "folwen (v.)," 2(c).

throne: “I schal telde vp my trone in þe tramountayne, / And by lyke to þat Lorde þat þe lyft made” (211–2), and by doing so, likens himself to God and usurps his role as the one and only Creator.



Fig. 65. God and the Fall of Lucifer. England, 1310–20; Queen Mary Psalter. BL. MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 1v.

The fall of Lucifer is vividly visualized in the fourteenth-century Queen Mary Psalter (fig. 65), in which God the Demiurge with a compass is paralleled with the image of Lucifer, who having fallen upside down from heaven, mimics God’s benediction gesture in a grotesque posture, and mocks His ability to create by drawing attention to his reproductive parts. The throne Lucifer makes becomes a “felonye,” a word denoting multiple meanings of sin, treachery, deceit, and craft,²⁰⁵ which suggests that human creation is both transgressive and lacking in truth.

²⁰⁵ See *MED* “felonīe (n.),” 1 and 2.

Lucifer's "felonye" is repeated by Nebuchadnezzar, who, having defeated Zedachiah with God's help, is consumed with pride and "serves the black Satan" (1449):

"I am god of þe grounde, to gye as me lykes,
As He þat hyze is in heuen, His aungeles þat weldes.
If He hatz formed þe folde and folk þervpone,
I haf bigged Babiloyne, burȝ alþer-rychest,
Stabled þerinne vche a ston in strenkþe of myn armes;
Mozt neuer myzt bot myn make such anoþer." (1663–8)

Like Lucifer, but even more explicit in his ambition, Nebuchadnezzar directly usurps the role of God by calling himself the God of the Earth. He likens his building of Babylon to God's creation of heaven. When describing the construction of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar focuses particularly on his own handwork in it by emphasizing that he set every gem with his own hands. He even claims to have the best skill by boasting that there is no such craft as his in making things. The examples of Lucifer and Nebuchadnezzar illustrate the self-serving kinds of creation in which the human maker is not content with being a self-erased, subordinate artisan but competes with God for the role of the artist, and hence becomes demonic.

Noah's story is related as a contrary example to Lucifer and Nebuchadnezzar. As an ark-builder, Noah appears to be an explicit image-maker. But like Beseleel's Tabernacle, the Ark's man-made quality is reduced by the emphasis on God's involvement in its construction: "Bot make to þe a mancioun, and þat is My wylle" (309). The Ark makes its first appearance in the poem not as a human device but a divine providence. Later, when the Ark is completed, Noah credits it to divine creativity by claiming that "Al is wrozt at þi worde, as þou me wyt lantez" (348). He avoids mentioning his active involvement in the making of the Ark by describing the

event in passive voice—the Ark is made, and it is through God’s words and wit that the task is completed. Like Beseleel, Noah allows himself to be a vessel accommodated by God so that any trace of human handiwork is reduced to the minimum, if not altogether deleted. By refraining from claiming any physical participation in the ark-building, Noah effaces himself and escapes the sin of counterfeiting God’s craft.

The poet further shows the importance of divine intervention in the process of human making by the example of Abraham and Sarah: “Boþe þe wyȝe and his wyf, such werk watz hem fayled / Fro mony a brod day byfore; ho barayn ay bydene, / þat selue Saré, wythouten sede into þat same tyme” (658–60). Sexual activity and reproduction are configured as an act of creation with the child as the “werk,” which Abraham and Sarah are unable to make until divine hands intervene:

þenne sayde oure Syre þer He sete: ‘Se! so Saré laȝes,
Not trawande þe tale þat I þe to schewed.
Hopez ho oȝt may be harde My hondez to work?
And zet I avow verayly þe avaunt þat I made;
I schal ȝeþly aȝayn and ȝelde þat I hyȝt,
And sothely sende to Saré a soun and an hayre.’ (661–6)

The procreative imagery is reinforced by the verb “ȝelde,” while the fruit, the child granted by God, is likened to a piece of work made with God’s hands. The work which “þat selue Saré” fails to make on her own is to be completed only with God’s help. She has to lose her pride and submit to God so that she can become a vessel in which the divine work is “born.”

Love-Making and Image-Making

The story of Abraham and Sarah calls forth the sexual overtones of *Cleanness*' theme of image-making. The association between sex and artistic creation is well-explored in medieval theological writings. In *Didascalicon*, Hugh of St. Victor distinguishes three forms of creativity: *opus Dei*, *opus naturae*, and *opus artificis imitantis naturam*. *Opus Dei*, the work of God, creates from nothing; *opus naturae*, the work of nature, brings out the hidden meaning of the former, and *opus artificis*, the work of human art, imitates nature.²⁰⁶ Hugh then commented on the nature of human work:

in his tribus operibus convenienter opus humanum, quod natura non est sed imitatur naturam, mechanicum, id est, adulterinum nominatur, quemadmodum et clavis subintroducta mechanica dicitur.²⁰⁷

[Among these works, the human work, because it is not nature but only imitative of nature, is fitly called mechanical, that is adulterate, just as a skeleton key is called a mechanical key.]

Hugh pointed out that human work is fraudulent because it is only an imitation of nature. The mechanical quality of human work is equated with adultery through an etymology first mentioned by Martin of Laon (c. 819–875): “Moechus est adulter alterius t[h]orum furtim polluens; inde a m[o]echo dicitur m[o]echanica ars, ingeniosa atque subtilissima.” (A fornicator is an adulterer who stealthily pollutes others' marriage beds; from the fornicator is said to occur a mechanical skill, which is

²⁰⁶ “Now there are three works—the work of God, the work of nature, and the work of the artificer, who imitates nature. The work of God is to create that which was not, [...] the work of nature is to bring forth into actuality that which lay hidden, [...]; the work of the artificer is to put together things disjoined or to disjoin those put together, whence we read, ‘They sewed themselves aprons.’” Translation is from Jerome Taylor, trans., *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts* (London, 1961), p. 55. See also Wetherbee, “The Function of Poetry in the ‘De Planctu Naturae’ of Alain de Lille.” *Traditio* 25 (1969): 87–125, pp. 93–6 for Hugh’s idea of secular writing in his broader review of the literary and intellectual traditions related to Alain’s work.

²⁰⁷ PL 176: 747D.

ingenious and most subtle.)²⁰⁸ Martin interprets adultery as an art which is subtle but ingenious in nature. Hugh reverses and extends this metaphor, seeing art as adultery and human artificers as adulterers. Human artistic creation therefore becomes a sexual betrayal to the “deus artifex.” Hugh describes how human artificers fall into adultery in a vivid image of statue-making: “qui statuam fudit, hominem intuitus est.” (The founder who casts a statue has gazed upon man).²⁰⁹ When men create an image, they turn their eyes away from God to look at another man—an image of their own likeness. The gaze on other men becomes a gaze on the self. Man, like God, creates images in his own image. This idea of reproducing a reproduction suggests a sense of deterioration in the process of making and the narcissistic nature of human making.

The narcissistic love of the self is often figured in medieval discussions as a feature of homosexuality. Alan of Lille (1128–1202) in *De planctu* singles out homosexuality among many sins as defiling God’s creation. Nature, as God’s deputy on Earth, complains that her work is ruined by male homosexuality.

Heu! quo naturae secessit gratia? morum
 forma, pudicitiae norma, pudoris amor! (431A)
 [...]
 Activi generis sexus, se turpiter horret
 sic in passivum degenerare genus.²¹⁰ (431B)

[Alas! Where has Nature with her fair form betaken herself?
 Where have the pattern of morals, the norm of chastity, the
 love of modesty gone?...]The active sex shudders in

²⁰⁸ The text is quoted in M. L. W. Laistner, “*Candelabrum theodosianvm.*” *The Classical Quarterly* 16.2 (1922): 107. Translation mine. Camille (1989) mentions Hugh’s use of “adultery” to bring up the idea of human creation as “something appropriating or stealing that which it should not” (35) and links it to the myth of Prometheus.

²⁰⁹ PL 176: 748A

²¹⁰ Latin texts of *De planctu* are quoted from PL 210: 429–81. Translation is quoted from James J. Sheridan, trans., *Plaint of Nature* (Toronto, 1980).

disgrace as it sees itself degenerate into the passive sex.]
(B.1, Meter 1)

The words “forma” and “norma” pronounce the theme of making at the beginning. The norm of chastity is broken when the form of sex degenerates into homosexuality, which is reminiscent of Hugh’s comment on the narcissistic and declining nature of human artwork. The near anagrams of “morum,” “norma,” and “forma” also reveal the closeness of the three and how dangerously easy it is to fall from normal into abnormal, from moral into immoral, simply by twisting the order and form of nature. The sexual transformation is represented by a metaphor of grammatical change, linking sex directly with verbal creation. The degenerative nature of this homosexual work is conveyed through the grammatical decline from the active voice into the passive.²¹¹ Venus is then held responsible for this sexual deformation. Having been assigned two hammers by Lady Nature to propagate the world, Venus leaves her work unattended because of her unrestrained lust:

Venus his furiis aculeata lethalibus, in suum conjugem
hymenaeum, tori castitatem peste adulterationis incestans,
cum Antigamo coepit concubinarie fornicari, sui que adulteri
suggestionibus irretita lethiferis, liberale opus in
mechanicum, regulare in anomalum, civile in rusticum
inciviliter immutat. (459B)

[Venus, goaded by these deadly furies into turning against her husband, Hymenaeus, and defiling the chaste marriage-couch by the blight of adultery, began to live in fornication and concubinage with Antigenius. Trapped by the deadly suggestions arising from her own adultery, she barbarously

²¹¹ Alan’s grammatico-sexual imagery is examined and explained in detail by Jan Ziolkowski in *Alan of Lille’s Grammar of Sex: The Meaning of Grammar to a Twelfth-century Intellectual* (Cambridge, 1985). See also Wetherbee (1969); Maureen Quilligan, “Words and Sex: The Language of Allegory in the *De planctu Naturae*, the *Roman de la Rose*, and Book III of *The Faerie Queene*.” *Allegorica* 2.1 (1977): 195–216; Gregory M. Sadlek, “Homo Artifex,” in *Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love’s Labor from Ovid through Chaucer and Gower*. (Washington, D.C, 2012), pp. 90–128.

turned a noble work into a craft, a work governed by rule into something ruleless, a work of refinement into something boorish.] (B.10, Prose 5)

The deformed work is considered to be the direct result of Venus' adultery. Her unnatural desire is described as a "mechanic" and "abnormal" handicraft, which breaks the moral patterns ("morum forma") formed by Nature. Venus's act of creation violates God's norm of chastity ("pudicitiae norma"), and thus renders herself an adulterer and her works adulterant.

Looking Back on the Fall

Cleanness expresses a similar concern with human artistic creation as a potential sexual transgression against God. In his account of the fall of Lucifer, the poet links his demonic making to a narcissistic gaze: "He sez noȝt bot hymself how semly he were, / Bot his Souerayn he forsoke and sade þyse wordez" (109–10). Lucifer, like Narcissus, is attracted to his own beauty and looks at nothing but himself. This self-love causes him to turn his eyes away from God and leads him to create another image which is "lyke to þat Lorde" (212). In *Pearl*, narcissistic gaze remains a passive form of idolatrous creation with its ability to give shape to its object suggested only through metaphors and allusions. In *Cleanness*, however, such gaze is openly linked with an actual act of demonic making. Lucifer's "fyrste felonye" becomes the archetypal form of satanic creation which prefigures the following human artistic creativities in the poem. The story of Adam and Eve follows Lucifer's fall. Adam is supposed to succeed to the heavenly paradise which Lucifer forfeits (240), but what he actually inherits is Lucifer's felony. Their sin is portrayed as a failure in fidelity

(“fayled in trawþe”) (236) which recalls Hugh’s metaphor of adultery and implies that their fall was a result of sexual betrayal to God.

The Self-Regard

The sexual overtones in the fall of man can also be felt in medieval iconography of Adam and Eve. Medieval images of Adam’s creation show very few variations.

Whether he is molded out of clay or carved out of stone, Adam is always depicted with his eyes looking at God and his hands in a praying gesture to suggest his respect for God (figs. 57–62). On the other hand, images of Eve’s creation appear less consistent in their portrayals of her posture.



Fig. 66. The Creation of Eve. England, 1310; The Ramsey Psalter. Morgan. MS M.302, fol. 1r.



Fig. 67. The Creation of Eve. France, 1320–40; *Bible historiale*, BL. MS Yates Thompson 20, fol. 1r.



Fig. 68. The Fall and Creation of Eve. Spain, 1325–50; Haggadah for Passover. BL. MS Additional 27210, fol. 2v.



Fig. 69. The Creation of Eve. France, 1350; *Bible historiale*. BL. MS Royal 19 D II, fol. 7v.

In some depictions, Eve appears to be like Adam, looking intensely at God in a praying gesture (fig. 66), while in other illustrations, Eve is depicted as looking forward but not exactly at God, and with a less (or not at all) enthusiastic expression (figs. 61, 67).²¹² Her hands are not placed together in front of her chest but are laid down by her feet.²¹³ In figs 59 and 68, Eve even turns her eyes completely away from God to look at the Adam lying behind. In fig. 59, her un-looking is juxtaposed against Adam's intense gaze on the left side of the image. Eve looks at the man from whom she is created. She is bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh. Her gaze at Adam is a gaze

²¹² In his study of the Queen Mary Psalter, George Warner also observes the difference in the demeanor of Adam and Eve in its image of the Expulsion: "Adam having a timid and deprecatory air, while Eve appears nonchalant, if not disdainful." See *Queen Mary's Psalter: Miniatures and Drawings by an English Artist of the 14th Century* (London, 1912), p. 10. This subtle difference between Adam and Eve's demeanor does not seem to have aroused much critical attention, but this pictorial detail may be, as what follows wishes to demonstrate, more significant than it appears.

²¹³ The iconography of Eve is generally seen as modelled on that of Adam. Dibelius and Wesenberg suggest that the pose of *orans* is usually associated with male figures in Christian iconography, which probably explains Eve's relaxed hands in some Creation images. For the iconography of Adam and Eve, see Marjorie Carol Swern, "The Iconography of the Creation of Adam and Eve in Early Christian Manuscript Recensions," MA Thesis, Ohio State U, 1965; Camille (1988); O. K. Werckmeister, "The Lintel Fragment Representing Eve from Saint Lazare, Autun." *JWCI* 35 (1972): 1–30; Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, "Adam and Eve in Christian Art," in *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz, vol. 1 (Boston, 2005), p. 50; William Tronzo, "The Hildesheim Doors: An Iconographic Source and Its Implications." *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 46.4 (1983): 357–66; Franz Dibelius, *Die Bernwardstür zu Hildesheim* (Heitz, 1907), pp. 5–13; Rudolf Wesenberg, *Bernwardinische Plastik* (Berlin, 1955), p. 70, n.169.

at herself. Her *orans* gesture, which is usually directed to God, is now aimed at Adam. Her worship of Adam becomes a worship of herself.

This self-directed gaze is often depicted in medieval images of the Fall. It is noteworthy that in the images of Eve's creation, Adam, who has always appeared to look at God when he himself is created, is consistently depicted as turning his head away in sleep, as if foreshadowing his betrayal of God under Eve's temptation. The close connection between looking and man's fall is explicit in the Bible: "And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold: and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband, who did eat" (Genesis 3:6). The act of seeing occurs before and leads to the act of eating, suggesting that the misplaced gaze is as crucial, if not more, in causing man's fall as the consumption of the apple. This probably explains why in many medieval visualizations of the Fall, emphasis is placed as much on the act of apple-eating as on the act of looking. In these images (figs. 70–78), Eve is usually shown as looking at the serpent with a female head which looks similar to herself.



Fig. 70. The Fall. England, 1310; The Ramsey Psalter. Morgan. MS M. 302, fol. 1r.

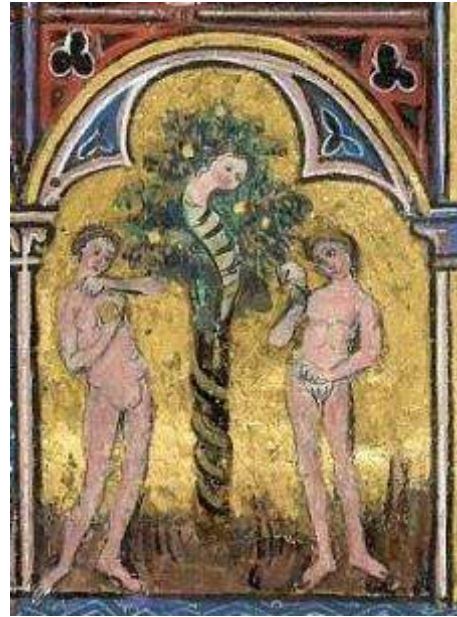


Fig. 71. The Fall. France, 1320–40; *Bible historiale*, BL. MS Yates Thompson 20, fol. 1r.



Fig. 72. Initial "A(dam)." England, 1360–75; *Omne Bonum*. BL. MS Royal 6 E. VI, fol. 46v.



Fig. 73. The Fall. England, 1300–25; The Welles Apocalypse. BL. MS Royal 15 D II, fol. 2r.



Fig. 74. The Fall. England, 1325–50. The Teymouth Hours. BL. MS Yates Thompson 13, fol. 20v.



Fig. 75. Left: The Forbidden Fruit. Right: The Fall and Expulsion. England, 1327–35; Holkham Bible. BL. MS Additional 47682, fols. 3v–4r.

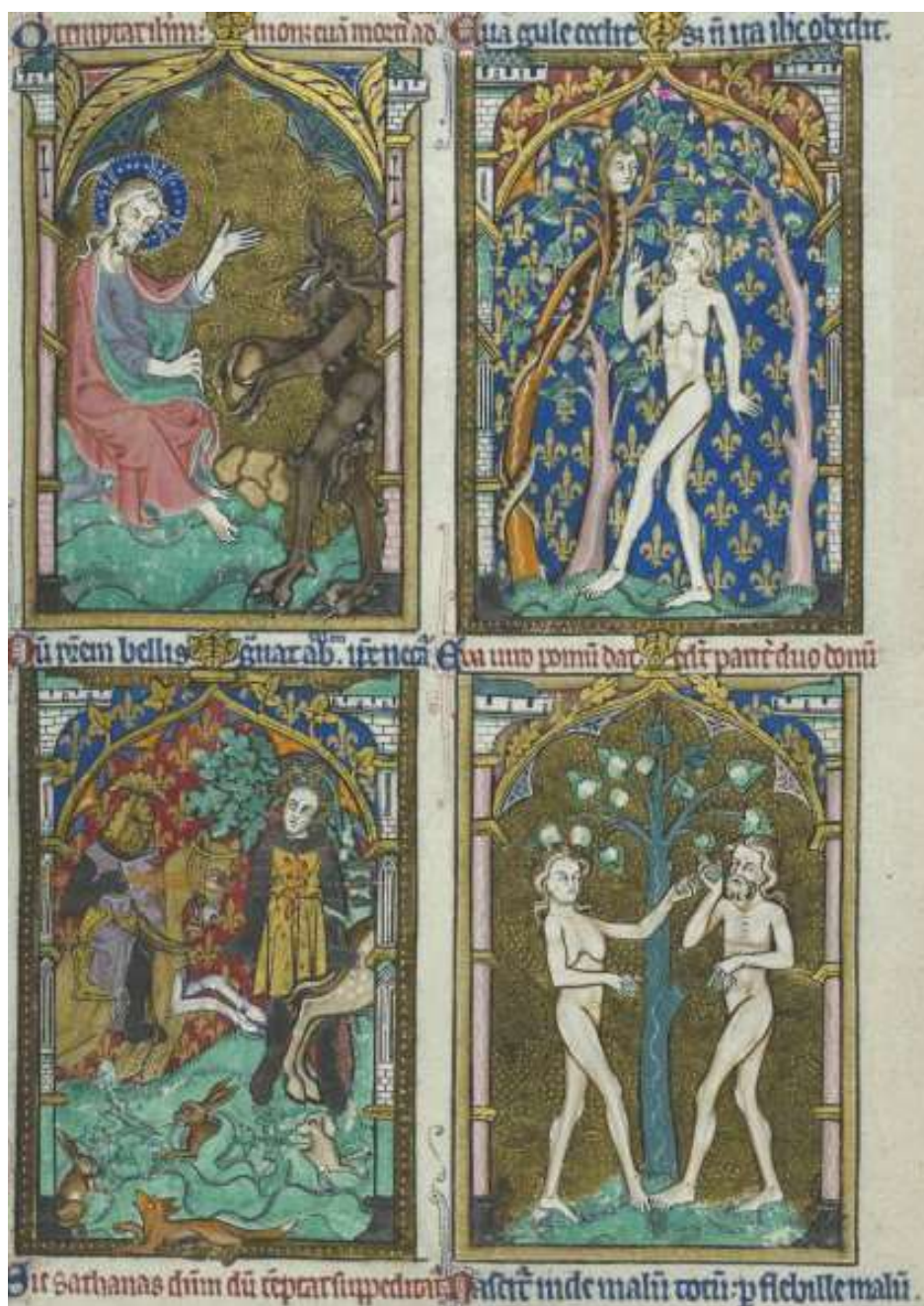


Fig. 76. Christ's Temptation (upper left), Temptation of Eve (upper right), Absalom's Death (lower left), the Fall (lower right). England, 1300–18; Peterborough Psalter. Bibliothèque royale Albert 1er. MS M. 9961–62, fol. 25r.

Medieval readers of these images would have believed that Eve is actually looking at another Eve because of the widely circulated legend of Lilith, who was believed to be the first wife of Adam, and who became a snake to tempt Eve out of jealousy.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Adam's two wives result from the Bible's ambiguous account of the Creation in which women are created twice in Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:22. God created Lilith and then expelled her from paradise because she refused to subordinate herself to Adam. Eve was then created to replace her.

Medieval commentaries also contributed to this image of two women looking at each other. Petrus Comestor quotes Bede who explains that the serpent has a female head because “*similia similibus applaudunt*” (like applauds like).²¹⁵ Bede’s comment recalls the poet’s description of people taking leave of their beloved ones (*luf lokez to luf*) (401) when the flood came, revealing the medieval misogynistic view of the Fall of Man and suggesting that the idea of self-love lies at the core of the sin which destroyed mankind. In a fourteenth-century English Psalter (fig. 76), the artist even devoted a separate image to the gaze between Eve and the serpent in addition to the image of the Fall. The artist of the Holkham Bible (fig. 75) juxtaposes Adam and Eve’s devout gaze at God in the prelapsarian garden with Eve’s desirous gaze at the serpent.

Descriptions of a female-headed serpent can be found in the contemporary works such as Chaucer’s *The Man of Law’s Tale*, B.362–3, and Langland’s *Piers the Plowman*, B.18.355. For the legend of Lilith, see Jeffrey M. Hoffeld, “Adam’s Two Wives.” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n.s. 26.10 (1968): 430–40; Virginia Tuttle, “Lilith in Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights.” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 15.2 (1985): 119–30; John K. Bonnell, “The Serpent with a Human Head in Art and in Mystery Plays.” *AJA* 21.3 (1917): 255–91; Henry Ansgar Kelly, “The Metamorphoses of the Eden Serpent during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.” *Viator* 2 (1971): 301–28.

²¹⁵ “*Elegit etiam quoddam genus serpentis, ut ait Beda, virgineum vultum habens, quia similia similibus applaudunt.* (There is a kind of serpent, as Bede says, which has a female head because like applauds like.)” PL 198: 1072, qtd. in Bonnell (1917), p. 257.



Fig. 77. The Fall. France, 1250; *Bible moralisée*. Bodleian. MS Bodl. 270b, fol. 7v.



Fig. 78. The Fall. Paris, 1220; *Bible moralisée*. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. MS 2554 fol. 2r. Image after the facsimile edited by Hausscherr (1992).

In *Bible moralisée* (fig. 77), the image of the female-headed serpent and Eve is paralleled by embracing couples in the roundel beneath to suggest the amorous relationship between them. Camille pointed out that this same-sex desire is associated with idolatry by the image of the man who appears to be worshipping a naked pagan god on the pedestal.²¹⁶ In the Vienna *Bible moralisée* (fig. 78), the gaze between Adam, Eve and the serpent is explicitly linked with homosexuality by the same-sex couples below. The inscription to fig. 77 explains that Adam and Eve obey their evil desire (“diabolice voluntati”), transgressing God’s law by allowing themselves to be bound by the devil through their eyes, throat, kidney (associated with lust), legs and

²¹⁶ These two images were also discussed in Camille (1989), p. 91. But he did not see the vessel image and the transformation of gaze in the inscription. Robert Mills also mentions this image in his discussion of the iconography of sodomy and heretics in medieval manuscripts of *Bible Moralisée*. See “Seeing Sodomy in the *Bibles moralisées*.” *Speculum* 87.2 (2012): 413–68, p. 442, fig. 11.

feet.²¹⁷ Their sin is construed as misusing their senses and body, which is desecrated and turned into a vessel of devilish pleasure, a “*corpus diaboli*” as Bede describes.²¹⁸ Their self-directed gaze becomes myopic, leaving them in “*tenebras infernales*” (infernally dark). The composition of these images of the Fall is reminiscent of the image of Narcissus and Amor (fig. 51) discussed in *Pearl*, with the bust of Amor on the tree mimicking the female-headed serpent and the couple of Narcissus and his lover as Adam and Eve incarnate. The iconography of the Fall might have lurked behind this unusual image of Narcissus and Amor, with the implicit narcissistic desire inherent in man’s fall visualized explicitly as a blatant self-regard of Love.

The Backward Gaze

Eve’s self-regard in the image of the Fall is also frequently visualized as an unnatural posture of looking backward (figs. 69, 79–83).



Fig. 79. The Fall of Man. England, 1120–45; St Albans Psalter. Hildesheim. St. Godehard’s Church, MS St. Godehard 1, p. 17.



Fig. 80. The Fall. France, 1357; *Bible historiale complétée*. BL. MS Royal 17 E VII, fol. 7v.

²¹⁷ “t[ran]sgrediuntur mandatum d[omi]ni et obediunt diabolice voluntati. les remunerat diabolus et innectit p[er] oculum, p[er] collum, p[er] renes, p[er] tibias, p[er] pedes. Sic ligatos p[ro]icit in tenebras infernales.” Transcription and translation mine.

²¹⁸ Bede describes that those who succumb to the devil become a part of him in *Commentaries on Genesis*, i. 3. 14, qtd. in Werckmeister (1972), pp. 10–11, n.51.



Fig. 81. God accusing Adam (left); God accusing Eve (right). England, 1325–50; The Taymouth Hours. BL. MS Yates Thompson 13, fols. 21r–21v.



Fig. 82. The Fall. England, 1405–50; Bible. BL. MS Royal 1 E IV, fol. 12v.



Fig. 83. The Fall. England, 1360–75; *Omne Bonum*. BL. MS Royal 6 E VI, fol. 2.

In these images, Eve is shown looking at the devil behind her in the same way that she had formerly turned her eyes away from God to Adam when she is created.²¹⁹ Now

²¹⁹ To my knowledge, Eve's backward gaze does not seem to have aroused much critical attention in iconographical studies. Backward movements, however, are often associated the devil. See Ruth Mellinkoff, "Riding Backwards: Theme of Humiliation and Symbol of Evil." *Viator* 4 (1973): 153–85. A relevant discussion of back-looking is H. Bateson's "Looking over the Left Shoulder," *Folklore* 34 (1923): 241–2, in which he notes that the act of looking over one's left shoulder is often associated with grief in folklore. See also Putter (2014), p. 517, note to line 981. I am indebted to Professor Ad Putter for bringing this article to my attention. I hope to show that the frequently seen representation of Eve as a backward-looker in the iconographical cycle of the Fall may have been intended to suggest her wickedness and the unnatural desire inherent in the cause of man's fall.

she turns her eyes again from Adam to another image of greater likeness to herself. From the Creation to the Fall of Eve, the images at which she looks are farther and farther removed from the image of God, the perfect Form. This casts Eve as a corruptible idolater and imitator who in her constant engagement with deteriorating copies of the Form, partakes of less and less divine truth until she finally becomes devoid of it and occupied by adulteration. This backward gaze culminates in the images of the Expulsion (figs. 84–8), in which the consequence of Adam and Eve's transgression is visualized as a sorrowful, backward gaze at the forfeited paradise, reminding the viewers of their misplaced gaze in the first place. The Holkham Bible (fig. 75) vividly illustrates the process of man's fall to expulsion in a sequence of images in which gaze is first shown as directed forward to God (left), then turned to oneself (upper right), and finally fixed in a perpetually backward look of reminiscence and remorse (lower right).



Fig. 84. The Fall and the Expulsion. England, 1330–40; The St Omer Psalter. BL. MS Yates Thompson 14, fol. 7.



Fig. 85. The Expulsion. England, 1325–50; The Taymouth Hours. BL. MS Yates Thompson 13, fol. 23.



Fig. 86. The Expulsion. England, 1310–20; The Queen Mary Psalter. BL. MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 4.



Fig. 87. The Expulsion. France, 1357; *Bible historiale Complétée*. BL. MS Royal 17 E VII, fol. 8v.



Fig. 88. The Expulsion. France, 1411; *Bible historiale*. BL. MS Royal 19 D III, fol. 9v.

Inscribing the Fall

The Law Perverter

In *Cleanness*, the poet attributes the fall of man to the “eggyng” (urging, temptation) of Eve (241), which echoes medieval misogynistic exegetical tradition of seeing her creation out of Adam’s body as prefiguring Christ’s crucifixion, such as fig. 89 shows.



Fig. 89. Upper roundle: Creation of Eve. Lower roundle: The Crucifixion. France, 1250; *Bible moralisée*. Bodleian. MS. Bodl. 270b, fol. 6r.



Fig. 90. Upper register: Christ Carrying Cross. Lower register: The Blacksmith and His Wife. England, 1327–35; Holkham Bible. BL. MS Additional 47682, fol. 31r.

In the Holkham Bible, the image of the Creation of Adam and Eve (fig. 64) is juxtaposed with the image of Christ. The inscription to this image connects Eve with the Crucifixion through an imagery of her transgression:

E de son coute Eve fesoyt
Ke son comaundement tot brisoit,

E tuht le south deux de [sount>son] sen.²²⁰

[And from his side he made Eve
Who would soon break his commandment,
And all wisdom came from God.]

Eve's creation is immediately associated with Law-breaking, which invokes the ruptured body of Christ as the Wisdom and the Word of God on the cross. Later in the same manuscript, the image of Christ with the Cross is paralleled with an unusual depiction of the apocryphal legend of the good Blacksmith and his wife (fig. 90).²²¹ In the lower register a man appears to be drilling on the cross held by Simon. The action of drilling is complemented by the wicked wife who is shown engaged in forging the nails with a hammer and a tong on the right side. The inscription to this image explains:

Coment l'en perceoyt la croyz u Ihesus estoyt cloué. E
coment un iuyfallat [-fere] forger les cloues dunt Ihesus
[e]serroyt [/in] cloue, et ne pout fevere trover que les vousiit
forger; [...] E sa femme saliit avant et diit: 'Por ceo ne
faudra que i[l] ne ines serrunt forgez,' et les alat forger.

[How is to be seen herein the Cross to which Jesus was
nailed. And how a Jew went to forge the nails with which
Jesus would be pinned, but could not find a forge; [...] and
his wife stepped forward and said: 'It is needful that they be
forged,' and she went to forge them herself.]²²²

In a realizing action of forging the nail, the wicked wife carries out the sin of Eve the

²²⁰ Brown (2007), p. 33.

²²¹ The blacksmith, who happened to be a devoted believer of Christ, was commissioned to forge nails for the Crucifixion. He refused the job under the pretext of having injured hands, which were miraculously made swollen by God. But his wife accepted the offer and forges the nails in her husband's stead. This story was made popular by medieval miracle plays. For more discussions of the story, see F. A. Foster, *The Northern Passion*, EETS o.s. 145 (London, 1914), pp. 168–73.

²²² Brown (2007), p.76.

Law-breaker by supplying the tools with which the body of Christ is abused and perverted. This association of Eve with the perversion of law is firmly rooted in patristic (especially Augustinian) commentaries which connect man's fall with human writing.²²³ By allowing herself to be tempted by the serpent to look at the Tree of Life and eat the fruit, Eve becomes both an unfaithful perpetrator and a perverter of divine text, whose improper gaze inscribes the fall of man, which is to be scraped by the Virgin Mary and rewritten with the Word of God.

The Heretical Exegetes

The poet explores the theme of law-pervverting and the idea of human artistic creation as adulterous and adulterant in the episode of Sodom. Sex appears as an artwork "compast" by God, who portrays and ordains it as a "kynde craft" between a man a woman who "tyzed hemseluen" together in truth (697–701). The Sodomites, however, show no respect for God's craft and create their own play:

Pay han lerned a lyst þat lykez me ille,
 Pat þay han founden in her flesch of fautez þe werst:
 Vch male matz his mach a man as hymselfuen,
 And fylter folyly in fere on femmalez wyse. (693–6).

They come up with a different "lyst" (desire, device) and "found" (find, create) a new

²²³ St Augustine was the first to have provided the link between the Fall and writing: "The serpent was called the most intelligent of all the beasts, that is, the most cunning, because of the cunning of the devil who plotted his tricks in him and through him. [...] But a pen is called a liar because through it a liar acts mendaciously, which is just like calling this serpent a liar because the devil used him mendaciously like a pen." P. Agaësse and A. Solignac, eds. and trans, *De genesi ad litteram, Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* 49 (Paris, 1972), p. 290. In some medieval stories of the Genesis, Eve actually appears as the inventor of writing. Eric Jager explores the role of Eve as a writer who gives birth to the first scribe, Seth, and the script which records the history of man's fall in medieval *Vitae* of Adam and Eve, showing how medieval authors of these works try to erase the feminine taint in the founding myth of writing to confine it exclusively to the male clerical domain. For more discussion of writing and the fall, see his "Did Eve Invent Writing? Script and the Fall in 'The Adam Books.'" *SP* 93.3 (1996): 229–50; idem. *The Tempter's Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, 1993).

form of sex on their own body (“in her flesch”) by making a man of their likeness their sexual mate, in the same way as God had created mankind. Their enthusiasm for images like themselves is reminiscent of Bede’s comments on Eve that like attracts like. The metamorphic process from “male” to “mach” (match) and finally to “femmalez” recalls Alan of Lille’s description of homosexuality as a verbal conjugation from active to passive voice. The poet here seems to be mimicking Alan’s grammatical metaphor by presenting a nominal declension from the masculine gender to the neuter and then to the feminine, and from the subject to the predicate; and by doing so, shows how the Sodomites violate the heterosexual plurality of God’s sexual grammar by misinterpreting his “hemseluen” (701) as the resolutely singular and masculine “hymself” (695), thus turning God’s “kynde” manner into a homosexual, autoerotic “vsage vnclene” (710). The Sodomites convert their own body into a “corpus diaboli,” and a textual surface on which they interpret and rewrite the words of God to their own pleasure, thus becoming at the same time the maker and a vessel of a perverted scriptural text.²²⁴

The Sodomites’ heretical exegesis of God’s law in a way recalls Chaucer’s curse to his unreliable scribe, Adam:

Adam scriveyn, if ever it thee bifalle
 Boece or Troylus for to wryten newe,
 Under thy long lokkes thou most have the scalle,
 But after my makynge thou wryte more trewe;
 So ofte adaye I mot thy werk renewe,
 It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape,

²²⁴ For a relevant discussion of sodomy as a sin against life and divine creation, and a form of pride, see A. V. C. Schmidt, “Kynde Craft and the Play of Paramorez: Natural and Unnatural Love in *Purity*,” in *Genres, Themes, and Images in English Literature*, eds. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 105–24.

And al is thorough thy negligence and rape.²²⁵

The relationship between the poet and the scribe is likened to that between God and mankind, in which God appears as the artist and man as a secondary artisan who imitates but is never equal to the former. Man's sin appears here as miscopying God's words as the result of one's "rape" (rashness) that invokes a violent, possibly sexual crime ("rape") in which the phallic stylus abuses the Word of God.

The Sodomites' perversion of scriptural text recalls the sacramental scene at the beginning of *Cleanness* where priests are condemned for imitating God and handling the Eucharist body of Christ in a "filthy" way. The Sodomites' counterfeiting and heretical exegesis of divine words are spelled out by God when he condemns their attempt at distorting ("skyfted") his divine "skyl" (709). They change the divine "maner" into their own "assyse."²²⁶ They aspire to "lere" (teach) their "lyst" (desire/device) to other men in the same way as God "kend" (taught) the craft of sex to mankind. The Sodomites' sexual pedagogy recalls the judges' law-teaching to Susanna in the *Pistill of Susan*, both of which seek to pervert the divine "corpus" into

²²⁵ "Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam, His Owne Scryveyn," in *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 650. This short envoy has been variously interpreted as a transparent criticism of the scribe, Adam Pinkhurst, who also copied the Ellesmere manuscript, or as an allegory of the original sin and salvation. See, for example, Chance, "Chaucerian Irony in the Verse Epistles 'Wordes Unto Adam,' 'Lenvoy a Scogan,' and 'Lenvoy a Bukton.'" *Papers on Language and Literature* 21 (1985): 115–29; Britt Mize, "Adam, and Chaucer's Words Unto Him." *ChauR* 35.4 (2001): 351–77; Brendan O'Connell, "Adam Scryveyn and the Falsifiers of Dante's 'Inferno.'" *ChauR* 40.1 (2005): 39–57; Linne Mooney, "Chaucer's Scribe." *Speculum* 81 (2006): 97–138; Glending Olson, "Author, Scribe, and Curse: The Genre of *Adam Scryveyn*." *ChauR* 42.3 (2008): 284–97; Alexandra Gillespie, "Reading Chaucer's Words to Adam." *ChauR* 42.3 (2008): 269–82; Simon Horobin, "Adam Pinkhurst, Geoffrey Chaucer, and the Hengwrt Manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales*." *ChauR* 44.4 (2010): 351–67.

²²⁶ Frantzen (1996) suggests that the word "assyse" alludes to the practice of anal copulation. I would add that this unspeakable sin is reinforced by the word "asscry" and the imagery of penetration evoked by words such as "shrylle," "scharp," "pass," and the "brych (vomit/buttock)" which the Sodomites "vpbrayde (throw up/raise)." Later when Lot offers the Sodomites his two daughters who are "tayt and quoynt," he may be implicitly countering their "assyse" with female genitalia evoked by the pun of "queint," which was also debatably employed by Chaucer. For Chaucer's pun of "queint," see Benson, "The 'Queint' Punnings of Chaucer's Critics." *SAC* (1984): 23–47, and Joseph A. Danae, "Queynte: Some Rime and Some Reason on a Chaucer[ian] Pun." *JEGP* 95 (1966): 497–514.

an illicit text. The Sodomites' "broþelych wordez" (848) and "harlotez speche" (874) yield nothing but stinking spew. Their meaningless production recall the metaphor of hammer and avil in *De planctu* in which the hammer "imprints on no matter," and "scores a barren strand."²²⁷ Their homosexual pen has inscribed on a wrong kind of parchment in contrast to the "suitable paper" ("competentibus cedulis") provided and prescribed by Nature and God, thus resulting in a meaningless, adulterant text which "semina nulla monetat" (coins no seeds)²²⁸ and lacks any material and semantic productivity.²²⁹

In the poet's account, the Sodomites' sin appears as a fully-blown crime of heretical writing and preaching, which reminds us of Chaucer's unreliable scribe whose "new writing" deviates from the poet's "making" and thus must be scraped. In *Cleanness*, the Sodomitic text undergoes a similar correction in the scene of the destruction of Sodom, which is represented in a book simile:

For when þat þe Helle herde þe houndez of heuen,
 He watz ferlyly fayn, vnfolded bylyue;
 þe grete barrez of þe abyme he barst vp at onez,
 þat alle þe regioun torof in riftes ful grete,
 And clouen alle in lyttel cloutes þe clyffez aywhere,
 As lauce leuez of þe boke þat lepes in twynne. (961-6)

The burning pit of Hell unfolds itself to accommodate Sodom, which is shattered into pieces like loose parchment leaves detaching from the spine of a book. The

²²⁷ PL 210: 431B, "Nullum materiam matricis signat idaea, / Sed magis in sterili littore vomer arat."
 Translation from Sheridan (1980), p. 69.

²²⁸ PL 210: 457A and 413 B. Translation from Sheridan (1980), p. 69.

