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Emotional Ethics in Middle English Literature

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in English

by

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ABSTRACT

Emotional Ethics in Middle English Literature

by

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This dissertation explores Middle English literary texts that consistently portray ethics as a patently emotional affair. The introduction rehashes recent neuroscientific discourses that similarly assert the centrality of emotion in processes of ethical decision-making, as well as other contemporary theoretical and historiographic accounts of emotion. Chapter 1 argues that Middle English rhetorics of righteous and sinful anger played an important role both in sparking the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and in retroactively reevaluating the dangers of uninhibited anger in the uprising's posttraumatic wake. The second chapter discusses Middle English discourses on dread that suggest that devotees in late medieval England conceptualized the ascetic project of dreading well as integral to the ethical project of living well. The third chapter argues that the three successive versions of *Piers Plowman*, as we know them today, contain three strikingly different theologies of love and dread. Rather than reading these as evidence of one man's gradual movement from a theology of dread to one of love, it reimagines the production of *Piers Plowman* as a densely intersubjective affair that engendered a network of differing (and deferring) theologies of love and dread. Chapter 4 turns to the famous Middle English elegy *Pearl*, arguing that the Pearl-maiden does not prompt the dreamer to happily share in her celestial estate, but instead stirs his envy of her heavenly bliss, suggesting that terrestrial devotees ought to work through, rather than eschew, their envy of their celestial loved ones. Chapter 5 focuses on another poem solely attested in Cotton Nero A.x: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. While critics often read Gawain's shame at the

end of the poem as sundering him from his fellow courtiers, I read Gawain's shameful confession to the court as profoundly and successfully reparative of the homosocial, chivalric *habitus* wounded by Gawain's life loving transgression. Moving next to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chapter 6 builds on a scholarly tradition that reads Troilus as a masochistic courtly lover, arguing that, at the poem's conclusion, Troilus spontaneously transforms into a sadistic courtly hater. Since masochistic courtly love and sadistic courtly hate constitute different responses to social privilege, the courtly lover always already possesses the potential to morph suddenly into a courtly hater, as does Chaucer's Troilus when he channels his disappointment at having lost Criseyde's love into vengeful, militarized violence against any and all Greeks. Finally, by way of conclusion, I discuss some of the pedagogical implications of my research into Middle English ideologies of emotion, focusing particularly on the vexed question of how one might ethically teach medieval cultures of compassion.

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INTRODUCTION:

EMOTIONAL ETHICS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

I. EMOTION AT THE ROOT OF ETHICAL DECISION

The past few decades have seen exponential advances in our understanding of the human brain, particularly its role in the complex, psychosomatic processes that we call emotions (i.e., proto-voluntary, psychosomatic judgments about our relationship to others).¹ Antonio Damasio influentially argues that these advances point toward a flaw in post-Enlightenment philosophy that he calls “Descartes’ Error.” Descartes errs, according to Damasio, in categorically separating mind from body, assigning reason to the former and emotion to the latter (*Descartes’ Error* 247–52). Damasio’s somatic-marker hypothesis (SMH) constitutes an attempt to correct Descartes’ error by mapping the process through which emotions inform our ostensibly rational decisions (Ibid. 173–75). Reason involves the prefrontal cortex, which is uniquely massive in human beings, but it also involves the closely interrelated limbic system, which is integral to both triggering emotions and remembering emotional experience. Since our engorged prefrontal cortex is a relatively recent evolutionary development compared to the limbic system, which all mammals have, it is apparent that reason did not evolve independently of emotion; more properly (at least from an evolutionary perspective), reason grew

¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines emotion “as any strong mental or instinctive feeling, as pleasure, grief, hope, fear, etc., deriving esp. from one’s circumstances, mood, or relationship with others” (3a.). Although this definition is helpful in shoring up our colloquial use of the word, the terms “mental,” “instinctive,” “feeling” and “mood” render it too vague for my purposes here. My definition modifies the *OED*’s with recourse to my current, admittedly limited understanding of emotion. I revise the *OED*’s “mental or instinctive” as “psychosomatic,” since emotion is both mental and bodily and therefore deconstructs any mind-body binary. Following Martha Nussbaum’s neo-stoic philosophy, moreover, I cast emotions as non-cognitive judgments (*Upheavals of Thought* 1–19). I call them “proto-voluntary,” rather than “involuntary,” to suggest that emotions, along with cognitions, (i.e., thoughts) constitutes, rather than opposes, volition (i.e., desire animated decision-making).

out of emotion (Ibid. 191–96). According to the SMH, emotional experience facilitates neuroplasticity (i.e., the multifaceted mechanism through which the brain changes itself).² Since neuroplasticity is memory’s modus operandi, emotional memories tend to be more vivid and durable than others (Schacter 192–217). Though they were unequipped with terms like neuroplasticity, pre-Cartesian thinkers were well aware of emotion’s importance to memory and taught each other to strategically utilize emotion to aid memory-acquisition (Carruthers 387, 392). By revealing that reason is rooted in emotional memory, then, Damasio’s somatic-marker hypothesis does not just correct Descartes’ error, but also hearkens back to premodern psychologies less invested in a rigid, reason-emotion binary.

In constructing the SMH, Damasio draws famously from the controversial case of Phineas Gage, a nineteenth-century railroad worker who suffered massive damage to his brain’s left frontal lobe when an iron rod accidentally shot through his skull (*Descartes Error* 3–33). Though Gage miraculously survived the ordeal, his disposition (according to some witnesses) was greatly altered as a result. Those who knew Gage before the accident went as far as to lament that the coarse, vulgar man who recovered therefrom was “no longer Gage” (Ibid. 8–10). When he lost his frontal lobe, Gage seems to have lost with it his social graces, at least temporarily. He suffered trauma, however, to the limbic system (i.e., the area of the brain that we usually associate with emotional memory), not his prefrontal cortex (i.e., the area of the brain we usually associate with cognition) (Ibid. 31–33). According to Damasio, Gage’s injury and its repercussions suggest that rational processes depend upon emotional processes. Hence, when Gage damaged his left frontal lobe, he did not simply become unemotional; he also became irrational. Some of Damasio’s critics not unfairly accuse him of

² For a detailed and accessible introduction to neuroplasticity, see Doidge xv, 97–98.

over-hyping Gage's post-accident social dysfunction for the sake of proving the SMH (MacMillan 72–87). In so doing, they often point out that first-hand accounts of Gage's behavior when he worked as a stagecoach driver in Chile years after his accident do not note any significant social dysfunction (MacMillan 302–04). If Gage's story is a testament to emotion's constitutive role in decision-making, it is also a testament to the neuroplastic brain's fantastic capacity to restructure its own neuronal networks in the wake of trauma (Doidge 215–44). Nevertheless, we need not throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water because emotional memory is not necessarily reason's *sine qua non*. Damasio has used Gage's case, along with many other contemporary cases that he has studied more directly, to effectively demonstrate that emotion and reason are usually *not* independent processes (even though they utilize different areas of the brain) and therefore should *not* be perceived in binary opposition to each other. Even though Gage was able to adapt to his posttraumatic circumstance, the testaments of those who saw his post-accident self as “no longer Gage” certainly suggest that emotion generally plays an important role in the decisions that make us recognizably ourselves.

Fear, for example, is integral to everyday decision-making. In fear, an organism not only anticipates an aversive future, but also learns to avoid the factors precipitating a (potentially) traumatic situation (*OED*, s.v., “fear”). Evolution has molded the fear response (often called the fight-or-flight response) to provide us heightened mental acuity and a burst of immediately disposable physical energy when we believe ourselves imperiled. In fact, a 2006 study conducted at Rice University found that subjects who had been artificially frightened through intranasal exposure to human fear hormones performed cognitive tasks more quickly and accurately than those who had not (Chen). Physical manifestations of fear, moreover,

facilitate interpersonal cooperation by alerting others of impending danger (Tomkins 235–240). During a fear response, the amygdala—one of two almond-shaped clusters of nuclei in the medial temporal lobe of the brain—trigger the release of a cocktail of hormones and neurotransmitters, including cortisol, epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine, which in turn modulate heart rate, respiration and metabolism (LeDoux, “The Emotional Brain” 727–28). Beyond these short-term effects, fear expedites the process through which we assess the world thereafter. Memories recorded when the amygdalae are in use are more vivid and durable than those recorded under normal circumstances (Schacter 192–217). Sadly, this accounts for the intense nature of the flashbacks experienced by people suffering from PTSD.³ However much emotional memory can mar posttraumatic life, functional amygdalae are vital to everyday decision-making. “The modulatory role of the amygdala,” according to Daniel Schacter,

is linked to its role in determining how various hormones affect memory. Studies of rats and other animals have shown that injecting a stress-related hormone such as epinephrine (which produces high arousal) immediately after an animal learns a task enhances subsequent memory for that task. This strongly implies that some of the beneficial effects of emotional arousal on memory are due to the release of stress-related hormones by a highly emotional experience. (215)

From an evolutionary perspective, our heightened ability to record fearful memories makes a fair amount of sense. After all, under normal circumstances (notwithstanding PTSD, in which trauma is remembered all-too-well), a detailed recollection of the events that previously cul-

³ PTSD is largely the malfunctioning, or over-functioning, of the system through which our emotional memories of fearful past experiences constantly inform our decisions.

minated in an unfortunate scenario facilitates the crucial task of avoiding similar situations in the future (LeDoux, “The Role of the Amygdala” 291–300).

As he does with the records detailing Gage’s trauma and its psychic effects, Damasio, like most neurologists, cultivates hypotheses by observing patients with dysfunctional brains. One such patient, “S,” suffers from Urbach-Wiethe disease, which has entirely calcified both of her amygdalae. Consequently, S is unable to experience fear, recognize it on another’s face or express it on her own. While we often use the adjective “fearless” positively to celebrate bravery, the effects of S’s actual fearlessness, as described by Damasio, are not altogether positive: “The fearlessness of her nature has prevented her from learning, throughout her young life, the significance of the unpleasant situations that all of us have lived through. As a result she has not learned the telltale signs that announce possible danger and possible unpleasantness” (*The Feeling of What Happens* 66). S exemplifies Damasio’s longstanding claim that emotion plays a crucial role in rational decision-making:

The inability to make sound social judgments, based on previous experience of situations that are or are not conducive to one’s welfare has important consequences for those who are so affected. [. . .] These individuals cannot protect themselves against simple and not-so-simple social risks and are thus more vulnerable and less independent than we are. Their life histories testify to this chronic impairment as much as they testify to the paramount importance of emotion in the governance not just of simple creatures but of humans as well. (Ibid. 67)

If victims of PTSD suffer too much from fear, victims of Urbach-Wiethe disease, like S, do not suffer enough. Through S’s story and others, Damasio demonstrates how fear fundamentally informs our capacity to make ostensibly rational decisions in day-to-day life.

Fear, of course, is not the only emotion to do so. For better or worse, acutely painful moments of shame condition us to avoid their precipitating factors in the future. Wonder, according to Plato, is the only beginning of philosophy and therefore the affective impetus behind a conscious decision to deliberately analyze world (66). Envy feeds into revolutionary decisions to protest plutocrats hoarding of wealth, as well as reactionary decisions to deny the poor state-sponsored welfare. As Freud knew when conceiving the pleasure principle, our past experiences of bliss or pleasure, which behaviorists might call positive reinforcement, powerfully direct our decisions, though not without being tempered by both the reality principle and the death drive.⁴ For drug addicts, as for mystics, memories of past bliss (and the pain that marks its absence) fade imperceptibly into decisions designed to attain future bliss. If we define love generally as an attraction to the good, moreover, it can be thought of as the basis of a host of rational decisions, despite the fact that Western discourses (especially discourses on courtly love composed long before Descartes' error) often characterize love as a cessation of reason.⁵ On the other hand, hate—i.e., repulsion from evil (whatever that is)—also breeds decision.