²²⁹ Sadlek provides an insightful and interesting discussion of the homosexual artisan in *De planctu* in relation to the idea of idleness and medieval monastic writing. See Sadlek (2012), pp. 90–128. The Sodomites' "broþelych wordez" and "harlotez speche" recall and contrast with William Thorpe's harlot-like body plowed and seeded with God's words. See above Ch. 1, pp. 46–50.

Sodomites' heretical text has first been distorted from its divine model and then inscribed on an "(un)suitable" surface that cannot hold meaning, thus rendering itself futile, like an "idle tablet" which is kept from proper use and becomes rusty, and hence should, as Genius claims in his sermon in *The Rose*, be destroyed completely.²³⁰



Fig. 91. A grotesque monk sawing books. England, 1310-24. The Gorleston Psalter. BL. MS Additional 49622, fol. 146r.

Departing from the apocalyptic image of heaven folding itself up as a book to exclude mankind, and the metaphor of erasing the name of sinners from the Book of Life of God in the psalms, the poet here employs a radical imagery of book-unbinding similar to an image in a fourteenth-century English Psalter (fig. 91).²³¹ On the upper

²³⁰ Dahlberg (1986), ll. 19561–82, pp. 322–3.

²³¹ For heaven as book closing itself off to man, see for example Revelation 6:13–4, Isaiah 34: 4. For God deleting sinners from his Book of Life, see Exodus 32:32–3, Psalm 68: 29, Revelation 3:5. For the image of books in medieval literature, see Ernst Curtius, "The Book as Symbol," in *European*

left corner of the page, a grotesque monk who appears to be cutting a pile of books with a huge saw is illustrated to accompany the text of Psalm 108 in which David prays to God that his adversaries would be “cut off” (“interitus”) and “blotted out” (“deleatur”) (108:13–4). The artist of this psalter seems to share a similar imagination with the poet by representing the sinners as malmanufactured books that need to be unbound and destroyed.

Whereas the city of Sodom is consumed by showers of fire and brimstone until it is covered with ashes like a smoking furnace in the Bible (Genesis 19: 24, 28), the poet here dwells on the imagery of raining (“pluit”), expanding and adapting it into another flood narrative which echoes both the story of Noah, and the perilous “myry mere” in *Pearl*. The poet describes the sunken city as a “malscrande mere” (bewildering sea) (991), a “stynkand stanc” (stinking pool) (1018), and “founs” (1026). He further gives this destroyed place a name: “Forþy þe derk Dede See hit is demed euermore, / For hit dedez of deþe duren þere zet” (1020–21). This dead “see” is defined by the “deeds of death” practiced there, which seems to link this “see” with an act of looking that brings about death. Its reminiscence of Narcissus’ fountain is further suggested by the unusual nature of this “see”:

If any schalke to be schent wer schowued þerinne,
 Þaʒ he bode in þat boþem broþely a monyth,
 He most ay lyue in þat loze in losyng euermore,
 And neuer dryze no dethe to dayes of ende. (1029–32)

The living dead fixed eternally to the water recalls Narcissus lying by the fountain and

Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask (London, 1953), pp. 302–32; Jesse Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca, 1985). Bowers (2013) sees this split book simile as an ironic parallel to the literary history of the poet’s own works, which might have been sundered with some of the pages lost during the process of transmission (66).

his fixity at the Stygian pool to look at himself after he dies. The *Pearl*-Dreamer re-enacts the gaze of Adam and Narcissus in his “myry mere,” while the Sodomites “duren” (continued) this deed of death by concentrating their enthusiasm on an image of their own likeness inside their stinking pool. They further aggravate this sin by turning their narcissistic gaze into a diabolic pen to rival with God through their heretical writing. Their transgression is made clear by the nature of this bewildering “mere”:

And þer ar tres by þat terne of traytoures,
 And þay borgounez and beres blomez ful fayre,
 And þe fayrest fryt þat may on folde growe,
 As orange and oþer fryt and apple-garnade,
 Also red and so ripe and rychely hwed
 As any dom myzt deuce of dayntyez oute; (1041–6)

The “dede see” is further defined as the “pool of traitors,” which recalls the “supplantorez” mentioned by the Pearl-maiden (440) and the overreaching “mad strivers” in the Dreamer’s prayer to God (1199). The mention of the fair fruit and apples inside this sunken city evokes the image of the Garden of Eden and reinforces the poet’s association of the Sodom story with the Fall. The emphasis on the “dede see” garden as a human “deuce” implies its man-made and fallible nature under its beautiful appearance: “Bot quen hit is brused oþer broken, oþer byten in twynne, / No worldez goud hit wythinne, bot wyndowande askes” (1047–8). The hollow, unendurable fruit embodies the Sodomites’ illicit body and writing, which is barren of meaning and “coins no seeds.” It also suggests the vainness of the self-regard in this idle “dede see” where desire comes to a (re)productive dead end.

The Diabolic Text

Situated at the heart of the Sodom episode is the story of Lot's wife, who shows no respect for God's culinary instructions and enters herself in a competition with the angels: "Bot zet I wene þat þe wyf hit wroth to dyspyt, / And sayde softely to herself: 'þis vnsaueré hyne / Louez no salt in her sauce; zet hit no skyl were'" (821–3). She belittles the divine skill and assumes that her own knowledge of meal-making is superior. Her disobedience and self-absorbed "skyl" are later represented as looking away from God:

Loth and þo luly-whit, his lefly two deȝter,
Ay folȝed here face, before her boþe yȝen;
Bot þe balleful burde, þat neuer bode keped,
Blusched byhynden her bak þat bale for to herkken. (977–80)

She violates the angels' order and looks behind. Her deviated gaze is contrasted with Lot's and his daughters' eyes which always look straight forward. It is at this moment of looking back that she becomes a stone:

Hit watz lusty Lothes wyf þat ouer her lyfte schulder
Ones ho bluschet to þe burȝe, bot bod ho no lenger
Pat ho nas stadde a stiffe ston, a stalworth image,
Al so salt as ani se—and so ho zet standez. (981–4)

By her own gaze, Lot's wife transforms herself into a stone-like image. What begins as meal-making turns into a satanic parody of divine creativity, for she, like God, literally creates an image in her own image. The way she "blusched" (glanced) behind connotes an implicit sense of impropriety and shame which echoes the angels' warning to Lot's family that they should never "agayntote" (931) on their way out of Sodom. The word "agayntote" suggests that the gaze of Lot's wife is not only an ordinary act of looking, but more specifically an act of peeping. He further qualifies

such a voyeuristic gaze as both backward and a relapse through the adverb “agayn,” as if associating her transgressive gaze with the primordial back-looker, Eve.

In some images (figs. 92–3), Lot’s wife appears as a lifeless statue to show the result of transformation. Some images (fig. 95), however, represent the process of transformation and show simultaneously the backward-looking woman and the statue she becomes, which in a way recalls Eve’s gaze at the female-headed serpent.

In some images (figs. 94, 96–9), Lot’s wife’s gaze and posture resemble Eve’s when she was expelled from the paradise.²³² The sense of idolatry in Lot’s wife’s gaze is keenly felt in some contemporary images of her. In fig. 96, the petrified body of Lot’s wife stands on the upper right corner, looking down on the destroyed Sodom where men are buried in the ruins, looking up at her and raising their hands upward as if seeking her help, suggesting the consequence of their wrongly placed gaze.²³³ The idolatrous gaze of these lifeless men contrasts with Lot and his daughters who walk away from death with their eyes looking straightly ahead under the angel’s guiding hand.

²³² As suggested in Camille (1989), p. 94. Camille discussed the pose of covering one’s private parts with male voyeurism. For discussions on Lot’s wife’s naked body, see Caviness, “A Son’s Gaze on Noah: Case or Cause of Viriliphobia?” in *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*, ed. Sherry C. M. Lindquist (Farnham, 2012), pp. 103–48.

²³³ This also recalls the storm scene in *Patience* where people call the names of their pagan gods and seek their salvation in vain.



Fig. 92. The Destruction of Sodom. Germany, 1204; Hours. Morgan. MS M.638, fol. 4r.



Fig. 93. The Destruction of Sodom. England, 1180; Canterbury Cathedral. Typological window. Photo by Julian P. Guffogg, Geograph Project Ltd.



Fig. 94. Lot's wife. France, 1250; *Bible moralisé*. Bodleian. MS Bodl. 270b, fol. 15v.



Fig. 95. The Destruction of Sodom. England, 1325; The Peterborough Psalter. Bibliothèque royale Albert 1er MS 9961-62, fol. 12r.



Fig. 96. The destruction of Sodom. England, 1250; De Brailes Bible. Walter Art Museum. MS. W. 106, fol. 4r.



Fig. 97. The destruction of Sodom. Germany, 1355–65; Morgan. MS M. 769, fol. 44r.

Fig. 97 conveys the sense of idolatry even more explicitly by portraying two drowning men who raise both their arms as if praying to the lifeless form of Lot's wife in front of them.²³⁴ Her blank form indicates a lack of response and inability to answer, which recalls Belshazzar's "falce goddes" which are made of "stokkes and stones" and whose "stoken tonge" prevents them from answering their worshippers (1521–4).

In *Cleanness*, Lot's wife is directly named as a "fol" (996) and her disobedience and self-regard seen directly as faults of "mistrauþe," (996), conveying both unfaithfulness and idolatry.²³⁵ Her desire to look back at Sodom, a monument to human sinfulness, casts human makers as overreachers who in their willful rivalry with God, cannot give up their attraction towards their own handiwork. With their homoerotic gaze, Lot's wife and the Sodomites demonstrate two opposite misuses of Nature's hammer and avil, which, as Genius claims, are loaned to every man and woman so that everyone can become a writer.²³⁶ Lot's wife and the Sodomites, who put their tools in improper, idle use, thus forfeit their rights to be a writer and turn their own body into a disfigured, foolish form²³⁷ and meaningless "corpus," echoing the "foles" who anger God by their unclean use and practice of the "fylþe of of þe flesch" (202).

²³⁴ Caviness examines a similar image of Sodom and Lot's wife (Manchester, John Rylands Library MS Fr. 5 fols. 19v–20r), in which a woman is shown in the ruins of the city with her hands raised as Lot's wife's on the adjoining folio, suggesting the implicit homosexual desire between these two figures. She sees the female body of Lot's wife as a "cipher of its lack, the phallus." See Caviness (2001), pp. 45–68, esp. p. 63.

²³⁵ See *MED*, "mistrouth(e) (n.)"

²³⁶ Dahlberg (1986), ll. 19629–69, p. 323.

²³⁷ See below Ch. 4, p. 246, n. 290 for the medieval idea of the fool as denoting spiritual, mental and physical deformity.



Fig. 98. Christ instructs his disciples. England, 1350-80; *Commentary on the Gospels*. Bodleian. MS Laud Misc. 165, fol. 366v.



Fig. 99. The Crucifixion. England, 1265-70; *Oscott Psalter*. BL. MS Additional 50000, fol. 11v.

In a fourteenth-century English commentary (fig. 98), the dwarfed body of Lot's wife appears with the figure of Christ to illustrate the text of Luke 17:32–3.²³⁸ Her empty form contrasts with the body of Christ, which is vested with visual details as if to suggest her body as an incompetent “corpus” barren of meaning as opposed to the significance of the Word. In fig. 99, the images of Lot's wife and Lot with his two daughters are illustrated on the two sides of the central images of Christ carrying the cross and his crucifixion. Lot's wife's back-looking mirrors Christ's sorrowful backward gaze while her unlooked-upon body contrasts with the bodily charter of Christ which is intently watched by the other figures in the image.

The Homosexual Psalmist

At this point, it is worth noting the story of Orpheus, another well-known back-looker

²³⁸ “Remember Lot's wife! Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose it shall preserve it.”

who is often compared to Christ in exegetical tradition. Orpheus is often allegorized as a Christ figure with his underworld journey likened to Christ's descent into Hell. He is also compared to David because of his harp-playing. The story is sometimes moralized as a man who loses his life for falling back on worldly temptations.²³⁹



Fig. 100. Orpheus and Eurydice. France, 1407–8; *Othea*. BnF. MS Français 606, fol. 32v.

In one illustration from Christine de Pizan's *Othéa*, Orpheus is shown as looking back at Eurydice (fig. 100). They are depicted in similar positions with both their bodies slightly inclining to the left and their hands raised in front of their chest. Instead of disappearing or being drawn away, Eurydice stands still like a statue with her draping gown and her expressionless face. The moment of loss is represented as a fixation rather than a disappearance, which seems to emphasize the petrifying effect of

²³⁹ For medieval allegories and adaptations of Orpheus, see Desmond (2006), pp. 100–12; John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1970), especially “Oraia-Phonos and Eur-dike in Hell,” pp. 86–145; Robert G. Calkins, *Monument of Medieval Art* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 1–10; Blumenfeld-Kosinski (1997), pp. 91–5.

Opheus' backward gaze. Not only Eurydice, but Orpheus himself, too, appears to be stupefied in that moment, fixed by his own gaze on an image of his likeness like Lot's wife.²⁴⁰ The comment accompanying the miniature warns of Orpheus' wandering gaze: "But he was to hote in loue, the which desired to beholde hire, might not kepe hym from loking ayen after his loue."²⁴¹ Orpheus' failure to keep himself from looking back recalls Lot's wife who "neuer bode keped" (989) and looked behind. The transgressions of Orpheus and Lot's wife are both construed as a misuse of their body, which turns them into a spectacle of its consequence. Orpheus' gaze is further equated with desiring things that are impossible to have:

Salamon seyth the same, 'It is a foly thing,' he sieth, 'toseke that the which is impossybylle to be hadde.' Be that a man shulde not goo to seke Euredice in hell, we may vndirstond that the goode speyte shulde aske ne require of God no thing that is meruellous, ne that mervell to be thing oon. That is to sey, to tempte God.²⁴²

This something impossible to have is further identified as belonging to God and should not be tampered with. *Ovidius moralizatus* offers perhaps a most striking allegory in which Orpheus is associated with the original sin:

Or say that Orpheus is a sinner who lost his wife—that is soul—because of a serpent—that is the temptation of the devil—while she was indiscreetly striving to collect flowers—that is assemble temporal, fleeting things [...]
There are many men who, because they look back out of love of temporal goods and like a dog mentally turn back to their own vomit and love their wife [...] too much with the result

²⁴⁰ The parallels between Lot's wife and Orpheus are discussed in Martin Harries, "Forgetting Lot's Wife: Artaud, Spectatorship, and Catastrophe." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11.1 (1998): 221–38; A. N. Marlow, "Orpheus in Ancient Literature." *Music and Letters* 35.4 (1954): 361–9.

²⁴¹ Warner (ed.), Ch. 70, p. 79.

²⁴² Warner (ed.), p. 79.

that they delight in desire of her and turn back the eyes of their mind to her, lose her again; hell receives her. John 12:25: “He who loves his life will lose it.”²⁴³

Bersuire sees the Orpheus story as a re-enactment of the Fall of Adam and Eve through a back-looking gaze which further connects it to Lot’s wife. The image of a dog licking their vomit provides a similar scenario to the *Gawain*-poet’s retelling of the stories of Sodom and Lot’s wife in *Cleanness*. The concluding quotation from the Bible also echoes Christ’s warning to his disciples in Luke 17:32–3, where he uses Lot’s wife as a *memento mori*: “Remember Lot’s wife! Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose it shall preserve it.”

In Chapter 67 of *Othéa* where Christine de Pizan tells the magical power of Orpheus’ music to move and to petrify, she allegorizes him into a poet figure whose sweet “poetis” delight and “besot” those who read them. Hence good knights should shun this “idylnes” and “fleysly delythes” which fool a man like the “snare of the serpent.”²⁴⁴ By seeing Orpheus’ poetry as pure idleness, Christine is implicitly suggesting that his texts lacks semantic significance. The association of homosexuality, idleness, and writing recalls the *Gawain*-poet’s representation of the Sodomites’ and Lot’s wife’s meaningless texts, which yield nothing but salt and vomit licked by beasts and lead to death. Christine follows a line of medieval commentary tradition of seeing the union of Orpheus and Eurydice as the union of rhetoric and wisdom, and yet departs from it by refusing to assign his work any rhetorical significance. This implied criticism of Orpheus as an incompetent writer might have derived from the concept of the homosexual scribe denounced in *De planctu*, or

²⁴³ Reynolds (1971), p. 347.

²⁴⁴ Warner (ed.), p. 74–5

Genius' open condemnation of Orpheus as one who reads Nature's rule backward by refusing to forge with his hammers, and thus "did not know how to plow or write."²⁴⁵ In contrast to David's psalms which deliver salvation, Orpheus' songs bring one to destruction because he is at the same the harper and the harped,²⁴⁶ the subject and the predicate, and thus becomes a "barbarian in grammar" and a "corpus diaboli" which is incapable of meaning.

The Fool's "Sauteray"

The satanic writing of the Sodomites and Lot's wife is copied by Belshazzar, who is fashioned into a demonic writer in the poet's account of the feast. Following a detailed ekphrastic account of Solomon's cup on which exquisite figures and patterns are carved as "God's speech expounded to special prophets" (1492), the poet shows Belshazzar eating and drinking with this sacred cup and the vessels robbed from the temple of Jerusalem. He makes merry with these vessels, which under his abuses, clatter and ring "as sonet out of sauteray songe" (1516), which implicitly likens Belshazzar to a psalmist like David. The subsequent mention of Belshazzar's prayers to his "falce goddes," however, makes it obvious that he is not David, but the God-denying "dotel" (1517), whose "dotage" fills his heart and impairs ("blemyst") his mind (1421–5), leading him to pervert "God's speech" and sacred psalms into nonsensical blasphemy.²⁴⁷ Belshazzar's demonic writing is later represented again as a failed attempt at parodying God's writing hand (1542–4). Frightened by the

²⁴⁵ Dahlberg (1986), p. 324. For more discussions of Orpheus as a homosexual writer, see for example, Desmond (2006), pp. 100–12; Salzman-Mitchell (2005), pp.75–7, in which she analyzes Orpheus' narrative of Pygmalion as a realizing fantasy of his own frustrated desire to fix Eurydice as a spectacle. A similar view is expressed by M Janan in "The Book of Good Love? Design versus Desire in *Metamorphoses* 10." *Ramus* 17.2 (1988): 110–37.

²⁴⁶ As pointed out in Desmond (2006), p. 282, n. 16. She quotes Thomas Bein's discussion of the verb "to harp" as an implicit metaphor of sodomy in medieval texts.

²⁴⁷ The image of David and the Fool is often drawn for the text of Psalm 52. See below Ch. 4, pp. 217–25, 235–40 for further discussion of the iconography of the fool.

mysterious hand appearing in his court, Belshazzar raises his palms to display his “lers” (features/narratives) as God writes words with his palm holding a stylus (1533). But unlike God’s “runisch sauez” which contain meaning, what Belshazzar produces are only beastly and confusing “rorez” (1543) that echo his earlier nonsensical “psalms.”



Fig. 101. Upper roundel: Belshazzar’s feast. Lower roundel: Abuse of holy vessels. France, 13th century; *Bible Moralisée*. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. MS 1179, fol. 165v. Image after Mills (2012), fig. 3.

In a thirteenth-century *Bible moralisé* (fig. 101), Belshazzar’s feast is juxtaposed with an image of amorous couples making merry with holy vessels. Homosexuality is suggested by the male couple on the right and the woman on the left who, being caressed by a man, looks at her own image in a mirror. In the caption to this image, Belshazzar is equated with a heretical exegete who misinterprets the words of God,²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ “H[ic] s[ignificat] q[uo]d her[eti]ci peruertunt sacram scripturam e[st] exponunt ad libitum suum (This signifies that heretics pervert the sacred scripture and explain it at their own pleasure/liberty.)

recalling his demonic “sauteray” in *Cleanness*, which turns him into a demented Psalm fool and an evil “boster” (1499–1500).

In Daniel’s lengthy explanation of God’s mysterious words, Belshazzar’s demonic writing is juxtaposed with his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar who appears first as satanic writer but then allows himself to be corrected by God. Over-blown with self-conceit, Nebuchadnezzar forgets his respect for God and boasts of his own accomplishment by “making with his words” (1662). His account of the beauty of Babylon and his own impeccable handwork (1663–8) becomes a panegyric of himself and a pseudo genesis narrative in which he blatantly names himself as the God of the earth. His words are considered by God as “blasfemy” (1661), for which he is punished and cast into wilderness with beasts.²⁴⁹ Nebuchadnezzar’s fall and expulsion are represented through a poetic metamorphosis from “a bull or ox” to a “cow” in his attempt at figuring out what he is (1681–5), and through the textual description of him as reduced to a beastlike human that crawls with all fours (1683).

The animal imagery recalls the *Pearl-Dreamer*’s metaphorical transformation into animals in front of the divine. The Ovidian motif of metamorphosis appears repeatedly in the *Gawain*-poet’s works to show men’s disfigurement both as a consequence of their sin and as a result of acute awareness of one’s own inferiority to the divine. It is at the moment when Nebuchadnezzar considers himself as a cow, rather than a God, and realizes the divine power which creates and destroys freely in

Transcription and translation mine.

²⁴⁹ This detail had escaped most critical attention when this chapter was drafted in 2009. However, in his recent study, Bowers also notes that “*Cleanness* owes an extra debt to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* for Ovid in Bowers (2013), p. 65. It is notable that the poet drew on this less popular section of the scriptural story of Nebuchadnezzar rather than the part about his dream of an idol and a tree, which was frequently retold and visualized in medieval works such as Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. It should leave little doubt that this episode was chosen to invoke Ovidian theme of metamorphosis.

contrast to his, that his reason is recovered and his normal human state restored (1701–4). Failing to learn from the lesson of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar repeats the former's sin by creating his own blasphemous "sonet" and "sauteray" until he finally meets his violent death and undergoes an irreversible metaphoric transformation into "a dogge also dere þat in a dych lygges" (1792), which faintly recalls the tragic dismemberment of Actaeon as the result of his potential attempt at "narrating," and his tampering with this divine skill.²⁵⁰ The bold "boster" not only looks like a "blemyst" fool, but ends up becoming an unseemly, and disfigured body cut off from the sight of God (1804).

Regarding *Cleanness*

The Unconventional Ark

Having discussed the poem's concern with image-making and the role of human makers, it would benefit our understanding of the work as a whole to look at how these ideas are conceived and represented in the images accompanying this poem.

²⁵⁰ See above Ch. 2, p. 117 and n. 173 for the significance of the verb "narrare" in the story of Actaeon and Diana.



Fig. 102. Noah's ark. England, c. 1400; *Cleanness*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A.x. fol. 56v (60v).



Fig. 103. The whale. England, 1230–40; *The Harley Bestiary*. BL. MS Harley 4751, fol. 69r.



Fig. 104. Building of the Ark. England, 1327–35. *Holkham Bible*. BL. MS Additional 47682, fols. 7v–8r.



Fig. 105. Upper: Noah in Ark Lower: Entering the Ark. France, 1350; *Bible historiale*. BL. MS Royal 19 D II, fols. 12v, 13v.



Fig. 106. Noah's Ark. England, 1300–10; The Ramsey Psalter. Morgan. MS M.302, fol. 1v.

The image of Noah's Ark in *Cleanness* (fig. 102) departs from medieval iconography of the story in several ways.²⁵¹ Medieval images of the Ark usually visualize the story in a series of events including God's instruction, the building of the Ark, the entrance and the flood (figs. 104–5), but the process of ark-building is completely left out in this miniature.²⁵² The Ark in *Cleanness* is represented as an ordinary boat. It does not have the tiered structure seen in conventional images of the Ark (figs. 105–6).²⁵³

²⁵¹ Lee (1977) points out that the fish in the miniature is drawn in the bestiary style which often depicts the whale as swallowing another fish, and suggests that these fish may symbolize the “baptismal effects of the flood which swallowed the earth” (39). But I think the image's allusion to medieval bestiary is deeper than Lee suggests, as its whole composition, not just the fish, shows greater likeness to the image of the whale in the bestiary (see fig. 103) than to other images of Noah's ark. Hilmo suggests that this miniature derives from medieval images of the mouth of hell, and see it as linking *Cleanness* with *Patience*, foreshadowing the story of Jonah and the whale in Hilmo (2004), p. 154.

²⁵² Medieval iconography of Noah is discussed in great detail by Don Cameron Allen in *The Legend of Noah: Renaissance Rationalism in Art, Science, and Letters* (Urbana, 1949), esp. pp. 155–73.

²⁵³ As noted in Allen (1949), p. 156, medieval biblical commentators did not see the Ark as a ship, but as “the box or chest of the Greek and Hebrew texts,” and the Ecclesia. They also considered Noah as the second Adam and the risen Christ. Images of Noah's Ark were influenced by these commentaries and so tend to represent the ark as a box or a casket, a sarcophagus in which the body of Christ the Word was laid. Scott also notes this iconographical difference of the Ark image in *Cleanness* and claims that this deviation indicates that “the artist did not know the more common models for the ark,” and reflects the artist's general limited knowledge of conventions, in Scott (1996), p. 67. The

Instead, a trident-like mast stands upright in the middle of the boat, occupying the upper register of the picture, which contradicts the textual emphasis that the Ark lacks any human devices to maneuver it. Noah holds the mast with both hands while other people look at the sea waves with apparent concern. There are no corpses in the water as shown in conventional images (figs. 104, 106). Instead, three fish are present in the water, one of which appears to be swallowing a smaller one. The trident and the fish together recalls one of the earliest symbols of the crucifixion of Christ, in which the fish stands for the body of Christ and the trident for the cross. (fig. 107).²⁵⁴

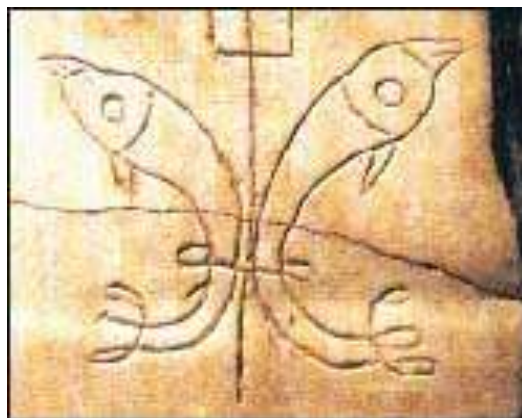


Fig. 107. Symbol of the Cross. Rome, c. 200. Catacombs of St. Callixtus. Image from JesusWalk.

choice of a plain boat over a cathedral-like structure might have derived from the same concern that leads to the overall lack of visual representation of deities in the *Gawain*-manuscript as Hilmo has observed.

²⁵⁴ The symbol of two fishes (sometimes dolphins) and a trident shape was most prominently used before the fourth century to replace the cross symbol. The cross often appeared in the disguise of an anchor, a trident, or a ship's mast. See Jack Tresidder, *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols: In Myth, Art, and Literature* (London, 2004), p. 154.



Fig. 108. Christ's Crucifixion. France, 11th century; Gospels. Morgan. MS M.333 fol. 85r.



Fig. 109. Detail of the Fish and the trident (figure on the right).

In a medieval image (figs. 108–9), a figure who holds a trident and fish in his two hands is drawn at the bottom of the frame in juxtaposition to the image of Christ on the cross in the upper left corner. In medieval Christian typology, Noah's Ark also symbolizes the Church and its mast stands for the Cross.²⁵⁵ The fish and mast in the Ark image of *Cleanness* seem to have drawn on these symbolical traditions. The

²⁵⁵ See Maurice Dilasser, *The Symbols of the Church* (Collegeville, 1999), p. 30.

presence of God is condensed into these two symbolic forms, which again reinforces the poem's emphasis on artistic creativity as God's essence. Noah holds the trident-like mast as he holds an ax when building the Ark in some medieval pictures (fig. 105), as if to suggest that it is not his hands, but God's, that create the Ark. The divine instruction and the process of ark-building are simultaneously assimilated into a trident form so that human craftsmanship is reduced. God's hand as the mast is juxtaposed with human hands which try to handle a huge oar. Noah's wife places her left hand on the shoulder of Noah while pointing to the oar and the sea with her other hand, as if to draw attention to the difference between the order created by the divine hand and the chaos aroused by man's useless maneuvering as suggested by the sea's tumult. The fish swallowing another small fish complements this sense of chaos and might have served to evoke the medieval allegory of the great fish (fig. 103) in which "a mediocre faith given over to pleasure and the enticement of food" is likened to small fish which are attracted by the sweet odor exhaled by the great fish, gathering themselves in its mouth and then is swallowed by it.²⁵⁶ The image of food, worldly temptation and sin through one's mouth in this allegory relates well to *Cleanness'* over-arching theme of feasting, and recalls man's fall through a bite of the poisonous apple (241).

The Humbled Daniel

Belshazzar's feast (fig. 110) is drawn on the other side of the page. In contrast to Noah's Ark, his court as representative of Babylon stands as the supreme example of human creation to a self-serving end.

²⁵⁶ Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: the Second-family Bestiary: Commentary, Art, Text and Translation* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 205–6.



Fig. 110. Belshazzar's feast. England, c. 1400; *Cleanness*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 56r (60r).

If human handiwork is reduced in the depiction of Noah's Ark, it is emphasized in detail in this image by the presence of elaborate vessels on the table. Among the many vessels portrayed, at least three are identifiable—a gold monstrance, a chalice, and a bishop's crozier, which seldom appear in an ordinary feast, but are used in the service of consecration.²⁵⁷ This pictorial representation seems to associate Belshazzar with the counterfeiters of God's craft in lines 10–11, who parody the Eucharist by handling God's body on an altar.

²⁵⁷ As pointed out in Hilmo (2004), p. 153. She also argues that the artist ignored the textual description of Belshazzar sitting on the throne, and portrayed him as sitting behind a high table to achieve this sacramental image.



Fig. 111. Belshazzar's feast. Netherland, 1432; Bible. BL. MS Yates Thompson 16, fol. 258v.



Fig. 112. Belshazzar's feast. Netherland, 1470; Bible historiale. BL. Royal 15 D I, fol. 45r.



Fig. 113. Belshazzar and Daniel. England, 1375–1400; *Speculum humanae salvationis*. Morgan. MS M. 766, fol.62r.



Fig. 114. Belshazzar and Daniel. Germany, 1350–1400; *Speculum humanae salvationis*. Morgan. MS M.140, fol. 43r.

It is interesting to note how the image of Belshazzar's feast in *Cleanness* assimilates two different iconographical conventions of the scene. In one convention Belshazzar and his guests are depicted as watching the mysterious hand appearing and writing above them (figs. 111–2). Another convention dwells on Daniel's explanation to

Belshazzar, transferring them from the feast into an empty background where the two of them converse under the hand of God (figs. 113–4). In both conventions, Daniel and Belshazzar both appear as readers of the divine words, watching them from below. But the image of Daniel and Belshazzar in *Cleanness* (fig. 110) creates a more complex visual hierarchy with Belshazzar sitting at the table and pointing his hand to the hand of God next to him while Daniel is standing in the lower register and watching the two of them above. The upper pictorial space which accommodates the king and God is linked to the lower space where Daniel stands by the other hand of Belshazzar which points to Daniel, as if suggesting a connection or identification between him and God's hand. This visual representation seems to show Belshazzar's overblown pride by placing him on a par with God while implying the potential likeness between the writing hand of God and Daniel, who through his interpretation, recreates the divine words. But by visually humbling and confining Daniel to a lower register, the artist frees him from any taint of transgression, distinguishing him clearly from the unclean vessels in the upper register.

The Legacy of Adam and Eve

In both the text and images of *Cleanness*, human transgression is always accompanied by symbols or examples of salvation to provide hope of redemption. As Reichardt suggested, the *Gawain*-artist chooses to visualize the whole text in the two images of the Ark and sign-reading to show the important role of reading and writing in guiding the human soul towards salvation.²⁵⁸ As the second Adam, Noah allows himself to be filled by God and avoids the narcissistic sin of his forefathers and the drowning death

²⁵⁸ Reichardt argues that the miniature of Daniel lies at the center of the manuscript between the illustrations of Nineveh and the New Jerusalem to evoke the “dual nature of manuscript textuality” and its production and consumption. See Reichardt (1997), p. 127. His argument echoes Stanbury's reading of *Cleanness* as a work describing how man learns to read signs to gain salvation.

of idolatry. His intense gaze on the trident-like mast and his hands which hold fast onto it recall the images of Adam praying to God in his creation. Unlike his forefathers, Noah does not turn his eyes away. He looks steadily and attentively on the mast, the symbols of Christ, and disregards the sea's tumult. The presence of Noah's family symbolizes the continuation of life in contrast to the death in which Adam spiritually drowns his offspring. Noah's departure from Adam's precedent recalls the Ovidian account of the flood in which Deucalion, who by throwing behind him the bones of his forefathers, the stone of the Earth, repopulates the postdiluvian world.²⁵⁹

Ovide moralisé likens Deucalion to Noah and his ark through an image of the Ecclesia:

Ainsi, en bien usant du bon conseil de Themis la deesse, c'est à dire de Sainte Eglise militant, qui est de getter par vraye confession les dures pierres des pechiez derriere leurs dos.²⁶⁰

[Thus, [Deucalion] takes well the good advice of the goddess Themis, that is to say of the Holy Church militant, which is to throw, through true confession of sin, the hard stones behind their backs.]

The sin is construed as an ancestral burden and represented in the form of bones. By throwing away the narcissistic legacy of Adam and Eve, and turning his back to their relics, Noah empties himself of the sin of his ancestors, becomes a clean vessel of God, and redeems mankind from the sin of idolatry.

²⁵⁹ *Metamorphoses* I.379-83: ““Oh, Themis, tell us by what means our race may be restored, and bring aid, O most merciful, to a world o'erwhelmed.’ The goddess was moved and gave this oracle: ‘Depart hence, and with veiled heads and loosened robes throw behind you as you go the bones of your great mother.’”

²⁶⁰ Boer (1954), XL, p. 61. Translation mine.

The Ovidian “Egge”

Through the biblical examples of Lucifer, Adam and Eve, the Sodomites, Lot’s wife, and Belshazzar, the poet shows the consequence of human makers who are full of themselves and tamper with God’s role as the Demiurge. He supplies the stories of Noah and Abraham as counter examples of demonic creation to demonstrate how man can safely engage themselves in the act of creating, and the key, as the poet shows, lies in an essential humble attitude of accepting and acknowledging the divine will as the only and supreme power behind every action of mankind. This humility comes from a realization that man has to submit himself to God, and see himself only as an agent of the divine will, and this is achieved when one empties his own body of willful pride, the filth, and becomes a clean vessel to accommodate God. In other words, to be a good maker lies ironically in his willingness to be recreated by God into an image of vessel. It is out of humility that Christ steps onto his cross to fulfill the divine will, and it is this humility of Christ that the poet has in mind when he urges his readers to conform to the “clean Christ” (1067–8).

The poet discusses the efficacy and ambiguity of human language in *Cleanness* by exploring writing as a specific form of image-making through his evocation of Eve as the archetypal Law-perverter whose inscribing gaze writes down at the same time the fall of man and a promise of redemption. Her perversion of divine law along with the heretical writing of the Sodomites and Lot’s wife contrasts with the Virgin Mary, the “lel mayden” (1069), who faithfully bear the words of God and brings the life-giving Word to mankind (1069–88). The poet’s awareness of the danger of writing as usurping God’s power can be felt at the conclusion of the poem where he states that he has shown how uncleanness penetrates God’s heart in three ways (1805), which parallels the three signs God writes on the wall, and recalls the *Pearl-Dreamer*’s three

senseless, ill-advised words rebuked by the Pearl-maiden in their debate (291).

This awareness of the writer as God is widespread in medieval culture. Chaucer, as we have seen, likens himself to God in his curse of his scribe Adam. This author/God metaphor is propagated by medieval Ovidian commentaries, and is explicitly visualized in a fourteenth-century manuscript of *Ovide moralisé* (fig. 115). In this image, God is shown to be creating the world in the form of a cosmic egg, “O,” which draws on the etymology of Ovid’s name as “egg-dividing.” In the next page (fig. 116), the image of Ovid writing with a stylus and a knife parallels with the image of God creating the universe with his compass. In another image (fig. 117), Ovid is shown writing with one of his hands holding an egg, which refers to his own name and the cosmic egg created by God as suggested by the background scene of chaos.



Fig. 115. Creation of God and the cosmic Egg. France, 14th century; *Ovide moralisé*. Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen. MS 1044, fol. 17v. © Bridgeman Art Library.



Fig. 116. Left: Creation of the world. Right: Ovid writing. France, 14th Century; *Ovide moralisé*. Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen. MS 1044, fol. 16v. © Bridgeman Art Library.



Fig. 117. Ovid writing. France, 1480; *Ovide moralisé*. Royal Library of Denmark. MS Thott. 399, fol. 26r. Image from Moralizing Ovid, The *Ovide Moralisé* Project.

The author of *Ovide moralisé* draws on the etymology of Ovid's name, and allegorizes the role of the poet as a creator of meanings: "To make manifest and convey a sense of the order and foundations of the elements, Ovid opens the egg so that we may see the truth" ("A ce veoir nous avisa, Ovides, qui l'œuf devisa.") (199–204).²⁶¹ The French poet equates Ovid's narratives and his own interpretation of them with God creating order out of chaos. They uncover the classical fables, like the cosmic egg which "contains three things enclosed by the shell"²⁶²—the yolk as the earth, the white as water, and a layer of air— so that their meanings are exposed and made known to readers.

The *Gawain*-poet may have had this interesting etymology in mind when he prefers to explain things in three ways in his works.²⁶³ However, he avoids his French

²⁶¹ This etymology appears in Latin *accessus* to Ovid's works as early as the thirteenth century. For medieval allegories of Ovid's name, see Pairet (2011), pp. 83–107, p. 92.

²⁶² Pairet (2011), p. 92.

²⁶³ The noticeable prominence of the word "egge" in *Cleanness* would also reinforce the allusion to the allegory of Ovid's name while calling forth the image of tools and a writing stylus. For example, in the flood scene (449–56), the water recedes and the enclosed ark stops by "eggez" (ridges) which are

colleague's high-flown metaphor of a Godlike author, and steers clear of the sin of usurping divine power by referring to his own writing purely as an act of "showing" through which God is made known, instead of using other words which might evoke the image of writing. In this, he seems to ally himself with Daniel, who appears as full of the "gostes of God" and his divine "syence sazes," and all he does is to "schawe" them (1598-9). At the conclusion of the poem, the *Gawain*-poet, too, submits himself to God's power. He casts himself as a vessel accommodated by God's "gere" and grace, and a subordinate looker on God's face (1810-11) as the Daniel in the miniature. He holds his gaze steadily on God like Noah, and commits his writing to God's "service" (1812). Because of this, his work becomes a clean and "fayre forme," which is devoid of the filth of willful pride and accommodates nothing but what God has to show.

The poet's keen awareness of himself as a scribe and vessel of divine words is similar to that of the anonymous scribe portrayed in the Holkham Bible (fig. 118). The Dominican patron reminds the scribe who is working with a stylus and a knife to "do the work well because it will be shown to a rich gent." To these words the scribe replies "if I make it true, and God grants me life, never will you see another such book."²⁶⁴ In other words, it is God's will that works through his hand, and all he does is to copy and show it faithfully. By allowing himself to be the vessel of God, the anonymous scribe, too, finds the fairest form for his work that will be incomparable.

partially "unhuled" (exposed). Noah then opens the window of the ark and sends the raven and the dove to fetch "message," "bodeword," and "syngne" of safety and salvation. The enclosed ark itself also contains a divine message of salvation that is exposed bit by bit after the flood recedes until it is finally fully open and releases its contents to set the chaotic postdiluvian world back into order.

²⁶⁴ "Si frai voyre, e deux me doynt vivere, / Unkes ne veyes Autretel livere." Brown (2007), p. 31.



Fig. 118. The patron and the scribe. England, 1327–35; The Holkham Bible. BL. MS Additional 47682, fol. 1.

For a poem dedicated to the concept of cleanness, the poet is overtly preoccupied with filth and dirt.²⁶⁵ This inversion might have derived out of his keen sense of humility and awareness of the limits of human language in representing the ineffable, hence this apophatic text in which the clean quality of God is consistently described through what it is not. If we consider the old definition of dirt as a “matter out of state” and disorder,²⁶⁶ the poet’s effort to define this uncleanness in a different register can be seen as an implicit Ovidian attempt at “making manifest a sense of order” out of the fallen, chaotic world so as to “further” God’s message. The flood and fire which wash

²⁶⁵ Andrew and Waldron (eds.), p. 112, note to lines 27–8.

²⁶⁶ See Bowers (2013), p. 58. He cites Mary Douglas’ discussion of “dirt” and suggests that the earlier understanding of it as “disorder” comes closest to the meaning of uncleanness in the poem.

away the foulness of the world answer the poem's apophatic understanding of cleanness as devoid of filth. This sense of emptiness lies at the core of being a good vessel to God. *Cleanness* calls forth the importance of humility in all human activities, and this self-lowering and self-emptying quality is further explored in *Patience*, where the poet redefines the virtue of patience and the Sign of Jonah in relation to the theological concept of *kenosis*.

Chapter Four

“Fettled in on forme”: The Dual Figure of Jonah in *Patience*

The Christological concept of kenotic humility is brought to the fore and explored as the main theme in *Patience* through a re-consideration of patience as a virtue consisting not only of passive suffering but also of passion. Many scholars have discussed the poet's use of the story of Jonah as a negative exemplum of the virtue of patience, seeing his rashness only as a contrast of God's mercy.²⁶⁷ Few, however, have considered this negative representation of Jonah along with his reputation as “the Sign of Jonah,” a symbol of salvation. This chapter examines how this conventional scriptural “Sign of Jonah,”²⁶⁸ a Christ figure based on the typological reading of Christ's descent into hell and that of Jonah into the fish's belly, is reshaped into an ambiguous figure on which a set of binary concepts are yoked together. It argues that,

²⁶⁷ For general discussions of *Patience*, see D. S. Brewer, “The *Gawain*-Poet: A General Appreciation of Four Poems.” *Criticism* 17.2 (1967): 130–42; Spearing, “*Patience* and the *Gawain*-Poet.” *Anglia* 84 (1966): 305–29; Putter (1996), pp. 103–46; Anderson (2005), pp. 126–57; Bowers (2013), pp. 72–86. For the sources of the poem, see Oliver Farrar Emerson, “A Parallel between the Middle English Poem *Patience* and an Early Latin Poem Attributed to Tertullian.” *PMLA* 10.2 (1895): 242–8; Ordelle G. Hill, “The Late-Latin *De Jona* as a Source for *Patience*.” *JEGP* 66 (1967): 21–5; Francis Cairns, “Latin Sources and Analogues of the M.E. *Patience*.” *SN* 59 (1987): 7–18. For discussions of the poem's meaning, see Johnson, “*Patience* and the Poet's Use of Psalm 93.” *MP* 74.1 (1976): 67–71; Normand Berlin, “*Patience*: A Study in Poetic Elaboration.” *SN* 33 (1961): 80–85; Hill, “The Audience of *Patience*.” *MP* 66.2 (1968): 103–9; David Williams, “The Point of *Patience*.” *MP* 68.2 (1970): 127–36; Jay Schleusener, “*Patience*: Lines 35–40.” *MP* 67.1 (1969): 64–6; Moorman, “The Role of the Narrator in *Patience*.” *MP* 61.2 (1963): 90–95; Anderson, “The Prologue of *Patience*.” *MP* 63.1 (1966): 283–7; Elizabeth D. Kirk, “‘Who Suffreth More Than God?': Narrative Redefinition of *Patience* in *Patience* and *Piers Plowman*.” in G. J. Schiffrorst ed., *The Triumph of Patience: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Orlando, 1978), pp. 88–104. For discussions which concern the relationship between man and God in the poem, see Myra Stokes, “‘Suffering' in *Patience*.” *ChauR* 18.4 (1984), 354–64; Prior, “*Patience*—Beyond Apocalypse.” *MP* 84.2 (1986): 337–48; Schleusener, “History and Action in *Patience*.” *PMLA* 86.5 (1971): 959–65; Andrew, “Jonah and Christ in *Patience*.” *MP* 70 (1973): 230–33; Lawrence M. Clopper, “The God of the *Gawain*-poet.” *MP* 94 (1996): 1–18; Lara Ruffolo, “Verbs in *Patience*: God's Patience in Action.” *SN* 65.2 (1993): 141–55; Edward Vasta, “Denial in the Middle English *Patience*.” *ChauR* 33.1 (1998): 1–30.

²⁶⁸ Matthew 12:39: “Who answering said to them: An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign: and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.”

as a traditional symbol of Christ, Jonah's sins and weakness draw attention to the humanity and frailty of Christ which late-medieval incarnational theology and devotions tend to emphasize over his abiding divinity and awe-inspiring majesty. By exploring the transformation of Jonah as a symbol, the poet looks into man's relations with God and shows the malleability, instability, and dynamics of signs which change not only with viewers' perspectives, but also with time.

The Kenotic Framing

The poet begins the story of Jonah with a prologue whose very first line sets out the main concept of the whole poem, "paciencie":

Paciencie is a poynt, þaʒ hit displese ofte.
 When heuy herttes ben hurt wyth heþyng oþer elles,
 Suffraunce may aswagen hem and þe swelme leþe,
 For houelles vche a qued and quenches malyce;
 For quoso suffer cowþe syt, sele wolde folze,
 And quo for þro may noʒt þole, þe þikker he sufferes. (1–6)

The curious association of the virtue of patience with the story of Jonah instead of Job has been noted and discussed by critics who see patience as endurance and an ability to stand tribulations with calmness, and connect this virtue with the eighth Beatitude: "Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam" (Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake) (Matt. 5: 10). In these readings, it is God's patience through the foil of the impatient Jonah that is emphasized in the poem. However, rather than an ability to suffer as to undergo hardship, the idea of being subject or submitting oneself to a higher presence, which is conveyed more clearly by the

passive Latin verb “patiuntur,” is perhaps what the poet is implying through his illustration of patience with the figure of Jonah, who is not even remotely patient in the sense of being tolerant and resigned, but who, like Christ, is made by God to undergo various hardships.²⁶⁹ The sense of subjection and humility is complemented by the words “suffraunce” and “thole” (5), both of which denote not only an ability to withstand, but also the state or willingness to be acted upon by an agent.²⁷⁰

The poet draws attention to the kenotic aspect of patience by binding it with poverty which symbolizes both physical and spiritual humility, framing the story of Jonah in a kenotic context in which emphasis is placed more on one’s role and willingness as an agent and instrument of God than on an ability to endure God’s trials. The poet illustrates this virtue of self-lowering through the negative exemplum of the proud, self-conscious and defiant figure of Jonah to explore the relationship between God the Creator and his human agents, between God’s word and man’s interpretation of it, demonstrating how the divine message is recreated and conveyed by the human messenger, and to what extent the messenger himself becomes the message in the poet’s representation of the sign of Jonah.

The themes of divine and human creation and the use of human language, which are also explored in *Pearl* and *Cleanness*, continue into *Patience* and are perceivable in the prologue in which the poet states the motivation for telling the story:

I herde on a halyday, at a hyze masse,
How Mathew melede þat his Mayster His meyny con teche.
Aȝt happes He hem hyȝt and vcheon a mede,

²⁶⁹ For similar arguments of “patience” as an active virtue after Christ, see Kirk (1978); Johnson (1976).

²⁷⁰ See *MED*, “sufferen (v.2)” (b) and “sufferaunce (n.2)” (a).

Sunderlupes, for hit dissert, vpon a ser wyse: (9–12)

The poet states that he is intrigued by a sermon he heard about Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Then he itemizes the eight Beatitudes in a similar wording to that of the Gospel. While previous critics have focused on the significance of the Beatitudes and their literal bearing on the story of Jonah in order to explain the poem's unusual framing by the virtue of patience,²⁷¹ the point lies perhaps not so much in the meaning of the Beatitudes as in the way in which they are preserved and delivered, that is, as the poet states, how St. Matthew speaks about what Jesus Christ teaches. In other words, the poet is not so interested in Christ's words *per se*, as in how they are delivered, received and interpreted throughout time—first by God himself, secondly by St. Matthew, then by the anonymous preacher of the narrator's time, and finally by the poet. Placing himself in the long line of transmission of the scriptural text, the poet is conscious of his own role both as the perceiver of the sign in hearing the sermon and as its interpreter and (re)creator in retelling the story of Jonah.

The kenotic concepts of self-humbling and its importance in human artistic activities are demonstrated in *Cleanness* through examples of both legitimate and evil human creators. In *Patience*, the poet also reminds the reader of the virtues of patience and poverty which are represented as “play-feres” (45) and are by necessity inseparable and the prerequisites for the poet to deliver the scriptural text with truth and authority:

Bot syn I am put to a poynt þat pouerté hatte,
 I shal me poruay pacyence and play me with boþe,
 For in þe tyxte þere þyse two arn in teme layde,
 Hit arn fettled in on forme, þe forme and þe laste,
 And by quest of her quoyntyse enquylen on mede. (35–9)

²⁷¹ Putter offers a different reading of this passage by looking into its hunting imagery in which the virtues are likened to hounds. See Putter (2006), pp. 372–5.

The narrator reveals his imposed poverty and shows his acceptance of humility and his submission to the divine will inflicted upon him before he begins to retell the biblical text of Jonah: “Wyl 3e tary a lyttel tyne and tent me a whyle, / I schal wysse yow þerwyth as holy wryt tells” (60). In his resigned acceptance of suffering, the narrator becomes an agent through whom the message of “patience” in the “holy wryt” is conveyed (“wysse”) to readers through his own example and that of Jonah in his retelling of the story.

Jonah the Antagonist

The Mock-heroic Martyrdom

The process of interpretation of the divine message starts at the beginning of the story when God commands Jonah to go to Nineveh. The poet expands two verses in the Vulgate into 14 lines (61–74), which describe two perspectives: the poet’s (61–4/73–4) and God’s (65–72). From God’s perspective, his own words are “speche,” “sazes,” and “arende,” which are meaningful texts. But from the poet’s perspective, God’s words at this moment appear to Jonah as mere “glam,” “roghlych rurd,” and “steuen”: loud but unintelligible and thus meaningless sound, which suggests his failure in interpreting them correctly.

The theme of interpretation and literary creation is also suggested by Jonah’s identification of the divine message as a “tale” and “tyþynges”:

If I bowe to His bode and bryng hem þis tale,
And I be nummen in Nuniue my nyes begynes:

He telles me þose traytours arn typed schrewes;
I com wyth þose tyþynges, þay ta me bylyue. (75–8)

Jonah resembles the Sodomites and Belshazzar who reject God's texts and misinterpret them into their own demonic writing by responding to the divine "tale" which God wants him to deliver with an imaginary narrative of the Passion of his own making, in which he is to be tortured by traitors:

'Oure Syre syttes,' he says, 'on sege so hyze
In His glowande glorye, and gloumbes ful lyttel
Paȝ I be nummen in Nunniue and naked dispoyled,
On rode rwly torent with rybaudes mony.' (93–6)

In his imaginary text, Jonah casts himself in the role of Christ. His fear of suffering recalls Christ's frailty and agony in the Garden of Gethsemane where he prays for strength to face the unknown tribulation that is to come (Luke 22: 41–3). Jonah's complaint of God's indifference to his well-being is reminiscent of the crucified Christ who, before taking his last breath, asks God why he has forsaken him (Matthew 27:46). Jonah's active embrace of the "rode" is then described in vivid detail:

Then he tron on þo tres, and þay her tramme ruchen,
Cachen vp þe crossayl, cables þay fasten,
Wizt at þe wyndas wezen her ankres,
Spende spak to þe sprete þe spare bawelyne,
Gederen to þe gyde-ropes, þe grete cloþ falles,
Pay layden in on laddeborde, and þe lofe wynnes,
Be blyþe breþe at her bak þe bosum he fyndes;
He swenges me þys swete schip swefte fro þe hauen. (101–8)

His escape for life is staged as a mock heroic martyrdom of crucifixion hidden in the poet's nautical language—the shipboard becomes the "tree" he steps on with other sailors fastening the "crossed" sail with ropes. The anchor which is weighed is

suggestive of a human body hung up.²⁷² The embarking of the ship is described in a way that recalls Christ who yielded his last “breþe,” with his body finally laid down in the “busum” of the Virgin Mary and his spirit ascending to the “hauen.” The antithetical atmosphere of this metaphorical Passion is suggested by the concluding phrase “fro the hauen”—Jonah’s mock-heroic martyrdom does not bring him anywhere close to the sweet refuge he seeks, but away “from” it as he departs from the haven of Joppa. Jonah’s defiance against the divine will and self-interest turns himself into an antithesis of Christ who obeys God’s providence and allows it to act upon/through himself despite the fact that it is not fully comprehensible to him. Jonah’s mock-heroic martyrdom is in some way a comic parallel to the contemporary Lollards’ self-comparison to Christ. They likened their persecuted situation to Christ’s by connecting the word “loller” etymologically to the verb “to loll,” which they claimed, invoked the image of Christ carrying the Cross: “The most blessed Loller that ever was, or ever shall be, was our Lord Jesus Christ, for our sins lolling on the rood tree.”²⁷³

Jonah’s mock-heroic martyrdom is complemented by the poets comment on his folly immediately after he embarks from Joppa:

Dyngne Daudid on des þat demed þis speech
 In a psalme þat he set þe sauter withinne:
 ‘O folez in folk felez operwhyle
 And vnderstondes vmbestounde, þaʒ ze be stapen in folé:
 Hope ze þat He heres not þat eres alle made?
 Hit may not be þat He is blynde þat bigged vche yʒe.’

²⁷² See *MED* “weien (v.1),” 6, “to bear, and to hang suspended”; “ankre (n.),” “anchor”, puns with “ancre (n.),” a Christian.

²⁷³ Margaret Deanesly, *The Lollard Bible and Other Medieval Biblical Versions* (Cambridge, 1920), p. 274. For a summary of “Lollard” as a term of abuse and its various etymologies, see Crompton (1968–9), p. 11. Bowers also relates the figure of Jonah and his errands to late-medieval itinerant Lollard preachers and self-appointed prophets such as William Thorpe in Bowers (2013), p. 75.

Bot he dredes no dynt þat dotes for elde.
 For he watz fer in þe flod foundande to Tarce,
 Bot I trow ful tyd ouertan þat he were,
 So þat shomely to schort he schote of his ame. (119–28)

The “vche yze” of foolish people suggests man’s partial (“vmbesounde”) and limited perspective in contrast to God’s omniscience. The poet’s comment centers on the gap between appearance and reality, and man’s constant failure to correctly perceive (“felez”) and understand what they see and hear. The poet alludes to Psalm 93 and switches its original focus on the folly of God’s enemies to the faulty perception of mankind. His reinterpretation of the biblical verse suggests the on-going transformation of the sign of Jonah, who now “schomely to schort he shote of his ame” (128). When Jonah embarks on his journey, he literally steps onto the rood and starts becoming a sign. Jonah’s missing shot indicates that at this moment he is at best a foolish Wisdom, and a failed “typus Christi.” Unlike Christ, who is nailed unto the Cross out of his voluntary subjection to God, Jonah embraces his own rood out of self-interest and disobedience, which turns him into an antithetical image of Christ, and an image which has only the form of Christ but is empty in his spirit, in other words, an idol without a soul.

The God-Denying Psalm Fool

The poet’s comment on Jonah’s folly is also visualized in the miniature of Jonah Preaching (fig. 119) by the hooded man who holds a stick in his hand. Critics have associated this quizzical figure and his “idiotic expression” with the foolish Ninevites (“sottez formadde”) (509) mentioned by God when he reproaches Jonah for his unjustified anger because of the ruined woodbine (505–15).²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ As noted in Gollancz, *“Pearl”, “Cleanness”, “Patience” and “Sir Gawain”* (London, 1923), p. 10. A similar opinion is expressed in Lee (1977), p. 35. Horrall disagrees and sees this figure as a

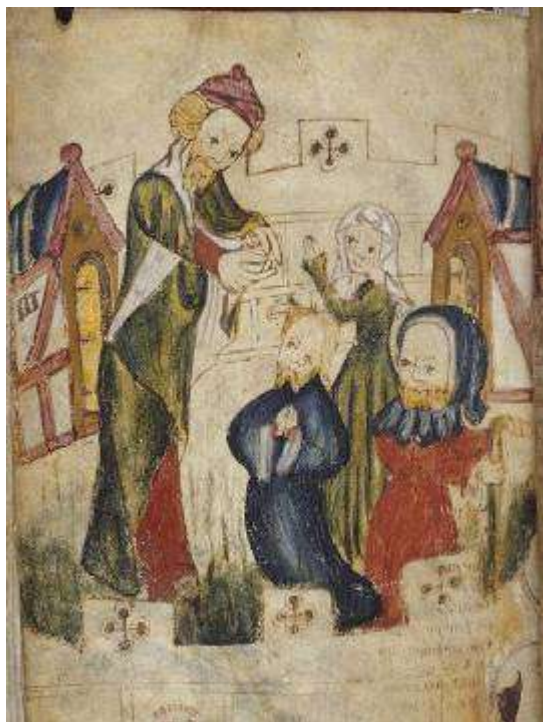


Fig. 119. Jonah preaching. England, c. 1400; *Patience*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A.x. fol. 82v (86v).



Fig. 120. Daniel and King Belshazzar. England, c. 1400; *Cleanness*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 56v (60v).

Critics have concentrated on this passage as the textual source for this miniature of Jonah Preaching (fig. 119), and identified each figure in this image accordingly. Thus, among the audience of Jonah, the two men and the woman in supplication might have signified the “malicious mon” (508) and “wymmen vnwytte” (511) and since the third one, the hooded man, is apparently not a “lyttel barne” (510), he is left to symbolize the mad, foolish Ninevites. However, a more straightforward identification of this hooded figure might be made with the “folez in folk” and Jonah the “dotes for elde” in the poet’s invocation of David and Psalm 93 (119–28) when commenting on Jonah’s folly of running away from God. This identification is supported by late-medieval pictorial tradition of the fool which tended to depict him as wearing a peaked cap with eared tippet and holding a bauble in his hand, as influenced by

commonplace in conventional images of preaching in Horrall (1986), p. 196, n. 20. Reichardt and Hilmo share Greg’s observation of the similarity between the hoods of the *Pearl*-Dreamer and this figure, suggesting that the hood is a symbol of worldly things throughout the *Gawain*-poems.

costumes and devices developed in late-medieval theaters.²⁷⁵

The image of the fool was made familiar through popular plays and the frequently seen illuminated initial “D” of Psalm 52: “Dixit stultus in corde suo non est Deus.” (The fool said in his heart: There is no God.).



Fig. 121. The fool. England, 13th century; Psalter. Bodleian. MS Douce 118, fol. 60v.



Fig. 122. The fool. England, 14th century; Psalter. Bodleian. MS Bodl. 953, p. 173.



Fig. 123. The fool and David. England, 14th century; Psalter. Bodleian. MS Ashmole 1523, fol. 66r.



Fig. 124. The fool and David. England, 14th century; Macclesfield Psalter. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. MS 1-2005, fol. 77r.

²⁷⁵ For the costume and representation of the fool in late-medieval theaters and manuscripts, see “Parallels with Medieval Drama,” in *The Egerton Genesis*, eds. Mary Coker Joslin and Carolyn Coker Joslin Watson (London, 2001), pp. 137–60, esp. pp.147–8.



Fig. 125. The fool and David. England, 14th century; Psalter. Bodleian. MS Auct. D. 2. 2, fol. 60r.



Fig. 126. The fool and David. England, 14th century; Psalter. BL. MS Royal 2 B. VIII, fol. 54.



Fig. 127. God and the fool. England, 1380; Great Bible. BL. MS Royal 1 E. IX, fol. 148.



Fig. 128. The fool and David. England, 1310-20; Psalms. BL. MS Arundel 83, fol. 40v.

This God-denying fool in Psalm 52 is conventionally portrayed as half-naked or wearing a hood with a liripipe, holding a bauble in one hand and a round disk in another as a mocking representation of God's scepter and orb.²⁷⁶ The fool is

²⁷⁶ For a survey of medieval images of the fool, see D. J. Gifford, "Iconographical Notes towards a Definition of the Medieval Fool." *JWCI* 37 (1974): 336–42. I am indebted to V. A. Kolve's inspiring and provocative discussion of the fool in medieval images and literature in "God-Denying Fools: Tristan, Troilus, and the Medieval Religion of Love," in Kolve (2009), pp. 223–56. Kolve discusses the fool in the context of sacred and secular love, demonstrating how the figure of fool was used as a convenient symbol to accommodate the unfamiliar and the uncategorizable. Although he discusses the fool with a different emphasis from mine, his study raises the question of the ambiguous and disturbing nature of the fool, which, as he concludes, remains open, and which I resume to explore in the context of Christological kenosis in this chapter. I borrowed the title of his chapter to refer to the fool in Psalm 52 in my discussion.

sometimes depicted as being alone and speaking to himself with mouth wide open or hands pointing to his mouth (figs. 121–2), and sometimes shown as engaged in a debate with David, God, or a devil (figs. 123–28). With this iconographical tradition in mind, the back-looking figure in *Patience* (fig. 119) who wears a hood with a liripipe invites the viewers to associate him with the Psalm-fool, who is employed in the poem to represent not only the mad Ninevites as the other critics have suggested, but also Jonah's folly as an embodiment of foolish mankind in general. This identification would seem even more probable if we consider the textual description of Jonah's denial of the divine command at the beginning of the poem:

‘At alle peryles,’ quop þe prophete, ‘I aproche hit no nerre.
I wyl me sum oþer waye þat He ne wayte after;
I schal tee into Tarce and tary þere a whyle,
And lyztly when I am lest He letes me alone.’ (85–8)

Jonah actually utters his stupid idea of escaping to a place unseen by God's eyes, where he shall get lost and be left alone, as the God-denying Psalm-fool in figs. 121 and 122, who is shown to be speaking to himself and being left in perpetual solitariness in a space created by his own foolish utterance, “D(ixit),” in opposition to the remaining textual space filled with the words of God which he refuses to acknowledge. The back-looking posture of the fool figure in the image of Jonah Preaching also recalls the woodbine scene in which Jonah, who fails to understand and appreciate the divine mercy extended toward the Ninevites, denies God in a metaphorical action of turning his back to the sun while watching what mishaps are to befall the city of Nineveh (441). The figure's backward gaze on Nineveh recalls the disobedient wife of Lot who looks behind her back at the fallen city of Sodom. Jonah's complaint over his ruined woodbine, which appears to God as purely “ronk noise” (490), echoes his “janglande” (grumbling) when he departs from the port (90)

and the useless “grychchyng” (complaining) in the face of hardship, mentioned by the narrator (53), both of which are reminiscent of the Psalm-fool’s senseless utterance.²⁷⁷ His disregard and incomprehension of God’s tale recalls Belshazzar the blemished fool’s failure to read the divine message. They then both engage themselves in heretical writing: Belshazzar with his demonic “sauteray,” and Jonah with his invented “jape” (jest) of crucifixion. Their words convey no meanings and turn the former into a pseudo-psalmist in *Cleanness*, and the latter a Psalm-fool here, whose senseless words become an apophatic statement of the divine omnipresence. Their bodies, meanwhile, like that of Lot’s wife, become a negative exemplum of the “corpus Christi.”

The Fool’s Bauble

Jonah the fool not only embodies mankind’s deviation from divine will by his back-looking posture, but also satirizes men’s foolish attempts to imitate God by the stick held by him, which as mentioned earlier on, is often a mock-heroic representation of God’s scepter.

²⁷⁷ Jonah’s noise also recalls the Lollards who were so named because of their meaningless and heretical mumbling, which was associated with the Middle Dutch verb “lollaerd.” Edwin D. Craun discusses Jonah’s impatient speech in relation to the concept of “murmuring” as blasphemy in medieval pastoral treatises. See “Exemplifying Deviant Speech: Murmur in *Patience*,” in *Lies, Slander and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 73–112. I am grateful to Professor Ad Putter for bringing the words “janglande” and “gruchchyng” to my attention in this chapter’s discussion of Jonah’s misuse of language.



Fig. 129. Fools. England, 1325-35; The Luttrell Psalter. BL. MS Additional 42130, fol. 167.

In the Luttrell Psalter (fig. 129), two fools are depicted in the margin by the text of Psalm 91, which praises God's work:

Quoniam laetificasti me Domine in opere tuo in facturis manuum tuarum laudabo. Quam magnificata sunt opera tua Domine satis profundae factae sunt cogitationes tuae. Vir insipiens non cognoscat et stultus non intellegit istud. (5–7)

[For thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in thy doings: and in the works of thy hands I shall rejoice. O Lord, how great are thy works! Thy thoughts are exceeding deep. The senseless man shall not know: nor will the fool understand these things.]

The fool in the middle right margin raises his bauble with one hand and his other hand touches the bell hung at the end of his liripipe. The bladder of his bauble points directly to the word “stultus” as a self-reflexive gesture. Another grotesque fool on top of him is drawn next to the lines cited above, with his eyes looking straight at the

words “manuum tuarum” while a tree branch sticks out from his grotesque reproductive part and points directly to the words “opera tua” in the following line, as if mocking God’s hands and his creation.

In *Patience*, Jonah’s foolish and unsuccessful imitation of the words and the Passion of Christ is paralleled by human imitation of God in the storm scene. Throughout the poem God is consistently invoked as a skillful artist who creates human eyes and ears (123–4), carves his crafts by hand (131–2) and makes everything out of his matter (206–8, 503). Even the storm is construed as the result of God’s skill (“gyn”) (146). The sinister nature and consequences of imitating God’s ability to create is conveyed in the storm scene in which men try to prevent the ship from sinking:

Per watz busy ouer borde bale to kest—
Her bagges and her feþer-beddes and her bryzt wedes,
Her kysttes and her coferes, her caraldes alle—
And al to lyzten þat lome, zif leþe wolde schape. (157–60)

Human efforts are represented as tangible works such as bags, feather beds, bright clothes, coffers and casks, all of which suggest material wealth and craftsmanship. When people try to cast out their belongings to lighten the ship (“lome”), they are at the same time working like a cobbler casting with clays (“lom(e)”) to shape the calmness of the sea and their own lives. Man’s works are immediately cast into doubt by the subjunctive phrase “if their peace (“leþe”) can be shaped.”²⁷⁸ The sinister nature of human imitation of God is reinforced by the image of the overworking (“forewrozt”) people who recall the labour Adam and Eve have to suffer after their expulsion from paradise. In contrast to the Noah in *Cleanness*, who avoids mentioning

²⁷⁸ The word “lith(e) (n.)” puns with “lith (n.1),” “bodily joints,” and “limbs,” which reinforces the image of carving and casting statues in this passage.

his own handiwork in the construction of the Ark and holds fast to God during the flood, the foolish people in the ship wrongly put trust in their own hands during the storm. Men's vain attempt and their "needles note" (220) cannot save them. To be saved, all they can do is throw away Jonah, the self-assumed Christ and the consummate fool, into the sea. The people empty the ship completely until they literally have "nothing in their hands" (222), and find their prayers to the pagan gods useless. It is at this point when they are put to poverty both physically and spiritually that men get their salvation.

Refashioning the Sign of Jonah

The "Typus Christi"

This is also the moment which is chosen to be visualized in the poem. The poet's emphasis on the humiliation of Jonah is also seen in the miniature of Jonah being cast away if we compare it to the conventional medieval iconography of Jonah. The story of Jonah is one of the most frequently depicted biblical themes in Christian culture.²⁷⁹

In early Christian art, the story is often represented in a trilogy of images: Jonah

²⁷⁹ For a collection of Jonah's iconography, see Otto Mitius, *Jonas auf den Denkmälern des christlichen Altertums* (Freiburg, 1987); H. Leclercq, "Jonas," in *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie* (Paris, 1927), pp. 2572–631. For discussions of the meaning of the "Sign of Jonah," see Kurt Weitzmann, ed. *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium* (N.Y., 1980), pp. 396–527 and "The Ode Pictures of the Aristocratic Psalter Recension." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976): 65–84; Besalel Narkiss, "The Sign of Jonah." *Gesta* 18.1 (1979): 63–76; Kitzinger, "The Cleveland Marbles," in *Art, Archaeology, and Architecture of Early Christianity*, ed. Paul Corby Finney (N.Y., 1993), pp. 653–75; Heidi J. Hornik, "The Sign of Jonah," in *Prophetic Ethics, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* 6 (Waco, 2003), pp. 55–9; William D. Wixom, "Early Christian Sculptures at Cleveland." *BCMA* 54.3 (1967): 67–88; M. S. Dimand, "Persian Miniatures of the Fourteenth Century." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 29.4 (1934): 58–60; Marion Lawrence, "Ships, Monsters and Jonah." *AJA* 66.3 (1962): 289–96; John K. Papadopoulos and Deborah Ruscillo, "A Ketos in Early Athens: An Archaeology of Whales and Sea Monsters in the Greek World." *AJA* 106.2 (2002): 187–227; Walter Oakeshott, "Some New Initials by the Entangled Figures Master." *The Burlington Magazine* 126.973 (1984): 230–32; Francis Wormald, "The Fitzwarin Psalter and Its Allies." *JWCI* 6 (1943): 71–9; Gretel Chapman, "The Bible of Floreffe: Redating a Romanesque Manuscript." *Gesta* 10.2 (1971): 49–62.

swallowed by the whale, Jonah cast up, and Jonah resting under the gourd vine. Jonah preaching in Nineveh is rarely depicted.²⁸⁰

In this kind of narrative representation (figs. 130–1), the visual emphasis is usually placed on the image of Jonah lying under the gourd vine, which was modeled on the images of Endymion in perpetual sleep, symbolizing serene repose in a bucolic paradise.



Fig. 130. The story of Jonah. From left to right: Jonah swallowed, cast up, and resting under the gourd vine. Rome, 3rd-century; Lateran Museum. Sarcophagus. Image after Jensen (2012), p. 155, fig. 4.4.



Fig. 131. The story of Jonah. Jonah cast up and resting under the gourd vine. Rome, c. 270. Santa Maria Antiqua. Sarcophagus . Image after Kleiner (2010), p. 213, fig. 8-6.

²⁸⁰ See Narkiss (1979), p. 69, n.15.



Fig. 132. Jonah and the whale. Konya Museum. Roman sarcophagus. Photo from Holy Land Photos.



Fig. 133. Jonah. England, 1148; Parc Abbey Bible. BL. MS Additional 14790, fol. 124. Image after Chapman (1971), fig. 16.

In some cases (figs. 132–3), the image of Jonah being cast up is chosen to represent the story. In these images, Jonah and the whale are often visualized as the Cross and the fish to symbolize the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fact that the Jonah story was a popular subject for funeral art in the Antiquity period suggests that it was associated with peace and paradise. In other words, Jonah was construed in early Christian culture as a symbol of resurrection and eternal rest. This interpretation

reflects the social circumstances during that time.²⁸¹ The Sign of Jonah expresses the hope for deliverance of the then persecuted Christians, and supplies them with a promise of eternal life after death. Since then, Jonah has become one of the orthodox images prefiguring Christ's resurrection and salvation all the way into the medieval period.

Late-medieval images of Jonah generally followed the early iconographical practice of representing his surge from the fish's belly (figs. 134–7, 143). In some cases when the image of Jonah being thrown into the water is drawn, it is usually accompanied by an image of his symbolic resurrection (figs. 138–9, 142, 147).



Fig. 134. Initial "S" with Jonah. England, 1340; Psalter. Bodleian. MS Douce 131, fol. 54r.



Fig. 135. Initial "S" with Jonah. England, 1340-3; Psalter. BL. MS Harley 2888, fol. 68.

²⁸¹ As noted in Hornik (2003), p. 58.



Fig. 136. Initial "S" with Jonah. England, 1350-99; Psalter. BL. MS Lansdowne 346, fol. 33v.



Fig. 137. Initial "S" with Jonah. England, 1350-75; Psalter. Bodleian. MS Liturg. 198, pt. I, fol. 60r.



Fig. 138. Initial "S" with Jonah. England, 1310-20; Queen Mary Psalter. BL. MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 168v.



Fig. 139. Jonah swallowed and cast up. England, 1330-40. Psalter. BL. MS Yates Thompson 14, fol. 70v.

The Word Upside Down

However, the artist of the *Gawain*-manuscript does not seem to have followed the conventional practice of depicting Jonah being cast up and resting under the gourd vine in his representation of the story. The two miniatures of *Patience* visualize

individually the moment of Jonah being swallowed by the whale and him preaching in Nineveh.



Fig. 140. Noah's ark. England, c. 1400; *Cleanness*.
BL. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 56r (60r).



Fig. 141. Jonah cast into the sea. England, c. 1400;
Patience. BL. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 82r (86r).

The image of Jonah being swallowed (fig. 141) also shows noticeable differences from other similar contemporary images, which usually depict Jonah as being thrown into the water head first, with his body naturally bending and arms randomly open as if to express his struggle and panic (figs. 138–9, 147) in contrast to his upright body and his hands in prayer when cast up. The *Gawain*-artist depicts Jonah as being thrown head down into the water with his eyes closed, hands praying, and his body in a perfectly straight position (fig. 141). His posture expresses more of a sense of willingness or even determination than of panic, recalling the Christological concept of voluntary sacrifice and subjection to God, which Jonah as a symbol of Christ is supposed to embody and yet fails to demonstrate at this moment in the text. His straight body also suggests more of a sense of immobility than of life, which

implicitly echoes the textual representation of Jonah as an empty form of Jesus Christ which only has his appearance but is devoid of his spirit—a lifeless idol which must be thrown away in order to achieve true salvation.

This antithetical spirit would seem even clearer if we compare the miniature of Jonah being swallowed (fig. 141) to that of Noah (fig. 140). The two images share similar composition and could almost be read as a continuous narrative. God’s words and presence appear in the Noah miniature as the cross-like mast, which Noah holds tightly to be saved. Such a sign of divinity, however, is completely lost in the miniature of Jonah. In this image, Jonah the conventional “*typus Christi*” replaces the mast and becomes the symbol of God to be held fast to achieve salvation. But this supposedly Christ-like symbol of resurrection is represented as a drowned idol, being thrown upside down into the water by a man who looks like Noah, recalling Noah/Deucalion’s casting away the ancestral sin of idolatry. The image of Jonah being cast out also echoes the last part of the text of *Cleanness* (1802–12) which was copied above the image on the same folio. These lines describe the fate of Belshazzar, who, having desecrated the divine vessels, is finally “thrust out of the worship of the world” and denied the sight of God (1802–03). His violent death from being pulled by his feet and abused parallels Jonah’s feet-over-head position in this miniature. This pictorial association with Belshazzar echoes the textual connection between him and Jonah: They both mock the words of God with their demonic and nonsensical works and hence become the Word upside down, and a disfigured fool.

The poet’s concern with Jonah as a sign culminates in the passage of lot-drawing. After Jonah is singled out as the cause of the storm, the people on the ship interrogate him to find out what evil he has done to incur God’s wrath (196–204). Jonah

immediately confesses his sin:

‘Alle þis meschef for me is made at þys tyme,
 For I haf greued my God and gulty am founden;
 Forþy berez me to þe borde and baþes me þeroute,
 Er gete ze no happe, I hope forsoþe.’
 He ossed hym by vnnynge þat þay vndernomen
 þat he watz flawen fro þe face of frelych Dryztyn. (209–14)

Without really telling them his deeds, Jonah shows these people signs (“vnnynge”) that are transparent enough for them to grasp immediately. In the Vulgate, Jonah “indicaverat (showed, declared)” to make his deeds known to the people. Here the poet translates a generic act of showing or a straightforward act of telling in the Vulgate into a conspicuous act of sign-creating and reading. This shift of focus and direct mention of signs reminds the reader of Jonah as a “*typus Christi*” and invokes Matthew 12: 38–41 in which Christ, after exorcising a possessed man, is confronted by the Pharisees who doubt his divine power and ask him for proof:

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him,
 saying: Master, we would see a sign from thee. Who
 answering said to them: An evil and adulterous generation
 seeketh a sign: and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of
 Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three
 days and three nights: so shall the Son of man be in the heart
 of the earth three days and three nights. / The men of
 Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall
 condemn it: because they did penance at the preaching of
 Jonas. And behold a greater than Jonas here.

Christ rebukes the foolish Pharisees for not believing the person standing right in front of them but asking instead for a tangible symbol. He uses Jonah as an intermediary to direct the gaze of these idolatrous people to his own person, “the

greater Jonah.” Jonah, too, discloses a sign for the people on the ship. The poet, who is known for his “realizing imagination,”²⁸² brings up this “vnninge” and yet chooses to leave it undescribed. The *Gawain*-artist filled this descriptive vacuum with pictorial vividness by supplying a figure who looks backwards in addition to the figure of the preaching Jonah, as if to visualize Jonah’s deviation from God (fig. 119). In this pictorial representation, Jonah himself is the sign he shows, becoming at the same the signifier and the signified. This fool-like figure draws the reader’s attention by his strange position and costume, and then through his backward gaze, transfers the reader’s eyes to the preaching Jonah, as the Sign of Jonah does to Christ. The two Ninevites in the middle are reminiscent of the repentant Nineveh in the scripture, who will rise to judge the “adulterous generation” which, like the people on the ship, often loses sight of meanings in their endless quest for forms. The oversized figure of the preaching Jonah as a “*typus Christi*” and the dwarfed Jonah as the fool might have been a literal representation of the scriptural description of Christ as a “greater” Jonah to suggest that truth should outweigh its appearance and that it is the former on which we should place our eyes.

The Word Between the Hands

The theme of sign-interpreting conveyed in the miniature of Jonah Preaching (fig. 119) would seem even more obvious if we compare this image to the miniature of Belshazzar’s feast (fig. 120). The figure of the preaching Jonah is depicted as almost the same as Daniel. They both wear hats and loose tunics, and have the same explaining gesture and look at the people to whom they are speaking. Belshazzar’s inability to understand God’s mysterious letters (“runes”) echoes the foolish

²⁸² Spearing (1970), p. 60.

Ninevites' failure to understand the "rule in roun" between their hands:

And of þat soumme zet arn summe, such sottetz formadde,
 Bitwene þe stele and þe stayre disserne noȝt cunen,
 What rule renes in roun bitwene þe ryȝt hande
 And his lyfte, þaȝ his lyf schulde lost be þerfor; (509-12)
 [...]
 And wymmen vnwytté þat wale ne coupe
 Pat on hande fro þat oþer for alle þis hyȝe worlde. (514-5)

The divine rule appears to the Ninevites as unintelligible runes. The mention of their hands recalls Belshazzar's hands pointing respectively to the letters and Daniel the interpreter. Between the king's two hands is a process of sign-perceiving and interpreting. These foolish Ninevites' failure to discern what is between their hands (514) might thus suggest an inability to perceive and interpret rightly, which in turn leads them to lose their lives (515) like Belshazzar. However, in the miniature of Jonah Preaching, God's words are nowhere to be seen. The division and distance between Daniel and the mysterious letters is now lost. The person and the words he delivers are integrate into the single figure of Jonah—the messenger and the message become one, the word and the image are fused into each other. This pictorial conflation of message and messenger is also found in the text. God's "lore" is now "loked" in Jonah (350). He must reveal it and make himself known to the Ninevites. The former contaminator of the ship which needs to be cast away like useless manmade caskets is transformed into a container of divine will which will be unlocked to deliver God's message.

Just as God has demonstrated his justice through the injustice Christ suffers, he makes his message of patience known through the impatience of Jonah. The role of a divine vessel seems to constantly involve experiencing that which is ungodly, and so is

unbearable to Jonah. He asks God for a quick death as freedom from this forced role as the word of God:

Now, Lorde, lach out my lyf, hit lastes to longe.
 Bed me bilyue my bale-stour and bryng me on ende,
 For me were swetter to swelt as swyþe, as me þynk,
 Pen lede lenger Þi lore þat þus me les makez. (425–8)

At the beginning of the poem, Jonah's fear of physical suffering appears as the main reason for his disobedience. But here his sole focus lies on being made "les," which means both being false and being inferior. It is his falsity as a prophet being made known to people and the public humiliation that Jonah cannot and will not suffer patiently. His impatience, therefore, is construed more as an incapability of humility than of endurance, which echoes his unwillingness to "lede (bear)" God's words to illuminate the poem's kenotic theme of self-lowering and subjection.²⁸³ This textual description of Jonah being made "less" might have been meant to echo the scriptural description of Christ as a greater Jonah, and served as a textual source for the pictorial representation of a dwarfed Jonah the fool in opposition to Jonah the preacher to show that the former is an inferior and often false surrogate of Christ which should be transcended.

The Body of Folly

This simultaneous representation of two Jonahs at different times in one image is not unique in the *Gawain*-illustrations. Gawain, too, appears twice in the miniature of the beheading scene. This image of Jonah the preacher and Jonah the fool not only invokes Christ and his Sign of Jonah, but also recalls the conventional image of David

²⁸³ *MED* "leden (v.1)," 6, "to bear and convey." Its meaning of "bodily passage" echoes the image of Jonah as God's vessel.

and the Fool in Psalm 52 (figs. 123–8), which has been discussed earlier. This association raises the question of the iconographical identification of Jonah with David. While this connection can be made through Jonah as a figure of Christ, Son of David, the conflation of these two figures actually existed in medieval iconography.