Anger is particularly important to this project, which is devoted to Middle English treatments of emotional ethics, since anger most obviously proves ethics to be a thoroughly emotional affair. Anger, according to Aristotle's seminal definition, occurs when the subject believes herself or her friends to have been wronged and desires compensation for that wrong (36–39). Following Aristotle, Western definitions of anger tend to presuppose an ethical dis-

⁴ For Freud's work on the pleasure principle, reality principle and death drive see *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

⁵ See, for example, Marie de France who writes: "Such is the nature of love that no one under its sway can maintain command over reason" (56).

inction between right and wrong, or at least the subject's capacity to make judgments based on belief in such a distinction (*OED*, s.v. "anger"). Anger marks a moment of ethical frustration that proves the subject has an ethical code to be violated. It is therefore inextricably bound up with ethics—the branch of philosophy devoted to determining right and wrong conduct and therefore the branch of philosophy most closely concerned with decision-making. From an evolutionary perspective, anger anticipates ethics, since our brain's emotional systems evolved long before the relatively recent prefrontal cortex, which is necessary for complex ethical reasoning (Panksepp 187–205). Anger is proto-ethical, though this visceral older brother of ethics is not moving away from home any time soon; hence Western philosophy's long preoccupation with anger management. The fundamental contention of this dissertation is that all emotions play a role in ethical decision-making, though it pays careful attention to anger, dread, bliss, envy, wonder, shame, love and hate.

Just as Damasio blames Descartes for proliferating spurious mind-body, emotion-reason dualisms, he celebrates Baruch Spinoza, "who saw ethics, the structure of the state, and the law as means for individuals to achieve the natural balance expressed in joy" (*Looking for Spinoza* 174). Indeed, Spinoza's *Ethics* is particularly preoccupied with the origin and nature of the affects, which he defines as "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections" (70). It must be noted, however, that Spinoza too was prone to producing an intellect-emotion binary, situating the former as the driving force behind human freedom (*Ibid.* 160–82), and the latter as the driving force behind human bondage (*Ibid.* 113–59). Though he is not simply an opponent of Cartesian dualisms, Spinoza does recognize the inextricable connection between ethics and affects. Following Spinoza, Damasio argues that

ethics, like reason, is rooted in emotion. Imagining a “dire scenario” in which “humanity had dawned with a population deprived of the ability to respond toward others with sympathy, attachment, embarrassment, and other social emotions that are known to be present in simple form in some nonhuman species” (*Looking for Spinoza* 156–57), Damasio writes:

I suspect that in the absence of social emotions and subsequent feelings, even on the unlikely assumption that other intellectual abilities could remain intact, the cultural instruments we know as ethical behaviors, religious beliefs, laws, justice, and political organization either would not have emerged, or would have been a very different sort of intelligent construction. A word of caution, however. I do not mean to say that emotions and feelings single-handedly caused the emergence of those cultural instruments. First, the neurobiological dispositions likely to facilitate the emergence of such cultural instruments include not just emotions and feelings, but also capacious personal memory that allows humans to construct a complex autobiography, as well as the process of extended consciousness that permits close interrelations among feelings, self, and external events. Second, a simple neurobiological explanation for the rise of ethics, religion, law, and justice is hardly viable. It is reasonable to venture that neurobiology will play an important role in future explanations. But in order to comprehend these cultural phenomena satisfactorily we need to factor in ideas from anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and evolutionary psychology, as well as findings from studies in the fields of ethics, law and religion. (Ibid. 159–60)

I include this lengthy quotation, substantially more proviso than hypothesis, to demonstrate that Damasio neither advocates neurobiological essentialism, nor argues that ethics grew out of emotion alone. He does, however, present an extremely convincing argument that ethical

processes cannot be said to be either a purely cognitive or purely emotional. Rather, ethics always already constitutes the process through which emotion and cognition mutually inform volition.

As we have seen, emotions do not simply “happen” in the limbic system. They are the result of exceedingly complex interactions between the limbic system, the prefrontal cortex and the myriad bodily processes regulated therefrom. Contra post- (and pre-) Cartesian philosophies that conceptualize human subjectivity as centered on the brain’s rational faculties, which are effected (but not constituted) by emotions, this dissertation presupposes the impossibility of a purely rational subject who has conquered emotion, because the decisions we make are rooted in emotional experience (barring aberrant cases such as those of S and Gage). Though Damasio is right to hold Descartes responsible for proliferating mind-body, emotion-reason dualisms, Descartes did not invent these erroneous binaries. Indeed, the fantasy of a purely rational subject bereft of all fear and anger was a favorite of the ancient stoics (Sellars 118, 142). On the other hand, the stoics arguably recognized the emotional nature of ethics more thoroughly than most; they were certainly forerunners of anger management.⁶ Just as Decartes’ error is older than Descartes, Damasio’s correction is older than Damasio. In fact, this dissertation demonstrates that Middle English literature is deeply invested in thinking through emotion’s constitutive role in ethical practice.

The Middle English texts that I examine herein conceive of ethical decision-making as a necessarily emotional affair and therefore conceive of decision-making as a matter of willfully integrating emotion and cognition in a never-ending quest to act ethically. These texts are both pedagogical (i.e., they offer to subjects an ideology of emotion and a concomi-

⁶ Martha Nussbaum’s neo-stoicism attempts to revive stoicism’s interest in emotion without endorsing its more apathetic ideals. See *Upheavals of Thought* 89–138.

tant ascetic program for emoting well) and meta-pedagogical (i.e., they teach subjects that emotional experience is always a “learning experience,” insofar as it always reveals something about the subject’s relation to others). These texts not only convey how and why a subject ought to manage or repress certain emotions and solicit or perform others; they also teach subjects that deliberate, cognitive engagement with both positive and negative emotions is integral to ethical decision-making. In the next three sections, I step back and briefly survey three of the scholarly movements—affect theory, theories of affective piety and history of emotion—in which this dissertation participates with an eye toward the profound impact that their foundational texts have had on my own writing and thinking these past few years.

II. AFFECT THEORY

Neuroscience is far from the only discipline to make advances in our understanding of emotion in recent decades. During its affective turn, critical theory has repeatedly reconceptualized the role of bodily experience—alternately called emotion, affect and feeling—in complex processes of acculturation.⁷ Brian Massumi, for one, makes much of the half-second lag between actually events and our experience of them (*Parables for the Virtual* 28–34). During this half-second, the brain interprets bodily experience in language. I convulse upon seeing a spider first; then, during the “missing half-second,” my brain retroactively interprets the sensory data and my initial reaction into language: “I see a spider and jump.” Due to the missing half-second, I experience the jump and narration simultaneously. Affect, for Massumi, constitutes our “prepersonal” experience prior to its capture in language, as well as the residual affect that always evades linguistic capture (*Ibid.* 27–28). Although he

⁷ For helpful overviews of the affective turn see Clough, as well as Gregg and Seigworth.

does not acknowledge it, Massumi draws upon the apophatic rhetoric of mysticism to describe in language conceptualizations of a prelinguistic, virtual reality not unlike Kant's noumena. Massumi, like the mystics, blends metaphysics and empiricism in an effort to inject wonder into everyday life. His definition of affect, however, cannot easily escape the paradoxes that inevitably accompany language meant to signify ineffable referents.⁸

Teresa Brennan offers a less paradoxical definition of "affect" as "the physiological shift accompanying a judgment," thereby drawing our attention (as does Martha Nussbaum) to affect's evaluative nature (5). Brennan's more central point, however, is that affect is by its very nature transmissible: "The transmission of affect means that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the 'individual' and the 'environment'" (6). Refreshingly, Brennan is quick to recognize that premodern subjects were quite able to recognize affect's transmissible nature, though they often attributed groupified affects to angels, demons, the Holy Spirit or the Devil (21–22). Like Brennan, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick draws on psychoanalytic treatments of the affects to highlight their interpersonal character (1–27). In a chapter of particular importance to this dissertation, Sedgwick uses infant psychology to argue that shame is not originally "about prohibition," but rather a visual plea for an other to reopen a communicative circuit the shamed subject judges to be imperiled (93–122). Later in life, of course, shame becomes inextricably bound with our ever-changing judgments about what behavior is or is not socially acceptable in a given situation. It is, of course, important to not over-celebrate shame, since contemporary (as well as medieval) heterosexist societies use(d) shame to painfully stigmatize counter-normative desires and behaviors (Neisen). Not only do such societies prohibit queer behavior, they, even more per-

⁸ For a thorough dismantling of Massumi's thinking on affect see Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique."

fidiously, raise subjects to subordinate queer desires to social expectations. In medieval and modern societies, however, shame also functions as a recuperative call for compassion. Sedgwick's intervention in shame studies is helpful insofar as it reminds us that, in post-infantile life, shame is about both prohibition and compassion. As we will see, the Middle English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*) is acutely aware of shame's importance to intra- and inter-personal communication; or, more specifically, the communicative process through which shame sutures self to society.

Finally, Sianne Ngai draws our attention to “ugly feelings” including envy, anxiety, irritation and contempt (1–37). These affects are less exhausting and therefore potentially more long lasting than rage or terror (6–7). Although Ngai's primary project is to analyze, rather than recuperate, ugly feelings, many of her readings beautifully illustrate that affects like envy or irritation are often produced by uneven and unethical social hierarchies, but retrospectively interpreted as character deficiencies.⁹ Scholars of the Middle Ages have recently begun bringing Ngai's insights to bear on Middle English texts. Andrew Cole argues that Margery Kempe seeks out worldly shame as spiritually valuable experience (*Literature and Heresy* 155–82); likewise, Jessica Rosenfeld argues that Kempe's autobiography records her making positive, devotional use of envy (“Envy and Exemplarity”). Continuing their work, my chapter on fear explores the considerable authority Kempe derives from performing dread.

III. THEORIES OF AFFECTIVE PIETY

Long before the critical theory's affective turn, the term “affective piety” was developed to describe a mode of Christian devotion centered on willful meditations on Christ's life, partic-

⁹ See, for example, her chapters on envy (126–73) and irritation (174–208).

ularly his infancy and suffering on the cross, which greatly influenced European culture during the Middle Ages.¹⁰ R.W. Southern famously argues that the eleventh century saw a switch in Western European Christianity from devotion to a heroic, warrior Christ, to a more emotional devotion to a contorted, suffering Christ or an adorably sweet, baby Christ, both of which remained mainstays in visual art throughout the high and late Middle Ages (219–58). More recently, however, Anglo-Saxonists, as well as scholars of late antique Christianity, have argued that the various modes of affective devotion that Southern argues to have grown out of the eleventh century and largely invented by Anselm of Canterbury were quite present in earlier Christian cultures.¹¹ Through the interminable retrogression accomplished by an increasingly backwards-looking series of revisions to the Southern hypothesis, microhistory creeps back towards the grand narratives it was designed to replace.

In a related revision to the Southern hypothesis, a long tradition of feminist scholars including Clarissa Atkinson, Carolyn Walker Bynum and Sarah McNamer argue that affective piety was an essentially female endeavor. Although Atkinson does not argue against the Southern hypothesis, her important study on *The Book of Margery Kempe* recognizes the potentially empowering nature of affective piety for women who practiced it (129–56). Bynum, of course, ran considerable distance with this hypothesis in both *Jesus as Mother* and *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, both of which demonstrate that women were able to subvert patriarchal discourses that associate masculinity with the spirit and femininity with the body by empha-

¹⁰ This section is deeply indebted to Wikipedia’s “affective piety” entry (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affective_piety), authored by Mary Agnes Edsall. I recognize scholarly citations of Wikipedia entries are generally frowned upon. Having expended no small amount of effort, however, I have not been able to discover an equally comprehensive and thoughtful survey of the scholarship on affective piety in any more traditional source.

¹¹ See, for example, Allen J. Frantzen’s “Spirituality and Devotion in the Anglo-Saxon Penitentials.”

sizing the theological significance of Christ's maternal carnality. By fasting, Bynum argues, women situated themselves as empty vessels readily filled by divinity in a mystical union with God. Despite the fact that misogynists associated women with absence, by owning this association some medieval women were able to speak from a position of absolute, transcendental presence by ventriloquizing God (*Holy Feast and Holy Fast* 208–18).

Following Bynum, Sarah McNamer radically revises Southern's hypothesis of the Anselmian origins of affective piety, arguing that the genre's foremost text, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (which was translated into Middle English over and over again) was potentially developed by Benedictine nuns (*Affective Meditation* 58–85; 110–15). Michelle Karnes, however, disputes McNamer's hypothesis (not to mention those of Bynum and her followers), arguing "affective meditation is at its foundation neither female- nor lay-oriented" (12).¹² Less controversially, McNamer helpfully demonstrates that many Middle English devotional texts functioned as "emotion scripts"—"the loosely affiliated cultural prescripts that aid in establishing and maintaining [. . .] 'emotional communities'"—designed to facilitate deliberate performances of devout compassion (*Affective Meditation* 11–14). This dissertation carries on McNamer's important work by analyzing Middle English emotion scripts that solicit emotions other than compassion, including anger, dread, envy, shame, love and hatred. On the other hand, it also explores how Middle English texts teach their audience, not only to manage, but to learn *from* emotions.

Although massively influential and important, Bynum and her followers have been justly critiqued for their depiction of affective piety was an essentially female endeavor. In her article "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," for example, Kathleen

¹² Karnes casts doubt on McNamer's hypothesis in *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 206, n. 49.

Biddick accuses Bynum of essentializing woman and paying scant attention to the always-complex interactions between gender difference and other nodes of social difference including class, race and religion (397). Likewise, Sharon Farmer argues that class differences affected medieval social practice as much as, if not more than, gender differences (153–171). Amy Hollywood, moreover, systematically argues that the binary Bynum constructs between an affective devotion practiced by women and an intellectual devotion practiced by men is profoundly deconstructable:

when men's and women's religious writings are looked at together, we see that men and women engage in often intense relationships of mutual influence, debate, and appropriation. As a result, any clearly marked distinction between men's and women's spirituality almost immediately breaks down (although the tendency for men to want women's spirituality to take certain forms remains constant at least throughout the Middle Ages and no doubt well into the modern period). ("Feminist Studies" 371)

Both Hollywood and Nicholas Watson illustrate that the fourteenth-century hermit Richard Rolle, whose works include *The Fire of Love*, *The Melody of Love*, *Against Lovers of the World* and two English *Meditations on the Passion*, evinces all of the tropes that Bynum attribute to female affective piety (Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* 106–08). It should be noted, however, that Bynum never advocated an absolute divide between modes of female and male devotion in the Middle Ages and her model remains a powerful explanatory schema for a great deal of medieval devotional literature (*Jesus as Mother* 134–35).

Finally, David Aers counters what he calls Bynum's "empowerment hypothesis" (i.e., her theory that women empowered themselves by "owning" initially misogynistic discourses

aligning them with absence and carnality), with his “disempowerment hypothesis,” which holds that affective devotional practices actually disempowered women and the laity in general (“The Humanity of Christ” 30–34). There is validity in Aers’ “disempowerment hypothesis,” but, like any radical revision, it runs the risk of replacing one reductive argument for another. Aers’ hypothesis, for Watson, threatens a “collapse of Bynum’s model of female resistance into generalized model of compliance to make space for a picture of Lollard heroism that seems as idealizing as what it replaces” (“Desire for the Past” 68). In other words, by making affective piety a mode of containment, rather than subversion (it is, of course, potentially both), Aers leaves us mired in a pessimistic historiography centered on conflict, not cooperation, despite the considerable amount of intra- and inter-gender cooperation that produced the cultural assemblage to which we refer to today as affective piety.¹³ His disempowerment hypothesis, moreover, indulges in as much gender essentialism as the empowerment hypothesis it attempts to negate.

Although Bynum and Aers may err in essentializing gender and, in so doing, reducing affective piety to an essentially female experience, they are certainly correct that gender politics are legible in any work of affective piety. Sometimes affective piety empowered women, as it no doubt does in the theological autobiography of Julian of Norwich and the auto-hagiography of Margery Kempe. Sometimes churchmen like Nicholas Love relegate affective piety to the project of fabricating docile, un-thinking laity too busy meditating about Jesus to realize the knowledge-power being withheld from them (225).¹⁴ The medieval con-

¹³ For a critique of New Historicism’s fascination with subversion and containment see Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love* 75–76.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the social conservatism of Love’s vernacular theology Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England.”

struction of affective piety, therefore, is a story of subversion and containment, as well as one of struggle between and among men and women. On the other hand, it is also a story of cooperation and mutual admiration between and among men or women. In what follows, I try to focus on the latter story, not because the former is inaccurate, but because it has been so carefully told by so many influential scholars. I do not, however, entirely abandon the notion of subversion and containment, but instead try to think beyond this stagnant dialectic by introducing a careful consideration of enjoyment's role in affective piety. This project is of course inspired by the scholarship and mentorship of L.O. Aranye Fradenburg (*Sacrifice Your Love* 75–76).

IV. HISTORY OF EMOTION

Historiography, like neuroscience and critical theory, has also seen a turn toward studying emotion in the early twenty-first century (Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History.”) Much of the early work in historiography's turn toward emotion is indebted to William M. Reddy's concept of emotive utterance. To J.L. Austin's distinction between constative utterances (i.e., those that describe reality or alternate realities, e.g. “It was a dark and stormy night”) and performative utterances (i.e., those that make something happen, e.g. “I now pronounce you husband and wife”), Reddy adds emotives, (i.e., expressions of emotion through the use of language; or, more generally, attempts to interpret something that is observable to no other actor, e.g., “That spider frightens me”) (104, 128). For Reddy, emotives lie somewhere in between constatives and performatives: they attempt to describe extant emotion, but, in so doing, they also change, build, manage, hide and intensify these emotions (319–30). Neither entirely descriptive, nor entirely performative, emotives deconstruct any holistic constative-performative binary. Emotives are neither simply *a posteriori* descriptions of

emotion, nor *a priori* productions of emotion; they can be either and more often fall somewhere in between, which makes a fair amount of sense, given the human brain's constant project of integrating emotion and cognition into ethical action. Following Reddy, Fiona Somerset demonstrates that medieval mystics like Richard Fitzralph ascribed a "different truth-value" to "excitative speech" (i.e., speech intended to express and/or stir emotion), holding it less obligated to accuracy than less emotive, constative utterances ("Emotion" 296–97).¹⁵ Although Fitzralph does so to get himself out of hot water with the papacy, his theory of excitative speech is consonant with a great deal of devotional discourse written under substantially less duress including that of Richard Rolle and Margery Kempe.

Barbara Rosenwein, moreover, develops the concept of "emotional communities" (i.e., "social groups whose members adhere to the same valuations of emotions and their expression") ("Problems and Methods" 1). The concept of emotional communities is of central importance to this dissertation. The Middle English texts upon which it focuses are profoundly interested in imagining, forming, maintaining and castigating various emotional communities. My primary project, however, is not to represent medieval emotional communities by speculating about how these texts made historical subjects feel. Of course, some Middle English texts tempt us to engage in such speculation more than others. For example, *Ancrene Wisse*—a rule for anchoresses—often uses imperative verbs to instruct a second-person addressee how she should or should not feel.¹⁶ On the other hand, the vast majority of Middle English texts are not so explicitly designed to codify an emotional community. In addition to representing and constructing a discrete emotional community, Middle English literature fre-

¹⁵ For a fuller account of Fitzralph theory, Somerset, "Excitative Speech."

¹⁶ See Chapter 2.

quently stages the moments of conflict and cooperation that occur when subjects already belonging to several extant and overlapping emotional communities come together to create a new emotional community. That is, after all, an accurate assessment of what occurs at the moment in which Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims decide to band together in play. As Derek Pearsall notes, "Chaucer [. . .] makes it almost impossible to talk about the 'historical' audience of *The Canterbury Tales* on the basis of internal evidence" (*The Canterbury Tales* 295). However true that may be, while reading Chaucer's great mennipean satire, it is profoundly difficult to resist imagining the early audience of *The Canterbury Tales* as resembling the Canterbury pilgrims themselves: a heterogeneous assemblage of subjects from all walks of life drawn together by a common love of fiction.

Piers Plowman too is an instructive example of the difficulties that attend the task of using Middle English literary texts to represent the medieval emotional communities that they grew out of and/or produced. Surviving in over fifty manuscripts, *Piers Plowman* was among the most popular poems in late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century England. Modern scholars have reconstructed three versions of the poem (A, B and C), which are often taken as a single author's drafts.¹⁷ As will become abundantly clear over the course of this dissertation, these major versions of the poem imagine, critique and construct radically different emotional communities. *Piers Plowman*'s early audience was neither a single emotional community, nor three discrete emotional communities. Instead, the poem's many manuscripts express a textual plurality much more complex than our three modern versions; one produced by a host of scribes, redactors and bowdlerizers in addition to *Piers Plowman*'s

¹⁷ For a recent critique of this view (particularly regarding the validity of modern editions of B) see Warner, *The Lost History of Piers Plowman*. See also my discussion of *Piers Plowman* in Chapter 2.

original author(s).¹⁸ If we cannot reconstruct the manner in which *Piers Plowman* brought its medieval audience together, we also cannot simply ignore the question of emotional communities when discussing the poem, especially since scholars have demonstrated the dramatic extent to which *Piers Plowman* resoundingly self-identifies as “public poetry” (Middleton, “The Audience and Public”). Indeed, the poem begins with the dreamer witnessing a “fair field of folk” commonly read to represent Christendom and continues to depict myriad emotional communities melting into each other throughout all of its versions. When studying *Piers Plowman*, there is a nearly irresistible urge (at least for me) to speculate about how the poem expresses its author’s feelings and generated those of its earliest audience. As Stephanie Trigg compellingly argues, we need not renounce such urges, though we should subject them to the same critical scrutiny that we apply to *Piers Plowman*:

[T]wo-fold attention to medieval emotions and the difficulties and pleasures of reading medieval emotions [. . . has] the virtue of drawing attention to the way that aesthetic and affective judgments are made. Langland’s writing—especially in the doubled and tripled fragments of parallel texts and revisions—is the unstable product of changing emotions and the elusive complexities of poetic form. (“Langland’s Tears” 45)

Following Trigg, my foremost concern below is to explore the poem’s treatment of emotional ethics, which shaped its early audience’s emotional judgments and ethical actions, just as it might shape ours (if we let it).