Fig. 142. Initial “S” with Jonah. England, 1325-50; Psalter. Bodleian. MS Auct. D. 2. 2, fol. 75r.



Fig. 143. Initial S with Jonah. England, 1310-20; Howard Psalter. BL. MS Arundel 83, fol. 47.



Fig. 144. David praying. France, 1410-19; *Breviary*. BL. MS Harley 2897, fol. 50v.



Fig. 145. David praying. England, 1300-25; Psalter. BL. MS Royal 2 B. VIII, fol. 64.



Fig. 146. David praying. England, 1235-40; Luttrell Psalter. BL. MS Additional 42130, fol. 121v.

The story of Jonah is a conventional pictorial subject for the illuminated initial “S” of Psalm 68 in which David describes his afflicted heart as in a tempest. In figs. 142–3, the figure of Jonah, rather than David, is shown praying to God. In other images (figs. 144–5), David and Jonah are conflated into one naked figure surging from the water and praying to God who looks down from above. The naked body of David in the water recalls the image of Bathsheba in her bath. Her obscure (“abscondita”) and sinful body is here invoked by David’s prayer to God: “Deus tu scis stultitiam meam et peccata mea a te non sunt abscondita.” (O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my offences are not hidden from thee) (6). David’s former illicit gaze on Bathsheba is here construed as a folly (“stultitiam”) which is no longer hidden (“abscondita”), but is known to God. David actively seeks God’s gaze, as if once God looks at and knows (“scis”) his body of folly, it would be cut (“scissus”) off from him. Through a baptismal immersion, David’s body of folly, like Bathsheba’s, is stripped of its sin and becomes a “word” of divine salvation, “S(alvum).” The bathing image also recalls Jonah asking the sailors to “baþe” him in the sea (211). In the fourteenth-century

Luttrell Psalter (fig. 146), a bathing/drowning David-Jonah appears standing erect with his eyes closed and hands folding in a ritual gesture. His naked body intersects vertically with the middle stroke of the initial S to create a form of a cross. The image of Jonah-David's body of folly here becomes not only a word, but the Word itself. The sinful body which was formerly inscribed with a foolish word of "stultitiam" is now rewritten into the Word of "salvum."



Fig. 147. Initial "S" with Jonah. England, 1310; Ormesby Psalter. Bodleian. MS Douce 366, fol. 89r.



Fig. 148. Initial "S" with Jonah. England, 1310; Ormesby Psalter. Bodleian. MS Douce 366, fol. 89r.

In the fourteenth-century Ormesby Psalter, the image of Jonah in the initial "S" is framed by two fool-like heads (fig. 147). Another fool carrying a bauble is drawn at the bottom of the same folio (fig. 148). The words "stultitiam" and "salvum" are literally conflated in and represented singly by the letter "S" in which both the folly and the salvation of Jonah are depicted.

With this iconographical association between Jonah and David available, it is possible that the pictorial juxtaposition of the preaching Jonah and Jonah the fool is to recall

the debate between David and the God-denying Psalm-fool. In the fourteenth-century Great Bible which might have been owned by Richard II (fig. 127),²⁸⁴ the Psalm-fool is depicted as arguing with God who looks down from heaven with his hands raised like the preaching Jonah, but more in a gesture of disapproval and prohibition while a group of people watch them debating. Similar emphases on audience and gaze are also seen in the image of Jonah Preaching. The intense gaze of Jonah the preacher is countered by the defiant gaze of Jonah the fool, who stares back in great earnest despite his quizzical costume, creating a sense of tension and confrontation between the two in contrast to the peaceful audience standing in the middle and listening to the preaching of the greater Jonah. The confrontation between the two Jonahs is represented as a silent exchange of gaze rather than oral conversation. This emphasis on looking reflects the poem's theme about signs—what signs are to be seen, and how they are conveyed, changed, perceived and understood.

This concern with signs is also detectable in an image of David and the Fool in the fourteenth-century Macclesfield Psalter (fig. 124). Unlike other similar images, a little monkey is drawn in the lower foreground, which is shown looking back at the viewers of the image rather than at the debate between the fool and David like the other onlookers.²⁸⁵ The monkey's presence seems to suggest the fool's aping of God,²⁸⁶ while at the same time invoking the frequently seen pun of singe/signs which Camille has shrewdly observed in medieval manuscript images.²⁸⁷ The monkey's gaze draws attention to the importance of seeing and perceiving in this image, reminding us of

²⁸⁴ The debatable ownership of Richard II is discussed in J. E. Krochalis "The Books and Reading of Henry V and his Circle." *ChauR* 23 (1998): 49–77 and Scott (1996), p. 109–115.

²⁸⁵ The explanation given to this image takes this little animal to be a dog. But based on the common medieval association between the monkey and the fool, I am inclined to the opinion that this creature is a monkey.

²⁸⁶ *MED* "ape (n.," 2(b).

²⁸⁷ Camille (1992), pp. 29–30.

God's concern with the fool's atheist declaration in the Psalm: "God looked down from heaven on the children of men: to see if there were any that did understand, or did seek God" (3). In other words, God is concerned with what and how people see and seek in him. Stella Panayotova has also suggested that the busts of royal or aristocratic figures in the margin might relate to contemporary concerns about the political disasters of Edward II's deposition and the subsequent turmoil.²⁸⁸ In the context of her discussion, these figures, accompanied by a devil's head, may also provide a warning against the vanity of self-regard and the denial of God which this implies. The artist of the Great Bible (fig. 127) shows an anxious God who directly reveals himself from heaven and takes up the task of debating by himself. In another fourteenth-century English Psalter (fig. 128), an even more radical representation of the debate is depicted. In this image, David is shown to be refuting the fool's denial of divine presence, so eagerly that he even stabs himself with a sword through his heart, making himself into a cross and an image of the Word to contradict the fool's "D(ixit)" from within. Folly and salvation is again conflated, and the Wisdom contained inside the appearance of folly. In a similar way as David writes his own body into a cross with a sword, Jonah has to "utter" ("lause") himself to make known the divine will. Their bodies are both transformed into the Word/words of God.

The Passion of Jonah

The Laughing Fool

The image of an oversized Jonah and a man and a woman looking at him from below

²⁸⁸ *The Macclesfield Psalter: A Complete Facsimile* (London, 2008), p. 70.

in the miniature of Jonah Preaching is in some ways reminiscent of the image of Christ's crucifixion watched by the Virgin Mary and St. John, such as the one in the Holkham Bible (fig. 149).



Fig. 149. The Crucifixion. England, 1327-35; Holkham Bible. BL. MS Additional 47682, fol. 32.

In this image, Christ's wounded body dominates the upper register and appears much larger in comparison to the other figures, like Jonah the preacher in the miniature of Jonah Preaching. The three Marys and St. John are depicted as standing on the left side and watching Christ, as the man and the woman in the Jonah-miniature are shown to be watching Jonah with their hands in supplication. The pictorial resemblance between the images of the Crucifixion and this Jonah-miniature are

further reinforced by the presence of a fool-like figure who appears in fig. 149 as a hooded centurion who holds a long axe in one hand and taunts Christ with his other pointing hand.



Fig. 150. Christ carrying the cross. England, 1325-35; Luttrell Psalter. BL. MS Additional 42130, fol. 93r.

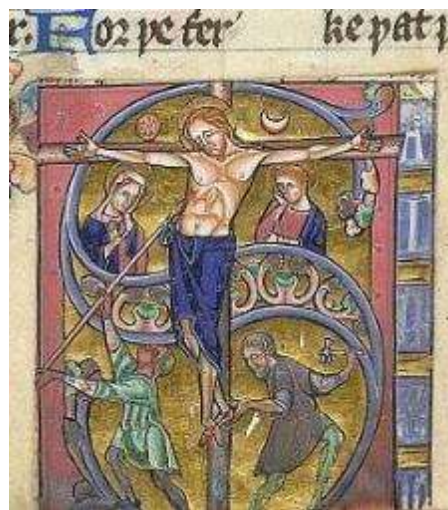


Fig. 151. The Crucifixion. England, 1400-25; Bible. BL. MS Arundel 104, fol. 354.

In the Luttrell Psalter (fig. 150), one of the centurions who drags Christ by his hand is wearing a double tailed hood which makes it obvious that he is a fool. The fool and his stick are often associated with the tormentors of Christ and the “*arma Christi*.”²⁸⁹ The back-looking posture of Jonah the fool in the miniature of Jonah Preaching also recalls the conventional images of the persecutors of Christ, who are often represented in unnatural postures such as looking backward or bending their bodies perversely to indicate their diabolic nature. In fig. 151, the man who is piercing Christ’s body is depicted as doing this by leaning back awkwardly while the man nailing Christ’s feet is shown in an even more eccentric position, with his upper body turned completely to the left while his legs bend to the right, an unnatural body which amounts to monstrosity.

²⁸⁹ Scott, “The Illustrations of *Piers Plowman* in Bodleian Library MS. Douce 104.” *YLS* 4 (1990): 1–86, p. 29.



Fig. 152. Christ being nailed to the cross. England, 1325–35; Luttrell Psalter. BL. MS Additional 42130, fol. 93v.



Fig. 153. The Crucifixion. England, 1325–35; Luttrell Psalter. BL. MS Additional 42130, fol. 94r.

In the Luttrell Psalter, Christ’s crucifixion is drawn for Psalm 49 at the bottom of the two facing folios (figs. 152–3). On the left folio (fig. 152), the image of Christ being nailed to the Cross is depicted right under the line “Et annunciant celi iustitiam” (The heavens announce [God’s] justice). Through the unjust suffering of Christ, God demonstrates his justice and providence to people, especially to those who “disregard” (obliviscimini) him and whose tongue and mouth speak evil (49:19–22). These God-forgetting and evil-tongued men are represented by the fool who stands among the onlookers and watches the crucifixion on the right folio (fig. 153). His black face and

horned hat suggest his diabolic nature. His sinful “dis-regard” of God is here depicted as a monstrous gaze, as the fool watches Christ’s suffering with an apparently untouched sense of pleasure in sharp contrast to the other sorrowful viewers.



Fig. 154. The scourging of Christ. (left) and the God-denying fool (right). France, 1300–25; Bodleian. MS Laud Lat. 84, fols. 129v–130.

In another fourteenth-century English Psalter, the image of the Scourging of Christ is paralleled with that of the God-denying fool conversing with a devil in the initial “D(ixit)” of Psalm 52 (fig. 154). Instead of being watched, the Christ on the left folio looks across the page to the scene depicted on the right folio in which the fool is shown turned toward the devil. This pictorial juxtaposition of Christ with the fool in a way recalls the exchange of gazes between Jonah the preacher and Jonah the fool. In this image, both Christ and the fool are shown as tied to a pole or holding a stick, as if suggesting a connection between the two, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Evil Tongue

The pictorial association of the miniature of Jonah Preaching with the images of Crucifixion would echo the textual description of Jonah's imaginary suffering on the cross in Nineveh. However, in contrast to the fool's monstrous gaze on Christ in fig. 153, Jonah the fool's disregard of God is visualized in the miniature of Jonah Preaching (fig. 119) as an awkward act of looking back, recalling the disobedient Lot's wife, whose backward gaze is directly associated with the fault of a "fol" (996) in *Cleanness*. In this image (fig. 119), the figure of Jonah the fool becomes a sign and example to which people should turn their back to, as the two Ninevites in the images show. This is reminiscent of the moment when Jonah shows his sign to the people on the ship and tells them that he must be thrown into the water, in a similar way as the other man-made objects must be forsaken in order to avoid the death resulting from rivalry with God. He was then cast into the sea. Jonah's "fall" is spelled out when he goes down into the whale's belly:

And zet I sayde as I seet in þe se boþem:
 "Careful am I, kest out fro Þy cler ygen
 And deseuered fro Þy syzt; zet surely I hope
 Efte to trede on Þy temple and teme to Þyseluen."
 I am wrapped in water to my wo stoundez;
 Þe abyne byndes þe body þat I byde inne;
 Þe pure poplande hourle playes on my heued;
 To laste mere of vche a mount, Man, am I fallen[.] (313–20)

He mourns for being cut off from the sight of God and prays for reunion with him. The theme of looking and expulsion together with Jonah's "fallen" state seems to allude to the Fall of Man. His desire for reunion with God and (re)visiting His divine temple invites comparison with Adam and Eve who are often shown as looking remorsefully back on the paradise when they are expelled from it in the images of the

Expulsion discussed in the previous chapter. A similar sense of remorse may be felt in an image from the Luttrell Psalter (fig. 155), in which a grotesque female figure is portrayed in the margin for the text of Psalm 33. Her deformed shaped and beastlike hindquarters remind one of the fool who mocks God's work in fig. 129.²⁹⁰ This female fool holds a long spear that invokes the instruments of the Passion. Her eyes look sorrowfully at the line: "Prohibe linguam tuam a malo" (Keep thy tongue from evil), to which her hand is pointing.



Fig. 155. A female fool. England, 1325–35; Luttrell Psalter. London, BL. MS Additional 42130, fol. 64.

The images of tongue and “malo” invoke Eve’s bite of the apple and her temptation of Adam. Her “evil tongue” is visualized as a disfigured body of folly, as if to warn

²⁹⁰ Although this female figure lacks an iconic hood of the fool, her grotesque, deformed shape would still categorizes her as a fool. For the medieval concept of the fool as a term associated both with physical and mental deformity and disability, and the distinction between the natural fool and the artificial fool, see Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages: Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment* (London, 2013), pp. 85–91. For a comprehensive discussion of the fool in the medieval period, see Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (London, 1968); Clifford Davidson, *Fools and Folly* (Kalamazoo, 1996).

readers of the consequence of failing to control one's own mouth. The poet shows a similar concern with misuse of language by repeatedly drawing attention to Jonah's "jape" and his incessant "janglande" and "gruchchyng," which connect him to Belshazzar the foolish "boster" in *Cleanness*, and which lead to his "fall" into the sea. Jonah's inability to understand God's words as meaningful texts, his foolish jape, his refusal to deliver God's message and his disobedient quarrels with God are all in some way related to a linguistic failure and may be seen as a misuse of the tongue. Rather than a Christ figure, Jonah here becomes the visual incarnation of Eve's bad tongue, a faulty Christ and the Word upside down, which, like a lifeless image, has to be cast away in order to obtain salvation.

In his complaint to God, Jonah grumbles without realizing that his prophecy is doomed to fail from the very beginning, for only through his false words, his "evil tongue," are divine providence and salvation fulfilled and manifested, just as without Eve's foolish bite, the incarnation of Christ would not have been realized. When Jonah is made to utter God's words in Nineveh, the former "evil tongue" is converted into a kenotic statement of the divine message and becomes the Word of God, in a similar way in which the blasphemous words of the God-denying Psalm-fool become a visual mnemonic of the thing he denies.

This transformation of Jonah as a sign is visualized in the miniature of *Jonah Preaching* (fig. 119), in which Jonah the fool and Jonah the Christ stand on the two sides of the Ninevites who pray in the middle, as if recalling the process of sign-interpretation denoted by Belshazzar's two hands in fig. 120. In this way, the figure of Jonah the fool can act in a similar way to Daniel the truth-teller, whose presence

serving as an intermediary to direct people's gaze to the figure of Jonah the Christ.²⁹¹ The constant reference to text and literary composition (“tème,” “tale,” “lore”) reminds the reader at the same time of Jonah being God's text and words, and the poet's recreation of the scriptural narratives and reinterpretation of the sign of Jonah. In the poet's reworking, the images of sin and salvation conflate at the same time on the figure of Jonah through his association of him with both David and the fool.

The Mad God in the Monstrous Church

This double figure of Jonah both as the fool and the “typus Christi” in the miniature brings to the fore another theological notion of Christ's folly, which does not seem to have been considered in relation to *Patience*. This seemingly blasphemous idea has its origin in the scripture:

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not in wisdom of speech, lest the cross of Christ should be made void. For the word of the cross, to them indeed that perish, is foolishness: but to them that are saved, that is, to us, it is the power of God. For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise: and the prudence of the prudent I will reject. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For, seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world, by wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of our preaching, to save them that believe. For both the Jews require signs: and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified: unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness: But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men: and the weakness of

²⁹¹ For the fool as a truth teller, see above n. 290 and C. F. Goodey, *A History of Intelligence and 'Intellectual Disability': The Shaping of Psychology in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 235–7.

God is stronger than men. For see your vocation, brethren,
that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many
mighty, not many noble. But the foolish things of the world
hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise: and the
weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may
confound the strong. (1 Corinthians: 18–27)

Christ as the Word and the Wisdom of God is meaningful only to those who believe in him, and would appear only as dead images (“stumbling block”) and foolishness to non-believers. This echoes God’s command to Jonah at the beginning of the poem, in which God’s words appear to himself and to the reader as intelligible discourse, but as meaningless sounds to the reluctant Jonah who tries to run away from his mission. Thomas Aquinas in his commentary on this confusing biblical passage defines the words “wisdom” and “prudence” to illuminate the meaning of the foolish Cross/Word.:

[T]hat the word of the Cross, i.e., the announcing of Christ’s cross is folly, i.e., it appears foolish, to them that are perishing, i.e., to unbelievers, who consider themselves wise according to the world, for the preaching of the cross of Christ contains something which to worldly wisdom seems impossible; for example, that God should die or that Omnipotence should suffer at the hands of violent men. Furthermore, that a person not avoid shame when he can, and other things of this sort, are matters which seem contrary to the prudence of this world. Consequently, when Paul was preaching such things, Festus said: “Paul, you are beside yourself: much learning makes you mad.”²⁹²

In other words, the folly of Christ consists in his lack of worldly wisdom, which enables him to actively embrace the shame and pain which are shunned by “normal”

²⁹² Text quoted from *Commentary by Saint Thomas Aquinas on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. Fabian R. Larcher and Daniel Keating, Chapter 1, paragraph 39. <<http://dhspriority.org/thomas/english/SS1Cor.htm#13>> 8 January 2011.

people. Christ's passionate imprudence is equated not only with folly and absurdity, but also with madness, which leads him to become human and mortal. In Aquinas's interpretation, Christ's incarnation and kenosis is less about giving up his divinity and more about renouncing sovereignty of his own reason. He not only empties himself of his divinity, but to do that, he has first emptied himself of his rational nature.

Christ's folly and madness is expressed straightforwardly in the meditation of St.

Catherine of Siena (1347–80) on the divine providence in her *Dialogue*:

“It seems, oh, Abyss of Charity, as if you were mad with love of your creature, as if You could not live without him.[...] Oh, Loving Madman! Was it not enough for You to become Incarnate, that You must also die?”²⁹³ (25: 134)

God is so mad in love with mankind that he gives his only son to them. And Christ out of a similar foolish love of man and meekness to God incarnates into mortal flesh to suffer for men's sin. The divine conflates with the profane, the wise with the foolish, and Christ with the “sottez formadde,” the lunatic fool.

This conflation of opposite qualities is constantly suggested throughout the poem by puns and wordplays. In the storm scene, the poet refers to divine salvation as “the best” when he describes the sailors' invocations of their gods who “gayned hym beste” (164), while their deliverance is delivered by a “best,” the whale. This ambiguous image of beast/best culminates in the passage of Jonah inside the Whale. The belly of this “beste” is described as a “munster” which is “as brod as a halle,”²⁹⁴ in which Jonah stumbles on something which he thinks to be a “rode” until he finally

²⁹³ Quoted from *The Dialogue of the Seraphic Virgin, Catherine of Siena*. Trans. Algar Thorold (London, 1907), p. 48.

²⁹⁴ For the motif of diabolic church, see Andrew, “The diabolical chapel: A motif in *Patience* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.” *Neophilologus* 66. 2 (1982): 313–9.

reaches a “le best” (best shelter) to stay and has his feet “fastened” (268–77). Inside this beastly, monstrous church, Jonah’s worst nightmare comes true. His former imaginary crucifixion is literally enacted in vivid processes. Jonah’s “fall” appears in the poem as a process of poetic metamorphosis in which he transforms from a prophet to a fool, and is transposed from God’s temple to this lowest bower inside a whale’s belly. It is in this lowest moment of his life, and in his lowest form as contained in a beast, that Jonah for the first time admits his own folly and calls himself a “fol” with a fickle and false heart (283). Inside the smelly “bouel” of the whale, Jonah prays for God’s forgiveness and salvation. The filthy “bouel of þat best” conflates with Christ’s bowels (“visceribus Christi”) as the seat of divine mercy.²⁹⁵ At this moment of accepting and acknowledging his own “fole,” Jonah, like Nebuchadnezzar, who regains his human state after coming to terms with his lowered form of life, rises again and becomes as a true “typus Christi.”

The poet dexterously demonstrates how the sacred contains the profane, and the profane can partake in the qualities of the sacred, and how wisdom can be veiled by foolishness. Like the initial “S” which signifies both “stultitiam” and “salvum” in the image of Psalm 68 (fig. 149), the figure of Jonah embodies the opposite qualities of Christ both as human and divine, invoking the image of a foolish God so mad with love of mankind that he allows himself to suffer a bitter death to bring about salvation for mankind. This concept of Christ as a holy fool might have lurked behind the frequent mentions of “folly,” “fool,” and “dote” in the text and the simultaneous representation of Jonah the “typus Christi” and Jonah the fool in the miniature of *Patience*. Both the text and the images of the poem depart from the conventional view

²⁹⁵ Phillipians 1:8: “testis enim mihi est Deus quomodo cupiam omnes vos in visceribus Christi Iesu.” (For God is my witness how I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.) See also *MED*, “bouel (n.),” 3.

of Jonah as a sign of Christ's majestic power and the patristic emphasis on Christ's noble humility in his kenosis. As many of his contemporary vernacular authors, the poet opts to dwell more on the humanity, weakness and suffering of Christ by introducing the figure of the fool and the theme of Christ's Passion into his reworking of the story of Jonah.²⁹⁶ Through the foil of Jonah the fool, the poet draws attention not only to the patience and mercy of Christ, but also to the impossibly foolish love and passion behind his willingness to suffer. In doing so, the poet configures Jonah as a new sign in which the potential likeness between man and God is acknowledged but the essential difference between the two silently accentuated, for as a human symbol of Christ, Jonah's ironic proximity to Him only shows that, however hard men try to imitate God, they can never really be Him. Jonah's easy relapse into sin (for example, his subsequent anger with God after rising as an obedient vessel from the whale's belly) contrasts with *Patience's* depiction of God, who, despite his immensely human-like quality, can freely move between the hierarchies of beings without diminishing his majesty and authority. This awareness of man's limitedness and inferiority is central to the poet's works, thus man's often (automatic) disfigurement in front of the divine, as already seen in the examples of the *Pearl-Dreamer* and *Nebuchadnezzar*.

“His ryche robe he torof”

Jagged body and Split Morality

The contrast and conflation of conflicting ideas such as the foul and the clean, the profane and the sacred, the fool and God, are represented by the two Jonahs in the

²⁹⁶ See above Ch. 1, pp. 53–6 for Christ's body in late-medieval vernacular theology and literature.

miniature of Jonah Preaching. This juxtaposition of opposites is also demonstrable through the clothing styles of these two figures in this image, especially Jonah the fool's jagged hood, whose sartorial and theological significance echoes the repeated metaphor of clothing in the text. A new fashion aesthetic developed for disrupted edges and surfaces of clothes in late-medieval Europe. Departing from the rectangular construction that allows minimum sewing work and material waste in the previous centuries, dagged clothes became a trend especially among the rich and fashionable people. Its superfluous and exaggerated style was often ironically compared to the ragged clothes of the poor and the penitents and became a target of much social criticism through its association with sin and moral disorder. Dagged clothes hence became an iconic symbol of pride in medieval English illustrations.²⁹⁷ The figure of Pride in the Douce *Piers* (fig. 156),²⁹⁸ for example, is shown as wearing a dagged chaperon and liripipe as a sign of his vainglory.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Anne Ejenholm Nichols, "Costume in the Moralities: The Evidence of East Anglican Art." *Comparative Drama* 20.4 (1986-7): 305-14, p. 311. For other discussions of medieval clothing theology, see Johnson, "The Man in Foul Clothes and a Late Fourteenth-Century Conversation About Sin." *SAC* 24 (2002): 1-47; Andrea Denne-Brown, "Rips and Slits: The Torn Garment and the Medieval Self," in *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650*. Ed. Catherine Richardson (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 223-37; Sebastian Brock, "The Robe of Glory: A Biblical Image in the Syriac Tradition," *The Way* 39 (1999): 247-59

²⁹⁸ This manuscript is dated around 1427, slightly later than Cotton Nero A.x. For probable influences of *Patience* on *Piers Plowman*, see Kirk (1978); Anderson (1969), pp. 20-22.

²⁹⁹ Scott (1990), p. 30. It is noteworthy that the dagged liripipe of Pride in this image bears a formal similarity to the enigmatic feather-like thing that floats up from the neck of the sleeping Dreamer in the first miniature of *Pearl* (fig. 31).



Fig. 156. Pride. England, 1427; *Piers Plowman*. Bodleian. MS Douce 104, fol. 24r



Fig. 157. The poor man. England, 1427; *Piers Plowman*. Bodleian. MS Douce 104, fol. 51r

The style of dagging was also frequently criticized in the contemporary literature. In the morality play, *Castle of Perseverance* (1405–25), Folly tempts Mankind with “ryche rentys” (557) to forsake his baptismal clothing of the “sely crisome” (294) and “sloppe” (loose gown) (2488), and to put on the new dagged clothes of the gallant.³⁰⁰ Chaucer, too, when talking about two kinds of pride in *The Parson’s Tale*, criticizes the superfluity of dagged clothing:

As to the first synne, that is in superfluitee of clothyng,
 which that maketh it so deere, to harm of the peple;/ nat
 oonly the cost of embrowdyng, the degise endentyng or
 baryng, owndyng, palyng, wyndyng or bendyng, and
 semblable wast of clooth in vanitee;/ but ther is also costlewe
 furryng in hir gownes, so muche pownsonyng of chisels to
 maken holes, so muche daggyng of sheres;/ forthwith the
 superfluitee in lengthe of the forseide gowens, trailyng in
 the dong and in the mire, on horse and eek on foote, as wel

³⁰⁰ Quoted from *The Castle of Perseverance*, ed. David N. Klausner (Kalamazoo, 2010).

of man as of womman, that al thilke trailyng is verrailly as in effect wasted, consumed, thredbare, and roten with donge, rather than it is yeven to the povre, to greet damage of the forseide povre folk./ And that in sondry wise; this is to seyn that the moore that clooth is wasted, the moore moot it coste to the peple for the scarsnesse./ And forther over, if so be that they wolde yeven swich pownsoned and dagged clothyng to the povre folk, it is nat convenient to were for hire estaat, ne suffisant to beete hire necessitee, to kepe hem fro the distemperance of the firmament. (416–22)

Dagging is here first accused of depriving the poor of already limited resources, thus further impoverishing those already in poverty.³⁰¹ Its deliberately shredded form achieved by cutting out more material is ironically suggested to be only as good as a rag that can hardly mend (“beete”) poor men’s necessities and beat the inclemency of the weather.³⁰²

The artist of the Douce *Piers* offers an image of the poor man (fig. 156), in which we see a fool-like figure wearing only a hood with a liripipe and a cloak that is not long enough to cover all of his body, holding a staff in his hand and looking backward in dismay at the accompanying text which reads:

Lytel loueth he that lord that lente hym al that blisse
That so parteth with the pore a parsel when hym nedeth.
Ne were mercy in mene men more then in riht riche,
Mony tymes mendenautes myhte goen afyngred;

(Passus XI: 45–8)³⁰³

³⁰¹ For a recent comprehensive study of the clothes in Chaucer, see Laura F. Hodges, *Chaucer and Array: Patterns of Costume and Fabric Rhetoric in the “Canterbury Tales,” “Troilus and Criseyde” and Other Works* (Woodbridge, 2014).

³⁰² See *MED* “beten (v.1),” 1(a), “to beat” and 6, “to cover and ornament”; “beten (v.2),” to mend and remedy. The decorating and mending images of the verb “beten” seems to work as an irony in the context of dagged clothing.

³⁰³ Text quoted from Derek Pearsall, ed., *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text* (Exeter, 2008), p. 203.

His scanty clothing contrasts with Pride's dagged outfit (fig. 156). This fool-like poor man stares vacantly at the word "blis" while his left hand is raised and pointing between the phrase "when hym nedeth" and the word "rich" in the following line, which recalls Chaucer's ironical comparison of the clothes of the rich and the poor in *The Parson's Tale*.

The image of dagged clothing as a cause of social injustice is further reinforced by its association with Christ's crucifixion through the sense of violence invoked by the acts of cutting and punching in the process of making such clothes and their etymological connection with the dagger.³⁰⁴ In a fourteenth-century English lyric, the disrupted side of such clothing is compared to Christ's crucified body:

Open thou hast thi side,
 Spaiers longe and wide,
 For veyn glorie and pride,
 And thi longe knif astrout—
 Thou art of thi gai route;
 Myn with spere sherpe
 Y-stongen to the herte,
 My body with scourges smerte
 Bi-swongen al aboute.³⁰⁵

Christ laments the worldly pleasure people derive from the fashionable opening of their clothes, and reflects on his own pain from the open wound, comparing his body pierced by a spear to men's accessorized bodies decorated with swords. Men's sartorial opening creates a moral wound on their own bodies which Christ amends by allowing his own body and garment to be opened and torn.

³⁰⁴ Denny-Brown (2004), p. 229.

³⁰⁵ Thomas G. Duncan ed., "Jhesus doth him bymene," *Medieval English Lyrics 1200–1400* (London, 1995), p. 136. Qtd. In Denny-Brown (2004), pp. 234.

The Sewing King

The eared hood of Jonah the fool in the miniature not only reflects the new style of dagging in contemporary fashion, but also suggests the figure's moral deficiency, and reinforces the association between this miniature and Christ's crucifixion through its connection with dagger and violence. Allusions to clothes and contemporary fashion may also be detected in *Patience*, sometimes through implicit wordplays, such as when the poet describes Jonah's imaginary suffering in Nineveh:

If I bowe to His bode and bryng hem þis tale,
 And I be nummen in Nuniue, my nyes begynes:
 He telles me þose traytours arn typed schrewes,
 I com wyth þose tyþynges þay ta me bylyue. (75–8)

The description of the Ninevites as “typed schrewes” seems to invite the image of tipped, pointy shoes that came into fashion at the same time with dagging.³⁰⁶ This implicit association of “shoe” and “shrew” echoes the image of shoe-making invoked by the image of Christ as “the forme and the laste” at the beginning of the poem, whilst complementing the sense of violence in this imaginary scene of crucifixion, and reinforcing the sinfulness of Ninevites.

The poet's close attention to clothing is also displayed in Jonah's prayer to God inside the whale's belly. Being “wrapped” in water, Jonah reflects on people's foolish “vanyte and vayne þynges” and their forfeited mercy (331–2). The motif of clothing appears again after Jonah is cast up on the shore. The poet comments on Jonah's

³⁰⁶ In *Castle of Perseverence*, Pride appears in jagged clothes and pointed shoes (“cracow”) (1057). In the *Gawain*-illustrations, Gawain is also depicted as wearing pointy shoes in the miniatures of the Beheading scene and his return to Camelot. The phrase “typed schrewes” has caused some difficulty for editors, and was glossed as “consummate, extreme” in Andrew and Waldron (eds.), p. 189.

“sluchched clopes” and his need to wash the “mantyle” (341–2). Jonah’s dirty clothes are not mentioned in the scripture and they contradict the conventional images of Jonah being cast up by the whale in which he is usually portrayed as naked to symbolize baptism and rebirth. But in the two miniatures of *Patience*, Jonah appears fully dressed both when thrown into the water and after he is cast up to preach in Nineveh, as if to echo the poet’s concern with clothes. The idea of clothes as an indication of one’s moral state is suggested in the parable of the Wedding Feast in *Cleanness*, in which the poet discusses man’s transgressions “in talle” (in words) and “in tuch” (in deeds)” (48). Clothes becomes a means of performing one’s morality. Contrasts are made between the elaborate “festial frok” (136) of other guests and the beggar’s “haterez totorne” (33), his “goun febele” which is “ratted [...] and rent at þe sydez” and “fyled with werkkez” (133–48). In *Cleanness*, clothes are seen as a sign of virtues in which men should seek to wrap themselves and which they should endeavor to improve. The poor “harlatez hod” (34), which recalls the hood of Jonah the fool, has therefore, to be cast away in order to achieve perfection and salvation.

However, in *Patience*, clothes become a sign of vanity and of worldly encumbrances that weigh men down. The poet further explores one’s sartorial morality in the passage of the repenting Ninevites, in which much detail is devoted to describe the clothes of the King:

His ryche robe he torof of his rigge naked,
 And of a hep of askes he hitte in þe myddez.
 He askez heterly a hayre and hasped hym vmbe,
 Sewed a sekke þerabof, and syked ful colde[.] (379–82)

Unlike in the scripture, the King in *Patience* not only changes himself, but actually “sews” his own repentant clothes. His torn rich robe recalls the luxuriously jagged

clothes criticized by Chaucer's Parson. The King and "all þe bodyes" (387) in the city "performed alle þe penaunce" (406) in the hope that God would forgive them if they abandon their sinful "layk" (act) (400–01). Through their penitential "layk" of changing and sewing, not only are the Ninevites' jagged fine clothes ("lake") sewn together, but their moral split and spiritual lack are also mended.³⁰⁷ The poet shows how the sartorial body becomes a site where one performs his moral and spiritual state through dressing and undressing oneself.

From Daged Hood to Seamless Robe

Clothes not only serve as a measure against which one's morality is judged, but also indicate one's salvific state. This idea originates from biblical and exegetical traditions in which the nakedness of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is contrasted with their postlapsarian covered body. In some medieval images, the moment of mankind's fall is portrayed as a sartorial change from complete nudity through partial coverage by fig leaves to fully-clad bodies in the robes of labor, as fig. 158 shows.

³⁰⁷ See *MED*, "leik (laik) (n.)," an act; "lake (laik) (n.2)," fine linen.

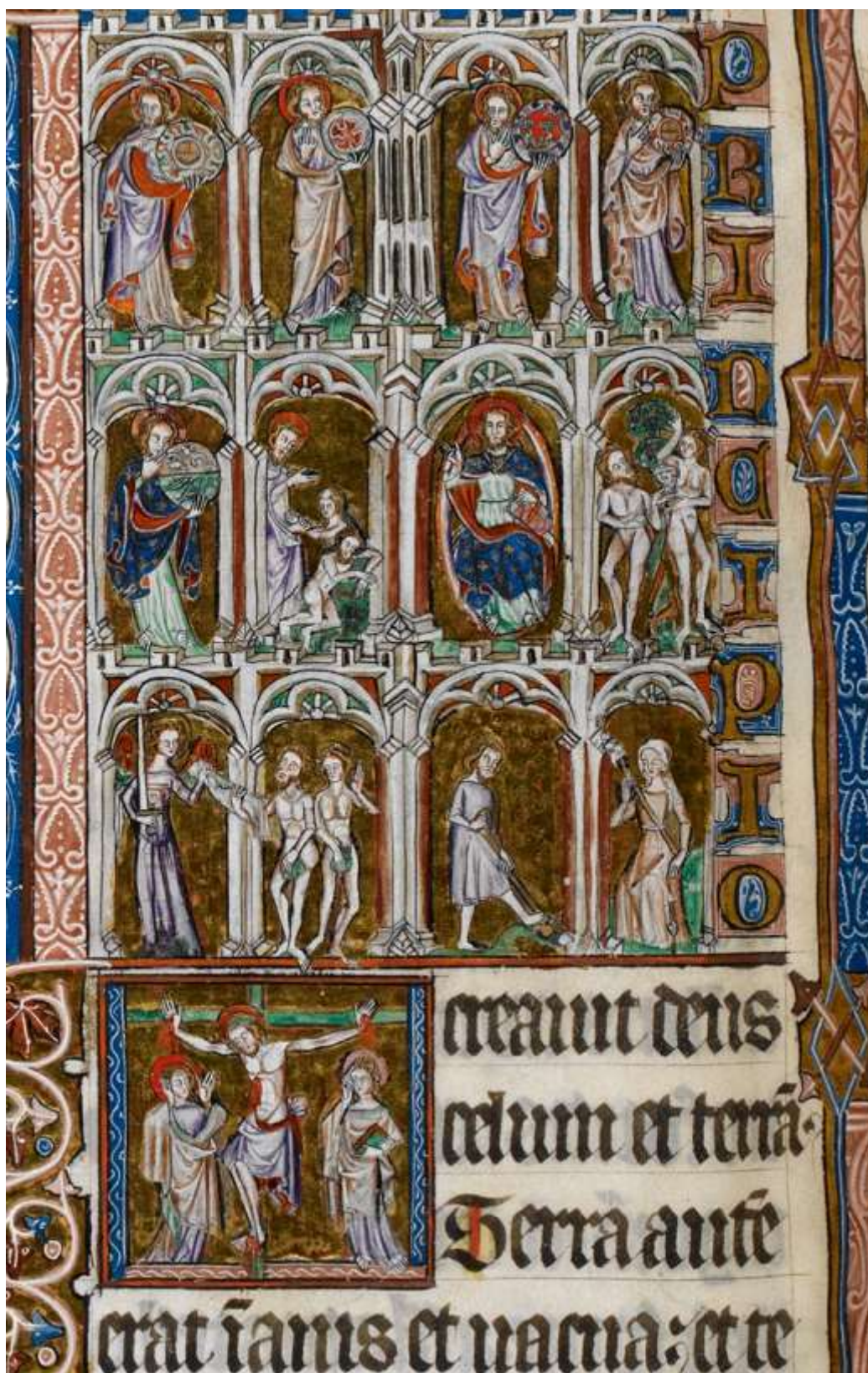


Fig. 158. The Fall and the Crucifixion. England, 1340-50, Octateuch Bible. BL. MS Royal 1 E. IV, fol. 12v.

In this image, the fig leaves which Adam and Eve sew together to cover their body

become a symbol of pride, concealment and self-righteousness, similar to the “wodbynde” which Jonah makes to cover himself from God’s inspection. The bodies of Adam and Eve barely clad in the dagged coverings cast a sharp contrast to the angel wearing an intact, flowing robe, which seems to invoke Christ’s seamless robe recorded in John: 19:23–4:

The soldiers therefore, when they had crucified him, took his garments [vestimenta], (and they made four parts, to every soldier a part) and also his coat. Now the coat was without seam [tunica inconsutilis], woven from the top throughout. They said then one to another: Let us not cut it but let us cast lots for it, whose it shall be; that the scripture might be fulfilled, saying: They have parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they have cast lots. And the soldiers indeed did these things.

Christ’s divided “vestimenta” and seamless “tunica” are not only symbols of salvation, but also reminders of his unjust suffering and his body humbled as a meek vessel of God. More importantly, his clothes signify the fulfillment of prophecy and divine providence—that they have to be torn and stripped of Christ in order to make God’s word known to people.

Thomas Aquinas comments on Christ’s seamless robe and the divided garments in a social context:

He says, also his tunic, that is, they took that along with his other garments. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom. He says that it was without a seam to indicate its unity. Some say this shows how valuable it was. On the other hand, Chrysostom says that the Evangelist says this to suggest that it was common and ordinary; for in Palestine the poor wear clothing made from many pieces of cloth, one

sewn over another: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor” (2 Cor 8:9).³⁰⁸

The divided garment and the seamless robe are here seen as indications of one’s social standing. Aquinas makes a kenotic interpretation of them by taking this sartorial change of Christ from a seamless robe to a divided garment as the symbol of voluntary impoverishment. Christ’s sartorial body then becomes a site to accommodate diverse ecclesiastical bodies spread across the world:

As for the mystical interpretation, this passage can be referred to the mystical body of Christ. Then Christ’s garments are divided into four parts because the Church is spread over the four parts of the world: “As I live, says the Lord, you shall put them all on as an ornament, you shall bind them on as a bride does” (Is 49:18). The tunic without seam, which was not divided, indicates charity, because the other virtues are not united by themselves, but by another, because all of them are directed to the ultimate end, and it is charity alone which unites us to this end. While it is faith which makes known our ultimate end, and by hope we tend toward it, only charity unites us to it: “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together” (Col 3:14).³⁰⁹

By putting on his split garment, Christ unites the divided churches into a whole ornament through his voluntary self-impoverishment and charity. His torn, dagged garments is sewn together back into a new robe of “love” for mankind to wear.