¹⁸ For a skeptical reading of “the Langland myth” (i.e., the canonical belief that one man, William Langland, wrote three successive drafts of *Piers Plowman*, accurately represented by modern editions of A, B and C see C. David Benson, *Public Piers Plowman* 3–42. For a critique of Benson’s critique, see Lawrence Warner’s scathing review of *Public Piers Plowman*.”

This dissertation explores how Middle English literary texts teach their audience, which includes us, to practice an emotional ethics. Somewhere between emotion scripts and premodern affect theories, the literary texts that I analyze in this study are all pedagogical in nature, though they do not always tell their audience directly how to feel in a given situation. Instead of privileging one set of emotions over another, they treat emotions as embodied judgments pertaining to certain situations (always in reference to an other, Other, or others) that help us make ethical decisions. Indeed, the medieval doctrine of the Seven Deadly Sins only prohibits *certain kinds of* negative emotions, rather than outlawing ugly feelings like anger wholesale. Following Aristotle, pastoral theologians (emblemized in Chaucer's Parson) always leave room for righteous anger (*CT.10.540*). That is not to say that Middle English literary texts fail to recognize the many ways that emotions (especially anger) often cause us to behave in a manner that we later deem profoundly *unethical*. Nevertheless, they do not advocate the stoic belief (or, more properly, fantasy) that the ideal subject experiences neither fear nor anger, but is ruled entirely by reason and rewarded by experiencing only positive emotions. Instead, they conceptualize ethical volition (i.e., decision-making) as a matter of deliberately integrating emotion and cognition.

V. EMOTIONAL ETHICS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE (CHAPTER OUTLINE)

To put the matter anachronistically, this dissertation explores Middle English literary texts designed to endow their audience with a sort of “emotional intelligence,”¹⁹ at least if we understand “intelligence” to mean the capacity to behave ethically while simultaneously con-

¹⁹ Goleman 3–12. According to Goleman's mixed model, “emotional intelligence” is a complex network of competencies involving self-awareness, self-regulation, social skill, empathy and motivation. Although it has gained considerable popularity in both academic and business-oriented circles, the concept of emotional intelligence has met with substantial criticism. See, for example, Locke, “Why Emotional Intelligence is an Invalid Concept.”

ceptualizing a standard of ethical behavior based on social experience. As we will see, Middle English literary texts (de)construct, exemplify and advocate a standard of emotional intelligence, which I call “emotional ethics,” according to which ethical volition is a matter of integrating emotion and cognition. Among other things, then, this dissertation demonstrates that, well before Damasio’s influential and controversial reading of Phineas Gage’s life records, Middle English texts conceptualized emotion at the root of ethical decision.

While medievals were of course unfamiliar with the term “emotional intelligence,” they nevertheless were acutely invested in the ethical project of helping themselves and others cultivate a “healthy” emotional disposition through willful acts—a project that undergirds the modern “emotional intelligence movement.” Of course, any standard of “emotional intelligence,” whether tacit or explicit, is a cultural construct and therefore biased towards the ideals of those with the privilege to construct culture. Indeed, medieval scholastic theologians (not unlike modern theorists of emotional intelligence) jealously guarded their privilege, not only to imply when and where their audience ought to experience a given emotion, but also to define emotion itself, as well as its role in the *psychomachia* of everyday life (Knuuttila 177–255). In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, scholastic theologians such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham increasingly espoused a voluntarist theology according to which emotions are indirectly controllable and, consequently, “one can learn to feel them in a proper manner by forming habits which change the conditions of the passions” (Knuuttila 256–86). For voluntarists, acts of volition are capable not only of managing involuntary emotional reactions, but also of changing the subject’s emotional disposition and, resultantly, her subsequent emotions. In this regard, their ideas live on to this day. Modern psychologists,

for example, often treat phobia by prompting patients to willfully confront feared objects in order to gradually reduce their emotional aversion thereto (Parsons and Rizzo 250–61).

In medieval England, of course, explorations of the relationship between the will and emotion were certainly not the sole province of lofty, Latinate scholastics. With the skyrocketing of literacy rates in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a new brand of devotional literature—Nicholas Watson’s “vernacular theology”—flourished throughout England, much of which directly assesses the extent to which willful acts can dictate one’s emotional disposition.²⁰ The first two chapters of this dissertation explore how Middle English works of vernacular theology (particularly *Piers Plowman*) produce ideologies of anger (in Chapter 1) and dread (Chapter 2) designed to teach subjects to deliberately and carefully use these emotions to pursue ethical behavior. Chapter 1, “Langland’s Wrath: Righteous Anger Management in *The Vision of Piers Plowman*,” shows that the A-text of *Piers Plowman* displays cautious optimism about righteous anger’s capacity to act as an engine of social change, particularly by excluding wrath from a several catalogues of Deadly Sins. By conspicuously eliding sinful wrath and narrating righteous anger, the A-text seems to have acted as a catalyst of one of the largest paroxysms of group anger in English history—the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381—and many have thought that, in its aftermath, Langland revised his poem to recant his position on the urgent need for reform. I argue instead that Langland’s revisions to the B- and C-texts were intended not to deny righteous anger’s necessity, but to clarify the perils of willfully performing it.

Chapter 2, “Better Living through Dread in Middle English Devotional Literature” explores the representations of dread across the versions of *Piers Plowman*, as well as those

²⁰ See Watson, “Introduction: King Solomon’s Tablets” and Gillespie, “Vernacular Theology.”

in Middle English mystical autobiographies, sermons, confession manuals, treatises on prayer, dramas and polemics in order to suggest that medieval England was home to a host of interacting, overlapping and at times competing dread-based emotional communities. Indeed, St. Anselm of Canterbury—the father of affective piety, at least according to the Southern Hypothesis²¹—wrote a meditation to stir up fear that was frequently translated into Middle English and is even cited by Chaucer’s Parson to describe the “anguish” of hell (CT.10.169).²² As Chapter 2 demonstrates, however, medieval preachers did not simply regale the laity with vivid depictions of fire and brimstone in an effort to stir up fear; they also imparted to their audience an elaborate ascetic program for distinguishing between the bad and good fears, eschewing the former and performing the latter.

Chapters 1 and 2 conclude by examining the uncanny resonances between Middle English treatments of anger and fear respectively and postmedieval discourses thereon. Chapter 1 concludes by exploring the rhetoric of righteous anger still at work in the reactionary politics of America’s “Tea Party” movement. Chapter 2 delves deeply into exploring the medieval influence on postmedieval philosophies of fear, dread and anxiety. Intellectual historians often credit Søren Kierkegaard as existential anxiety’s “prime mover.” Arguing against this popular sentiment, I read Kierkegaard, not as the *ex nihilo* inventor of existential anxiety, but as a modern practitioner of a deep-historical, dread-based asceticism. Kierkegaard and the existentialists who followed him participated in a Judeo-Christian tradition of dread-based asceticism, the popularity of which had dwindled, but never completely vanished since

²¹ Against this assumption, McNamer argues that “affective meditation originally was a woman’s genre” 18, 86–115.

²² For Anselm’s *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, see Anselm 221–24. For a discussion of the Middle English translations of Anselm’s text, including Chaucer’s, see Haewaerts 258–69.

the Middle Ages. Following medieval ascetics, modern philosophers like Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre deliberately cultivated and analyzed anxiety in an effort to embody authenticity. By beginning to consider premodern ascetics early existentialists and modern existentialists latter-day ascetics, Chapter 2 conceives of the long history of existential anxiety as an ascetic tradition built around the ethical goal of living better through dread. In the concluding section of Chapter 2, I explore the echoes of John Wycliffe's fear-based political theology in the conservative political theory of Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt. Chapter 3 argues that the three successive versions of *Piers Plowman*, as we know them today, contain three strikingly different theologies of love and dread. Rather than reading these as evidence of one man's gradual movement from a theology of dread to one of love, it reimagines the production of *Piers Plowman* as a densely intersubjective affair that engendered a network of differing (and deffering) theologies of love and dread.

Chapter 4, "Envyng Heavenly Bliss in *Pearl*", and Chapter 5, "Shame, Chivalry and Salvation in *SGGK*" deal with poems from the famous manuscript Cotton Nero A.x, which also contains *Patience* and *Cleanness*. Given the prominence of voluntarist ideas in late medieval England, I understand Cotton Nero A.x as a series of exemplary narratives designed to help their audience willfully construct an ethical emotional disposition. Yet these narratives tend to portray, not characters who un-problematically emote ethically, but ones who struggle to emote well: *Pearl*'s dreamer erratically swings from melancholia, to bliss, to dread, to envy and back to melancholia; characters in *Cleanness* are terrorized for their "unlawful" enjoyment; Jonah learns that patience amounts to willfully enduring anger at God; and Gawain is compelled by a love of his own life, and concomitant fear of losing it, to withhold the green girdle from Bertilak on the third and final day of their "exchange of winnings game,"

though he eventually re-ingratiates himself both to Bertilak and denizens of his own homo-social habitus, Arthur's court, through two public displays of shame.²³ According to these narratives neither positive feelings (bliss, mirth and love), nor uncomfortable feelings (envy, fear, anger and shame) are extraneous bodily conditions to be avoided, obfuscated or repressed. Instead, they are valuable—if potentially dangerous—ecstasies and adversities to be worked through in an effort to achieve a more finely tuned emotional disposition. In compiling these narratives, Cotton Nero A.x vies to teach us, not only how (not) to willfully craft emotional relationships with terrestrial and celestial others, but also that the capacity to emote ethically is not an innate character-trait, but an art-form that we must deliberately cultivate through a lifelong process of trial-and-error. The pedagogical character of these narratives, therefore, accords well with scholastic and voluntarist devotional programs that hold willful acts capable of habituating the passions.

The process of trial-and-error through which Cotton Nero A.x's characters struggle to emote well is nowhere more pronounced than in *Pearl*, much of which is spent detailing either the dreamer's mercurial emotional state or the pearl-maiden's critique thereof. Some critics argue that the dreamer successfully accomplishes the work of mourning over the course of *Pearl* (e.g., Astell, *The Song of Songs* 121). Others read him as obstinately refusing, right up until the end of the poem, to perform an identificatory shift from a melancholic, courtly lover of the pearl-maiden to a universalist, Christian lover of the corporate church (e.g., David Aers, "The Self Mourning"). While in some ways opposed, these two critical strains both presuppose that the pearl-maiden's didactic agenda is to coax the dreamer from a melancholic obsession with his lost love-object to an acceptance of his loss. To the contrary,

²³ For in-depth analyses of the political uses of misogyny in *SGGK*, see Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 107–36; and Schiff, *Revivalist Fantasy*, 72–99.

I argue in Chapter 3 that the dreamer evinces exactly this brand of acceptance in the poem's seventh fitt and that the pearl-maiden subsequently does everything in her power to render the dreamer desirous, even envious, of her existence in a celestial world characterized, ironically enough, by a complete lack of envy. *Pearl*, therefore, powerfully asserts the spiritual utility of envy and grief.