This concept of sartorial salvation is also represented in a fourteenth-century English Bible (fig. 163). The images of Adam and Eve in their coverings made of fig leaves

³⁰⁸ Quoted from *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Trans. Fabian R. Larcher et al. (Washington, D.C., 2010), XIX: 2428, p. 240.

³⁰⁹ Larcher (2010), XIX: 2429, p. 241.

and in their robes of labor are coupled with an image of the Crucifixion. The bodies of Adam and Eve barely clad in their dagged coverings echo Christ's ragged loin clothes as a sign of their fallen state, while the former are put on out of pride and the latter out of charity. The image of Christ in his ragged clothes is drawn right below the scene of the Expulsion in which an angel is shown giving a piece of clothing to Adam and Eve, encouraging the viewers to make a connection between Christ's stripped seamless robe with the one that is being given to Adam and Eve. Clothes become an ambiguous sign which marks at the same time both God's severest punishment of mankind and his mercy and good will for them even in their worst sin.



Fig. 159. The Expulsion. England, 1310-20; The Queen Mary Psalter. BL. MS Royal 2 B. VII, fol. 4.

A juxtaposition of man's dagged covering with the divine seamless robe can be seen in the Queen Mary Psalter (fig. 159), in which the scene of the Expulsion is accompanied by an image of an angel delivering a robe to Adam and Eve ("e les baile

robe”) to cover them. The garment of the angel and the robe he holds cast a sharp visual contrast to the dagged covering of Adam and Eve. The Middle French verb “baile” also means to wield a weapon, which invites the viewers to associate the robe the angel is handing over to Adam and Eve with the sword he is wielding against them in the upper register. The robe in this image literally becomes a symbol of both God’s malice and mercy.

At the end of *Patience*, God’s reproaching words to Jonah are resonant with a similar seamless embodiment of justice and mercy:

Wer I as hastif as þou here, were harme lumpen;
 Couþe I not þole bot as þou, þer þryued ful fewe.
 I may not be so malicious and mylde be halden,
 For malyse is noȝt to mayntyne boute mercy withinne. (520–23)

The poet compares God’s mercy for mankind with Jonah’s self-righteous, obsessive love for his woodbine. This juxtaposition of opposite ideas can also be seen in the miniature of Jonah Preaching (fig. 119), in which Jonah the fool’s dagged hood as a sign of sin and pride is juxtaposed with the stately seamless robe of Jonah the Christ. The jagged hood and stick of Jonah the fool both marks and mocks men’s foolish “imitatio dei” without capturing the divine spirit—that everything God does, including the malice he inflicts upon mankind, comes from an essentially merciful concern for their ultimate salvation. God’s love for mankind, which often appears to be unintelligible and impossible to human perceptions, makes God withhold his malice to men and even urges him to suffer it for them, just as Christ allows himself to be stripped of his seamless robe and has his garment divided into rags to amend mankind’s moral wound. When the poet condemns people’s foolish and hasty embrace of vanity and sin, as conveyed in a metaphor of tearing their own clothes as

if turning them into the sinful dagged style, he nevertheless provides a hope of redemption through the mending image of sewing patiently at the very end of the poem:

Be nozt so gryndel, godman, bot go forth þy wayes;
 Be preue and be pacient in payne and in joye;
 For he þat is to rakel to renden his clopez
 Mot efte sitte with more vnsounde to sewe hem togeder. (524–7)

Jonah falls through his selfishness and folly, which are represented, I argue, in the fool's "vnsound" hood of the preaching illustration, but by enduring the soiled mantle in which he emerges from the whale's belly, he is able to rise as a "typus Christi" in, as it were, a seamless robe, with his previously ragged morality now healed and mended. His self-interested foolishness serves as a foil to Christ's passionate folly. Through the figure of the fool, the poet demonstrates that Christ's patience does not simply consist in passive suffering, but comes out of a passion that leads him to actively abnegate his own will and reason, and it is this foolish passion behind his patience to which the poet is drawing attention.

The Sign of Jonah was a symbol of resurrection in a time when death was an immediate, pressing threat to people due to religious persecutions. Amidst his own background of religious conflicts, the poet vests this sign with new messages whose focus shifts from a longing for the other world through worship of a majestic God, to a recognition and appreciation of a God who fears, doubts, and have emotions as men do, and whose humanity and suffering brings him closer to people, whilst reminding them of the impossible equality between men and God. Jonah's double sartorial bodies become a site of contemplation where readers, like the two kneeling Ninevites, ponder on the contradictory and yet complementary ideas of Christ's form and

meaning, his divinity and humanity, wisdom and folly, malice and mercy, which are set out in the sartorial difference between dagging and seamless robe in the pictorial representation of Jonah, and are sewn together into an optimistic message of salvation which the poet manages to convey at the end of the poem despite an obstinately sinful human nature.

Chapter Five

“For quat gome so is gorde”: Uncovering *Sir Gawain*

The *Gawain*-poet displays an awareness of clothing and contemporary fashion in *Cleanness* and *Patience* by incorporating the “theology of clothes” into his probing of religious issues about image-making and the relationships between God and mankind. His sharp observation of contemporary clothing style is most obviously demonstrated through the dazzling arrays of material decorations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This chapter analyzes the issue of identity and performance in gender relations in this poem through the lens of textile materiality as a means of image-making in medieval courtly culture.

As the most popular work of the *Gawain*-corpus, *Sir Gawain* has been exhaustively analyzed in a well-established literature of criticism. These studies have significantly facilitated our understanding of the poem by exploring its cultural and religious associations, narrative structure, the role of the Green Knight, the symbols of the pentangle and the girdle, and last but not least, the poem’s representation of gender. Critics have, for example, discussed gender reversal and conflicts between homosexuality and heterosexuality in *Sir Gawain* from different theoretical perspectives.³¹⁰ Very few, however, have looked into this issue from the aspect of the poem’s rich materiality, especially its extravagant display of the characters’

³¹⁰ See, for example, Catherine S. Cox, “Genesis and Gender in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *ChauR* 35.4 (2001): 378–90; Geraldine Heng, “Feminine Knots and the Other *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *PMLA* 106. 3 (1991): 500–14; Carolyn Dinshaw, “A Kiss Is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and Its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Diacritics* 24.2/3 (1994): 204–26; Felicity J. Riddy, “Nature, Culture and Gender in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” in *Arthurian Romance and Gender: Selected Proceedings of the XVIIth International Arthurian Congress*, ed. Friedrich Wolfzettel (Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 215–25.

clothing.³¹¹ The poem's narrative is significantly marked by several important descriptions of sartorial transformations that are integral to each stage of its development: The Green Knight's weird costume in the court of Camelot; Gawain's glorious knightly accoutrement when he sets out on his journey; his divestment of his armor after arriving at Hautdesert; the Lady's richly decorated robe and her uncovering of the girdle in the Bedroom scenes; Gawain's donning of the girdle and his armor when leaving for the Green Chapel; and finally the Round Table knights' adoption of the baldric into their uniform. The poem's visually flamboyant description of sartorial styles not only reflects the luxurious courtly culture of Richard II's reign, but also reveals to what extent gender hierarchy in the courtly culture depends on its strict dress codes which in a sense create and maintain the images and identities of its members, and govern, regulate, and define the appropriate behavior of these members.

This chapter demonstrates how the identities of the characters are constantly being reconfigured in the process of their dressing, undressing and cross-dressing, and to what extent the conventional binary gender system in medieval romance and courtly culture is problematized and undermined in the poem's fluid sartorial transitions from one costume style to another, from covering to nudity, and from male armor to female

³¹¹ For the motif of cross-dressing in medieval literature, see *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*. Eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (N.Y., 1997), esp. Putter, "Transvestite Knights in Medieval Life and Literature," pp. 279–302, in which he discusses how the Arthurian knights assert their masculinity through cross-dressing. Other scattered and brief discussions of cross-dressing in *Sir Gawain* can be found in Rosanne Gasse, "The Fierce Achilles in Gower, Chaucer and the *Gawain*-poet," in "*Sir Gawain*" and the *Classical Tradition: Essays on the Ancient Antecedents*, ed. E. L. Ridsen (Jefferson, 2005), pp. 121–34. Susan Crane discusses courtly performance and bodily display in late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century English and French literature in *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing and Identity during the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia, 2002). She re-considers *Sir Gawain* in the ritualistic context of hunting and the green man in her chapter "Wild Doubles in Charivari and Interlude," pp. 140–74. Bowers (2013) mentions the idea of cross-dressing and the sartorial anecdote behind this poem (51), but does not explore them in depth. I read his book after this chapter was drafted in 2010.

skin. My reading does not aim to argue against the well-discussed issue of gender reversal in the poem, but to complement and substantiate the conclusion of these theoretical readings by focusing on the objects and accessories described in the poem and their function and significance in the contemporary life of the poet. By doing so, I show how the cultural semiotics of these objects is incorporated into the poem to represent the complications of gendered identity and how their malleability as symbols can facilitate our understanding of the complex relations between man and woman, fiction and truth in the poem.

Cross-dressing Knights and Ladies

Guinevere's Canopy

The binary gender system in Camelot is emphasized at the very beginning of its appearance in the poem through the constant textual juxtaposition of “lordez and ladies”: the “most kyd kny3tez” and the “louelokkest ladies;” the “comlokest kyng” and Queen Guinevere who is “þe comlokest to discrye.” The gender roles and hierarchy assigned to these knights and ladies can be detected in their Christmas game: “Ladies lazed ful loude þo3 þay lost haden / and he þat wan watz not wrothe— þat may 3e wel trawe” (69–70). The court of Camelot operates on a traditional gender scheme in which men win and women lose. This traditional gender relation is further reinforced by the description of Guinevere, the representative of the ladies in the courtly culture:

Whene Guenore ful gay grayþed in þe myddes,
Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al aboute:
Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir ouer

Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe
 Pat were enbrawd and beten wyth þe best gemmes
 Pat myzt be preued of prys wyth penyes to bye
 In daye. (74–80)

Guinevere's appearance in the court is represented in a series of actions described in passive voice: she is "grayþed" (seated) amid people; "dressed" (placed) at the high table, and "dubbed" with jewelry. The narrator creates a sense of passivity by depriving Guinevere of her ability to act as a subject. When she is "dressed" on the high table amid men, she is literally clothed and concealed in the richly embroidered canopy that surrounds her. Her body seems to fuse with the hall which is filled and dominated by men. The precious exotic fabrics from Toulouse and Tharsia show her supreme status as the Queen while also objectifying her body as a commodity, covering the women in Camelot under a blanket label of passive decorations won and worn by men. The exotic textiles not only serve as a means of identifying, classifying and objectifying the female body, they also become a site on which the binary gender position is mapped out and accentuated by the polarization of Tharsia and Toulouse, the East and the West.³¹² Guinevere is further objectified by the gaze of the male participants in the feast:

Þe comlokest to discrye
 Þer glent with yʒen gray;
 A semloker þat euer he syʒe
 Soth mozt no mon say. (81–4)

Her body concealed under the beautiful canopy is visually embroidered into the tapestries on the wall and becomes a static image, like a portrait, for all men to see.

³¹² The exotic textiles as a conduit of expressing female desire is discussed by E. Jane Burns in *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 1–16; and further explored in *Sea of Silk: A Textile Geography of Women's Work in Medieval French Literature* (Philadelphia, 2009).

She appears as an ideal object of men's desire and gaze, for no man ever saw a more beautiful woman. Her body is reduced to the background of the courtly feast in which men assert their subject position by winning the Christmas game over women and looking at their bodies. However, the narrator implicitly unsettles this traditional gender hierarchy by drawing attention to Guinevere's gray eyes, the only part of her body that is made openly visible both to the courtly guests and the reader. Her glistening eyes reflect with the "best gemmes" (79) embroidered on the tapestry around her body,³¹³ which is nested at the center of the hall as the "crown jewel."³¹⁴ While this jewelry metaphor reinforces the image of Guinevere as a commodity, these two gems are far from passive, and even less fixed. Her gemlike eyes shine and glisten ("glent"), emitting rays and looking back on those who look at her. The word "glent" implies a hard, shiny surface that glistens and reflects, which evokes the image of glass, as if suggesting that when these men behold Guinevere, they are looking into a mirror.

The association of Guinevere with jewels and mirrors recalls the Pearl-maiden who also has gray eyes and who is referred to as the "juel" and the "gemmez gente" (253–4). Like the crystal stones in Narcissus' fountain and the "perlez" in the Dreamer's "myry mere," Guinevere's "gemmes of prys" actively shine and look back, dazing the lookers and fixing their sight on her exclusive appearance. The image of a looking glass evoked by Guinevere's eyes seems to associate Camelot with the "myry mere"

³¹³ This embroidered style was mentioned by contemporary chroniclers as "broidered of stone," which was introduced into England by Queen Anne of Bohemia through her marriage to Richard II. See Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, 1841), pp. 308–10. Anne's style was so popular and admired that this "newe guise of Beawme" became synonymous with "quentise" and "beautiful," as described in *Confessio Amantis* 8: 2470–72.

³¹⁴ As noted by William F. Woods in "Nature and the Inner Man in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *ChauR* 36.3 (2002): 209–27, p. 210. He sees Guinevere's concealed body as a visual expression of the sheltered and shrouded court of Camelot.

of the *Pearl*-Dreamer and suggest Camelot's fixed, rigid self-regard which sees women as men's mirror image and reflections of male desire, like the most beautiful Queen, Guinevere, who is turned into a statue under the ever-present male gaze.

The Green Knight's "Smale Wast"

This internal, self-indulgent gaze of Camelot is interrupted by the appearance of the Green Knight in his glorious apparel:

Ande al grayped in grene þis gome and his wedes:
 A strayt cote ful strezt þat stek on his sides,
 A meré mantile abof, mensked withinne
 With pelure pured apert, þe pane ful clene
 With blyþe blaunner ful bryzt, and his hod boþe,
 Pat watz lazt fro his lokkez and layde on his schulderes[.] (151–6)

The similar phrasing in the descriptions of Guinevere's and the Green Knight's clothes invite the reader to read these two figures as sartorial counterparts. They both "grayped" their entrance into the hall, surrounded by luxurious clothing: Guinevere is "dubbed" all about in her embroidered "selure," while the Green Knight is "mensked withinne" in his fur-lined "pelure." They both have a color ascribed to them as a personal attribute: Guinevere's gray eyes and the Green Knight's green body. Both of them are at the same time the central objects of the court's gaze because of their singularity and exclusiveness: no one has ever seen a woman more beautiful than Guinevere, while the Green Knight in his costume "watz neuer sene in þat sale wyth syzt er þat tyme" (197). The Queen's face seems to become ever more beautiful when one looks at it (83). The Green Knight's color appears to grow greener and greener under the courtiers' gaze (235). That these two figures act as foils to one another can also be sensed in the miniature of the Beheading scene (fig. 160), in which both

Guinevere and the Green Knight are shown to be wearing green clothes. The chaplet that the Green Knight wears on his head also parallels the crown of Guinevere.



Fig. 160. Arthur's Feast. England, c.1400; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A. x., fol. 90v (94v).



Fig. 161. The Green Chapel. England, c. 1400; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A. x. fol. 125v (129v).

However, in contrast to Guinevere's form, which is obscured and concealed by the canopy, the Green Knight's body is laid open for scrutiny in the text, just as in the miniature, the body of Guinevere is shielded and eclipsed by the figures of Arthur and Agravain, while the Green Knight's distinctive body replaces hers as the visual focus in the foreground (fig. 160):

Per hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster,
 On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe;
 Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware and so þik,

And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and so grete,
 Half-etayn in erde I hope þat he were,
 Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene,
 And þat þe myriest in his muckel þat myzt ride;
 For of bak and of brest al were his bodi sturne,
 Both his wombe and his wast were worthily smale,
 And alle his fetures folzande in forme, þat he hade,
 Ful clene. (136–46)

The Green Knight is tall, thick-necked and has strong and long limbs as one would expect from a warrior-like man. But in contrast to his “sturne bodi,” the Green Knight has a small waist, which creates a curvaceous body. This unusual feature of the Green Knight, which is faithfully rendered in the miniature in contrast to his puffy sleeves, echoes the description of his coat which “stek on his sides” (gathered at his waist) (152) in correspondence with the late-fourteenth-century fashion taste which preferred tailored and tightly fitting short jackets to the centuries-old style of long loose tunics. The coat that “stek” (attached, stabbed) to the Green Knight’s “sides” also recalls the popular dagged style and the violence associated with it. This new fashion style enables men to display the curves of their body shape, something traditionally associated with feminine beauty, and erotizes male body at the expense of its masculinity.³¹⁵ The Green Knight’s feminine quality is further reinforced by the emphasis on his and his horse’s matching wavy locks: his lovely hair spreads like a fan enveloping his shoulders (180–2) in parallel with the horse’s “well curled and combed” mane. In contrast to Guinevere’s loosely hanging, concealing canopy which obscures her body as tunics used to hide men’s, the Green Knight’s tightly fitted, revealing outfit reforms his body shape, displacing the royal female body as the

³¹⁵ In *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* (London, 1995), James Laver suggests that a recognizable fashion in clothing first emerged in the late fourteenth century (62). Camille suggests that this late-medieval fashion trend favoring tight clothes began to eroticize the male body for the first time in history. See *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (London, 1998), p. 40.

central object for the courtly company's erotic gaze. His imposing body disrupts Camelot's focalized gaze on Guinevere (which now appears to be an act of self-regard) and unsettles its established self-perception by demanding it to look elsewhere.

The Folly of the Green Knight

The description of the Green Knight's luxurious clothes and appearance also evokes the longstanding issue of excessive luxury in clothing and related debates concerning social status and identity that occurred throughout the medieval period. As early as the twelfth century, St. Bernard of Clairvaux railed against contemporary knights' overzealous attention to what they wore:

What then, O knights, is this monstrous error and unbearable urge to devote such expense and labor in fighting, for no purpose except death and sin? You deck your horses with silk, and plume your armor with all manner of rags. You paint your saddles and shields [with emblems]. You adorn your bits and spurs with gold and silver and precious stones. And then in all this glory you gallop in shameful frenzy and mindless stupidity to your own death! Are these the trappings of a warrior, or are they not rather the trinkets of a woman?³¹⁶

³¹⁶ Ch. 2, "On Worldly Knighthood," qtd. in *Feudal Society in Medieval France: Documents from the County of Champagne*, ed. and trans. Theodore Evergates (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 98–101, p. 99. For Bernard of Clairvaux's influence on the *Gawain*-poet, see Elizabeth G. Wolfe, "Poetic of Holiness: Bernard of Clairvaux and the *Pearl*-poet." Diss. Baylor U, 2009. For medieval regulatory activities both by secular monarchs and by the church to control the production and distribution of clothes as a means of maintaining the stability of social hierarchy, see Françoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane, "The Diffusion and Regulation of Fashion," in *Dress in the Middle Ages*, trans. Caroline Beamish (New Haven, 1997), pp. 77–95; Joanna Crawford, "Clothing Distributions and Social Relations c. 1350–1500," in *Clothing Culture, 1350–1650*, ed. Catherine Richardson (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 153–64; Thomas M. Izbicki, "Forbidden Colors in the Regulation of Clerical Dress from the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) to the Time of Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464)," in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles, 10 vols.*, eds. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, vol. 1 (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 105–14; idem. "Failed Censures: Ecclesiastical Regulation of Women's Clothing in Late Medieval Italy," in Netherton and Owen-Crocker (eds.), vol. 5 (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 37–54; Margaret Rose Jaster, "Clothing Themselves in Acres': Apparel and Impoverishment in Medieval and Early Modern England," in Netherton and Owen-Crocker (eds.), vol. 2 (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 91–100; Burns "Refashioning Courtly Love," in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, eds.

The sartorial excess of knights is condemned both because it affects their military performance in battle and is hence inappropriate for their identity, and because it essentially transgresses God's law both by seeking worldly vanity and by transgressing the hierarchy and gender boundary ordained by God in the creation of the world. St. Bernard further attacks the effeminate appearance of these worldly knights in more explicit terms:

[A] knight [...] must have strength, energy, and shrewdness; he must be unencumbered in his movements; and he must be able to draw his sword quickly. Why then, on the contrary, do you blind yourselves with effeminate locks of hair, and trip yourselves up in long and flowing tunics with in which you bury your tender, delicate hands?

Long hair indicates an inability to see and a lack of perception, while delicate hands and baggy sleeves mark the death of knightly strength and shrewdness in battle. This moral concern with dressing appropriately according to one's gender, identity and status also appears in some late fourteenth-century criticisms on extravagant clothing. John Lydgate in the *Fall of Princes* describes a proper dress code instituted and endorsed by God:

Wher superfluite is vsid of aray,
 Riot folweth, proud port & idilnesse; (6.2689–90)
 ...
 God suffreth weel ther be a difference
 Touchyng array, as men been of degre:
 Hih estatis, that stonde in excellence,
 Mut be preferrid, of resoun men may see;
 As cloth of gold, stonis and perre

Karma Lochrie et al. (Minneapolis, 1997), pp. 111–34; Claire Sponsler, "Narrating the Social Order: Medieval Clothing Law." *Clio* 21.3 (1992): 265–83; Susan L'Engle, "Addressing the Law: Costume as Signifier in Medieval Legal Miniatures," in *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress: Objects, Texts, Images*, eds. Désirée G. Koslin and Janet E. Snyder (N.Y., 2002), pp. 137–53.

Was for princis, with othir fressh clothynges,
But speciali purpil was for kyngis. (6.2696–2702)³¹⁷

In his discourse, Lydgate addresses the importance of matching one's clothes with one's social status, emphasizing the consistency between what one wears and what one is. Thus the higher a person is on the social scale, the better the quality of clothes he should wear. Violation of such clothing rules is not only a social offence but also a transgression against divine order. Thomas Hoccleve, however, looks into the same issue from the perspective of morality and virtue. In his *The Regiment of Princes*, Hoccleve points out the frequent disparity between one's appearance and one's inner quality through the mouth of an old man admonishing the poet's *alter ego*. The old man mocks the latest fashion trend of wearing outrageously long sleeves which sweep the ground wherever the wearer goes:

Now hath this land but litil neede of bromes
To sweepe away the filthe out of the street,
Syn syde sleeves of penylees gromes
Wole it up likke, be it drie or weet. (533–6)³¹⁸

The “syde sleeves” echoes St. Bernard of Clairvaux’s “cumbersome sleeves” which hinder a knight’s movement and make them effeminate. These trendy “syde sleeves” contrast with John of Gaunt’s old-fashioned garment which is “nat ful wyde” (512–20), and yet the latter’s nobility is in no way reduced by his modest clothes. The old man further advises Hoccleve not to judge a person by his appearance but by his inner “trouthe and clenness” (550), just as the old man’s aged look, “array untheende” (556) and his “bare old russet” (675) should not diminish the value of his words.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Text quoted from John Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1923).

³¹⁸ Text quoted from *Thomas Hoccleve: The Regiment of Princes*, ed. Charles R. Blyth (Kalamazoo, 1999).

³¹⁹ For the linked implications of modest clothing, morality and plain speech in Hoccleve’s *Regiment*, see Nicholas Perkins, *Hoccleve’s “Regiment of Princes”: Counsel and Constraint* (Cambridge,

The attacks against the foolish observance of fashion trends appear nowhere more direct and fierce than in Chaucer's *The Parson's Tale*. The Parson rails against the tight clothing style of his time:

Upon that oother side, to speken of the horrible disordiat
scantnesse of clothyng, as been thise kuttid sloppes, or
haynselyns, that thurgh hire shortnesse ne covere nat the
shameful membres of man, to wikked entente./ Allas, somme
of hem shewen the boce or hir shap, and the horrible swollen
membres, that semeth lik the maladie of hirnias, in the
wrappynge of hir hoses;/ and eek the buttokes of hem faren
as it were the hyndre part of a she-ape in the fulle of the
moone. (X.421–3)

The curvaceous body shape made visible by tight clothes is condemned as a “wikked entente” of exhibitionism. Chaucer’s metaphor of the ape suggests the absurd nature of these fashionable clothes, which St Bernard had condemned as folly in his criticism of effeminate knights. Fernand Braudel records a fourteenth-century French chronicler’s comment on the body wrapped in this “figure-hugging” costume: “Around that year (1350), men, in particular noblemen and their squires, took to wearing tunics so short and tight that they revealed what modesty bids us hide. This was a most astonishing thing for the people.”³²⁰ Such sartorial excess here becomes a matter of immodesty and shame. The astonished reaction of the lookers upon seeing a body wrapped in such clothes recalls the similar shock of Arthur’s court when they see the Green Knight’s strange, curvaceous body. More often than not, the extravagant clothing style of Richard II and his wife became a metonymy for graver issues which

2001), pp. 42–3; 80–81. Ironically, one of the earliest surviving manuscripts of the poem, BL MS Arundel 38, fol. 37r, depicts in a presentation portrait its addressee Prince Henry with either Hoccleve or the manuscripts’ patron, both of whom wear flowing robes with long sleeves.

³²⁰ “Superfluity and Sufficiency: Houses, Clothes and Fashion,” in *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century: The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits to the Possible*, trans. Sian Reynolds, vol. 1 (London, 1981), pp. 266–333, p. 317.

contemporary chroniclers addressed and criticized. Thomas Walsingham, for example, calls the members of the court of Richard II “knights of Venus rather than of Mars” (“milites plures erant Veneris quam Bellone”) who pay more attention to their appearance and the art of love than to martial skills, and who are quicker to speak than to fight,³²¹ which is reminiscent of the merry-making knights of Camelot and their game and banter with ladies at the beginning of the poem.

Read in this context of sartorial propriety, the Green Knight with his luxurious clothes, small waist and combed hair becomes an unnatural body that transgresses the boundary between men and women, knights and ladies. His weird, incomplete accoutrement further adds to his ambiguity: he is dressed in a richly decorated tunic and mantle but without a coat of mail, helmet and shoes. Instead of the standard knightly weapon of the sword or the lance, he holds an axe and a holly bob in his hands. His horse is fully equipped as is appropriate for an armed knight, and yet he himself is not quite so. If Guinevere’s tunic-like canopy hinted at an inherent disorder and instability shrouded under Camelot’s neatly fixed binary divisions, the Green Knight, as her sartorial counterpart, brings this disorder and instability to the fore and lays them open for public scrutiny through his curvaceous, feminized body. If the two poles of men and women, subject and object are mapped on Guinevere’s canopy, they converge at the Green Knight’s small waist where the sex differences meet and their distinctions blur.

The Green Knight’s ambiguous clothes and body escape the well-defined gender binaries of the court of Camelot. His “marvelous” body arrests the gaze of the court

³²¹ *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, ed. and trans. John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs and Leslie Watkiss, 2 vols (Oxford, 2003–11), vol. I, pp. 814–5.

and engages them in a collective deciphering of “quat hit mene myzt” (233). Both Arthur and Gawain take the Green Knight as “foly” (324) and his words as “nys” (nonsense) (323, 358) in a way that likens his strange body, which is “such a fole vpon folde” (196),³²² to Jonah’s body of folly clothed in the fool’s bizzare hood in *Patience*. The image of the fool is reinforced by the mention of the Green Knight’s hood which lies down around his neck and the tree branch held in his hand like the bauble held by the fool. Failing to comprehend the Green Knight’s true identity at this point, the court of Camelot manages to suppress this sartorial upheaval of the Green Knight by penetrating his body as an attempt to re-inscribe it back into the norm of Camelot.

The miniature of the beheading scene (fig. 160) has a similar composition to the image of Belshazzar’s feast in *Cleanness*, both featuring a feast table which divides the pictorial space in two, with the Kings and the Queens occupying the upper register while Daniel and Gawain/the Green Knight stand below. The pictorial resemblance between these two images encourages the viewer to associate the exotic axe brought by the Green Knight into the hall of Arthur with the mysterious hand and words of God that appear in Belshazzar’s court. Gawain, who asks to take up the Green Knight’s challenge (“bis melly mot be myne”) (342) on Arthur’s behalf, resembles Daniel who solves the riddle for the king. However, whereas Daniel insightfully interprets the words of God for Belshazzar, Gawain fails to appreciate the consequence of the Green Knight’s words and dismisses it as “nys” (foolish) as Arthur has. But ironically, in the image of the beheading scene (fig. 160), it is Gawain who,

³²² The “fole” in this line literally refers to the horse which the Green Knight rides. But the horse’s green color, wavy manes, and elaborate adornments makes it obvious that it is a visual parallel to its rider. The Green Knight on this “fole” becomes the consummate image of folly on earth which was never seen by the court of Camelot. The double sense of the word “fold” both as “the world” and “clothes” also reminds readers of the Green Knight’s absurd outfit.

with his red top and blue hose, is wrapped in a parti-colored outfit, which is often associated with the fool (figs. 123–8 in Chapter 4), and which in some way parallels the blue hood and red robe of Jonah the fool in the miniature of *Jonah Preaching*.³²³ By claiming the Green knight's foolish challenge as his own, Gawain becomes the fool whom he is soon proven to be, and whose folly which he is to bitterly admit when he returns to Camelot.

This idea of role reversal may also be felt in the image of Gawain's encounter with the Green Knight at the Green Chapel (fig. 161), which appears as a reversed image of the beheading scene (fig. 160). Gawain in his armor looks like the beheaded Green Knight, while the Green Knight, who holds an axe and stands on the cave, appears exactly like Gawain who takes up the challenge for Arthur. While the Green Knight's outfits remain consistently mono-colored in these two images, Gawain's bodies (and his horse as well) are noticeably wrapped in a two-colored outfit. If we consider parti-colored clothes and its association with "the fool," an idea figuring so prominently in the poems and images of the *Gawain*-manuscript, the noticeable parallel between these two miniatures may perhaps have been meant to suggest the role reversal of Gawain and the Green Knight, and the idea that, instead of the Green Knight, Gawain is the foolish of the two.

Gawain's "Saylande Skyrtez"

³²³ See also below pp. 328–31 for the image of Gawain back in court (fig. 192), in which Gawain is shown as wearing the same outfit, and its connection with the fool. In medieval culture, parti-colored and stripy textiles and clothes ("medle (melly)") were notoriously ambiguous as discussed by Laura F. Hodges in her extensive research on the clothing in Chaucer's work. These two-colored clothes were not only associated with the fool, but were also actually worn both by lawyers (widely known through the image of the Sergeant of the Law in *The Canterbury Tales*) and by criminals on their trials. This ambiguity of righteousness and crime, the just and the guilty conveyed by the parti-colored clothes seems relevant to the poem's overarching concern with identity and the gap between appearance and truth. See Hodges, "Misunderstood 'medlee cote'" in *Chaucer and Costume* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 101–25, esp. 112–9.

The sartorial disturbance caused by the Green Knight to Camelot is countered by its best knight Gawain. About a hundred lines (566-668) are devoted to elaborating Gawain's preparation for his journey, which consists mainly of the process of donning clothes and armor:

Dubbed in a dublet of a dere tars,
 And syþen a crafty capados, closed aloft,
 Pat wyth a bryzt blaunner was bounden withinne.
 Pen set þay þe sabatounz upon þe segge fotez,
 His legez lapped in stel with luflych greuez,
 With polaynez piched þerto, policed ful clene,
 Aboute his knez knaged wyth knotez of golde;
 Queme quyssewes þen, þat coyntlych closed
 His thik þrawen þyzez, with þwonges to tachched;
 And syþen þe brawdén bryné of bryzt stel rynges
 Vmbeweued þat wyz, vpon wlonk stuffe,
 And wel bornyst brace vpon his boþe armes,
 With gode cowters and gay and glouez of plate,
 And alle þe godlych gere þat hym gayn schulde
 Pat tyde;
 Wyth ryche cote-armure,
 His gold sporez spend with pryde,
 Gurde wyth a bront ful sure
 With silk sayn vmbe his syde. (571–89)

Gawain's accoutrement is itemized in full detail—a cape, a coat of mail, arm pieces, elbow pieces, gauntlets, thigh pieces, knee pieces, steel shoes—and on top of these things a surcoat, a spur, and a belt are added. The verbs “closed,” “lapped” “tachched” and “vmbeweued” emphasize the idea of enclosing and covering. Later, in lines 605-668, Gawain's helmet and shield are introduced. By this point, Gawain's whole body is completely covered under his knightly outfit, and not a single part of flesh is left visible to the outside. The fine quality and shining glamor of his accoutrement correspond to his knightly virtue, which is condensed into the symbol of the

pentangle, the marker of his identity as the “gentylest knyzt of lote” (639). Gawain’s identity as the best knight is constructed literally when his natural body is completely concealed and erased by his armor.³²⁴ The knight’s accoutrements not only protect him, but also function as a marker of power and masculinity in the courtly culture of feudal society.³²⁵ The red and gold colors of the Pentangle shield (619–20) are especially noted, which may have been a textual source of Gawain’s two-colored outfit in the miniatures. The shield’s dual color and its two sides of masculinity and femininity implied by the images of the Pentangle and the Virgin Mary seem to suggest its elusiveness and ambiguity as a sign, foreshadowing Gawain’s subsequent transformation from the perfect knight to a fallible one, from the hero to a fool.

Gawain leaves Camelot fully armed and arrives at Hautdesert only to be stripped. The process of divesting Gawain of his armor and clothing begins right after he enters the castle of Bertilak. Gawain is brought to his room by his servant under Bertilak’s command:

Pe lorde hym charred to a chambre and chesly cumaundez
 To delyuer hym a leude hym lozly to serue;
 And þere were boun at his bode burnez innoze
 Pat brozt hym to a bryzt boure þer bedding watz noble:
 Of cortynes of clene sylk wyth cler golde hemmez

³²⁴ Here I borrow Burns’ and Elizabeth Grosz’s idea of the social body as a body constructed by historical, social, cultural and linguistic processes, in opposition to the anatomical body which is naturally given. See *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, 1993). See also Grosz’s “Sexed Bodies,” in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, 1994), pp. 187–210, in which she defines a social body as a material organization which is given unity through psychical and social inscription.

³²⁵ On the courtly dress code and gender issues in medieval romances, see Brigitte Buettner, “Dressing and Undressing Bodies in Late Medieval Images,” *Künstlerischer Austausch / Artistic Exchange: Akten des XXVIII*, ed. Thomas W. Gaehtgens (Berlin, 1993), pp. 383–92; Burns (1993), Burns (2002) and Burns (1997); idem. “Ladies Don’t Wear Braies: Underwear and Outwear in the French *Prose Lancelot*,” in *The Lancelot-Grail Cycle: Text and Transformations*, ed. William W. Kibler (Austin, 1994), pp. 152–74; idem. “Which Queen?: Guinevere’s Transvestism in the French *Prose Lancelot*,” in *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*, ed. Lori J. Walters (London, 2002), pp. 247–66; and Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s “Canterbury Tales”* (Princeton, 1994).

And couertorez ful curious with comlych panez
 Of bryzt blaunmer aboue, enbrawdedyz,
 Rudelez rennande on ropez, red golde ryngesz,
 Tapytez tyzt to þe woze, of tuly and tars,
 And vnder fete, on þe flet, of folzande sute. (850–59)

While Bertilak withdraws to his own “chamber,” Gawain is led to his “bower.” Whereas both words refer to a private room, “bower” carries an explicit feminine connotation by its association with the womb of the Virgin Mary,³²⁶ which echoes Gawain as the knight of Mary and the image of Mary painted on the inner side of Gawain’s Pentangle shield. The feminine bower in Hautdesert casts a sharp contrast to Camelot’s “sale,” where Gawain stays all day before he sets out on his journey to find the Green Chapel (557–65).³²⁷ Gawain leaves the hall of Camelot fully-armed as the knight of the Pentangle and is now to be disarmed in this bower assigned to him:

Per he watz dispoyled, wyth spechez of myerþe,
 Þe burn of his bruny and of his bryzt wedez;
 Ryche robes ful rad renkkez hem brozten
 For to charge and to chaunge and chose of þe best. (860–63)

Gawain’s coat of mail and all of his armor are removed from him. To replace his knightly accoutrements, a luxurious trailing gown is put on him. E. Jane Burns reminds us that the exposition of a knight’s body parts and flesh not only “invites wounding, but marks [his] formal defeat,” and that the notion of “desarme” (disarmed) often implies the divestment of knightly identity.³²⁸ John Benton also demonstrates that the long robe for aristocratic men in the twelfth and thirteenth

³²⁶ See *MED* “chamber (n.1)” and “bour (n.),” 2(b), 3(a).

³²⁷ Dominique Battles compares the architectural spaces of Camelot and Hautdesert and sees the two as embodying a pre-conquest English hall that operates on Anglo-Saxon values and a Norman-styled castle in which French customs are observed. See “Castle Architecture and English Identity,” in *Cultural Difference and Material Culture in Middle English Romance: Normans and Saxons* (London, 2013), pp. 58–83, esp. pp. 75–80.

³²⁸ Burns (1997), p. 118.

centuries was indeed a “unisex garment,” which could have been worn by men or women (as figs. 192–4 show).³²⁹ This sartorial change of Gawain, therefore, both suggests that he is losing his distinct masculinity and knightly identity, and announces the beginning of his transformation into a feminized body. The verbs “charge,” “chaunge” and “chose” describe vividly the metamorphosis of Gawain’s body on both the literal and the metaphorical levels. His former reputation as “tulk of tale most trwe” and gentlest knight of “lote” (638–9), characteristics which mark his and Camelot’s renown, is now silently challenged and “dispoyled” (stripped) by the “spechez of myerþe” of Hautdesert. The sense of falsity and nonsense which the word “lote” conveys³³⁰ also implies that Gawain’s knightly identity and reputation is something constructed and imposed on him like his layered accoutrements, which conceals his body and is now divested and uncovered.

Having been dressed in the de-gendered gown, Gawain begins to take on more feminine qualities, which are expressed by his look in the gown:

Sone as he on hent and happed þerinne,
 Pat sete on hym semly, wyth saylande skyrtez,
 Þe ver by his uisage verayly hit semed
 Welnez to vche habel, alle on hwes,
 Lowande and lufly alle his lymmez vnder;
 Pat a comloker knyzt neuer Kryst made,
 Hem þoȝt. (864–70)

³²⁹ This unisex clothing style sometimes creates ambiguity and difficulty in interpreting the gender of a figure so clad. For example, when discussing the two figures appearing on a medieval seal of Raymond de Mondragon, Marc Bloch saw the seal as depicting the theme of courtly love in which a knight kneels to his lady, while Benton saw a vassal paying homage to his lord. See John F. Benton, “Clio and Venus: A Historical View of Medieval Love,” in *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. F. X. Newman (Albany, 1968), pp. 19–42; Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society: The Growth of Ties of Dependence*, trans. L. A. Manyon, vol. 1 (London, 1962), Part III “The Ties between Man and Man Kinship,” pp. 121–42. This case was also mentioned in Burns (1997), but she mistakes the name “Raymond de Mondragon” for “Simon de Mondragon.”

³³⁰ See *MED*, “lot(e) (n.)” 1 (c), (d), and 3.

Concealed in his flowing skirts, Gawain actually starts to appear like a woman: his visage is spring-colored and his limbs beautiful and shining, which are compliments conventionally bestowed on women. Gawain leaves Camelot as a “lowande leder of ledez”) (679). But now in his bower at Hautdesert, his illustrious masculinity and leadership are transformed into lovely gleaming limbs (“lowande and lufly ... lymmez”). If the knight’s fully covered body defines his masculinity in courtly culture, the visible flesh of women marks their social status as ladies. The ladies’ fair skin and delicate limbs classify and identify their bodies as vulnerable and needing protection as much as a knight’s accoutrements define his prowess and ability to hurt and protect. Gawain’s sartorial transformation from knightly dress to a unisex gown corresponds to his geographical transition from the public masculine space of a hall to the private feminine enclosure of a bower. When he is stripped of his knightly costume, Gawain is not only disrobed of his masculinity, but increases his vulnerability by exposing his flesh.

Gawain has first appeared as a model of sartorial correction for the disturbance caused by the Green Knight, but ends up becoming a body as ambiguous, if not as disturbing, as the Green Knight’s. Gawain’s ambiguous body might explain why the Pentangle shield, which is an iconic feature to Gawain both as a physical weapon and a spiritual symbol, mysteriously disappears and is never mentioned again after its first and only appearance in the court of Camelot, for Gawain’s knightly appearance and feminine quality literally become a bodily expression of the two sides of the shield, with its inner, feminized side, which used to be visible only to the insider, now being turned over for open scrutiny as Gawain’s masculine body is gradually uncovered in the castle of Hautdesert.

The Lady's "Gorger"

After donning this unisex robe, Gawain enters the hall and joins Bertilak and the two ladies in the feast. The Lady and the old woman come into the scene in juxtaposition with Gawain:

Penne lyst þe lady to loke on þe knyzt;
 Penne com ho of hir closet with mony cler burdez.
 Ho watz þe fayrest in felle, of flesche and of lyre
 And of compas and colour and costes, of alle oþer,
 And wener þen Wenore, as þe wyze þoʒt.
 Ho ches þruz þe chaunsel to cheryche þat hende. (941–6)

 Kerhofes of þat on wyth mony cler perlez;
 Hir brest and hir bryzt þrote, bare displayed,
 Schon schyrer þen snawe þat schedes on hillez; (954–6)

The description of the Lady's white skin, beautiful visage and fine body proportions recall the similar description of Gawain in his "ryche robes" earlier on, only with more explicit emphases on her naked flesh. Gawain immediately associates the Lady with Guinevere and compares the two. The phrase "as þe wyze þoʒt" implies Gawain's gaze on the two women, and suggests that the following descriptions of the two ladies are from Gawain's perspective. Unlike Guinevere's covered, obscure body, the Lady's body appears in a distinct form emphasized through a series of synonyms which draws attention to her naked skin: "felle," "flesche," "lyre." Her gaze is as conspicuous as her body. Whereas Guinevere's ability to see is in a sense weakened into a passive nominal presence of the eyes with their sight mediated and veiled by the metaphor of glistening light, the Lady's gaze takes on the form of a direct, self-initiating (she "lyst") action of "looking." The Lady's beautiful form is juxtaposed and contrasted with the old woman accompanying her:

Anoper lady hir lad bi þe lyft honde
 Pat watz alder þen ho, an auncian hit semed,
 And hezly honowred with hapelez aboute.
 Bot vnlyke on to loke þo ladyes were:
 For if þe zonege watz 3ep, 3ol3e watz þat oþer;
 Riche red on þat on rayled ayquere,
 Rugh ronkled chekez þat oþer on rolled; (947–53)
 ...
 Pat oþer wyth a gorger watz gered ouer þe swyre,
 Chymbled ouer hir blake chyn with chalk-quyte vayles,
 Hir frount folden in sylk, enfoubled ayquere,
 Toret and treleted with tryflez aboute,
 Pat nozt watz bare of þat burde bot þe blake brozes,
 Þe tweyne y3en and þe nase, þe naked lyppez,
 And þose were soure to se and sellyly blered[.] (957–64)

Unlike the revealingly dressed Lady, the old woman is all bundled up, with her chin muffled in a neckerchief, her forehead wrapped in silk, leaving only her eyes, nose and lips visible to others. Her “tweyne eyes,” unlike Guinevere’s lovely, glimmering eyes, are “blered” (watery) and “soure to se.” The idea of pain and wretchedness caused by the sight of this lady’s eyes encourages one to associate them with the gorgon’s gaze. The old woman’s “blere” eyes remind us of the watery eyes of Narcissus’ reflection, which beguile the looker into destruction.

The detailed itemization of the things used to cover every part of the old woman’s body mirrors Gawain’s donning the different parts of his accoutrements before he goes on his knightly journey. The military vocabulary “gorger” and “gered” suggests that the old woman not only metaphorically resembles, but is literally a knight, fully armed with her power, and respected accordingly by the real warriors around her (948-9). The old woman’s cross-dressing serves as a foil to the feminized Gawain, revealing the unconventional gender hierarchy in the court of Hautdesert. Gawain, in

his unisex robe, is often represented as set (“tan,” “fonge”) in between the two women (977, 1316). The Lady and the knight-like old woman together constitute the two extremes of a gender spectrum between which Gawain moves with his body constantly reformed by the clothes put on him.

Opening the Case of Gawain

In the Secluded Bower

The process of refashioning Gawain’s body is signaled by Bertilak’s ceremonial gesture of taking off his hood during the feast:

De lorde luflych aloft lepez ful ofte,
 Mynned merthe to be made vpon mony sypez,
 Hent hezly of his hode and on a spere hinged
 And wayned hom to wynne þe worchip þerof
 Pat most myrþe myzt meue þat Crystenmas whyle:
 ‘And I schal fonde, bi my fayth, to fylter wyth þe best,
 Er me wont þe wede with help of my frendeȝ.’ (981–9)

The hood appears as a trophy for the winner. The presence of a spear and the verb “fylter” (to contend) together indicate that this “mirth of Christmas” resembles a battle or tournament in nature and echoes the Green Knight’s “Crystemas goman” offered to Arthur’s court. The two games are respectively represented by a hood hung on a spear in Hautdesert, and by an axe put up on the wall tapestry (476–9) in Arthur’s court. In Hautdesert, the challenge takes the form of clothes-(ex)changing, and failure is literally represented as a divestment. Bertilak, who has been dismissed as “nys” and “fole” in the court of Camelot, now officially divests himself of the covering of the foolish hood, and is ready to bestow it to the person who can “devise most amusement” (985)—in other words, the best fool and jester, which strongly points to

Gawain, who in the following narrative, is shown as constantly engaged in entertaining the Lady (and the members of Hautdesert, of course) in his supposedly private encounter with her. Bertilak's self-deriding remark that he would better find help before he loses his clothes foreshadows the sartorial changes of Gawain in the following Bedroom scenes, in which Gawain's renowned "lotes" are stripped from him and his identity reformed in the speech contest between him and the Lady.

Following the neutralization of his body, the total stripping of Gawain is carried out in the bedroom scenes, in which the complete gender reversal is realized. Gawain is described as lurking under coverings and fully curtained within his bed. The locked bower and the curtained bed constitute a twofold enclosure, which often symbolizes the integrity and inaccessibility of the female body in the convention of courtly love, along the lines of the biblical metaphor of the female body as an enclosed garden in the Song of Songs. A fourteenth-century mirror case (fig. 162) shows a couple playing chess, a common medieval metaphor of the pursuit between man and woman in the game of love.



Fig. 162. Lovers' game. Paris, 1300–25; Mirror Case. Victoria & Albert Museum. No. 803-1891.

Their amorous play is represented in a framed, curtained space. The male lover's outstretching right foot and the phallic pole he holds with his left hand embody his sexual advances towards the lady, whose acquiescence is symbolized by her open legs while the outcome of their game, as Camille suggested, is implied by the parted curtains above the couple.³³¹ Similar visual metaphors for male penetration of the female body can be seen explicitly in figs. 163–65.



Fig. 163. The Lover enjoys the Rose. France, 15th century; *The Romance of the Rose*. Bodleian. MS Douce 195, fol. 155v.

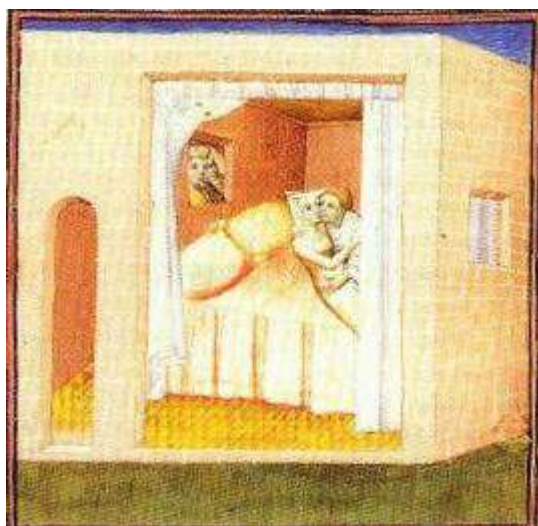


Fig. 164. A couple in bed. Paris, 1400; *Livre des Proprietez des Choses*. Herzog August Bibliothek. MS I.3.5.I Aug 2, fol. 146r. Image after Camille (1998), p. 140.



Fig. 165. David and Bathsheba. Paris, 1245; Old Testament. Morgan. MS 638, fol. 41v.

³³¹ In his discussion of this image, Camille noticed that the lady is “gouged out of the creamy ivory in a series of swaying Gothic folds, emphasizing her penetrability.” He suggested that the parted curtain symbolizes an anatomical opening of the woman’s body, which is also seen in above figs. 164 and 165. See his *Art of Love* (1998), pp. 121–55, p. 124 for discussion of these images.

The couple's amorous play beneath the bedclothes is visualized by the symbolic image of an upright candle pointing directly toward the center of the parted curtain in fig. 165. In fig. 166, an open door functions like a parted curtain to suggest the sexual consummation of Lancelot and Guinevere. These openings on an enclosed space also create a sense of voyeurism as is suggested by the man who watches the couple from the little hole on the wall in fig. 164, as if to remind the reader of their own voyeuristic gaze when looking at the image.



Fig. 166. Lancelot and Guinevere. France, c. 1316; *Lancelot du Lac*. BL. MS Additional 10293, fol. 325v.



Fig. 167. Gawain and the Lady. England, c. 1400; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. BL. MS Cotton Nero A.X. fol. 125r (129r).

In the miniature of the Bedroom scene (fig. 167), Gawain is shown as sleeping on a bed curtained about on three sides. The missing fourth curtain leaves Gawain's body open to penetration by both the reader's gaze and, as Bowers has noticed, the omnipresent, collective surveillance of the people in Hautdesert.³³² Similar amorous bedroom scenes were not uncommon in medieval romances. The miniatures of Lancelot and Guinevere (figs. 168–9), for example, show a highly similar composition. In fig. 168, Guinevere looks similar to Gawain, with both her hands covered, leaving only her head and neck visible. She appears passive and vulnerable in contrast to Lancelot's advances. The square-shaped bed and room structure reinforce the sense of propriety and enclosure of Guinevere's body, which is to be violated and penetrated by Lancelot in a symbolic act of his hand reaching out to feel her. In fig. 169, Guinevere is depicted as less restrained, with her hands raised in a gesture of welcoming Lancelot. But even so, she is the one who gets undressed, like the parted curtain, subject to Lancelot's desire and gaze.



Fig. 168. Guinevere and Lancelot. Paris, 1400; *Lancelot du Lac*. BnF. MS Français 119, fol. 398v.



Fig. 169. Guinevere and Lancelot. Paris, 1400; *Mort le Roi Artu*. BnF. MS Français 120, fol. 493v.

³³² Bowers (2013), p. 43.

On the Perilous Bed

The Bedroom miniature of *Sir Gawain* (fig. 167), however, shows the same scenario with the roles of the lover and the lady reversed. It is Gawain, not the Lady, who lies naked under the bedclothes. It is unclear whether Gawain sleeps naked or clothed. Both are possible based on the ambiguous textual description that he sticks his head out of the “clopez” (clothes, bedclothing) (1184) and his request for the Lady’s permission to dress himself better (1220). But it is quite possible that Gawain has an “chemise” (undergarment) on, as Burns suggests that the heroes in romances often wear their undergarments in sleep during their journeys.³³³ Gawain’s wearing something would seem more plausible if we consider the medieval iconography of Gawain on the Perilous bed, which appears both in manuscript images and ivory carvings (figs. 170–76).³³⁴



Fig. 170 Gawain in bed with a woman. France, late 13th century; *La Continuation de Perceval*. BnF. MS Français 12576, fol. 201v.



Fig. 171. Gawain on the Perilous Bed. Paris, 1330; *Roman de Perceval le Galois*. BnF. MS Français 12577, fol. 45. Image after Hindman (1994), fig. 103.

³³³ Burns (1994), pp. 152–74.

³³⁴ For a list and discussion of the medieval images of Gawain on the Perilous bed, see Martine Meuwese, “Chrétien in Ivory,” in *Arthurian Literature*, eds. Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson, vol. 25 (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 119–52. For a discussion of the images of Gawain on the ivory carvings, see Elizabeth L’Estrange, “Gazing at Gawain: Reconsidering Tournaments, Courtly Love, and the Lady Who Looks.” *Medieval Feminist Forum* 44.2 (2008): 74–96, pp. 81–7. The images of figs. 173–6, 177 and 181 are from the “Gothic Ivories Project” at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London.



Fig. 172. Gawain on the Perilous Bed. France, late 13th century; *La Conte du Graal*. Bibliothèque de l'Université de Mons-Hainaut. MS 331/206, fol 103. Image after Hindman (1994), fig. 49.



Fig. 173. Gawain on the Perilous bed. France, 1320–30; Mirror case. Museo Civico Medievale. Inv. 697.



Fig. 174. Gawain on the Perilous bed, France, 1300-25;
Writing tablet. Musée Bernard d'Agesci. Inv. no. 914.1.143.



Fig. 175. Gawain on the Perilous Bed. France, 1330-50; Ivory casket with scenes of romances (back). Watler Art Museum.
Inv. 71.264.



Fig. 176. Gawain on the Perilous Bed. France, 1325-50; Ivory casket with scenes of romances (back). BM. No. 1856,0623.166.

In medieval French romances, Gawain often appears as a womanizer. This image culminates in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval ou la Conte du Graal*, in which Gawain, being tempted by a beautiful woman in the Castle of Marvels, manages to defeat an onslaught of magic arrows and bolts, and spends the night with the Lady on the Perilous bed.³³⁵ The bed became an iconic image of Gawain's prowess, which was circulated and made familiar to people through various images of this scene depicted in manuscripts or carved on ivory accessories. In these images, Gawain is depicted not only as clothed, but fully-armed from head to toe, either lying on the bed (figs. 171, 173–6) or standing in front of it (fig. 172). In fig. 170, Gawain is shown naked on top of a woman under the bedclothes. Even at the most amorous moment, a sword-like weapon is still kept in Gawain's hand which lies outside the bedclothes. Although divested of his knightly outfit, Gawain still manages to maintain a marker of his masculinity and power, and probably the most highly gender-charged one—a phallic sword.

In the late fourteenth century, the image of Gawain on the Perilous bed became a

³³⁵ The influences of medieval French romances on *Sir Gawain* are extensively explored in Putter (1995).

popular theme for ivory mirror cases and caskets. In these carvings, a sleeping Gawain is always accompanied by three women who are shown to be watching him lying on the bed (figs.173–6). Scholars have associated these ivory items with aristocratic women who receive these mirror cases and caskets as betrothal gifts or wedding dowry. Susan L. Smith suggests that the female spectators in these carved images serve as a didactic “model of looking that encouraged them [the female owners] to see themselves as they were seen by men and to subordinate their own looking to the demands of male heterosexual desire.”³³⁶ When looking at the woman spectators carved on an ivory mirror case or casket, its female owner is reminded to take good care and control of her body and gaze, and to contain her own desire as the jewelry is enclosed in the casket. In other words, whether as an onlooker of (figs. 173–6) or a participant in (fig. 170) Gawain’s play on the bed, women in these medieval images of Gawain are invoked as an object of male desire which seeks to contain female sexuality into a prescribed heterosexual structure through the gifts men give to women.

The Bedroom scene’s allusion to these contemporary literary and iconographical traditions is keenly felt not only through the pictorial resemblance between the miniature and the images of Gawain on the Perilous bed,³³⁷ but also in the Lady’s

³³⁶ “The Gothic Mirror and the Female Gaze,” in Jane L. Carroll and Alison G. Stewart, eds., *Saints, Sinners and Sisters. Gender and Northern Art in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 73–92. For the role of female spectators both as inspiration and a means of constructing masculinity for men in medieval tournaments, see Juliet Barker and Richard Barber, *Tournaments, Jousts, Chivalry and Pageantry in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1989); Mary Arlene Santina, “The Lady and the Tournament,” in *The Tournament and Literature: Literary Representations of the Medieval Tournament in Old French Works, 1150–1226* (N.Y., 1999), pp. 91–108. For an alternative view of female gaze in medieval tournament as an active participation and a desiring subject rather than a desired object, see Phillippa Josephine Plock, “Watching Women Watching Warriors: Nicholas Poussin’s *Tancred and Erminia* and the Visuality of Papal Court Tournaments.” *Art History* 31 (2008): 139–58, and L’Estrange (2008).

³³⁷ In addition to the similar bedroom setting in the image of Gawain on the Perilous bed, the four scenes carved on these ivory casket from left to right: Gawain killing a lion, Lancelot crossing the sword bridge, Gawain on the Perilous bed, and three women, also cast a parallel to the narrative of *Sir*

conscious references to books of romance and her repeated comparisons of Gawain with them in their conversations.³³⁸ However, instead of conforming to these traditions, the Bedroom miniature in *Sir Gawain* (fig. 167) seems to have worked at odds with them. The Lady in this image not only appears as a spectator of Gawain on the bed, but visually replaces those arrows and bolts the French Gawain endures on his body (figs. 171, 173–6) as if suggesting her dangerous nature. In this pictorial representation of the scene, the Lady becomes more than a passive female spectator in the game, and assumes the role of a contender who actively wages a combat with Gawain on this perilous bed in Hautdesert by engaging him in a contest of love-talking. The image of battle is made obvious by the poet's descriptions of the Lady who laughingly "lanced" her "bourdez" (jests)/ "bourdis" (tournament) (1212) while Gawain "pulged with hir prepe" (1859) as enduring an attack, almost like the French Gawain who bears those magic arrows and bolts that fall on his body.

In their battle of love-talking, Gawain and the Lady "lanced words gode" to one another (1765) and "gret perile bitwene hem stod" (1768). Instead of showing their exchanges of banter, the Bedroom scene miniature (fig. 167) fixes on Gawain's complete passivity and defenselessness. Gawain's body appears to be not so much covered as bound within the bedclothes. His bound-up position parallels the Lady's hunting vocabulary which likens Gawain to an "vnslyze" (unwary) prey and a

Gawain which describes Gawain's fights with beasts in the woods on his way to find the Green Chapel, his crossing the drawbridge of Hautdesert to enter it, and his encounters with the Lady in the bedroom. Lee states that "no established iconographic tradition was available" for *Sir Gawain*, and that even "if, as has been suggested, there existed an iconographical or representational 'pool' of Arthurian scenes, quite likely none would have applied to this Arthurian tale as it apparently was not one commonly known" (40). I have to disagree with Lee's opinion both because there was an iconographical traditional of Gawain on the Perilous bed that appeared repeatedly both in contemporary manuscripts and in objects used in daily life, and that the assumed obscurity of the poet's works in his time does not mean that other iconographical and literary traditions were unknown to him or to the different artists or artisans involved in the making of this manuscript.

³³⁸ Putter looks into the Lady's use of romance as a mediator of her desire for Gawain, their battle of love-talk, and Gawain's failure as a result of confusing real life with illusory romance in Putter (1995), pp. 100–48.

“prysoun” of her. Without his knightly outfit on, Gawain is reduced into a female body, like that of Guinevere in figs. 173 and 174, which is to be penetrated by Lancelot. The Lady assumes the role of the male lover, who initiates the sexual advance:

3e ar welcum to my cors,
Yowre awen won to wale,
Me behouez of fyne force
Your seruaunt be, and shale. (1237–40)

She offers to be Gawain’s servant as a knight offers his service to his lady. But instead of the heart (“cor”), the conventional gift of love, the Lady offers her body (“cors”) to Gawain. A medieval lover often gives his penetrated heart to the lady both as a sign of love and a portent of the subsequent sexual penetration of the latter’s body.³³⁹ The Lady here, too, offers Gawain her “cors.” Her body becomes at the same time the means and the ultimate goal of the love game. The other meaning of “cors” as an ornamented silk strip worn as a belt also foreshadows the girdle of the Lady which she is to give Gawain on the third day.³⁴⁰ This wordplay might have lurked behind what looks like a piece of white clothing which the Lady holds in her right hand in the miniature.

Out of the Ivory Case

The Lady’s sexual advance is visualized in the miniature as a gesture of laying her hand on Gawain’s chin, which is not described in the text. On the contrary, it is the Lady’s chin and cheek that are mentioned when Gawain watches her creeping into his bower:

³³⁹ For images of the lover offering his heart to his Lady, see Camille (1998), pp. 95–119, esp. pp. 111–9.

³⁴⁰ See *MED*, “cors (n.),” 5 (a)

Þe lede lay lurked a ful longe quyle,
 Compast in his concience to quat þat case myzt
 Meue oþer amount. To meruayle hym þoʒt;
 Bot zet he sayde in hymself: ‘More semly hit were
 To aspye wyth my spelle in space quat ho wolde.’
 Pen he wakenede and wroth and to hir warde torned
 And vnlouked his yze-lyddez and let as hym wondered
 And sayned hym, as bi his saze þe sauer to worthe,
 Wyth hande.
 Wyth chynne and cheke ful swete,
 Boþe quit and red in blande,
 Ful lufly con ho lete
 Wyth lyppez small laʒande. (1195–207)

The Lady’s rosy cheek and chin are the focal point of Gawain’s gaze. She first appears to be the object rather than the subject of gaze and desire. Her passivity and coyness however, are soon undermined by her speech contest with Gawain. The miniature captures this role reversal by representing Gawain as literally bound in the bed at the Lady’s disposal. It is not her chin, but his, that is caressed.



Fig. 177. The Hunt of Love. France, 1300-30; Ivory mirror case. Musée du Louvre. OA 118.



Fig. 178. The Hunt of Love. France, 1330–40; Ivory mirror case. Victoria & Albert Museum. Inv no. 219-1867.



Fig. 179. Knights' tournaments. France, 1325–50; Ivory casket (upper lid). BM. Inv. no. 1856,0623.166.



Fig. 180. A courtly couple (left) and the maiden and the unicorn (right). France, 1325–50; Ivory casket (left side). BM. Inv. no. 1856,0623.166.



Fig. 181. Scenes of a courting couple. France, 1300–25; Ivory casket. Kunstgewerbe Museum. Inv. no. 1882,608.



Fig. 182. Scenes of courtly love. France, 1350–1400; Ivory casket (back). St Ursula Schatzkammer. Image from St Thomas Guild.



Fig. 183. Bayeux Tapestry. England, 1080; Musée de la Tapisserie. Image from Ken Pennington's lectures, Syracuse University.



Fig. 184. Lancelot reaches for the rose. France, 1320–30; *Lancelot du Lac*. Bodleian. MS. Rawlinson. Q. b. 6, fol. 284v.

The Lady's chin-chucking gesture places her in line with the male lover in medieval images of the Hunt of Love, which is a frequently seen motif carved on ivory mirror cases and caskets.³⁴¹ In these images, a couple is shown riding to hunt while the man caresses the lady's chin (figs. 177–8) as a sign of erotic communion that alludes to coitus.³⁴² In fig. 180, the image of a couple out for hunting is paralleled with the image of a unicorn seduced by a maiden and penetrated by a lance to suggest the power of the sight of the lady on the lover. A blatant act of penetration replaces the gesture of chin-chucking to evoke the erotic play between the couple. When this scene of hunting appears on caskets, it is often accompanied by an image of tournaments (fig. 179) and a series of scenes of a courting couple which culminate in the male lover offering his heart to the lady while the latter crowns him with the chaplet of love in return (figs 181–2).

The parallels between the hunting scenes and the bedroom scenes in *Sir Gawain* have been noted and discussed, but little attention has been paid to the medieval iconography of the Hunt of Love and its possible influence on the poem's texts and images. If viewed in this visual tradition, the Lady's hand on Gawain's chin in the Bedroom miniature can be seen as a metaphor of sexual penetration, with her hand literally breaking into the bodily boundary of Gawain, like Lancelot's outstretching hand which visually intrudes into the well-defined, square-shaped bed frame which suggests the integrity of Guinevere's body on the bed (figs. 168–9). The Lady's gesture of chin-chucking is not only a sign of desire, but appears an act of boundary

³⁴¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the game of love as a hunt in classical and medieval literature, see Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, 1974), esp. pp. 71–88, in which he discusses *Sir Gawain* as an “instructive chase.”

³⁴² Leo Steiberg associates the gesture of chin-chucking in medieval love scenes with the images of the Child Christ touching the chin of the Virgin. See *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Chicago, 1997), pp. 3–7, 110–18. For medieval ivory images of chin-chucking, see Robertson (1962), pp. 192–4; Camille (1998), figs. 85 and 86.

breaking, analogous to Camille's reading of a Bayeux Tapestry scene (fig. 183) in which the male cleric breaks out of the social and sacred boundary by reaching out for the woman closed inside the frame.³⁴³ A reverse image is seen in fig. 184, which shows an imprisoned Lancelot reaching out from the barred window for the rose which reminds him of Guinevere's rosy cheeks. The sight of the rose tree arouses his desire for her, and urges him to try to pluck the flower and have it as a substitute for Guinevere. In the text, Lancelot fails to touch the rose because of the distance, but in this image, he not only manages to touch the rose tree, but appears to be caressing it as if it is the body of Guinevere, with an allusion to the *Romance of the Rose* and the lover/dreamer's desire to pluck the rose. Lancelot's fondling hands penetrate both the feudal boundary and the division between fiction and reality, literal and symbolic. Even though Lancelot is enclosed in prison, this male lover still manages to break out of his containment and penetrate his symbolic lady with his hand.

Similar to the imprisoned Lancelot, Gawain is bound to his bed and intrigued by the sight of the Lady's rosy cheek, but instead of breaking out of his confinement to contain the Lady's verbal and sexual advances, Gawain visually becomes the rose being plucked and fondled in the miniature (fig. 167). The Lady's chin-chucking hand crosses the division between male and female, reversing the conventional power relations in courtly love. This idea of boundary breaking is represented in the text through the narrative imagery of locking and opening. When Gawain watches the Lady opening his door and coming into his room, he ponders on the significance of his case and situation (1197). The Lady sits by the side of Gawain to "loke quen he wakened" (1194), which echoes her wish to bind him to his bed as soon as she sees

³⁴³ Camille (1998), fig. 8, pp. 16–8.

him awoken (1211). The locking imagery is reinforced by the Lady's emphasis that the door of the room has been shut and locked with hinges (1233) and her comparison of Gawain to a lovely thing which she would treasure in this enclosed space and enjoy alone (1234–5). In the Lady's discourse, Gawain seems to be fashioned into a piece of jewelry that she seeks to contain into her jewelry box. Gawain resists the Lady's attempts to contain him by unlocking ("vnlouked") his own eyelids (1201) and trying to leave the bed so that he can "zelde" (open, exhibit) himself (1215). This seems to recall the medieval ivory caskets discussed earlier (figs. 175–6), which were given by a man to a woman as a symbolic gesture of containing her into his male, heterosexual desire. However, in this enclosed bower of Hautdesert, the female spectator of Gawain's body not only refuses to be objectified, but dismantles and objectifies the male body with her gaze and sexuality, and engages him in a homosexual exchange with Bertilak, in which the knight metaphorically becomes a lady. The female body seeks to contain rather than being contained. It is not his desire but hers that is imposed and accommodated. The poet transposes Gawain from a courtly hall to a feminine bower and makes him look at his own situation (1262) in which his own body is watched by the Lady, as if to cast Gawain as a female owner of an ivory casket, who, having been imposed it, is also transformed into one to accommodate the Lady's desire.

The Lady's unnatural transgression may have also been suggested by her spotted gown and the striped bedclothes. Medieval artists seldom took pains to elaborate on the patterns and colors of the clothes their characters wore. It is also worth noting that, among the twelve miniatures in the *Pearl* manuscript, the Bedroom image is the only one which represents its figures in patterned clothes. Little red and green dots are added on the Lady's gown, while different shades of green are used to create a stripe

pattern on the bedclothes. If we consider the symbolic significance of dots and stripes in medieval culture, we would find that this unusual representation is more likely to be a meaningful, rather than a random choice of the artist. Dots were considered to be an irregular pattern, and hence often connoted a sense of disorder and degeneration associated with the Devil. The stripy pattern, on the other hand, was opposite to both the plain and the dotted. Stripes were a visual accent and often represented a “rhythmic, dynamic, narrative surface that indicates action, the passage from one state to another.”³⁴⁴ The Lady’s dotted gown and the stripy bedclothes which wrap Gawain in the miniature (fig. 167) might thus suggest an on-going process of sartorial and gender transformation in the text, and its essentially unnatural and diabolic nature.

The Hanging Sleeves and the Missing Purse

The Lady’s boundary-crossing in the bedroom also takes the form of cross-dressing. In the Bedroom scene miniature (fig. 167), Gawain’s nakedness is juxtaposed with the Lady’s fully covered body. The text, by contrast, depicts the Lady as wearing a “décolleté” style which features low cut neckline and exposure of the upper torso: “Hir þryuen face and hir þrote þrowen al naked, / Hir brest bare bifore, and bihinde eke” (1740–1). The Lady appears as almost naked, corresponding to the sartorial convention of courtly romances.³⁴⁵ In this miniature, however, the Lady is shown wearing a high-necked gown, with her body all wrapped up to her neck. The only visible part of her body is her face and her two hands. This pictorial representation

³⁴⁴ For a discussion of medieval sartorial patterns, see Michel Pastoureau, *The Devil’s Cloth: A History of Stripes*, trans. Jody Gladding (Washington, D. C., 2003), p. 22. See esp. pp. 19–26. See also above n. 323 on the ambiguous significance of stripy and parti-colored clothes in the Middle Ages.

³⁴⁵ Burns (2002), p. 132.

recalls the description of the bundled up old woman. The two figures seem to have been combined in this image of the Lady, as if implying that the two women are actually one and the same.

The Lady's fully covered body casts a sharp contrast to Gawain's vulnerable (semi-)nakedness. When Gawain senses the danger of the situation, his first reaction is, like other romance heroes, to dress himself back in his old covered/armed body—"I wolde boze of þis bed and busk me better" (1220)—as if by doing so, he would be able to regain his power to break through the Lady's enclosure. Gawain then claims that dressing himself would help him to "keuer þe more comfort to karp" with the lady (1221). By "covering" himself, Gawain regains not only his "comfort," but also his courage, strength and support to "recover" from his stripped, feminized body, and resume his male prowess to take more "pleasure" in the Lady.³⁴⁶ Clothes-changing appears here not only as a courtly etiquette, but is configured as a source of power and a means of (re)defining and maintaining one's identity. Gawain's request for dressing himself is denied by the Lady, who instead, proposes to change Gawain herself: "Ȝe shal not rise of your bedde. I ryche yow better: / I shal happe yow here þat oþer half als" (1223–4).³⁴⁷ The Lady not only offers to dress Gawain, but literally presents her

³⁴⁶ The word "keuer" has multiple meanings of casting, dressing, covering and recovering, while "comfort" can refer to a feeling of relief, courage, or strength. See *MED*. "coveren" (v.1) esp. 10; "coveren" (v.2) esp. 4(b), and "comfort" (n) 1, 2, 5, 6. Andrew and Waldron translate the verb "keuer" as "take" and the sentence as "I should take more pleasure in talking with you" based on the word's meaning of getting something successfully (*MED* "coveren" (v. 2), 6). This reading is generally accepted by other editors. But the word's multiple meaning of covering, concealing and recovery, which echoes the scene's nuanced subtext of hunting and clothes-changing, seems to me to be lost in this translation.

³⁴⁷ Andrew and Waldron gloss the verb "ryche" as "recchen (to direct, to guide)" and the two lines as "I give you better instructions: I shall imprison you here on the other side too." While the captive image is maintained, the sartorial dimension of the meaning is lost. Both "ryche" and "happe" can mean to clothe or to cover. This meaning would seem more suitable for a reply to Gawain's request to dress himself better. See *MED* "richen (v.1)," and "happen (v.2)." The word "ryche" may have implicitly punned with "rechen," which means to reach for, to seize, and to penetrate and pierce. See "rechen (v.1)," 1–3. This wordplay of recchen/richen/rechen seems to me to be fully at work in this scene of sartorial battle between the Lady and Gawain.

own body as a piece of clothing to wrap him, which echoes her invitation to Gawain to come to her “cors” (body/silk clothing”) and take his pleasure (1237). She dresses Gawain “better” by ironically leaving him naked, so that she can “reach” him and “penetrate” him more easily.

The Lady’s clothing metaphor is later materialized into the green girdle she presses on Gawain. In the miniature, the Lady’s left hand reaches out to tickle Gawain under the chin while her right hand holds a piece of clothing (“cors”), which makes one wonder if this might have been a literal representation of the lady’s desire to “rych” and “happe” Gawain better. The green drapery which seems to be not so much covering as binding Gawain might have been a visual representation of the man who “so is gorde with þis grene lace,” and the girdle which “hade hemely halched aboute” Gawain’s body (1851–2). The bed clothes cover half of Gawain’s body, wrapping him tightly and leaving his upper torso revealed, as if he is the one who wears the décolleté dress. By usurping Gawain’s ability to dress himself, the Lady also usurps his role of taking the initiative assigned by courtly culture. She takes away Gawain’s clothes and with them, his identity, to become a knight in his stead. Her long sleeve hangs right down towards Gawain’s naked body under the drapery, with its angular shape, like an arrow, penetrating into his body.

Many critics have pointed out the parallels between the bedroom scenes and the hunting scenes, but no one seems to have compared the two in terms of their motif of undressing.³⁴⁸ Gawain being divested by the Lady in the bedroom is paralleled by the

³⁴⁸ See, for example, Savage, “The Significance of the Hunting Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.” *JEGP* 27.1 (1928): 1–15; Donald R. Howard, “Structure and Symmetry in *Sir Gawain*.” *Speculum* 39.3 (1964): 425–33; G. Morgan “The Action of the Hunting and Bedroom Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.” *ME* 56.2 (1987): 200–16.

animal carcasses stripped of their skin by Bertilak and his men. In the three hunts, the prey is repeatedly penetrated. The process of removing the animals' skin from their dead bodies is described in elaborate detail. When Bertilak returns from his first hunt, he cannot wait to show Gawain his gain:

And al godly in gomen Gawayn he called,
Techez hym to þe tayles of ful tait bestes,
Schewez hym þe schyree grece schorne vpon rybbes:
'How payez yow þis play? Haf I prys wonnen?['] (1376–9)

The dead animal's "tayle" (shape), which puns with "taille" (clothes), is displayed to Gawain with its skinless body ("schyree grece") laid bare to be seen. The image of stripping culminates in the third hunt in which Reynard the fox is killed. After the Lady successfully puts the green girdle on Gawain's body on the third day, the scene shifts to Bertilak's dismemberment of the fox: "Her hedez þay fawne and frote / and syþen þay tan Reynarde / and tyruen of his cote" (1919–21). Reynard stripped of his "cote" parallels Gawain's body stripped of his traditional knightly outfit and covered by the Lady's girdle. Divested of his "cote" of arms, Gawain loses his knightly identity, being covered by the Lady's "cors" and becoming a transvestite body in a décolleté dress.

The Peddling Lady

Andreas Capellanus in his tongue-in-cheek treatise *De amore* describes the etiquette of gift-giving in courtship:

A woman who loves may freely accept from her lover the following: a handkerchief, a fillet for the hair, a wreath of gold or silver, a breastpin, a mirrour, a girdle, a purse, a tassel, a comb, sleeves, gloves, a ring, [...], to speak in

general terms, a woman may accept from her lover any little gift which may be useful for the care of the person or pleasing to look at, or which may call her lover to her mind if it is clear that in accepting the gift she is free from all avarice.³⁴⁹

He not only advises on what gifts should be given, and in what manner they should be taken, but more importantly, shows the highly gendered code of gift-giving in courtly love—the man gives and the lady receives. Suitable gifts for a lady are those which aim chiefly to enhance her appearance—mirrors, combs and sartorial decorations—things associated with self-preening. These things, like the ivory caskets and mirror case discussed earlier on, are given to remind the female owner of her duty of accommodating the demands of male desire.

This gendered code of gift-giving, however, is undermined when the Lady usurps Gawain's dress and his knightly role and takes up a subject position in their game of love. Instead of waiting to be offered a gift, the Lady actively solicits one from Gawain. When her request is refused, she eagerly offers one to him. The gift-giving between Gawain and the Lady in the bedroom scenes violates the boundary both between genders and between social classes. Their blatant commercial language transforms the courtly gift-giving into a business deal.³⁵⁰ When the Lady offers herself to Gawain, she fashions her own body into a material item ("won") for Gawain to choose and take ("wale"). This commercial metaphor is repeated in her pledge to be Gawain's "seruaunt," which inclusively refers to any person providing

³⁴⁹ B.2: 21.49. Quoted from *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. J. Parry (N.Y., 1960), p. 176.

³⁵⁰ Many critics have read *Sir Gawain* from a social-economic perspective. Among them, R. Allen Shoaf's *The Poem as Green Girdle: "Commercium" in "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"* (Gainesville, 1984) remains one of the classic studies in this field. Shoaf sees *Sir Gawain* as a social critique of "the conflict in late-fourteenth century England [...] between chivalry and commerce as two systems of value" (p. vii), predicting the inevitable failure of the former to the latter. See also Jill Mann "Price and Value in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Criticism* 36.4 (1986): 294–318.

his service to other people.³⁵¹ A vassal paying feudal service to his lord is thus as much a servant as a merchant offering commercial service to his customers. The Lady plays the double role of a courtly lover and a merchant at the same time.



Fig. 185. Dietmar disguised as a peddler. Zurich, 1304–40; Manesse Codex. University of Heidelberg Library. MS Cod. Pal. germ. 848, fol. 64.

³⁵¹ See *MED* “servaunt (n.),” 2(d).



Fig. 186. Rape of Dinah. England, 1350–75; Egerton Genesis. BL. MS Egerton 1894, fol. 17r.

The conflation of these two seemingly incompatible roles, odd though it may at first appear, originates from medieval troubadour tradition, in which the male lover sometimes disguised himself as a peddler in order to approach his unattainable lady.³⁵² An example would be the portrait of the minstrel poet Dietmar von Aist in the fourteenth-century manuscript *Codex Manesse* (fig. 185). In this image, Dietmar, a poet from an aristocratic family, disguises himself as Kramer the peddler, and displays to the lady his goods which include two girdles, four purses and a ring-shaped mirror, all of which are conventional symbolic gifts of love.³⁵³ The sexual overtone is suggested by the two lovers who both grab the dangling belts with their hands and the

³⁵² This literary trope might have derived from real practices of medieval peddlers, who, among very few people, could easily gain access to strictly guarded palaces and mansions, and have direct and close personal contact with the ladies inside. Lightbown mentions that in 1375, a peddler entered the Palace of Poitiers and sold girdles, gloves, paternosters, a mirror, and a casket to Jean de Berry's children and servants. For a detailed introduction to the medieval jewelry trade, see Lightbown (1992), pp. 49–56.

³⁵³ For a discussion of the image, see “Herr Dietmar von Aist” in Ingo F. Walther and Gisela Siebert, ‘*Codex Manesse*’: *Die Miniaturen der Grossen Heidelberger Liederhandschrift* (Frankfurt, 1988), p. 54; Camille (1998), pp. 51–2.

lady's dog, which is a common medieval symbol of the erotic energy of lovers. A similar combination of erotic desire and commercial activities is also seen in a fourteenth-century English Genesis book (fig. 186), in which the image of Dinah meeting the Shechemite woman accompanies that of her rape. The artist visualizes the ambiguous scriptural description of Dinah's "going out" and connects it with a vivid act of buying belts and purses from a stall, as if to suggest an association between peddling and sex, and the erotic nature of these clothing accessories. A similar literary trope of lover/peddler also appears in a fourteenth-century Middle English lyric "The Minstrel and His Wares":

We ben chapmen lyzt of fote,
þe fowle weyis for to fle. [burden]

We bern abowtyn non cattes skynnys,
Pursis, perils, syluer pynnys,
Smale wympeles for ladyis chynnys;
Damsele, bey sun ware of me.

I haue a poket for þe nonys,
Perine ben tweyne precious stonys;
Damsele, hadde ze asayid hem onys,
Ze xuld þe rapere gon with me.

I haue a Ielyf of godes sonde,
Withoutyn fyt it can stoned;
It can smytyn and hazt non honed;
ryd zoursel quat it may be.

I haue a powder for to selle,
Quat it is can I not telle—
It makit maydenys wombys to swelle;
Perof I haue a quantyte.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁴ The lyric is recorded in BL MS Sloane 2593, fols 26v–27r, quoted here from *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins (Oxford, 1952), p. 6.

The minstrel/peddler tries to court a damsel in the form of selling his goods to her. The explicit sexual connotation of the things he tries to sell—a pocket with two stones, a magical jelly which can stand and smite, and aphrodisiac powder—reveals the underlying theme of courtship which aims ultimately at sexual consummation: to penetrate the damsel with the things she buys from him.