Just as Middle English devotional literature flourished throughout late medieval England (at least until the fifteenth century), a proliferation of chivalric literature likewise disseminated a network of interacting ideologies of emotional ethics. As I mention above, *SGGK* portrays shame as a communicative call for the other to reinstate social bonds the shamed subject judges to be threatened. On the other hand, shame also acts in *SGGK* as negative reinforcement that helps the shamed subject to avoid potentially shameful situations in the future. Hence, *SGGK* portrays shame as a crucial, but fallible, ethical compass, as well as a social cry for help. As McNamer argues, *SGGK* is less interested in insisting that knights ought to fear dishonor before death and more interested in forgiving knights who fail to live up to this exceedingly difficult standard of emotional ethics ("Feeling" 256). Where McNamer argues that *SGGK* prompts its readers to dis-identify with the jaded, paranoid Gawain of the poem's conclusion and instead identify instead with the life-loving courtiers, I focus on the nature in which the acceptance of the life-loving courtiers allows Gawain to identify again as a valued member of the chivalric community. Just as Edward III exercises sovereign decision to transvaluate an ostracized subject into an honored one in the Order of the Garter's origin myth (Trigg, *Shame and Honour* 27), so to do Arthur and his courtiers at the end of *SGGK* (Ibid. 61).

Chapter 6 turns to the transmodern affective assemblage called “courtly love.” It begins with a brief review of psychoanalytic theories of courtly love, particularly those of Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek.²⁴ Both thinkers characterize courtly love as masochism before the invention of that term. In his famous essay on courtly love, Žižek makes use of Gilles Deleuze’s observation in *Coldness and Cruelty* that sadism and masochism do not constitute a binary opposition. For Deleuze, sadism and masochism are both modes of enjoyment that respond to privilege (33–41). The sadist enjoys exercising his privilege by inflicting pain upon others from the perspective of a Godlike arbiter of justice. The masochist, on the other hand, enjoys abandoning his privilege, though in a carefully pre-regulated manner, and suffering at the hands of otherwise abject subjects. It is curious that both Žižek and Jeffery Jerome Cohen use Deleuze to discuss the courtly lover’s masochism without discussing his potential sadism (Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment* 91; Cohen 89) According to Deleuze’s view, however, the masochistic courtly lover always already possesses the prerequisite privilege to simultaneously act as a sadistic courtly hater. The courtly lover, therefore, is never simply a masochist, but always potentially also a sadist. Chapter 6 demonstrates that Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* reveals, through Troilus’ character arc, the swiftness and ease in which passive, masochistic, courtly lovers can become violent, sadistic courtly haters. Chapter 6 concludes by comparing Troilus to a real-life would-be courtly lover turned courtly hater, Elliot Rodger, who terrorized Isla Vista, the small, college-town bordering my university, killing six people and injuring many more, while I was in the midst of writing this dissertation.

²⁴ For Lacan see “Courtly Love as Anamorphosis” in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 139–54, especially 108. For Žižek see “Courtly Love, or Woman as Thing” in *The Metastases of Enjoyment* 89–112, especially 109.

Finally, I conclude by briefly discussing the pedagogical implications of my research into treatments of emotional ethics in Middle English literature. Over the seven years I have spent conceiving of and writing this dissertation and simultaneously teaching courses in English literature, it has become abundantly clear to me that English instructors, whether we acknowledge it or not, are responsible for endowing our students with a culturally constructed standard of emotional intelligence by mediating and (hopefully) facilitating the process through which our students' emotional responses to literature influence their lives as ethical subjects thereafter. I often find myself mildly ashamed, however, while openly discussing my feelings, even in a class on English literature. Perhaps this shame is rooted in the fact that English classes provide the stereotypical environment for discussing emotions and somewhere, deep down, I believe (as do many instructors) that English teachers ought to be opposing this stereotype head-on. We do not "just talk about feelings" in English classes; we investigate what literature can tell us about history and vice versa; we open our students' eyes to uneven distributions of social privilege as they are evinced in literature; we teach students (often implicitly) to actively resist the emotional pull of literary texts and provide in their essays a rational (often suspicious) analysis of said texts. These latter projects are indeed imperative, but cannot be fully undertaken without a consideration of emotion's role in literary experience. Perhaps we should not *just* talk about feelings and ignore political and social issues; but we *should* discuss the myriad ways that literature reveals ethics to be the necessarily emotional practice that it is because, in so doing, we help students learn to deliberately integrate emotion and cognition into ethical decision, just as Middle English authors did centuries ago.

CHAPTER 1:

LANGLAND'S WRATH: RIGHTEOUS ANGER MANAGEMENT IN *THE VISION OF PIERS PLOWMAN*

Anger is the political sentiment par excellence.

— Jean-Luc Nancy (qtd. in Lingis 212)

Angry people aren't interested in logic; they aren't interested in odds; they aren't interested in consequences. When they get angry, they realize the condition that they're in—that their suffering is unjust, immoral, illegal, and that anything they do to correct it, they're justified.

— Malcolm X (107–08)

PRÉCIS

This chapter begins by arguing that theologians, preachers and poets in late medieval England tended to conceptualize anger as morally ambiguous (i.e. potentially either sinful or righteous). In so doing, it closely examines a series of Middle English descriptions of the Deadly Sin wrath. Although these texts obviously depict the affect as spiritually detrimental, they frequently also cite Ps. 4.4 “irascimini et nolite peccare” (“be angry and do not sin”) in zealous approbation of righteous anger. Reading this ambivalence as pedagogical, this chapter suggests that religious writers in late medieval England taught devotees to take anger's judgements both seriously and critically.

“Langland's Wrath” turns next to the A-text of William Langland's alliterative masterpiece *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, which appears to deviate from this traditional ambivalence by twice excluding wrath from catalogues of the Seven Deadly Sins. Despite the fact that the A-text elsewhere characterizes wrath as a grievous threat to sanctity, taken out of context, these lacunae can be read as subtle attempts to cleanse the affect of sinfulness and thereby implicitly endorse righteous anger as a catalyst for positive, social action. In fact, the *Prima epistola iohannis balle*—an insurgent missive, instrumental in sparking the Peasants'

Revolt of 1381—references Langland’s A-text by excluding wrath from a list of Seven Deadly Sins. Given the dramatic consequences of Ball’s allusion to *Piers Plowman*, this chapter posits that certain emendations made to the post-1381 C-text ought to be read as responses to the *Prima epistola*’s Langlandian elision of wrath. Specifically, it argues that Langland purposefully omits Piers’ “pure tene” at a pivotal crux in the C-text—the infamous Pardon-Tearing Scene—in an effort to distance his poem from the concept of righteous anger in the wake of the Rising. Although this gesture is no doubt condemnatory, it constitutes an attempt, not to annihilate the socio-cultural memory of *Piers Plowman*’s influence on the Rising, but to dramatize the manner in which revolutionary discourse (i.e., the A-text’s elision of wrath) all-too-frequently manufactures its own reactionary censor (i.e., the C-text’s excision of Piers’ “pure tene”). Having made this point, “Langland’s Wrath” briefly re-assesses the critical term “affective piety”—which is currently employed almost exclusively to describe an empathic mode meditating on Christ’s passion—in light of the radical theology of anger and action promulgated by Ball and company. Finally, I examine some of the ways that rhetorics of righteous anger continue inflect reactionary politics in modern America.

I. ANGER’S TWO FACES

As we have seen, emotion is neither opposed, nor prior to cognition or knowing (Damasio, *Descartes’ Error* 127–64). On the contrary, it is knowledge “at first blush.” If a taste disgusts me, for instance, I have already judged that which I am eating to be repulsive. There is no guarantee, however, that the “knowledge” manifested by a given emotion is accurate. I suppress the impulse to spit out the disgusting medicine because reason (or, more precisely, my faith in scientific reason) assures me that its effects are actually desirable (*Ibid.* 191–92). Upon retrospect, we often come to consider our initial, emotional judgments to be dispro-

tionately severe, if not downright irrational. Despite our penchant for spouting saccharine fiats to “trust your gut” or “follow your heart,” as a culture we tend to trust visceral judgments considerably less than rational ones.

If emotion is epistemic, anger is juridical. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* defines anger as “the desire, accompanied by [mental and physical] distress, for conspicuous retaliation because of a slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near one” (124). Anger, in other words, is the visceral experience of a breach in justice: a form of *a posteriori* knowledge, necessarily predicated on an *a priori* moral code. I cannot, after all, feel slighted if I am unequipped with a sense of right and wrong. Aristotle’s definition of anger has had a profound impact on Western culture. Like so much Aristotelian thought, St. Thomas Aquinas subsumed it into scholastic theology in the thirteenth-century. For Aquinas, anger is the desire for *just* vengeance (*ST.I-II.47.1–2*). The rub, so to speak, is that affects (which Aquinas calls “passions”) are necessarily subjective and therefore fallible. Consequently, Aquinas reasons that anger itself must be subjected to moral judgment: “ira est bona in quantum ratione regulatur: si autem ordinem rationis excludat, est mala” (*ST.II-II.158.2*; “anger is good in so far as it is regulated by reason, whereas it is evil if it sets the order of reason aside” 1839–40). Anger can be righteous, but only by submitting to reason’s rule (*ratione regulatur*). By depriving anger of juridical sovereignty, Aquinas effectively split the subject, ceding to reason (*ratio*) the censorial task of policing raw affect (*passio*).²⁵ The fact that Western penal codes continue to distinguish crimes committed “in cold blood” from those committed “in

²⁵ Aquinas’ distinction between affect to reason is echoed by Sigmund Freud, who explicitly states in *The Ego and the Id* that: “The ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passions” (25). As a staunch atheist, however, Freud would probably have understood Aquinas’ “reason” as less akin to the ego than the super-ego, which is formed when the father’s external authority is internalized as a persecutory agent of psychic censorship.

the heat of passion” suggests that this rupture has yet to close (Foucault, *History of Madness* 451–53).

Aquinas was by no means alone in his desire to distinguish between righteous and sinful anger. Medieval theologians the likes of Gregory the Great, John Cassian, Alcuin, Hugh of St. Victor and Robert Grosseteste (to name a few) all theorized righteous anger (with varying degrees of enthusiasm).²⁶ Further, short descriptions of “good” anger frequently precede the lengthy diatribes on wrath contained in popular, medieval treatises on the Seven Deadly Sins. Geoffrey Chaucer’s Parson, for instance, proclaims to the Canterbury Pilgrims that:

Ire is in two maneres; that oon of hem is good, and that oother is wikked. / The good
Ire is by jalousie of goodnesse, thurgh which a man is wrooth with wikkednesse and
agayns wikkednesse; and therefore seith a wys man that Ire is bet than pley. / This Ire
is with debonairetee, and it is wrooth withouten bitternesse; nat wrooth agayns the
man, but wrooth with the mysdede of the man, as seith prophete David, “*Irascimini et
nolite peccare*” (CT.X.540–52).

“Good Ire,” according to the Parson, is spurred on by the “jalousie of goodnesse [. . .] agayns wikkednesse”; “bet than pley,” righteous anger is productive, spiritual labor. Through the experience of such anger, the subject participates in the pan-historical struggle of “goodnesse” against evil. Anger “withouten bitternesse,” however, is in constant danger of becoming embittered (Rosenwein 235). Jerome’s translation of Ps. 4.4—to which Paul alludes in

²⁶ For Gregory the Great, see the *Magna moralia* V.xlv.82. For John Cassian, see *De institutis coenobiorum* VIII.VII. For Grosseteste, see the *Dicta* LXXV. For a comparative discussion of the discourses on righteous anger proliferated by Alcuin, Hincmar of Rheims, Hugh of St. Victor and Thomas of Chobham, see Barton 155-156. See also, Althoff 69-74 for an interesting discussion of kingly anger.

Eph. 4.26—neatly encapsulates the ideo-affective straightjacket into which demagogues like the Parson forced their adherents: while the initial imperative (*irascimini*) demands anger, the corollary injunction prohibiting sin (*nolite peccare*) anxiously subordinates affective judgments to doctrinal law.