The poem's allusion to this tradition of a peddling minstrel is detectable in the poet's description of the "mirth and minstrelsy" in *Hautdesert* (1952) and the Lady's sophisticated skill of love-talking. The Lady's role as a peddler is discerned by Gawain, who responds to her solicitation with an even more explicit mention of money: "Bi God I were glad and yow god þoʒt, / At saʒe oþer at seruyce þat I sette myzt / To þe plesaunce of your prys, hit were a pure ioye" (1245–7). Gawain configures the Lady's praise of him as a price she puts on him. The Lady then sets out on a task to materialize Gawain in her attempt to close the deal:

Bot hit ar ladyes innoʒe þat leuer wer nowþe
 Haf þe, hende, in hor holde, as I þe habbe here—
 To daly with derely your daynté wordez
 Keuer hem comfort and colen her carez—
 Pen much of þe garysoun oþer golde þat þay hauen. (1251–5)

She weighs the value of Gawain's dainty words against treasure and gift jewels given to women. Gawain is metaphorically configured into a piece of jewelry, which brings comfort to its owner and frees her from grief and care. The Lady's remark is reminiscent of the description of the Dreamer who sees the Pearl-maiden as the ground of his bliss. However, unlike the Pearl-maiden, who constantly resists the worldly value put on her by the Dreamer, the Lady in *Sir Gawain* takes on the role of

objectifying Gawain instead of being objectified. This jewelry image culminates in the Lady's comments on Gawain's courtesy: "So god as Gawayn gaynly is halden / and cortaysye is closed so clene in hymself" (1297–8). In the Lady's discourse of gift-giving and peddling, Gawain not only becomes the receiver of courtly gifts, but is also fashioned into a casket in which his pleasing virtues are enclosed to accommodate female desire. The Lady further claims Gawain's superiority over other worldly treasures:

For were I worth al þe wone of wymmen alyue,
 And al þe wele of þe worlde were in my honde,
 And I shulde chepen and chose to cheue me a lorde,
 For þe costes þat I haf knowen vpon þe, knyzt, here
 Of bewté and debonerté and blyþe semblaunt—
 And þat I haf er herkkened and halde hit here trwee—
 Per shulde no freke vpon folde bifore yow be chosen. (1269–75)

Under her scrutiny, the body of Gawain is objectified and split into different constituents which can be examined separately. His beauty, gentleness and manners are fashioned into different indicators which help determine the quality and value of a jewel. After careful appreciation, this "princes of prys" then decides Gawain's "costes." He is more valuable than the wealth of all the women in the world, and therefore, a perfect bargain for the lady to buy.

Gawain's priced body recalls Guinevere's body shrouded in expensive exotic textiles with her female sexuality configured into a commodity for male consumption through their gaze on her. Unlike Guinevere, the Lady is the consumer, not the consumed. The Lady as a foil to Guinevere can be further detected in the description of her gaze on Gawain. Before leaving the bedroom after her talk on price and value, the Lady bids Gawain goodbye: "þenne ho gef hym god day and wyth a glent lazt/ and as ho stod ho

stonyed hym wyth ful stor wordez” (1290–1). She looks at him (“glent”) with a smile, but a change of mood immediately follows her gaze. She reproaches Gawain for not being as courteous as his reputation is. When she looked at Gawain and “stonyed” him with her words, the Lady’s “glent” is implicitly associated with the fatal gaze of the Gorgon which transforms its looker into stone. Gawain’s metamorphosis is suggested by his reaction to her severe words: ““Querfore?” quop þe freke, and freschly he askez, / Ferde lest he hade fayled in fourme of his castes” (1294–5). His concern with his failed “fourme” draws attention to his changed sartorial body and his transformation from the gallant Gawain on the Perilous bed that appears on ivory caskets to a transvestite male body wrapped in a décolleté dress in the bower of Hautdesert.

Having metaphorically imposed her gift casket on Gawain, the Lady manages to engage him in another form of exchange. She displays her ring and girdle to Gawain, like the disguised peddler Dietmar in fig. 185 and the Middle English minstrel/peddlers, hoping that he would take her items as a gesture of love. When Gawain, who does not have a purse with him (“And I am here an erande in erdez vncoupe / And haue no men wyth no malez with menskful þingez”) (1808–9), makes it explicit that the ring is too expensive for him to afford, the Lady, instead of stopping her “businessse” (1840), offers the girdle to him as another bargain:

‘Now forsake 3e þis silke,’ sayde þe burde þenne,
 For hit is symple in hitself? And so hit wel semez:
 Lo! so hit is little and lasse hit is worþy.
 Bot whoso knew þe costes þat knit ar þerinne,
 He wolde hit prayse at more prys, paraenture[.] (1846–50)

The Lady emphasizes the discrepancy between the girdle’s humble appearance and its

high value. She begins to explain the magic power of the girdle as the minstrel/peddler who tries to sell the damsel his magic jelly that can protect her from any unwanted harm. Gawain concedes this time: “þen kest þe knyzt and hit come to his hert” (1855). The deal is closed, and the girdle is on Gawain’s body. When Gawain sets his eyes (“kest”) on the girdle and considers taking it, he at the same time casts away his knightly garment and integrity. He literally undresses (“kest”) himself, and accomplishes his own cross-dressing by allowing the Lady to “bere on hym þe belt” (1860). The girdle not only wraps Gawain’s naked body, but “goes into his heart,” and penetrates his body like the Lady’s hanging sleeve in the miniature (fig. 167).

The Penniless Knight

The juxtaposition of Gawain’s lack of “malez” (bags) with the Lady’s girdle also reinforces the sexual overtones of this exchange. Both purse and girdle are standard utilitarian accessories for medieval men and women. They were among the most popular wedding gifts from a bridegroom to his bride,³⁵⁵ and as Camille argued, served as sexual conduits for lovers in the game of love.³⁵⁶ Hanging down from the waist of the wearer, the purse and girdle mark the lower part of the human body, and are thus often endowed with amorous significance. When worn by a woman, the purse’s drawstring becomes a metaphor for the opening and closing of her body, while when worn by a man, the dangling bell-shaped purse containing valuables forms part of his sartorial genitalia. In fig. 187, a bride is shown wearing a purse as a symbolic subjugation of her body to her husband. In fig. 188, the bride’s submissive, downcast

³⁵⁵ For the usage and social implications of girdles and their history and design, see “Girdles and Belts,” in Lightbown (1992), pp. 306–41. Purses and knaves became fashionable gifts in late fourteenth century Norwich, see Joslin and Joslin Watson (eds.), p. 116.

³⁵⁶ For gifts as sexual conduits in courtly love, see Camille, *Medieval art of love* (1998), pp. 51–72, esp. pp. 64–5, for a very brief but suggestive discussion of purses and their sexual connotation in medieval images.

look is complemented by the two purses she wears on her body. The purse as a betrothal gift not only symbolizes female submission, but also represents, as fig. 189 shows, the union of the couple and the love and wealth they share with each other in their marriage.³⁵⁷



Fig. 187. Sacrament of marriage. France, 1425–50; *Pèlerinage de vie humaine*. BnF. MS Français 376, fol. 6v.



Fig. 188. Sacrament of marriage. France, 1375–1400; *Hours of Notre-Dame*. BnF. MS NAL 3093, fol. 175v.



Fig. 189 Marriage of a couple. France, 1250–75; *Digeste vielle*. BnF. MS Français 20118, fol. 271r.

³⁵⁷ This image and below fig. 191 are also discussed in Camille (1998), p. 64-5.



Fig. 190. Man offering his purse to a woman. Flemish, 1338–44; *Romance of Alexander*. Bodleian. MS Bodl. 264, fol. 59r.



Fig. 191. The Lover's purse. France 1280; *Roman de la Rose*. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Urb. 376, fol. 51v. Image after Camille (1998), fig. 52.

While the purse is a sign of female chastity, it can sometimes point to erotic love. In fig. 190, a man is courting a woman not by offering his heart, but by presenting to her his large purse, which is rejected by her. On a fourteenth-century ivory casket carved with four scenes of a courting couple (fig. 182), the purse attached to a belt being offered to the lady (right register) becomes an embodiment of eros like the dog held by the lady and the garland offered to the lover. In a thirteenth-century manuscript of

The Rose (fig. 191), the Lover's enormous bell-shaped purse visually replaces his phallus for the woman to touch, as Camille pointed out (65).

The purse serves as an ambiguous sign of both marital chastity and illicit lust. Its symbolic meaning shifts easily from the sacred to the profane, from male subjectivity to female subjection, from a penetrating phallus or site of reproductive coinage to a penetrated vulva. The *Gawain*-poet draws on the semiotic fluidity of the purse in his representation of the love game between Gawain and the Lady. The monetary and erotic meanings of the purse culminate in Gawain's missing "malez." The Middle English minstrel peddles around with his pocket containing two sexual "stones" while the disguised poet Dietmar rides, with his "male" filled with spiky, phallic content, toward his lady, who reciprocates his aroused desire by lifting up her skirt as a tacitly understood sign of willingness to be penetrated (fig. 185). Gawain, on the other hand, without his "malez," is reduced to a female body without a phallus/testicles. Deprived of his ability to penetrate, he is only able, at his best, to try to "folden fayth" and to remain "festned so harde" to his lover imagined by the Lady, and not to "lausen" himself to the Lady's temptation (1783–4). In his efforts to maintain his knightly integrity, Gawain metaphorically becomes a submissive wife, as seen in figs. 187 and 188, who vows to be faithful to her husband in a ceremonial gesture of closing her body like a tightly shut purse. Later on, Gawain apologizes to the Lady that he does not have a decent gift for her:

And I am here an erande in erdez vncouþe
 And haue no men wyth no malez with menskful þingez
 (Þat mislykez me, ladé) for luf, at þis tyme;
 Iche tolke mon do as he is tan—tas to non ille
 Ne pine." (1809–12)

When he confesses about his failure of courtesy, Gawain is perhaps upset not only with his missing purses (“malez”), but also his lost phallus in this game of love, which is suggested by his awareness of the taken (“tan”) man and the Lady who takes (“tas to non ille”) (1812). Without his “malez” filled with “menschful þingez”, Gawain can only be taken and, in the manuscript’s pictorial version of this encounter, penetrated by the Lady’s trapezoidal sleeves. Gawain’s words recall Genius’ curse of homosexual men who fail to further Nature’s cause of fecundity by refusing to use their hammers to “write” and “plough” on the suitable tablets and fields in *The Rose*:

“[M]ay they, in addition to the excommunication that sends them all to damnation, suffer, before their death, the loss of their purse and testicles, the signs that they are male! May they lose the pendants on which the purse hangs!”³⁵⁸

By putting off the Lady’s body which she offers him, Gawain in a way becomes an unnatural traitor of Nature in Genius’s definition, and loses both his purse and his genitalia as a punishment.

Re-covering the Knight

The “Bend Abelef”

When Gawain leaves Hautdesert, the same dressing ritual is again staged in his bower, where he had been disrobed earlier on. His accoutrements are itemized here as when he prepared to leave Camelot, only with less precision. He puts on his coat of mail, body armor, plate-armor, and a sword. The remaining part of his knightly accoutrements is

³⁵⁸ Dahlberg (1986), ll. 19669–87, p.324.

simply inclusively mentioned as “his oþer harnays” and “clothes.” This sartorial vagueness, in contrast to his previously clearly defined knightly outfit in Camelot, potentially opens up Gawain’s body, echoing his naked image in the bedroom scenes, and suggesting his now imperfect and wounded body as a knight. This transformation is indicated by the missing Pentangle shield, the iconic marker of Gawain’s knightly identity as the “tulk of tale most trwe / And gentylest knyzt of lote” (638-9). In its place, the green girdle of the Lady is now fastened tightly around his waist. The woman’s girdle together with the incomplete knightly dress create a hybrid, cross-gendered costume for Gawain, and fashion him into a knight in a lady’s clothes.

The girdle on Gawain’s body becomes a token of its vulnerability—that he was once “tane in tech of a faute” (2488). The fault is further identified as the “faut and þe fayntyse of þe flesche crabbed”: an unnatural, perverse body. Gawain’s fault and fleshly weakness may be read as his excessive love for his own life, and as his moments of fleshly temptation by Bertilak’s wife, but their whole encounter, in which their gender roles are confused and Gawain is unmanned, can also be seen as part of this faulty, “crabbed” flesh. Gawain’s metaphorical loss of manhood, and now his hybrid dress, construct a grey zone between schematic gender dichotomy, creating an indescribable body that cannot be categorized and accommodated into the well-defined, binary gendered courtly space which Camelot seeks to maintain. This explains the weird reaction of the knights and ladies when they welcome Gawain’s return to Camelot. The whole court laughs loudly after Gawain’s bitter confession of his “fault.” This moment has not, perhaps, received as much critical attention as it deserves.³⁵⁹ But this

³⁵⁹ See Martin Stevens, “Laughter and Game in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Speculum* 47.1 (1972): 65–78. Stevens investigates the laughter in different scenes in the poem and sees the court’s laughter at the end as ridiculing Gawain’s fault, from which the reader can “take the comfort that even the best of players on occasion are losers” (78). Putter discusses Sir Dinadan’s cross-dressing and Guinevere’s laughter in *Le Morte D’Arthur*, suggesting that the gender anxiety in chivalric

unexplained, ill-timed, and somewhat rude response of the court that is known for its courteousness requires explanation. We may try to imagine that Gawain in his hybrid, cross-dressing costume among the most famous knights in Camelot, would have appeared not only bizarre and incompatible, but also unexpected, as he left Camelot in his iconic knightly accoutrements but returns in an indescribable, cross-gendered outfit. Gawain stands for Arthur and the Round Table in taking up the challenge. His “fault,” therefore, becomes the whole court’s fault. When Gawain was disarmed and stripped of his clothes, the courtly body of the Round Table is at the same time laid bare to the penetrating eye of the outside world. The “hole” on Gawain’s naked neck becomes a hole on the court’s own body. When his knightly identity is blurred in his neither-male-nor-female costume, the Round Table’s identity is at the same time obscured. Faced with this inconvenient truth, the whole court can only laugh it away with embarrassment.

The Round Table knights then choose to wear the same girdle on their bodies:

Þe kyng comfortez þe knyȝt, and alle þe court als
 Lazen loude þerat and luflyly acorden
 Þat lordes and ledes þat longed to þe Table,
 Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue,
 A bende abelef hym aboute, of a bryȝt grene,
 And þat, for sake of þat segge, in swete to were.
 For þat watz acorded þe renoun of þe Rounde Table
 And he honoured þat hit hade, euermore after[.] (2513–20)

Instead of wearing the girdle on their waists, the Round Table knights wear it diagonally across their bodies. The girdle is completely deprived of its practical use and elevated to a purely symbolic level. It is removed from the part of the body where both men and women wear it identically to a part where only men would usually do

literature is here laughed off and relieved. See Putter (1997) in Cohen and Wheeler (eds.), pp. 296–7.

so, to redraw a clear-cut sartorial dichotomy between men and women, and eliminate any possible confusion.³⁶⁰ In this way, not only is the gender ambiguity created by Gawain's cross-gendered costume erased, but his indescribable body is also re-accommodated and re-categorized into the binary system of Camelot's courtly culture. By refashioning the girdle into a baldric, the Round Table knights reconfigure the sign of the feminized body into a marker of pure "broþerhede." They appear to keep the girdle as a reminder of a knight's noble fault, while actually refashioning it as a palimpsest of its previous form and meaning, seeking to obscure its troubling implications for Camelot's values. When they "acorden" to wear the "swete" (matching suit) on their body, they are in fact "reconciling" to "harmonize" the odd thing out and to "amend" their wounded, "crabbed" bodies.³⁶¹ This emphasis on unity and harmony reveals the irony that Camelot's distinguished courtliness actually depends on its rigidly homogenous nature and that its outstanding identity to a great extent lies in being identical. The court's laughter, then, is perhaps not only embarrassed, but in a sense self-ironic.

³⁶⁰ See *MED* "bauderik (n.)," meaning 1, nearly all of whose examples are of men wearing them for carrying a sword, horn, or on ceremonial occasions. The word "girdle" seems to have a more even spread of use between genders.

³⁶¹ See *MED* "accorden (v.)," 1, 2, 5, 6.



Fig. 192. Gawain returns to Camaelot. England, c. 1400; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.
BL. MS Cotton Nero A.x., fol. 126r (130r).

“The hurt watz hole”

Gawain’s confession causes the whole court to laugh loudly. By making him the source of laughter, the poet seems to associate Gawain with the figure of the fool. And he is indeed one, if we consider the fact that the girdle replaces Bertilak’s hood to become the trophy of Gawain’s unaware victory in the ironic competition for the role of the best amusing fool in Hautdesert. The game begins with an act of divestment and ends with transvestitism, with the body clothed in its trophy becoming the “most mirþe” (985) that entertains everyone. Gawain leaves Camelot to fulfill the Green Knight’s challenge of “fole” and “nys”, but is made a fool in his stead when he returns

to Arthur's court. In her description of the miniature of Gawain returning to Camelot (fig. 192), Lee passingly entertains the possibility of Gawain as a fool figure on account of "his strange position, pointed helmet and gloves [which] lend him the appearance of a court jester."³⁶² But she leaves this idea unpursued without considering the textual evidence. Gawain's foolishness is not only suggested by his parti-colored outfit in the miniatures for this poem, but is also represented at the end of the text by his peculiar sartorial body which is divided into two halves by the girdle/baldric "bounden by his syde" (2486). The girdle/baldric visually slashes his body, creating an opening that replaces the wound which the Green Knight leaves on his neck. Gawain's fleshy wound was healed ("þe hurt watz hole") and his body becomes whole again, but the sartorial "hole" on his body remains a reminder of his once penetrated body. The cutting imagery and Gawain's open "side" recall the dagged clothes which are often associated with the fool. The poet dramatizes the "foolish" Camelot through the figure of Gawain as the fool and represents its folly by clothing the whole Round Table in this hybrid costume whose sartorial opening serves as a silent caricature of their "renowned brotherhood" (2516–9).

³⁶² Lee (1977), p. 41.

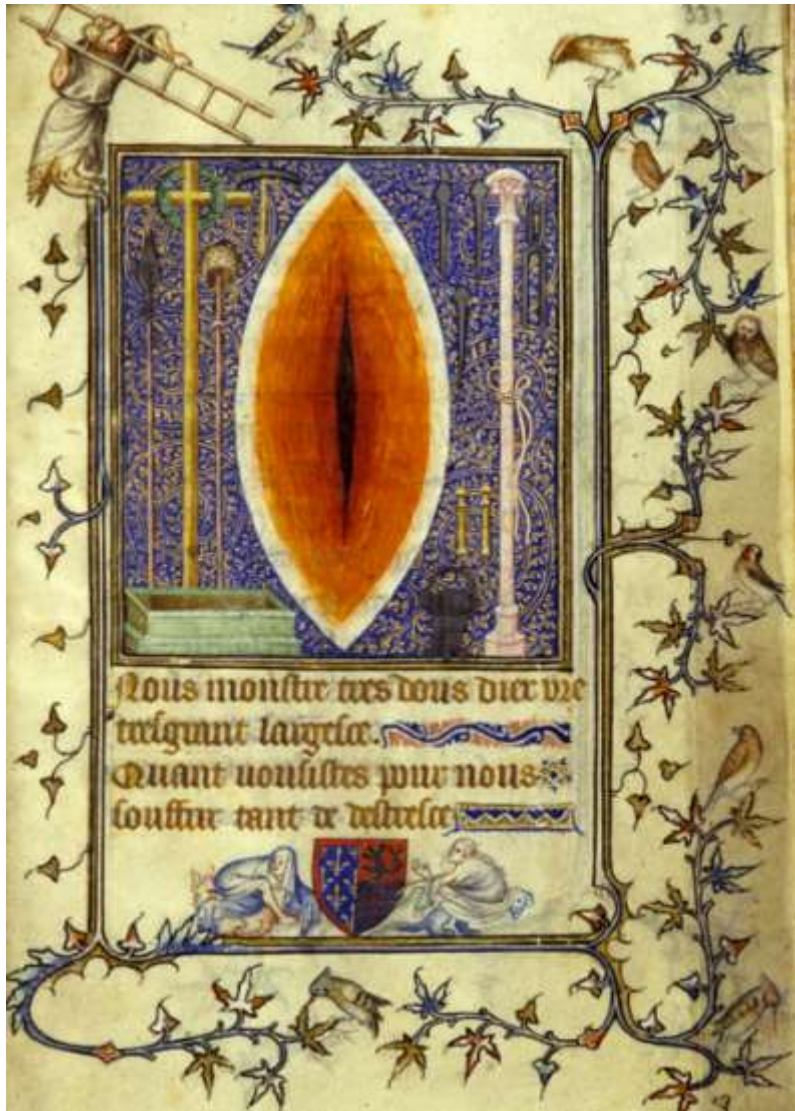


Fig. 193. Christ's wound and the instruments of the Passion. France, 1345; Psalter. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Cloisters Collection. MS 69.86, fol. 331r.

In his confession, Gawain calls himself a “fole madde” (2415), which recalls Jonah the fool and the “sottez formadde” in *Patience*. Gawain associates himself with David, who is “blended” (blinded/deluded, but also potentially “mingled”) (2419) by Bathsheba. At this crucial point in the poem, the allusion to the Bathsheba story reminds us of the consequences of misdirected looking and desire, as well as suggesting a comparison between Gawain’s dagged and parti-colored body in the

bizarre baldric and David's bodily medley of folly and divinity.³⁶³ The baldric becomes a visual and sartorial replacement of the fleshly wound, creating on Gawain's body a permanent hole for people to watch and contemplate, analogous with Christ's wound (fig. 193). In this image, from a manuscript made for Bonne of Luxemburg, the body of Christ is metonymically represented by the wound on his side. The wound's shape invokes a female vulva; this and similar representations have fuelled debate around the feminization and sexualization of Christ's wounds in late-medieval devotion. The visual penetration engages readers in a productive contemplation in which the Word of God is conceived.³⁶⁴ The sacred and the profane, the male and the female are conflated into the image of Christ's wound, just like the sartorial hole on Gawain, the Knight of Mary, simultaneously invokes both his knightly renown and his foolish fault, his masculine body clothed by the baldric and his feminized body once penetrated and opened like a vulva-like purse.

An Ovidian Excursion

Gawain's forced cross-dressing invites comparisons with the story of the undressed

³⁶³ See above Ch. 1, pp. 7–25 for David's inscribing gaze and Bathsheba's textual body, and Ch. 4, pp. 235–40 for discussion of the mixed body of Jonah the fool and David in medieval illuminated initials.

³⁶⁴ See above Ch. 1, pp. 53–6 for the body of Christ as a spectacle in medieval incarnational theology. For discussions of Christ's wound and its pictorial representations, see, for example Wolfgang Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, trans. Bernard Standring (London, 1981), p. 46, commenting on the *Stimulus amoris* by the Franciscan James of Milan, which draws an analogy between Christ's wound and the vulva, possibly punning on *vulnus/vulva*. For further comment, see for example Martha Easton, "The Wound of Christ, the Mouth of Hell: Appropriations and Inversions of Female Anatomy in the Later Middle Ages," in *Tributes to Jonathan J.G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, Art and Architecture*, eds. Susan L'Engle and Gerald B. Guest, (London/Turnhout, 2006), pp. 395–414; idem. "'Was It Good for You, Too?' Medieval Erotic Art and Its Audience." *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspective on Medieval Art* 1 (2008): 1–30; S. L. Smith, "The Bride Stripped Bare: A Rare Type of the Disrobing of Christ." *Gesta* 34.2 (1995): 126–46.

Hercules in Ovid's *Fasti*³⁶⁵ in which the poet explains the cult of nakedness of Faunus:

Sed, cur praecipue fugiat velamina Faunus,
Traditur antiqui fabula plena joci. (B.2: 303–4)

[But to explain why Faunus should particularly eschew the use of drapery a merry tale is handed down from days of old.]³⁶⁶

The story begins with Faunus seeing the Lydian Queen Omphale walking with Hercules, her slave and lover, on their way to a cave. Fascinated by Omphale's beauty, Faunus swore in his heart that he would take over the Queen from Hercules. He followed them stealthily to the cave. Then the scene shifts to the amorous play between Omphale and Hercules in the enclosed cave:

Dumque parant epulas potandaque vina ministri,
Cultibus Alciden instruit illa suis.
Dat tenues tunicas Gaetulo murice tinctas:
Dat teretem zonam, qua modo cincta fuit. (B. 2: 317–20)

[While the attendants were making ready the viands and the wine for the wassail, she arrays Alcides in her own garb. She gave him gauzy tunics in Gaetolian purple dipped; she gave him the dainty girdle, which but now had girt her waist.]

Omphale removes Hercules' club and lion skin and wraps him with her girdle (cincta) and her other outfit. Hercules's big body, then, breaks out of the feminine garments:

³⁶⁵ See Hilda Bottenwieser, "Manuscripts of Ovid's *Fasti*: the Ovidian Tradition in the Middle Ages," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 71 (1940): 45–51. Bowers (2013) also suggests that *Sir Gawain* is a "happy-ending version of *The Bacchae*" (51) and mentions the parallel between the cross-dressing of Gawain and that of Pentheus. This suggestion would complement my reading of Faunus in *Fasti*.

³⁶⁶ Text and translation are quoted from *Fasti*, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. Sir James George Frazer (Cambridge, 1989).

Ventre minor zona est: tunicarum vincla relaxat,
 Ut possit vastas exseruisse manus.
 Fregerat armillas non illa ad brachia factas.
 Scindebant magni vincula parva pedes.
 Ipsa capit clavamque gravem spoliūque leonis,
 Conditaque in pharetra tela minora sua. (B.2: 321–6)

[For his belly the girdle was too small; he undid the clasps of the tunics to thrust out his big hands. The bracelets he had broken, not made to fit those arms; his big feet split the little shoes. She herself took the heavy club, the lion's skin, and the lesser weapons stored in their quiver.]

The poet describes in vivid detail how the over-sized male body penetrates the tiny female outfit that covers it. Hercules' hands thrust out and uncovered ("exeruisse") the garment, his arms broke ("fregerat") the bracelet, and his huge feet split ("scindebant") the shoes. Omphale's outfit was so small that at the moment it seeks to contain Hercules, his body automatically "undressed" and "uncovered" it with violent and penetrating movements. Omphale's attempt to cross-dress Hercules only results in the undressing of herself. Instead of feminizing Hercules, Omphale's girdle and dress reinforce the image of his masculinity. Even though his club is taken away, a "quiver" ("pharetra") is still kept, in which Hercules' arrows and other weapons are covered. This image of quiver and arrow also invokes the lover's erotic play and Hercules's sexual penetration of Omphale's naked body.

After their love-making, Hercules and Omphale fell into sleep in their transvestite costumes. Faunus, seeing that the lovers were both asleep, entered the cave to consummate his love for Omphale. He groped in the darkness, and when he touched the soft fabrics, he mistook the body beneath it to be Omphale—"mendaci decipiturque nota" (The sign of untruth deceives him) (348). He pulled up the soft

dress, and stuck his hand into it. But what he found under the clothes were Hercules' legs with bristling hair. Faunus' sexual advance was met with Hercules' strong, masculine hand, which hurled him down to the ground. Omphale called for her maids and light, and saw the god lying prostrate on the bare ground groaning. The whole crowd then burst into laughter:

Ridet et Alcides, et qui videre jacentem;
Ridet amatorem Lyda puella sum (355–6)

[Alcides laughed, as did all who saw him lying, and the Lydian wench laughed also at her lover.]

The god, betrayed by clothes (“veste ... lusus”), hates the clothes which trick the eye (“fallentes lumina vestes”), and ever since then, demands nudity to his rites (“nudos ad sua sacra vocat”) (357–8).

The clothes in *Sir Gawain* and in this story are both associated with falseness and untruth (“mendaci ... nota”), suggesting the deceptive nature of the sartorial covering. Whereas the girdle put on Hercules serves as a comic endorsement of the traditional binary system of the masculine and the feminine in the classical heroic world, the girdle imposed on Gawain unsettles and problematizes the opposition between knights and ladies in courtly love romances, in which gender dichotomy often relies on and is strictly defined by a set of sartorial codes conventionally observed by the players of the game.

The sartorial disturbances in the story of Faunus and in *Sir Gawain* both end in an institution of norms; the former calls for nudity while the latter opts for a peculiar costume. Camelot's attempt to reinstate masculinity is echoed in the poem's epigram

“Hony soyt qui mal pence,” which alludes to the sartorial anecdote lurking behind the founding of the Order of the Garter. The Lady Joan of Kent, when dancing with Edward III, accidentally dropped her garter on the ground. The King picked up the garter and tied it to his own leg to endorse the Lady’s reputation.³⁶⁷ The garter was later adopted as the sign of the Order and since then has become a symbol of chivalric spirit and masculinity. Whether as the broken “cincta” on Hercules, the garter on Edward III’s leg, the twinning girdle on Gawain’s waist, or the diagonal baldric worn by the Round Table knights, the girdle takes up different sartorial forms to show the malleability of clothing as a symbol in medieval culture and how it can function as a fecund site to explore the boundary between man and woman, the public and the private, and the gap between appearance and truth. As the Green Knight who challenges Arthur’s court to a collective deciphering of a mysterious body, the poet engages his readers in a riddle by wrapping up his story of marvel in an ambiguous sign of baldric/girdle as moral hole/wholeness at the end of the poem. He leaves its significance deliberately open for interpretation—as the meaning and moral responsibility lies in the eyes and ethical judgments of the reader.

³⁶⁷ The story is passed down in many versions, among which, the most well-known one, as is summarized here, was based on Jean Froissart’s account. For a detailed discussion of the perceptions of the Garter in medieval literary works, see Hugh E. L. Collins, *The Order of the Garter, 1348–1461: Chivalry and Politics in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 255–78. Thomas B. Costain also records some of the different versions of the story in *The Three Edwards: A History of the Plantagenets* (N.Y., 1994). For a full-length discussion of the relation between the Order and *Sir Gawain*, see Francis Ingledew’s “*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” and *the Order of the Garter* (Notre Dame, 2006).

Chapter Six
Conclusion: Looking, Image, and Word
in *St Erkenwald*

In the previous chapters, I have shown how centrally important the correct uses of human senses, images, and language are to the *Gawain*-poet's project, and how he concerns himself with contemporary social, cultural and theological issues and phenomena in a more active way than was previously thought. In my analyses, I have also demonstrated that his works bear a deeper and more comprehensive influence from Ovidian materials than has been accepted up to now. At the end of the thesis, I would like to pinpoint these repeated concerns which help bind together the poems in MS Cotton Nero A. x. by looking at another short text, *St Erkenwald*, to show that across different genres and through different sources, the *Gawain*-poet was drawn repeatedly to the dangers and possibilities of (in)sight for imagining human's relationship with the divine, and with their own creative processes in their quest for salvation.

St Erkenwald has long been associated with the *Gawain*-poet for its alliterative style, Cheshire dialect, similar phraseology, and thematic concerns, though debate still surrounds the question of whether it was written by the *Gawain*-poet himself.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁸ The theory of common authorship was accepted by early editors and readers of the poem such as Gollancz and Savage, but was called into question by Benson in his influential article, "The Authorship of *St Erkenwald*." *JEGP* 64.3 (1965): 393–405. This theory underwent a recent revival through several significant critical endorsements by Andrew, Marie Borroff, and Bowers, who include *St Erkenwald* in their editions, translations, and discussions of the complete works of the *Gawain*-poet. See Andrew, Finch and Clifford, eds., *The Complete Works of the "Pearl"-poet* (Berkeley, 1993); Borroff, *The "Gawain"-poet: Complete Works* (London, 2011); Bowers (2013) esp. p. 87.

Critics have analyzed the poem's Latin sources, its use of the story of Trajan and Pope Gregory, its overarching concern with man's salvation from grace or work, the collapsing of the present and the past, and its allusions to contemporary politics.³⁶⁹ But I argue that the legend of Pope Gregory and Trajan is invoked as an iconoclastic context and that, under its hagiographical appearance, the poem is essentially a treatise about the act of looking and the use of images.

Between Image and Word

“Of þis Augustynes art”

Having learned of Bishop Serenus' violent destruction of the images in the churches

³⁶⁹ For sources of the poem, see James Root Hulbert, “The Sources of ‘St Erkenwald’ and ‘The Trental of Gregory.’” *MP* 16.9 (1919): 485–93. Gordon Whatley traces both the literary and liturgical sources of the poem and thoroughly compares the poem with earlier versions of the Trajan legend and its late medieval renditions in “The Middle English *St Erkenwald* and Its Liturgical Context.” *Mediaevalia* 8 (1982): 277–306; “*Vita Erkenwaldi*: An Anglo-Norman's Life of an Anglo-Saxon Saint.” *Manuscripta* 27 (1983): 67–81; “The Uses of Hagiography: The Legend of Pope Gregory and the Emperor Trajan in the Middle Ages.” *Viator* 15 (1984): 25–63; “Heathens and Saints: *St Erkenwald* in Its Legendary Context.” *Speculum* 61.2 (1986): 330–63. For the theme of “the just pagan,” see Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (Oxford, 2001), and Cindi L. Vitto, *The Virtuous Pagan in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia, 1989). For the poet's view on salvation and his religious inclination, see Whatley (1984) and Whatley (1986) in which he discusses the poem as an orthodox response to scholastic theology in the late fourteenth century. Similar views include Jennifer L. Sisk, “The Uneasy Orthodoxy of *St Erkenwald*.” *ELH* 74.1 (2007): 89–115; William Kamowski, “*Saint Erkenwald* and the Inadvertent Baptism: An Orthodox Response to Heterodox Ecclesiology,” *Religion & Literature* 27.3 (1995): 5–27. T. McAlindon sees the poem as an “unusual blend of traditionalism and individualism (472)” in his “Hagiography into Art: A Study of *St Erkenwald*.” *SP* 67.4 (1970): 472–94. David Coley argues in a similar vein that the poem lies in the middle ground between strict orthodoxy and heresy in “Baptism as Eucharist: Orthodoxy, Wycliffism, and the Sacramental Utterance in *Saint Erkenwald*.” *JEGP* 107.3 (2008): 327–47. For discussions of the encounter between the past and present in the poem, see Monika Otter, ““New Werke”: *St Erkenwald*, St Alban's, and the Medieval Sense of the Past.” *JMRS* 24.3 (1994): 387–414; D. Vance Smith, “Crypt and Decryption: Erkenwald Terminable and Interminable,” *NML* 5 (2002): 59–85. Coley discusses this poem as exploring medieval English Christian identity and its relationship with the Judaic past in “*Saint Erkenwald*: The Sacrament of the Altar and the Persistence of the Past,” in *The Wheel of Language: Representing Speech in Middle English Poetry, 1377–1422* (Syracuse, 2012), pp. 69–112. For attempts to relate the poem to contemporary politics, see Frank Grady, “*Piers Plowman*, *St Erkenwald*, and the Rule of Exceptional Salvation.” *YLS* 6 (1992): 61–88; Bowers (2013), pp. 87–102. Chaganti discusses Erkenwald's shrine as a reliquary and its ritual performance and process of translation in the poem in “Silent Inscription” in Chaganti (2008), pp. 47–71.

of Marseille, Pope Gregory wrote him a letter in which he approves of the Bishop's good will but reproaches his indiscretion:

Word has since reached us that you, gripped by blind fury, have broken the images of the saints with the excuse that they should not be adored [...] To adore images is one thing, to teach with their help what should be adored is another. What Scripture is to the educated, images are to the ignorant, who see through them what they must accept; they read in them what they cannot read in books. This is especially true of the pagans [...] Therefore, you ought not to have broken that which was placed in the church not in order to be adored but solely in order to instruct the minds of the ignorant [...] and rather than scatter the flock that was collected, you could have collected the flock that was scattered, and so have enhanced the glory of your name of pastor rather than acquired the guilty name of a disperser [...].

For these dispersed children of the church must be called back, and those passages of the Holy Scripture should be shown to them that prohibit the adoration of man's handiwork [...] But then you should add that because [of] those painted likenesses, made for the instruction of the ignorant [...] they might understand the stories, and so learn what occurred. And you should tell them: "If you wish to have images in church in order to gain from them instruction for which they were formerly made, I freely permit them to be made and placed there." And explain that it was not the sight of the story there related in a painted text that angered you, but the worship which had been paid to them illicitly.³⁷⁰

Pope Gregory's letter seems apposite to read against the story of *St Erkenwald* not only because its author is the model of the figure of Bishop Erkenwald in the poem,

³⁷⁰ The Latin text is in *S. Gregorius Magnus: Registrum epistularum*, ed. Dag Norberg (CCSL 140–140A) (Turnhout, 1982). Translation quoted from Caecilia Davis-Weyer, "Europe under Barbarian Rule," in *Early Medieval Art, 300-1150: Sources and Documents* (Toronto, 1971), pp. 47–9.

but also because the theme of destruction and purgation of churches mentioned in this letter is highly reminiscent of the religious turmoil and conversion at the beginning of the poem (1–24). St Augustine of Canterbury is named in line 12. He was sent by Pope Gregory to Britain to convert its pagan people. Legend has it that St Augustine carried with him a cross and an image of Christ on his departure to replace the pagan idols and to re-consecrate pagan shrines into Christian churches.³⁷¹ Against this historical background of iconoclasm the poet introduces Erkenwald's episcopal see in London:

Now of þis Augustynes art is Erkenwolde bischop
 At loue London toun and the laghe teches,
 Syttes semely in þe sege of Saynt Paule mynster
 Pat was þe temple Triapolitan as I tolde are.³⁷² (33–6)

Erkenwald is likened to St Augustine of Canterbury to suggest how he establishes his episcopal see by emulating the latter's "art." Read in this iconoclastic context, the "art" of Augustine plausibly refers not only to his episcopal administration, learning, or the geographical range of his diocese, as other critics have suggested, but also more significantly could invoke his "artistic" way of conforming pagans with the images of the cross and Christ, and by extension, the devotional images which Pope Gregory mentions in his letter to the Bishop of Marseille.³⁷³ By alluding to the Gregorian mission, the poem brings to the fore the conflicts about the use of images both in its

³⁷¹ Davis-Weyer (1971), p. 47. The mission, also known as the Gregorian Mission, is recorded in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. Images of Augustine of Canterbury often show him holding a crosier topped with a cross in one hand and an image of Christ in the other. Examples of such images include a historiated initial labeled "Augustinus" in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (the Saint Petersburg Bede), and a statue of him carved on the exterior of Canterbury Cathedral.

³⁷² References to the poem are from Clifford Peterson, ed., *Saint Erkenwald* (Philadelphia, 1977).

³⁷³ The word "art" has been variously glossed as "a discipline," "ecclesiastical province." Helen Young interprets it as a body of knowledge which Erkenwald inherits as a legacy of St Augustine of Canterbury in "Line 33 of *St Erkenwald*." *N&Q* 54.2 (2007): 124–5. Andrew Breeze reviews and rejects the above explanations and proposes that the word denotes a south-eastern direction in his "Art 'Direction' in *St Erkenwald*." *N&Q* 55.3 (2008): 273.

contemporary era and in the times of Pope Gregory. Different ways of looking at images are examined through the poem's description of a collective viewing of a corpse and the effects of such gazes on the transformation of the body, and in turn, its impact on the lookers.

The Poet's Somatic Texts

As Bowers notes, *St Erkenwald* is a poem about transformation.³⁷⁴ It starts with the history of religious conversion and dynastic changes, and describes a corpse's miraculous decomposition into ash through Bishop Erkenwald's sacramental speech. The poem stages historical, cultural and religious changes through the encounter between Erkenwald and the corpse of a pagan Judge to call forth the gaps and reconciliations between the old and the new, the pagan and the Christian. The poem's emphases on both spiritual and bodily changes echo the *Gawain*-poet's repeated use of the Ovidian motif of metamorphoses through which he dramatizes the tensions and conflicts between opposing yet sometimes complementary ideas. In *Pearl*, the Dreamer's metaphorical transformation into a Narcissus figure and animals demonstrates man's frequent confusion of the tangible signs of this world with the intangible ideas of God. In *Cleanness*, the metamorphoses of Nebuchadnezzar and Lot's wife illustrate the ideas of humility and pride, and suggest the consequence of transgressing the boundary between the divine and the human. In *Patience*, the Christ-like Jonah becomes a fool to illuminate the dual nature of Christ as both human and divine, the folly and the Wisdom. In *Sir Gawain*, the Green Knight's shifting shape, the interchangeable bodies of him and Gawain, as well as the reversed sartorial bodies of the Lady and the knight obscure and unsettle the line between male and female,

³⁷⁴ Bowers (2013), p. 99.

fiction and truth.