According to Siegfried Wenzel, Chaucer is likely to have employed a late thirteenth-century, English abbreviation of William Peraldus' *Summa vitiis et virtutibus* in composing the Parson's Tale ("The Source" 351-352). An extensive treatise on the Seven Deadly Sins and their corresponding Seven Heavenly Virtues, Peraldus' *Summa* was widely influential in both France and England during the late Middle Ages. The Dominican Friar Laurent of Orleans drew heavily from it in composing the Old French *Somme le roi*, which was in turn translated into Middle English no less than nine times during the fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries.²⁷ Further, as Wenzel has illustrated, Latin preaching-manuals such as the Franciscan *Fasciculus morum* borrowed both form and content from Peraldus' *Summa* (*Verses in Sermons* 10). While the Parson's Tale, Peraldus' *Summa*, the *Fasciculus morum* and the Middle English *Book of Vices and Virtues* uniformly oppose the Deadly Sin wrath to the definitively passive heavenly virtue patience, they all explicitly acknowledge the existence of righteous anger.²⁸

²⁷ Dan Michel's *Ayenbite of Inwyte*, *The Book of Vices and Virtues* and Caxton's *Royal Book* all belong to this group, *The Book of Vices and Virtues* ix.

²⁸ *Fasciculus morum* explicitly states that "duplex est odium, scilicet virtuosum et viciosum" (II.iii.4 "there are two kinds of wrath, one virtuous, the other a vice" 121). It cites Ps. 4.5 in II.i.12-13). For an in-depth comparison of The Parson's Tale and a thirteenth-century abbreviation of Peraldus' *Summa*, see Wenzel's "The Source of Chaucer's Seven Deadly Sins," 362-64. Finally, *The Book of Vices and Virtues*—a Middle English translation of the Old French *Somme le roi*, which is in turn based of Peraldus' *Summa*—contains the following passage: "vnderstonde wel þat þer is an ire þat goode holy men han aʒenn euele, þat is vertue to destroie wiþ yuele" (fol. 9b), but cites neither Ps. 4.4 nor Eph. 4.26.

Such summary texts were in high demand throughout Chaucer’s England, largely due to the fact that ecclesiastical legislation such as the *Constitutions* of the Council of Lambeth—called by the Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury John Peckham in 1281—mandated that “[q]uilibet sacerdos [. . .] quater in anno dilucide exponat subditis suis Articulos fidei” (qtd. in *The Book of Vices and Virtues* ix–x; “all priests [. . .] clearly expound the articles of the faith to their subjects four times a year”).²⁹ In fact, the *Constitutions* of the 1287 Synod of Exeter go as far as stipulating that every priest of that diocese must have at his disposal a catechism, which would have invariably included a description of the Seven Deadly Sins (Ibid. x).³⁰ Given this social context, it is likely that Chaucer’s fictional account of the Parson zealously indoctrinating his fellow pilgrims on anger’s “two maneres” would have “rung true” to a contemporary audience.

Indeed, his treatment of anger is clearly echoed in an anonymous Middle English sermon, most likely composed during the last quarter of the fourteenth-century (*Middle English Sermons* xxxiv–xlii):

þer be two ires, on gode, a-nother euell. Þe tone comyþ of the flessh, that other of the spryte. Ire þat comyþ of the flessh commenly is euell, oute of the qwyche ire spryngen foure braunches, hert swellynge and dedayne, scorne, stryfyng, and blasfeme. For

²⁹ For a convincing discussion of the manner in which Peckham’s *Constitutions*, which demand a minimum of theological knowledge to be possessed by the laity, differ from the *Constitutions* of Thomas Arundel’s 1407 Synod of Oxford, which seek to limit theological learning in the laity, see Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change” 825–28, as well as Craun 121.

³⁰ Among the most famous of these catechisms is *The Lay Folks’ Catechism*, compiled by John of Thoresby, which is based on Peckham’s 1281 *Constitutions*. Revealingly, the text does not discuss righteous anger in its description of the Deadly Sin wrath.

when an irus man oft tymes hym wrathes, his hert swelles a-non for tene. (*Middle English Sermons* 306)

Like the Parson—who warns his audience that anger causes “the herte of man, by eschawfinge and moevyng of his blood, [to] wexeth so trouble that he is out of alle juggement of resoun” (*CT.X.536*)—the author of this sermon denigrates the affect’s physiological, or fleshy, aspects as sinful, while sacralizing a purely spiritual anger. This provocative notion of a righteous anger “of the spryte,” however, sits somewhat uncomfortably next to points made earlier in the sermon about anger’s capacity to disrupt mental and social stability:

For what man so is irefull, oft he is vnwyse, as Goddes lawe teches, Iacobi ij: “Ira enim viri iusticiam Dei non operatur.” And therefore says Salomon þus, “Cum iracundo noli conuersari—wyth a wrathfull man be not þou conuersante.” For they maken discord and leten men of pease. And also Ysaye ij, “Quiescite ab homine in cuius naribus spiritus eius est—[rest] 3e 3u fro a man in whose nese-thyrilles his spryte is.” (305–06)

The paranoid contention that the subject ought to trust no one “in whose nese-thyrilles his spryte is” (Is. 2.22) is subtly ironized by the aforementioned invocation of a righteous anger “of the spryte.” Somewhat paradoxically, the sermon employs the noun “spryte” to signify both righteous anger’s *modus operandi* (*irascimini*) and the inherent fallibility of embodied judgments (*nolite peccare*). Like the preaching manuals on which it is based, the sermon therefore betrays a deep-seated ambivalence towards anger’s juridical value.

Although the sermon-cycle containing these passages is thoroughly orthodox (*Middle English Sermons* lv n.1), a near-contemporary Wycliffite sermon gives an analogous account of righteous anger:

And þus as Poule biddiþ aftir *men shullen be wrooþ and not synne*, for men shulden hate mennus synne and loue þer kynde and þer uertues. And þus was Crist wraþful, but *þe sunne fill not on his wraþþe*. And þus shulden cristen men be wrooþ, and kepe þre þyngis in þer wraþþe. First þat þer wraþþe shulde not longe laste. [. . .] Þe secounde witt of Poulis wordis biddiþ þat þe sunne of ryȝtwisnesse go not down fro man bi grace, for siche wraþþe þat he haþ. And so þe þridde witt of Poulis wordis biddiþ þat man shulde not be wrooþ, but for þe more lyȝt of loue þat shulde shyne faste in his soule. (*Wycliffite Sermons* I.E49.49–59, emphasis mine).

Unlike the Parson's Tale or the *Fasciculus morum*, the heterodox sermon attributes the phrase “irascimini et nolite peccare” to Paul rather than David. It is, moreover, a good deal more exegetically adventurous than its orthodox counterparts. Like them, however, the Wycliffite sermon insists that anger should be directed at “mennus synne,” not “þer kynde.” Further, like Aquinas, it appoints an alternate psychic agent (the “lyȝt of loue”) to regulate wrath.

Thus far, I have argued that, following Aristotle, medieval Christian ideologues tended to conceptualize anger as an embodied mode of moral judgment. Since they considered impassioned judgments fallible, however, they portrayed subjective anger as morally ambiguous and therefore requiring a supplementary psychic agency to evaluate its juridical claims (i.e., Aquinas' *ratio*, the Parson's “debonairete,” the orthodox sermon's “spryte” and the Wycliffite Sermon's “lyȝt of loue”). Although they differ considerably in particulars, taken together, the aforementioned examples suggest that “righteous anger management” was a widely discussed issue in Chaucer's England. The remainder of this chapter traces the emergence of an alternative theology of anger—one that drastically downplays the affect's capaci-

ty for sin in a tacit endorsement of its juridical efficacy—in the ideological economy of late fourteenth-century England.

II. IRE UNDER ERASURE

Some late medieval texts are less tolerant of anger's moral ambiguity than others. The early fifteenth-century Wycliffite polemic *The Lanterne of Liȝt*, for example, zealously asserts that “as iust wraþþe is no wraþþe, but a feruent diligence, so riȝtwiſe ſmyting is no ſmyting, but a juſt amending” (XII.9–11; fol. 93^r). Curiously, the *Lanterne* introduces the notion of righteous anger only to erase and rename it. Where the Parson and his ilk reconcile the moral ambiguity of “ire” by bifurcating the affect along moral lines—“ire is in two maneres; that oon of hem is good, and that oother is wikked”—the *Lanterne*-author presents righteous anger as conceptually implosive. There is an implicitly performative quality to the seemingly constative statement “iust wraþþe is no wraþþe”: the very act of its utterance (if felicitous) effectively evacuates the signifier “wraþþe” of any potential justice.³¹ Those feelings that would be called “wraþþe” if not for their justness are semantically displaced onto the phrase “feruent diligence.” Supplementing this performative de-sacralization of “wraþþe” is a parallel treatment of violence. Accordingly, righteous anger becomes juridical diligence and just violence becomes valid retribution.

Why does the *Lantern*-author indulge in this paradoxical phrasing? Why not simply state that righteous “wraþþe” and “ſmyting” are *also known as* “feruent diligence” and “iust amending” respectively? Perhaps this self-destructive conceptualization of righteous anger betrays an authorial desire to render the signifiers “wraþþe” and “ſmyting” exclusively pejorative, in order to sidestep, in “vernacular theology” (Gillespie 401–20), the moral ambiguity

³¹ On the difference between “performative” and “constative” utterances, see Austen 1–12.

already firmly entrenched in the Latin *ira*. After all, as Kantik Ghosh convincingly argues, Wycliffites tended to be easily as wary of semantic instability as their ecclesiastical opponents, despite (or perhaps because of) their zeal for translating scripture into the vernacular (22–66). Unlike the Wycliffite sermon above—which registers, but also restricts, the plurality of meaning present in the statement “þe sunne fill not on his [Christ’s] wrappe”—the *Lanterne* is completely unwilling to tolerate moral ambiguity in the signifier “wrappe.” Semantics, above all, are at stake in the *Lanterne*’s performative disavowal of “iust wrappe.”

No matter how radical its wording, the *Lanterne*’s conception of righteous indignation is not simply a progressive answer to the Parson’s “conservative” orthodoxy. Just as the Parson subordinates affect to morality—allowing the former to determine the latter, but not *vice versa*—the *Lanterne*’s de-moralization of “wrappe” and “smyting” presupposes the supremacy of an *a priori* moral law. Although it clearly attempts to perpetuate anti-institutional sentiment, the *Lanterne*’s “call to arms” is haunted by the specter of sin: the fact that “iust wrappe is no wrappe” does nothing to alleviate anxieties about anger’s association with sin. The *Lanterne*’s audience is therefore no freer to embrace anger as an autonomous mode of judgment than that of the Parson. Implicit within both texts is the mandate that *irascimini* must always be tempered by *nolite peccare*. The deadliness of the sin wrath, it seems, stands between a zeal for righteous anger and a wholehearted endorsement of the affect’s juridical potential.

Yet it is not difficult to imagine a theology of anger devoid of ideological constraint: *irascimini* without *nolite peccare*. Since anger’s moral fallibility forces the subject to “second-guess” its judgments, such a theology would have to eschew the notion of sinful anger. This brings us to the A-text of Langland’s *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, which notably

elides the Deadly Sin wrath. All three major versions of Langland's poem—the A-, B- and C-texts—contain a discrete episode commonly referred to as the Confession of the Seven Deadly Sins.³² An artistic *tour de force*, it depicts personified Deadly Sins as they confess publically to their newfound priest Repentance. However, in the A-text—long thought to be an early draft of the poem, composed sometime in the mid 1370's (*Piers Plowman: The A-text* 6–8)—we only meet six Deadly Sins: Pride, Lust, Envy, Covetousness, Gluttony, and Sloth. Wrath is conspicuously absent.³³

Of course, Wrath's absence alone hardly suggests that Langland's exclusion of anger constitutes an intentional elision, or even an unconscious repression. After all, he might simply have forgotten to personify Wrath in this early draft of the poem. Alternatively, he may have waylaid his treatment thereof because he did not yet feel up to that particular artistic task. These possibilities, however, are unlikely for two reasons. First, although the A-text's Confession Scene never personifies wrath, the signifier "wraþþe" and its cognates appear multiple times therein. Curiously, each mention of wrath occurs in direct relation to Envy. Envy, for instance, describes the manner in which he sabotages his neighbor's reputation by exclaiming: "Betwyn hym & his meyne I haue mad wraþþe" (A.V.79). Later, he says "whoso haþ more þanne I, þat angriþ myn herte" (A.V.97). Even Envy's physical appearance is affected by wrath: "His body was bolnid for wraþþe þat he bot his lippes, / And wroþliche he wroþ his fest, to wreke hym he þouzte" (A.V.66–67). It is improbable that the existence of the Deadly Sin wrath slipped the same mind that so emphatically pointed out envy's capacity to engender anger. Further, when Langland does portray Wrath in the B- and C-texts, his

³² The Confession Scene takes place in Passus V of the A- and B-texts and Passus VI of the C-text.

³³ For an early discussion of Wrath's absence from the A-text see Manly 115–16.

character vignette appears directly after that of Envy, thus maintaining the A-text's sense that sinful anger issues from a matrix of jealousy (B.V.135–87; C.VI.103–70). There is a considerable difference, however, between characterizing wrath as a Deadly Sin that tends to result from envy, and demoting the former to a mere noxious byproduct of the latter.

Secondly, Passus II of the A-text also contains a catalogue of six Deadly Sins that excludes wrath:

Wyten & wynessen þat wonen vpon erþe,
þat I, Fauel, feffe Falsnesse to Mede,
To be present in *Pride* for pouere or for riche,
Wiþ þe Erldom of *Enuye* for euere to laste,
Wiþ alle þe lordsshipe of *Leccherie* in lengþe & in brede;
Wiþ þe Kingdom of Coueitise I croune hem togidre;
And al þe Ile of Vsurie, & *Auarice* þe faste,
Glotonye & grete oþes I gyue hem togidere;
Wiþ alle þe delites of lust þe deuil for to serue,
In al þe Signiure of *Slouþe* I sese hem togidere;
þei to haue & to holde & here eires aftir
Wiþ alle þe purtenaunce of purcatorie into þe pyne of helle. (A.II.57–68, emphasis mine)

Thus Favel weds Falseness to Lady Mede. Although the character in whose mouth this speech is placed is by no means reputable—the semantic valance of the noun “favel” includes lying, deceit and insincerity (“favel”)—it remains quite telling that his otherwise-standard cartography of sin should exclude wrath altogether. Both the B- and C-texts sup-

plement the fourth line of the passage above, elongating “þe Erl-dom of enuye” to “þe Erl-dome of Envye and Yre togideres” (B.II.84; C.II.91). Furthermore, immediately after the A-text’s Favel completes his unholy marriage ceremony, Theology angrily alludes to St. Truth’s anger: “Þanne tenide hym Theologie what he þis tale herde, / And seide to Cyuyle, ‘now sorewe on þi bokes, / Such weddyng to werche to wrappe wiþ Treuþe” (A.II.79–81). Once again, Langland seems to go out of his way to remind us that he is conscious of wrath’s existence, but does not consider it a Deadly Sin.

Perhaps the A-text’s elisions of wrath are meant to facilitate an ulterior condemnation of *acedia* (sloth). John Bowers has convincingly argued that *Piers Plowman* evinces a distinct preoccupation with sloth by consistently depicting it as the last in its catalogues of Deadly Sins (61–96). If Langland was particularly worried about the prevalence of sloth in his community, he might have come to suspect the populace of passing laziness off as patience, which, as we have seen, was often defined as the righteous eschewal of wrath. By twice passing the sin over in silence, the A-text implicitly critiques the absence of righteous anger in its portrait of a slothful, contemporary Christendom. In other words, it downplays wrath’s sinfulness in order to reduce its audience’s self-conscious reservations about impassioned, social action. Indeed, this rhetorical strategy makes sense in the context of Langland’s larger theological project, which, if not “semi-Pelagian” (Adams 367–71), is certainly in favor of good works: “chastite wiþoute charite worþ cheyned in helle” is his narrator’s harsh vernacularization of “fides sine operibus mortua est” (A.I.162; “faith is dead without works”).

On the other hand, Langland was not willing—or, perhaps, able—to completely cleanse anger of sinfulness. By depicting an irascible Envy, the poet implies that angry be-

havior is at least closely related to sin. If he intentionally elides a portrayal of Wrath in order to incite social action in his audience, Langland also implicitly cautions his readers not to mistake their frustration with worldly poverty for righteous anger. In fact, the A-text *does* personify wrath, though not in the Confession Scene. Shortly thereafter, towards the end of Passus VI, the crowd to which the narrator belongs—presumably comprised of the aforementioned six sins, though no more is heard from them—is first introduced to the eponymous Plowman, who gives them elaborate directions to the abode of St. Truth (who represents God-the-Father, salvation and moral rectitude, to name a few).

In and of themselves, these directions allegorize the Christian's journey through life, giving a schematic account of the mental states and ideals one ought to either pursue or avoid in the quest for salvation. At the climax of this sub-allegory, the subject presupposed by Piers' directions finally discovers the ever-elusive St. Truth, embedded in her own heart: "And ȝif grace graunte þe to gon in on þis wise, / Þou shalt se treuþe wel sitte in þin herte / And lere þe for to loue & his lawes holden" (A.VI.92–94). The act of inwardly "seeing" this kernel of divinity renders one able to learn and uphold celestial law. By allegorizing the Augustinian dictum that knowledge of divinity begins with introspection, Langland celebrates the divine "moral sentiment" innate within the human soul (Raw 153–54).

This introspective epiphany, however, does not mark the end of the Plowman's directions. Immediately after enjoining his audience to follow the laws of Truth, which are also the laws of the heart, Piers warns them to "be war þanne of Wraþþe, þat wykkide shrewe / For he haþ enuye to Hym þat in þin herte sitteþ" (A.VI.95–96). In this unsettling reversal, the A-text for the first time explicitly personifies anger. The poem's audience can no longer write wrath off as a mere characteristic of Envy; in Passus VI, envy becomes an attribute of

Wrath. Piers' warning implies that wrath has the capacity to disrupt the subject's internal communion with Truth. Otherwise, why would his audience need to "be war"? In this vein, the Plowman goes on to delineate the manner in which anger can initiate a devastating fall from grace:

[Wrappþe] pokip forþ pride to preise þiselue.
þe boldnesse of þi biefait makip þe blynd þanne,
And so worst þou dryuen out as dew & þe dore closid,
Ikeizid & ycliket to kepe þe þeroute
Happily an hundrit wynter er þou eft entre. (A.VI.97–101)

The intrusion of Wrath into Piers' allegory is likened to the onset of a spiritual blindness that tragically obscures the subject's "moral compass." Piers' precautionary allegation against wrath echoes Gregory the Great's warning that "per iram, inquit, lux veritatis amittitur, quia cum iracundia confusionis tenebras menti incutit, huic Deus radium sue cognicionis abscondit" (qtd. in *Fasciculus morum* II.ii.11–13; "through wrath the light of truth is lost, for when anger injects the darkness of confusion into the mind, God withholds from it the ray of his knowledge," 119). For both Gregory and Piers, anger is not simply a fallible mode of moral judgment, but a threat to the subject's God-given contemplative faculties.

According to Joseph S. Wittig's *Concordance*, Kane's A-text contains about twenty-three words for anger ("angre," "wrapþe," "tene," "yre" and their respective cognates).³⁴ Of these, four refer to celestial anger—that of St. Truth, Do-Wel, or, in one case, an angel—ten refer to anger felt by a character within the narrative (of these, four are directed at Lady Mede and two are instances of Piers Plowman's "pure tene"), five refer to the personified

³⁴ None of these "anger words" has a stable "moral hue." Each can be used to describe righteous anger and sinful anger. Their context determines their morality.

Envy, three are used in general injunctions to eschew wrath and one appears in an account of how it arises from willful behavior (Wisdom tells Wrong “Whoso werchīþ be wil wrappe makīþ ofte” A.IV.56).³⁵ Although Langland’s theology of anger is substantially complicated by the B- and C-texts, this “mixed bag” of usages clearly registers a profound ambivalence towards anger, already apparent in the A-text. After all, Langland may have omitted Wrath in the Confession Scene in an effort to render his violent incursion in Passus VI all the more shocking. Whatever his intentions, no complete version of *Piers Plowman* unequivocally endorses the notion that anger cannot sin, although certain passages, taken out of context, appear to do just that. Just as the Parson’s contention that righteous anger is “bet than pley” is ironized by the recurrent laudations of “pley” throughout *The Canterbury Tales* (Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love* 35), Wrath’s unexpected absence in Passus V is counter-balanced by his unexpected presence in Passus VI. Like most medieval Christian ideologues, Langland seems to have been, from the start, “on the fence” about anger.

III. WRATH IN THE RISING

Although he explicitly warns his audience to beware Wrath, *Piers Plowman* became thoroughly ensconced in the greatest outburst of public anger in English history—the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. In his otherwise-Latinate account of the Rising, the Augustinian canon and chronicler Henry Knighton includes several snippets of Middle English prose and verse, supposedly uttered by the rebel leaders, Jakke Milner, Jak Carter, Jak Trewman and John Ball. The text attributed to Carter famously references Langland’s *Plowman* as follows:

Iakke Carter preyes 3owe alle þat 3e make a gode ende of þat 3e haue begunnen and
dop wele and ay bettur and bettur, for at þe euen men heryeþ þe day. For if þe ende be

³⁵ See Wittig 28, 328, 635, 776–77.

wele þan is alle wele. Lat Peres þe Plowman my broþur duelle at home and dyȝt corn. And I will go wiþ ȝowe and helpe þat y may to dyȝte ȝoure mete and ȝoure drynke, þat ȝe none fayle. Lokke þat Hobbe Robbyoure be wele chastysede for lesyng of ȝoure grace. For ȝe haue gret nede to take god wiþ ȝowe in alle ȝoure dedes. For nowe is tyme to be war. (fol. 174^r)

The narrator, Carter, clearly identifies with Piers, calling him “my broþur.” His Plowman is a pacifist, remaining patiently “at home” to “dyȝt” corn. In alluding to Langland’s character,³⁶ Carter aims to instill within his audience the comforting notion that, whatever might happen during the Rising, the archetype of the peaceful and humble yeoman farmer will live on, completely intact, “at home.” While Piers stays home, however, Carter proposes that he and his second person addressee ought to leave it in search of meat, drink and, of course, the opportunity to chastise “Hobbe Robbyoure,” who may or may not stand in for one of the Rising’s most famous victims, Robert Hales, Richard II’s Lord Treasurer (Astell, *Political Allegory* 58). Unsurprisingly, many critics have detected Langland’s influence in this passage’s rustic imagery, its allegorical characters—Hobbe Robbyoure quite resembles *Piers Plowman*’s Robert þe Robbere (A.V.242; B.V.469; C.VII.316; Hudson, *Premature Reformation* 399)—and its command to “doþ wele and ay bettur and bettur” (Justice 118–25).