The *Gawain*-poet is an expert in giving shape to his metaphysical discussion of binary ideas with fleshy, bodily concreteness. In his works, the human body invokes man's createdness and propensity to sin but also serves as a conduit of divine knowledge which is imparted to man through human senses. The Pearl-maiden's elusive figure appears both as a Narcissistic image of idolatry and an embodiment of the divine. The deformed bodies of Lot's wife and Jonah the fool become both a monument of sin and an intermediary to the "Corpus Christi." The Green Knight's severed head calls forth an examination of the gap between Gawain's "godhede" and "monhede" through its monstrosity.

The poet displays a deep interest in the idea of metamorphosis through the constantly changing and changed bodies of his characters. Metamorphosis in Ovid, as Joseph B. Solodow suggests, often functions as a means of "clarification" and finding out who one is.³⁷⁵ Here in the *Gawain*-poet's works, metamorphosis seems to have been drawn for a similar use: for man to realize what he is in the face of God. Man's disfigurement in front of the divine contrast with the poet's human-like God who can freely transfigure between the divine and the human, and move between the hierarchies of beings, suggesting a potential likeness between men and God whilst showing the essential difference between them, and hence man's need of self-humbling. Whereas self-realization leads the Ovidian figures only to misfortune and death, and their metamorphoses are irreversible, the sinners in the poet's works are often given a chance to become normal again, as we have seen in the examples of the

³⁷⁵ See his *The World of Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'* (Chapel Hill, 2002), esp. "Introduction," pp. 1–8. A relevant discussion is Charles Segal, "Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies: Art, Gender, and Violence in the *Metamorphoses*." *Arion* 5.3 (1998): 9–41.

Pearl-Dreamer and Nebuchadnezzar. In Ovid, the moment of man's realization of his inferiority to the gods marks at the same time his death to show the merciless divine power. In the poet's works, however, such a self-realization becomes the key to life, and attests to God's mercy.

The *Gawain*-poet's Ovidian fascination with the human body and its ambiguous status both as a fallen sign of sin and a salvific text of divinity is paralleled by the representation of the corpse in *St Erkenwald*. The tomb first appears as a fine work of art. It is fairly formed out of quality marble decorated with gargoyles.

For as þai dyzt and dalfe so depe into þe erthe
 Þai founden fourmyt on a flore a ferly faire tounge.
 Hit was a throghe of thykke ston thryuandly hewen,
 Wyt gargeles garnysht aboute alle of gray marbre. (45–8)

These gargoyles, which mark the craftsmanship of late-medieval Gothic architecture, lend the tomb the appearance of a church building. The presence of these monstrous forms, which are often seen as vestiges of paganism and are associated with idolatry, implies that the tomb is a kind of temple and shrine that itself has to be re-consecrated. Despite their monstrosity, these gargoyles are carved on church buildings as a talisman to keep out evil spirits. They are also considered as a visual message for the illiterate laity to remind them of the existence of evil which lurks outside the church.³⁷⁶ The ambiguous nature of gargoyles both as idolatrous, nonsensical luxuries and useful pictorial texts was often the focus of social and devotional controversy. St Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, questioned the meaning and use of these laboriously carved shapes:

³⁷⁶ For the apotropaic function of gargoyles, see Camille, *The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame: Medievalism and the Monsters of Modernity* (Chicago, 2009). He also discusses the "protective gaze of deformed forms" in Camille (1992), p. 75.

Caeterum in claustris coram legentibus fratribus quid facit illa ridicula monstruositas, mira quaedam deformis formositas, ac formosa deformitas? Quid ibi immundae simiae? quid feri leones? [...] quid maculosae tigrides? quid milites pugnantes? quid venatores tubicinantes? Videas sub uno capite multa corpora, et rursus in uno corpore capita multa. [...]. Tam multa denique, tamque mira diversarum formarum ubique varietas apparet, ut magis legere libeat in marmoribus quam in codicibus, totumque diem occupare singula ista mirando, quam in lege Dei meditando. Proh Deo! si non pudet ineptiarum, cur vel non piget expensarum?³⁷⁷

[But apart from this, in the cloisters, before the eyes of the brothers while they read—what is that ridiculous monstrosity doing, an amazing kind of deformed beauty and yet a beautiful deformity? What are the filthy apes doing there? The fierce lions? [...] The fighting soldiers? The hunters blowing horns? You may see many bodies under one head, and conversely many heads on one body [...] In short, everywhere so plentiful and astonishing a variety of contradictory forms is seen that one would rather read in the marble than in books, and spend the whole day wondering at every single one of them than in meditating on the law of God. Good God! If one is not ashamed of the absurdity, why is one not at least troubled at the expense?]

St Bernard is particularly concerned about the use of these absurd forms in the ecclesiastical context, and implicitly compares the sight of these images with/against the written words seen and read by the monks. Although he disapproves of the money and effort wasted in making these gargoyles, he seems, however reluctantly, to have

³⁷⁷ *Apologia ad Guillelmum abbatem*. The Latin text is in PL 182: 893-918A, passage quoted here from 916A-916B. Translation quoted from Diane J. Reilly, “Bernard of Clairvaux and Christian Art” in Brian Patrick McGuire, ed., *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 279–304, p. 279.

allowed that these absurd forms are in some way an alternative to the books read by the clerical brothers.

This association of gargoyles with books, and bodies with scriptural texts is also seen in the description of the excavated tomb in *St Erkenwald*:

The sperle of þe spelunke þat sparde hit olofte
 Was metely made of þe marbre and menskefully planede,
 And þe bordure enbelicit wyt bryzt golde lettres,
 Bot roynyshe were þe resones þat þer on row stoden. (49–52)

This tomb inside St Paul's Cathedral, being decorated with gargoyles and inscribed with gold letters, seems to recall the "painted texts" in churches which Pope Gregory speaks for in his letter. The idea of this tomb as a pictorial message to be read is reinforced by the poet's immediate association of the discovery of the tomb with "crafty cronecles" and written records upon its excavation (43–4).

Inside the finely-made coffin is found a corpse no less magnificent than its container:

So was þe glode wyt-in gay, al wyt golde payntyde
 And a blisfulle body opon þe bothum lyggid
 Araide on a riche wise in rialle wedes.
 Al wyt glisnande golde his gowne was hemmyd,
 Wyt mony a precious perle picchit þer-on,
 And a gurdille of golde bigripide his mydelle,
 A meche mantel on-lofte wyt menyuer furrir
 (þe clothe of camelyn ful clene wyt cumly bordures). (75–82)

The luxurious outfit of the corpse becomes the first thing through which it can be identified. The gold-hemmed "cumly bordures" of the clothes form a parallel to the tomb's border embedded with gold letters (51). This description is analogous to a

decorated border of a manuscript page, but with the traditional hierarchy of text and image reversed. Instead of a text framed by marginal images, here on this Gothic manuscript page, an image lies in the center of the page and is bordered with undecipherable letters, as if to give the body of the Judge a textual status and to liken it to a book for the citizens of London and clerical members of St Paul's to read. The people attempt in vain to identify the body by surveying through "tale," "boke," "martilage" and "cronicle" (102, 103, 154, 156):

Bot þat ilke note was noght for nourne none couthe,
 Noþir by title ne token ne by tale noþir
 Pat ever was breuyt in burghe ne in boke notyde,
 Pat ever mynnyd suche a mon, more ne lasse. (101–4)

The undecipherable marginal letters on this bodily manuscript echo these useless "breuyt" (written) materials. They not only fail to identify and explain the significance of the body/image it contains, but themselves become a source of unease and uncertainty, like the grotesque images on the marginalia in a Gothic manuscript. The lavishly decorated body in its coffin enchants people with its fine appearance, haunting and disturbing the minds of those who see it, engaging the whole city in a collective fever of scrutinizing and sign-reading:

Fulle verray were þe vigure, þer avisyde hom mony;
 Bot alle muset hit to mouthe: and quat hit mene schulde,
 Mony clerke(s) in þat clos, with crownes ful brode,
 þer besiet hom aboute noȝt, to brynge hom in words. (53–6)

People ponder on the sight in conversation while monks try to come to terms with it through their learning. The clerical attempt to articulate what they see in words implies a traditional priority given to word over image that has its root in the Mosaic law. It also reflects a sense of anxiety and insecurity widely felt about the use of

images in late fourteenth-century England. The gaze of the laity which is drawn to the “vignes” is juxtaposed with clerical eyes which focus on the “words,” which recalls St Bernard’s metaphor of gargoyles as a marble text inferior to real scriptural texts. People’s muttering mouths inside St Paul’s invoke the medieval trope of rumination as a reading activity, and echo the images of biting animals and gaping monsters carved on the church buildings. This further reinforces the idea that the corpse is an image intended for the laity, just as a gargoyle on a church roof is a “painted text” for its unlettered viewers.

God’s “Bodeworde” and Man’s Tongue

The conflation of body and text is further made explicit when this marvel is brought to Bishop Erkenwald’s attention:

þe bodeworde to þe byschop was broght on a quile
 Of þat buriede body, al þe bolde wonder.
 þe primate wyt prelacie was partyd fro home;
 In Esex was Ser Erkenwolde an abbay to visite. (105–8)

The news of a mysterious corpse inside the coffin appears as a “bodeworde” (law, order) to the Bishop. The dead body as a text is further echoed by the mention of it as a “cors” (110). The pun of corpse and corpus as written records of law corresponds to the dead body’s identity as a judge and the poem’s concern with the law of salvation, while echoing the meaning of “bodeworde” as the divine Law and the stone tablet on which the Ten Commandments are carved.³⁷⁸ For the first time in the poem, this pagan, idolatrous body is manifestly allowed to partake in some sort of sanctity for its potential of containing divinity in its form. Bishop Erkenwald responds to this

³⁷⁸*MED*, “cors (n.)” 3(b) and 4(d).

mysterious bodily message and the trouble it raises in people with letters, as Pope Gregory the Great did to the controversy over the images in churches. By doing so, he not only endorses the corpse's intrinsic value as something worth looking into, but also acknowledges its potential as a painted text in which the unlettered laity might see what they cannot read in the scriptures.

The judge's corpse as a bodily message of God is again confirmed in the speech of the Dean of St Paul's to Bishop Erkenwald and his noble company just before Erkenwald investigates the tomb:

“Lo, lordes,” quoth þat lede, “suche a lyche here is
Has layn loken here on loghe how longe is vnknawen,
And zet his colour and his clothe has cazt no defaute,
Ne his lire, ne þe lome þat he is layde inne. (146–9)

The word “lordes” is juxtaposed with “lyche” (corpse, likeness) as if to suggest the potential likeness between the two. A similar comparison occurs again in lines 314–5 when Bishop Erkenwald prays to God. In his prayer, the “lyche þer lay” parallels the “Lord lene” who grants it life. The dead body through its likeness to God invokes the body of Christ which as the Word of God is literally the ultimate divine “bode-word.” The body which lies locked in the coffin is not only a conduit through which the divine is conveyed, but itself is a divine message to be uncovered, just like Jonah, whose body locks the words of God, and becomes the Word he preaches.

St Erkenwald investigates the analogy between the human body and books, and draws attention to the use and efficacy of tangible signs and images as a means of conveying meaning in relation to texts. The poem allows the corpse to utter his own identity, just as the bodies of the Pearl-maiden and the Green Knight reveal their significances to

the Dreamer and Gawain, both of whom have engaged themselves in a fruitless quest for meaning because of their reliance on literal understanding. Instead of being an inferior kind of text to real books, and a source of absurdity like those grotesque figures appear to be in Gothic marginalia, the body/image in *St Erkenwald* and the *Gawain*-poet's works is given a power to articulate itself, and to complement, if not outweigh, the often incapable letters.

The poem's depreciation of human intellect and written words is resonant with the *Gawain*-poet's inherent distrust in human language as an efficacious means of conveying meanings and representing the divine, which he suggests through the Dreamer's insufficient tongue in *Pearl*, the demonic writings of the Sodomites and Belshazzar in *Cleanness*, and Jonah's parody of the Word of God in *Patience*. This self-reflexive skepticism of writing is also found in *Sir Gawain*, particularly through the Lady's constant and conscious references to the books of romance and the gap between the Gawain she sees in the bedroom and the Gawain she reads in them. Such distrust of human language underlies the consistent theme of the gap between fiction and truth that binds the poems in the *Gawain*-manuscript, and the poet's apophatic tendency to explain his ideas through negative exempla such as illustrating cleanness by the filthy bodies of the Sodomites and Lot's wife, explaining divine mercy and wisdom through the ungodly temper and folly of Jonah, and satirizing Camelot's glory through its failure to stand up to its reputation.

Looking at the Image

The Clerical Role

The insufficiency of human language in delivering meanings is compensated by the use of images in *St Erkenwald*. But the poem recognizes both the power of images to convey meanings, and the dangers of their being misunderstood. The negative impacts of images on their viewers are described through the unrest and disturbance which this mysterious tomb arouses among the people. The body in the tomb attracts and appalls at the same time with its exoticism. It gathers people from every corner of the nation into St Paul's Cathedral to look at it, and entices these viewers to think about its meaning. This recalls the pedagogical value Pope Gregory has allowed and acknowledged for the artistic objects in churches, which he sees as a shepherd who helps collect the scattered flock back into God's domain by arresting the illiterate eyes which have escaped the scriptures and fixing their gaze onto the things they cannot see in the texts.

This instructive power of images on the laity is represented in *St Erkenwald* as having to be mediated by an ecclesiastical agency. The laity's intuitive ability to understand an image is brought into question through the puns of looking/locking in the first half of the poem which describes the disturbances in the city created by the sight of the corpse:

Quen þe maire wyt his meynye þat meruaile aspied
 By assent of þe sextene þe sayntuaré þai kepten,
 Bede vnlouke þe lidde and lay hit byside;
 Þai wolde loke on þat lome quat lengyd wyttinne. (65–8)

The unlocking of the coffin lid is juxtaposed with the mayor's act of looking

(“aspied”).³⁷⁹ His unmediated gaze, rather than uncovering the mystery of this ‘bodeworde’ when looking at it, locks the body and fixates it as tangible and corruptible, like a “lome” that recalls the clay used to shape forms. The mayor’s ineffective gaze is paralleled by the Dean’s unsuccessful inspection of the corpse. When the Dean invites people to “lo” (look) at the “lyche” that is “loken” in the “lome” (146–9), he emphasizes its vivid colors and luxurious clothes as if it is a piece of artwork in a similar way in which the *Pearl-Dreamer* and the collective gaze of Camelot objectify the Pearl-maiden and the Green Knight respectively. The laity’s fixed gaze on the outward appearance of the image only leads them to confusion and unease, and blocks them from the truth, just as the rose is locked in the case of the Dreamer’s literal understanding, and the Green Knight’s body appears as folly under Camelot’s self-indulgent gaze.

The poem illustrates the spectacular form of the corpse through the eyes of people from “alle þe worlde” (64) to suggest that this secular gaze is confined by its overt reliance on the tangible. Their mistaken notion that the body is a King, based on its refined clothes, shows how faulty and devious this unmediated gaze can be. The poem offers Bishop Erkenwald as a model of looking to counter and mediate the idolatrous and ignorant gaze of the laity:

Tulkes tolden hym þe tale wyt troubulle in þe pepul
 And suche a cry aboute a cors, crakit euer-more.
 The bischop sende hit to blynne by bedels and lettres
 Ande buskyd þiderwarde by-tyme on his blonke after.
 By þat he come to þe kyrke kydde of Saynt Paule;
 Mony hym metten on þat meere þe meruayle to telle:

³⁷⁹ The imagery of opening and closing and of darkness and light is also noted in McAlindon (1970), pp. 488–9. He does not link them with the act of looking but with the theological idea of “the power of keys” which is used by Christ to open the gate of hell and remove sin.

He passyd in-to his palais and pes he comaundit,
And deuoydit fro þe dede and ditte þe durre after. (109–16)

Instead of hurrying to see the dead body as the other people do, Bishop Erkenwald avoids any contact, either visual or physical, with it, and seeks seclusion upon his arrival at St Paul's. In this "meere" of St Paul's, people look at a dead likeness which causes spiritual unrest. The "troubulle in þe pepul" turns out to be a trouble with their "pupils," like the *Pearl*-Dreamer whose pearly eye disease prevents him from seeing correctly. The people's troubled gaze is countered by the Bishop's eyes which first "deuoydit" (avoided) both the "dead" corpse and the "deed" of looking at the body, and then sought divine revelation on this mysterious "bodeworde":

þe derke nyzt ouerdrofe and day-belle ronge
And Ser Erkenwolde was vp in þe vghten ere þen,
þat welneghe al þe nyzt hade naityd his houres
To biseche his souerayn of his swete grace
To vouch safe to reuele hym hit by a visioun or ells.
"Paghe I be vnworthi," al wepande he sayde
Thurghe his deere debonerté, "digne hit my Lorde
In confurmyng þi Cristen faithe, fulsen me to kenne
þe mysterie of þis meruaile þat men opon wondres." (117-25)

By asking God to "reuele" to him, Bishop Erkenwald literally renounces his naked corporeal eyes and seeks to be "re-veiled" by God.³⁸⁰ This divine veiling does not prevent him from seeing, but like an optical filter, corrects the myopic gaze of sensual perception that cannot see beyond appearance, and endows the Bishop with an insight ("visioun") into the mystery of this marvel.

³⁸⁰ The veil as an important element in ecclesiastical habit symbolizes the wearer's purity, chastity and his identity as Christ's bride, and is hence a visual statement of one's willingness to live a life of obscurity in service of God. This sartorial image of voluntary obscurity invoked by the pun of "reveal" and "re-veil" is apposite to Bishop Erkenwald's humility in this scene. McAlindon also notes the word "reuele" and mentions its original meaning of "drawing back a curtain," as derived from Middle French "revelare," in McAlindon (2010), p. 488.

The Veiled Marvel

Marvel is one of the consistent themes which bind the four poems of the *Gawain*-manuscript together: the “meruelous merez” which escape the judgment of the Dreamer in *Pearl*, the story of Nebuchadnezzar narrated to the reader as a “mervayl” in *Cleanness*, God’s marvelous, unfathomable ways in *Patience*, as well as the Green Knight’s body as “a mervayle among tho menne” in *Sir Gawain*. The *Gawain*-poet constantly uses the word “marvel” to refer to bodies and ideas which erode the boundary between the wondrous and the horrific, the sacred and the profane, and the wise and the absurd, and which elude human perception and comprehension, and deflect men’s gaze from the truth.

In *St Erkenwald*, the ambiguous body also appears as a confusing marvel. But through Bishop Erkenwald’s voluntary obscurity and humility in seeking divine revelation, the message veiled by this dead image is revealed to people. He comments on this seemingly unintelligible marvel in his reply to the Dean’s account of the mystery:

“Þu says soþe,” quop þe segge þat sacrid was byschop,
 “Hit is meruaile to men þat mountes to litelle
 Towarde þe prouidens of þe prince þat paradys weldes,
 Quen Hym luste to vnlouke þe leste of his myztes.” (159–62)

Bishop Erkenwald shows how the marvel which God wishes to unlock often appears as confounding in the unmediated perception of men which sees and understands little. This contrast between man’s incompetent senses and God’s marvelous message recalls the comparison between man’s faulty eyes and ears with God’s omniscience in *Cleanness* and *Patience*. The Bishop then points out the short-sightedness of men and provides a solution to it:

Pere-as creatures crafte of counselle oute swarues,
 Þe comforthe of þe creatore byhoues þe cure take.
 And so do we now oure dede, deuyne we no fyrre;
 To seche þe sothe at oure selfe zee se þer no bote,
 Bot glow we alle opon Godde and His grace aske
 Pat careles is of counselle and comforthe to sende,
 And þat in fastynge of zour faithe and of fyne bileue.
 I shal auay zow so verrayly of vertues His
 Pat ze may leue vpon longe þat He is lord myzty,
 And fayne zour talent to fulfille if ze Hym frende leues. (166–76)

The implied eye defect is reinforced by the image of medicine through the words “cure” and “glow.” The Bishop prescribes the cure to this eye defect in the forms of a physical unlooking and a spiritual “visioun” that is achieved through a self-awareness of men’s insignificance and powerlessness, a willing renunciation of “monnes myzt,” their “resons”(163–4) and “crafte of counselle,” (167) and a total adherence to God.

It is at this moment of giving up one’s own subjectivity and allowing oneself to be a vessel “fulfilled” (176) by the divine that men can remove the obstacles in their corporeal eyes and lift the blinding veil to see the marvel of God through Bishop Erkenwald’s intermediation. This kenotic virtue of self-emptiness and voluntary obscurity marks the transition of the poem from the unmediated and devious gaze of the laity in the first half of the poem to the divinely filtered insight in the second half, through which Bishop Erkenwald instructs (“auay”) his people on how to look at this “cors”:

Than he turnes to þe tounge and talkes to þe corce,
 Lyftande vp his eghe-lyddes he loused suche wordes:
 “now lykhame þat þus lies, layne þou no lenger;
 Sythen Jhesus has iuggit to-day His joy to be schewyde,
 Be þou bone to His bode, I bydde in His behalue;

As He was bend on a beme quen He His blode schedde,
 As þou hit wost wyterly and we hit wele leuen,
 Ansuare here to my sawe, councele no trouthe. (177–84)

The enlightened gaze is represented by the opening of the Bishop's eyelids which loosen the locked mystery from its tangible confinement. It is also at this point that the mysterious dead body rises above its status of being a carcass and an idolatrous image to become not only a book, but literally a copy of "corpus Christi" which Christ wishes to show to the people. The body appears as a "cors" three times in the poem (110, 177, 317), each time accompanied by the presence of the Bishop, as if to suggest that an image is useful and capable of delivering meanings only through ecclesiastical mediation, just as Pope Gregory constantly reminded Bishop Serenus of his need to explain to his people the difference between adoring an image and worshipping the meaning behind it.³⁸¹

The Sin of Adam

Through the Bishop's mediation, the body is animated to narrate its own story and explain the meaning of its clothes. Instead of a king as it was formerly believed to be, the corpse reveals its identity as a virtuous judge whose soul, like other people's, is condemned to hell because of Adam's sin, but was left unsaved because he never had the chance to know Christianity:

And þer sittes my soule þat se may no fyrre,
 Dwynde in þe derke dethe þat dyzt us oure fader,
 Adam our alder þat ete of þat appulle
 Pat mony a plyztles pepul has poysned for euer.

³⁸¹ Whatley also discusses how the Judge's body is referred to in the poem to prove whether he comes to life or not and the validity of Bishop Erkenwald's baptismal prayer as a part of his broader argument for the poem's endorsement of ecclesiastical role in personal salvation. See Whatley (1986): esp. pp. 335–6, n.18.

Ze were entouchid wyt his tethe and take in þe glotte
 Bot mendyd with a medecyn ze are made for to lyuye
 Pat is, fulloght in fonte wyt faitheful bileue,
 And þat han we myste alle merciles, myselfe and my soule.
 Quat wan we with oure wele-dede þat wroghtyn ay rizt,
 Quen we are dampnyd dulfully into þe depe lake
 And exilid fro þat soper so, þat solempne fest
 Per richely hit arne refetyd þat after right hungride? (293–304)

The sin of Adam is visualized as an vivid act of eating and swallowing the apple, which poisons innocent people. This preoccupation with the Fall and the original sin also characterizes the *Gawain*-poet's project: the idolatrous pool of Adam which drowns mankind in *Pearl* and *Cleanness*, Jonah's "fall" in *Patience*, and Gawain's marred sartorial body which he connects to Adam's foolish temptation by Eve in *Sir Gawain*. The poet seems at the same time hopeless and sympathetic about man's stubborn propensity to sin by associating it with the fault of Adam and Eve in their misuse of senses and subjection to both visual and oral temptations. The original sin finds its incarnational form in the Dreamer's problematic vision and his excessive bemoaning in *Pearl*, the self-interested gazes of Satan and the Sodomites in *Cleanness*, the disobedient gaze and incessant complaint of Jonah the fool in *Patience*, along with Camelot's idolatrous self-regard in *Sir Gawain*.

In the poet's discussion of misusing human senses, he is often primarily concerned with looking, and consistently represents man's fallen state as a loss of sight of God in a world where men desire to re-connect their eyes with God's through seeking and making images that invokes Him. But their efforts and works are often wishful and vain, similar to the Judge's useless good deed (301), which, without a proper (Christian) context and the necessary intermediation of the Bishop, cannot help him gain his salvation from the "depe lake" where he "se may no fyrrre" than sin and death

(293). The theme of how to see properly to regain the sight of God thus becomes a main concern which runs across the poems in the *Gawain*-manuscript. As a solution to man's situation, the poet consistently offers the body of Christ both as a model of looking and an appropriate image to be seen. Christ allows himself to be penetrated and fulfills divine providence before he is able to ascend to heaven and be united with God. Out of the same humility he exposes his unseemly body before the eyes of man with its wound as an opening though which man sees God again, as is highlighted by the story of Longinus.³⁸²

By encouraging his readers to conform to Christ, the *Gawain*-poet not only offers humility as the key to man's attempt at regaining the prelapsarian union with God, but also suggests the importance of guidance and mediation in such attempts through Christ's intermediary role in the salvation of mankind. Adam and Eve's bodily transgressions through self-interested gaze and carnal appetite are to be remedied by a contemplative gaze on Christ's body and the rumination of it as a divine corpus. The process from visual intake through oral rumination to spiritual understanding has to be guided, just as the Dreamer has to be mediated by the Pearl-maiden, Belshazzar by Daniel, the Ninevites by Jonah, and Gawain by the Green Knight, when faced with perplexing images and signs.

The Disappearing Body

Through Bishop Erkenwald's mediation, the mysterious "bodeworde" which God deliberately leaves for mankind to read is unveiled, like the veil of the Holy of Holies where the Tablet of Law is stored is torn when Christ dies on the cross and the divine

³⁸² See above Ch. 1, pp. 36–7 and fig. 25 for a pictorial conflation of Longinus and the illicit Judges who harass Susanna in an image of the Crucifixion.

is revealed and henceforth made accessible to all mankind.³⁸³ The mysterious and elusive form of the Holy of Holies which Nebuchadnezzar desecrates in *Cleanness* appears as a copy of “Corpus Christi” for man to see in *St Erkenwald*. The old prohibitive law of the covenant that prescribes death to man’s transgressive gaze is rewritten by Christ’s body into a new receptive law of mercy which accommodates every gaze that seeks it. The “depe lake” of death, where men are confined and prevented from seeing further than their own work, is remedied by the “fulloght in fonte” (baptismal fountain) (299), whose medicine cures “plyztles pepul” affected the original sin (296). Through the inadvertent baptism of the corpse, the poem demonstrates how the sin initiated by an illicit looking is redeemed by another merciful gaze:

Til he toke hym a tome and to þe toumbe lokyd,
 To þe liche þer hit lay, wyt lauande teres.
 “Oure Lord lene,” quop þat lede, “þat þou lyfe hades,
 By Goddes leue, as longe as I myzt lacche water,
 And cast vpon þi faire cors and carpe þes wordes,
 ‘I folwe þe in þe Fader nome and His fre Childes,
 And of þe gracious Holy Goste’ and not one grue lenger;
 Þen þof þou droppyd doun dede, hit daungerde me lasse.”

Wyt þat worde þat he warpyd þe wete of eghen
 And teres trillyd adoun and on þe toumbe lighten,
 And one felle on his face and þe freke syked.
 Þen sayd he wyt a sadde soun: “Our Sauyoure be louyd; (313-24)

The teardrops of Bishop Erkenwald become the holy water through which the corpse gets baptized. The repeated mention of the eye suggests its important role as a

³⁸³ Matthew 27:51, “And behold the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top even to the bottom: and the earth quaked and the rocks were rent.” The veil-breaking is followed by many graves opening and bodies of saints coming alive, which echoes the animated corpse of the Judge in the poem.

medium in this successful baptism—not only does it produce the baptismal tears, but itself is the “wete” (spring) (321),³⁸⁴ the baptismal fountain which sees and accommodates the body and consecrates it. The poem seems to suggest that the meaning of an image is in the eyes of the beholder, and that whether it is idolatrous or transcendent depends solely on how one sees it. The corpse’s confession reinforces this idea of the eye as a looking fountain:

For þe wordes þat þou werpe and þe water þat þou sheddes—
 Þe bryȝt bourne of þin eghen—my bapteme is worthyn;
 Þe fyrst slent þat on me slode slekkyd al my tene.
 Ryȝt now to soper my soule is sette at þe table. (329–32)

He claims that the baptism is achieved through the Bishop’s words, tears, and the stream of his eyes, which implies a visual emission and echoes the beam cast into the abyss where his soul was formerly condemned (333–4). The Bishop’s life-giving gaze contrasts with Adam’s sin, which like a poisonous “glotte” (mucus), is swallowed down by men (297) and cause them unable to see further than death. The word “glotte (glet)” invites association with the word “golet” (gullet) evoked by the swallowing image, invoking the gargoyle of the tomb, through whose gobbling conduit the drowning water of the pool of death is channeled into the living water of baptism: the obscuring mucus in the eyes is transformed into an enlightening beam, and monstrous salivation becomes divine salvation.

The poet shows how a fundamentally idolatrous sensation can be indistinguishable from Christian love and mercy by staging the solemn baptismal ritual as a classical Pygmalion-like drama in which the image comes to life as desired. But the desire to

³⁸⁴ See *MED*, “wet (n.),” 1.

see the body live is mediated by Bishop Erkenwald and channeled correctly through God to the significance behind the form of the body. As soon as the marvel is revealed, the corpse loses its distinctive form and corrupts into ashes:

For as sone as þe soule was sesyd in blisse
 Corrupt was þat oþir crafte þat couert þe bones,
 For þe ay-lastande life þat lethe shalle neuer
 Deuoydes vche a vayne-glorie þat vayles so litelle. (345–8)

The images are only needed while they are useful for teaching and getting to the next stage of enlightenment. They are a means to an end, as Pope Gregory implies, and when that end has been achieved, they can be dispensed with. The corpse of the Judge is gone, just as the Pearl-maiden disappears from the Dreamer's sight when his vision of Jerusalem begins; the hand of God vanishes after drawing people's attention to his message; the "vnnyng" of Jonah must be cast away after the sailors learn its significance; and the mysterious Green Knight just leaves Gawain and goes "wherever he wishes" after the truth is imparted. The *Gawain*-poet mingles his warning about idolatry with a message about the use of proper imagery through these ambiguous bodies and images which arrest readers' eyes but vanish once they are transcended and the gaze is turned to the messages lying behind them.

The Introspective Gaze

The poem ends with a celebratory procession which recalls the one in the Latin *Vita Erkenwaldi*, in which the people of London translate the relics of St Erkenwald to his shrine at the old St Paul's Cathedral. But here in *St Erkenwald*, the bones decompose into ashes. Rather than entering St Paul's to worship the sacred relics, people proceed

out of it with their hands empty and the bones left behind. Not only is the corpse gone, but the figure of Bishop Erkenwald, who is the main protagonist and is supposedly at the head of the procession, blends into the crowd and is not seen or mentioned at the end of the poem. The divine marvel loses its adherence to a tangible form and chooses to be commemorated and remembered not by any visible objects, but through the invisible sounds of the bells in the city.

Bishop Erkenwald is transformed from an object of gaze in *Vita Erkenwaldi* into the subject of it in *St Erkenwald*. His gaze on the dead body is at the same time a self-reflexive gaze on himself as an object of adoration, linking with the revival of his cult in 1386. The poem fuses the legend of Trajan and Pope Gregory with the hagiographical story of Erkenwald, vesting a pre-Christian body with an anachronistic late-medieval costume of a sergeant of Law. By doing so, a late-Antique Latin story about salvation by grace or work is fashioned into a vernacular exploration of how mankind achieves his salvation through examining the issues of looking, image-use and artistic creation that grew ever more heated in late fourteenth-century England. In the *Gawain*-manuscript, Ovidian materials are stitched into biblical stories, and are similarly vested with Christian morals. The classical and the biblical traditions are sewn together so apparently seamlessly that the fusion has escaped the notice of most critics. Theological concepts and religious issues are visualized and explored in the poet's works through the often ambiguous Ovidian bodies of his characters, whose eroticism, violence, humanity and even absurdity bridge the gap between the spiritual and the carnal, the abstract and bodily, and the clerical and the secular. Through his somatic texts, the poet clothes the abstruse "godhede" of high Latinate scriptures with the simple "monhede" of vernacular writing to re-invent his "lyghte doctrine," or

amateur theology, as some scholars would describe,³⁸⁵ on the use of image and one's eyes in his quest for salvation for his fourteenth-century readers.

The dangerous but rewarding potential of looking and being seen also becomes a core feature of the poet's own staging of the act of making, shaping and writing. The poet's keen self-awareness as an author and a messenger of God is suggested by his Ovidian ambition of uncovering the divine, his constant placing himself in line with Christian prophets and apostles in the transmission of scriptural texts, and his preoccupation with the virtue of humility, which is shown most clearly by the poet's obvious departure from the alliterative tradition of heroism in favor of insignificant and even absurd characters.³⁸⁶ Read in this overarching context of Christological self-effacement, the anonymity of the poet and the artists involved in the making of this manuscript, whether intentional or accidental, may be seen as a gesture of humility and a tribute to Christ, the ultimate "clene make" to whom everyone should conform (*Cleanness*, 1067). The obscurity of the *Gawain*-manuscript is then itself an embodiment, a "bodeworde" of the "Corpus Christi," which, like the enigmatic body in *St Erkenwald*, is known "noþer by title ne token ne by tale noþer" (102), but which draws readers' attention to the messages of God and mediates their gaze onto the intangible divinity it seeks to convey without fixing them on its own craftsmanship. This obscurity of poet and the manuscript then becomes the ultimate "knot" and "merveil" left for its readers to contemplate about the poet's message of humility and its role in human salvation.

³⁸⁵ For example, Tolkien and E. V. Gordon and Norman Davis, eds. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, (Oxford, 1925), p. xv. A similar view is shared in Bowers (2013), p. 150.

³⁸⁶ As noted in Spearing (1966), p. 306.

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MS 897 (fig. 45)

Austin

Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin
MS HRC 008 (fig. 28)

Baltimore

Walter Art Museum
MS W. 106 (fig. 96)
Ivory Casket (fig. 175)

Bayeux

Musée de la Tapisserie
Bayeux Tapestry (fig. 183)

Berlin

Kunstgewerbemuseum
Ivory casket (fig. 181)

Bologna

Museo Civico Medievale
Mirror Case (fig. 173)

Brussels

Bibliothèque royale Albert Ier
MS M. 9961-62 (figs. 76, 95)

Cambridge

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University
MS 300 (figs. 6, 7)
MS 1-2005 (fig. 124)
Trinity College Library, Cambridge University
MS B. 11. 7 (fig. 22)

Cologne

St Ursula Schatzkammer, Romanische kirchen
Ivory Casket (fig. 182)

Copenhagen

Royal Library of Denmark
MS Thott. 399 (fig. 117)

Heidelberg

University of Heidelberg
MS Cod. Pal. germ. 848 (fig. 185)

Hildesheim

St Godehard's Church
MS St. Godehard 1 (fig. 79)

Kent

Canterbury Cathedral
Typological Window (fig. 93)

Konya

Konya Museum
The Jonah Sarcophagus (fig. 132)

London

British Library
MS Additional 10293 (fig. 166)
MS Additional 14790 (fig. 133)

- MS Additional 27210 (fig. 68)
MS Additional 42130 (figs. 129, 146, 150, 152-3, 155)
MS Additional 47682 (figs. 64, 75, 90, 104, 118, 149)
MS Additional 49622 (fig. 91)
MS Additional 50000 (fig. 99)
MS Arundel 83 (figs. 128, 143)
MS Arundel 104 (fig. 151)
MS Arundel 120 (fig. 59)
MS Cotton Nero A. x (figs. 31, 37, 47, 50, 55, 102, 110,
119–20, 140-41, 160-61, 167, 192)
MS Egerton 859 (fig. 26)
MS Egerton 1894 (figs. 57, 186)
MS Harley 616 (fig. 61)
MS Harley 2863 (fig. 17)
MS Harley 2897 (fig. 144)
MS Harley 2888 (fig. 135)
MS Harley 2969 (figs. 15, 16)
MS Harley 4381 (fig. 60)
MS Harley 4664 (fig. 12)
MS Harley 4751 (fig. 103)
MS Harley 4772 (fig. 62)
MS Kings 7 (figs. 13, 14)
MS Lansdowne 346 (fig. 136)
MS Royal 1 E. IV (figs. 82, 158)
MS Royal 1 E. IX (fig. 127)
MS Royal 2 B. VII (figs. 2-5, 58, 65, 86, 138, 159)
MS Royal 2 B. VIII (figs. 126, 145)
MS Royal 6 E. VI (figs. 10, 72, 83)
MS Royal 15 D. I (fig. 112)
MS Royal 15 D. II (fig. 73)
MS Royal 17 E. VII (figs. 80, 87)
MS Royal 19 D. II (figs. 69, 105,)
MS Royal 19 D. III (fig. 88)
MS Royal 20 A. XVII (figs. 32, 35, 36)
MS Yates Thompson 13 (figs. 74, 81, 85)
MS Yates Thompson 14 (figs. 84, 139)
MS Yates Thompson 16 (fig. 111)
MS Yates Thompson 20 (figs. 63, 67, 71)

British Museum

The Lothair Crystal (fig. 19)

Ivory Casket (figs. 176, 179–80)

Victoria & Albert Museum

Mirror Case (fig. 162)

Mirror Case (fig. 178)

Los Angeles**Elizabeth J. and James E. Ferrell Collection**

MS Ferrell Rose (fig. 54)

New York**Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection**

MS 69.86 (fig. 193)

Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum

MS M. 126 (fig. 30)

MS M. 140 (fig. 114)

MS M. 245 (fig. 51)

MS M. 302 (figs. 66, 70, 106)

MS M. 333 (figs. 108, 109)

MS M. 638 (figs. 1, 92, 165)

MS M. 766 (fig. 113)

MS M. 769 (fig. 97)

MS M. 833 (fig. 27)

MS M. 948 (fig. 56)

MS M. 1166 (fig. 29)

Niort**Musée Bernard d'Agesci**

Writing Tablet (fig. 174)

Oxford**Bodleian Libraries**

MS Ashmole 1523 (fig. 123)

MS Auct. D. 2. 2 (figs. 125, 142)

MS Bodl. 264 (fig. 190)

MS Bodl. 270b (figs. 8, 9, 77, 89, 94)

MS Bodl. 953 (fig. 122)
MS Douce 104 (figs. 156-7)
MS Douce 118 (fig. 121)
MS Douce 131 (fig. 134)
MS Douce 195 (fig. 163)
MS Douce 211 (fig. 20)
MS Douce 366 (figs. 147-8)
MS Douce 381 (fig. 25)
MS Laud Lat. 84 (fig. 154)
MS Laud Misc. 165 (fig. 98)
MS Liturg. 198, pt. I (fig. 137)
MS Rawlinson Q. b. 6 (fig. 184)
MS Selden Supra 57 (figs. 40, 43, 49)

Paris

Assemblée Nationale

MS 1230 (fig. 38)

Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal

MS 3338 (fig. 33)

MS 5209 (fig. 34)

MS 5226 (fig. 39, 42, 48)

Bibliothèque de l'Université de Mons-Hainaut

MS 331/206 (fig. 172)

Bibliothèque Nationale de France

MS Français 119 (fig. 168)

MS Français 120 (fig. 169)

MS Français 156 (fig. 21)

MS Français 376 (fig. 187)

MS Français 380 (fig. 44, 53)

MS Français 606 (fig. 100)

MS Français 9221 (fig. 23)

MS Français 12576 (fig. 170)

MS Français 12577 (fig. 171)

MS Français 12595 (fig. 41)

MS Français 20118 (fig. 189)

MS Français 24391 (fig. 46)

MS Latin 10525 (fig. 11)

MS NAL 3093 (fig. 188)

Musée du Louvre

Mirror Case (fig. 177)

Philadelphia

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philip S. Collins Collection

MS 1945-65-3 (fig. 52)

Rome

Catacomb of Praetextatus

Arcosolium of Celerina (fig. 18)

Catacomb of St Callixtus

Symbol of the Cross (fig. 107)

Lateran Museum

The Jonah Sarcophagus (fig. 130)

Santa Maria Antiqua

The Jonah Sarcophagus (fig. 131)

Rouen

Bibliothèque Municipale de Rouen

MS 1044 (figs. 115, 116)

Siena

Pinacoteca Nazionale (fig. 24)

Vatican

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

MS Urb. 376 (fig. 191)

Vienna

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MS 1179 (fig. 101)

MS 2554 (fig. 78)

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