In his seminal work on the 1381 Rising, Steven Justice argues that the “Rebel Letters” included in both Knighton’s *Chronicle* and that of Thomas Walsingham constitute acts of “assertive literacy”:

³⁶ Although this allusion is most likely to Langland’s *Piers*, both Paul Freedman and Wendy Scase have discussed the relationship between the figure of the plowman of the Rebel Letters and a literary tradition of complaints against servitude dating back to the ninth century (Scase 6; Freedman, *Images* 40–55). In fact, Ælfric’s *Colloquy* features a Plowman protesting his abject condition: “Magnus labor est, quia non sum liber” (“the labor is great because I am not free”; qtd. in Scase 6).

Clearly, [the letters] had to mean something more than and different from [their manifest content] to be worth the writing or the reading amid the violence of insurgency. Writing itself—both the activity and the product—was at issue in these letters: their composition and copying, recomposition and recopying were so many *acts of assertive literacy*. (24)

I would go one step further to argue that the composition of Carter's Letter, at least, was an act of assertive *literary criticism*. By alluding to "Peres þe Plowman," the insurgents proclaimed their ability to grasp the philosophical complexities of Langland's poem. As any reader of *Piers Plowman* will readily attest, this task requires far more of its practitioner than mere literacy.

In fact, the Rebel Letters contain another, hitherto unrecognized allusion to the A-text. The last snippet of Middle English dissent recorded in Knighton's chronicle—entitled *Prima epistola iohannis balle*—contains the following lyric:

Now raigneth pride in price,
Covetise is holden wise,
Leacherie without shame,
Gluttonye without blame:
Envie raigneth with treason,
And slouth is taken in greate season;
God doe bote, for now is time. (fol. 174^v)

Like the A-text's Confession Scene and Favel's narrative map of sin, Ball's *Prima epistola* lists six Deadly Sins, excluding wrath. It is, of course, impossible to definitively prove that Langland's elision of wrath influenced Ball's. In fact, the *Prima epistola* is almost entirely

derived from another source. As Rossell Hope Robbins illustrated more than fifty years ago, Ball's lyric closely mirrors a Middle English complaint copied in a near-contemporary commonplace book:

Now pride ys yn pris,
Now couetyse ys wyse,
Now lechery ys schameles,
Now gloteny ys lawles,
Now slewthe ys yn seson,
In envie & wrethe ys treson;
Now hath god enchesyn
to dystrie thys worle by reson (*Historical Poems* xlii).

Although they initially seem all but identical, Robbins argues that “[i]n these two poems, the distinction [between criticism and subversion] consists in a single line at the end of [Ball's letter]: ‘God doe bote for nowe is time.’ Previously, many had regretted evils; Ball wanted to remove them” (Ibid.).

According to Wenzel, Ball's *Prima epistola* is genetically related to another lyric, contained in the preaching handbook of the Franciscan John Grimestone (174–98):

Gula is samel[es]
Luxuria is laweles
Ira is rithfulness
Inuidia is holiness
Accidia is feblesse
Superbia in prise

Cupiditas is holden wys. (qtd. in Wenzel, *Preachers* 174)

Although Grimestone's poem uses the Latin names for the Seven Deadly Sins, its rhetorical formula (sin = virtue) is quite similar to that used in the other two lyrics. Wenzel claims that all of these poems belong to a family of English complaint lyrics, dating back to the thirteenth-century (Ibid. 198). Members of this family are most frequently found in commonplace books and preaching manuals such as that of Grimestone, the Dominican John of Bromyard's *Summa praedicatorum* and the aforementioned *Fasciculus morum* (Ibid. 101–02).

Although it is unclear whether or not he ever belonged to a particular mendicant order, Ball seems to have been an itinerate preacher. After paraphrasing one of Ball's sermons, Jean Froissart tells us: "Enssi dissoit cils Jehans Balle et parolles semblables les diemenses par usage, à l'issir hors des messes as vilages" (II.213.70–72; "John Ball usually preached in the villages on Sundays when the congregations came out from mass," 212). Ball was, in short, precisely the sort of person likely to own a book such as Grimestone's. Additionally, it is more than likely that he was a reader of *Piers Plowman*. In a sixth Rebel Letter—included in Walsingham's *Chronicle*, but not in Knighton's—he explicitly "biddeþ Peres Plouzman go to his werk and chastise wel Hobbe þe Robbere" (fol. 287^r). Unlike Carter's Letter, Ball's depicts "Peres Plouzman" actively taking part in the chastising poor Hobbe, suggesting that he saw Piers as a symbol, not of passive endurance, but of radical, social action.

As Richard Firth Green adeptly points out, Ball's *Prima epistola* differs from its analogues "in reversing the order of Sloth and Envy and omitting, perhaps for obvious reasons, Wrath altogether" (182). The A-text shares these exact particularities. Given the several Langlandian allusions elsewhere in the Rebel Letters, it is probable that, in composing the

Prima epistola, Ball adopted a standard Franciscan complaint lyric and effectively *Langlandized* it by switching sloth and envy and deleting wrath. In a likeminded gesture, he also appended to his source the final lines with the phrase “god doe bote for now is time”; a revision that, according to Robbins, “turned [the original lyric] into a call for action” (*Historical Poems* xlii). Unlike its source, Ball’s lyric is not a complaint, but a suggestion.

By interweaving Langland’s works-centered theology with a traditionally Franciscan strain of complaint, Ball constructed an understanding of anger far more radical than that of either of his sources. Somewhat ironically, it is through the *exclusion* of a line such as “[i]ra is rithfulness” that Ball implicitly places “ira” within the bounds of actual “rithfulness.” Where the *Lanterne* invalidates the phrase “iust wrappe,” thereby rendering all “wrappe” sinful, Ball elides anger in his litany of contemporary moral-decay in order to render all “wrappe” righteous. In so doing, the demagogue clearly aimed to produce a maximum of uninhibited, public anger—*irascimini* without *nolite peccare*. He was, needless to say, quite successful in this venture.

IV. RAGE, REVOLUTION, REACTION

Most retrospective portrayals of the 1381 riots are less than sympathetic to its participants. John Gower, for instance, depicts the rebels degenerating into wild beasts as their fury crescendos (*VC*. I.184–240). His hysterical account of the Rising portrays furious peasants (*rusticos*) refusing to heed the prayers of mercy put forth by their innocent victims:

Consumptis precibus furiens violencior extat

Rusticus, et peius quod valet ipse facit.

Sic nec aper media silua tam seuus in ira

Fulmineo rapidos conrotat ore canes. (*VC*.I.1191–94)

(When prayers were employed, the peasant raged more violently and did the worst deeds that he was able to. Hence, even the wild boar, assaulting quick dogs in the middle of the forest, did not fulminate so much in his anger.)

Gower's comparison draws a sharp distinction between the choreographed violence of the aristocratic hunt and the anarchic, boorish rage of the insurgents. His bestialization of the angry *rusticos* is echoed by the *Fasciculus morum*, which describes the wrathful subject as "non homines, sed potius bestie" (II.iii.30; "not a man, but a wild beast," 120). Although the rebels saw themselves as zealous proponents of Truth, from Gower's perspective their rage was unnatural and therefore dehumanizing. Sadly, as Paul Freedman has extensively illustrated, it is extremely rare to find any favorable, medieval representations of peasant anger ("Peasant Anger" 171–90). While the aristocratic knights of medieval romance are frequently animated by righteous anger, its churls generally do not experience such lofty affects. The insurgents of 1381 asserted more than literacy, more too than literary criticism; they asserted their capacity to *feel righteous anger*.

That having been said, they were hardly moral relativists; time and again the sources depict them employing a fundamentalist rhetoric of truth. Hence, during the burning of John of Gaunt's palace, the Savoy, the rebels reportedly threw a looter into the fire, "dicentes se zelatores ueritatis et iusticie, non fures aut latrones" (Knighton fol. 173^r; "crying that they were men zealots for truth and justice, not thieves and robbers," 215). The rebels seemed to believe that their anger provided them unmediated access to divine truth. Like Langland, however, they also worried about envy's tendency to masquerade as righteous anger. "Si quis in aliquo furto fuerat" ("If anyone had been caught in an act of theft"), another source recounts, "deprehensus sine processu sine iudicio ad mortem rapiebatur decapitandus" ("he

would have been taken off for execution without trial or verdict,” *Polychronicon* 9.2).³⁷ The insurgents aligned themselves, in other words, with “Peres Plouzman,” not “Hobbe þe Robbere.”

Among the primary objects of their anger was the rapidly expanding London bureaucracy, which the mob blamed for both the Poll-tax and the Statute of Laborers (Rodney Hilton 137–64). They were angry at government, but they were not anarchists. According to the otherwise Anglo-Norman *Anonimalle Chronicle*, when asked “With whom haldes yow?” the rebels identified themselves by replying “wyth kynge Richarde and wyth the trew communes” (fol. 344^r). While critics have debated the extent to which this “wache worde” reflects actual loyalty to Richard II, its presence certainly suggests that the insurgents were not rebelling against government-*qua*-government (Justice 172–73; Strohm 41–42). Sadly, it was their (misplaced) loyalty to the adolescent Richard at Mile End that finally caused the mob to disband, incorrectly believing their mission to have been accomplished (Justice 3). According to Green, the rebels were not progressives, but conservatives:

Traditional complaint literature may well have been [. . .] profoundly conservative in outlook, [. . .] but if at the same time it helped to articulate and focus popular discontent [. . .] perhaps this was because those who rallied to its call were also conservative—because they were trying to prevent a new age, not usher one in; reactionaries, not revolutionaries; Luddites, not Bolsheviks. (189)

In a sense, Green is correct to characterize the rioters as more backward than forward thinking. After all, Walsingham recounts that during an open-air sermon at Blackheath Ball famously asked: “When Adam dalf, and Eve span, who was thanne a gentilman?” (fol. 287^r).

³⁷ Green’s translation (183).

Walsingham depicts in Ball the conviction that historical progress ought to follow a regressive trajectory away from the feudal present, into the Prelapsarian past. Green's claim that the rebels were "trying to prevent a new age, not usher one in," however, is more dubious. In Walsingham's synopsis, Ball preached that

omnes pares creatosa natura, seruitutem per iniustam oppressionem nequam hominum introductam contra Dei uoluntatem; quia, si Deo placuisset seruos creasse, utique in principio mundi constituisset quis seruus, quisue dominus, futurus fuisset. (*Ibid.*)
(all men were by nature created equal from the beginning, and that servitude had been introduced by the unjust and evil oppression of men, against the will of God, who, if it had pleased Him to create serfs, surely in the beginning of the world would have appointed who should be a serf and who a lord, 547).

By likening the rise of serfdom to the fall from Eden, the "mad priest from Kent" undermines feudal hegemony as an unnatural evil and advocates its immediate elimination. Ball would have believed, of course, that humanity's fall into original sin was reversed by Christ's guiltless Passion. Accordingly, by proposing to reverse feudal stratification, he renders his own violent agenda messianic by analogy. If that's not an attempt to usher in a new age, what is?

In fact, Jean Froissart's *Chronicle* depicts a downright proto-Marxist Ball, opining to his flock that "les choses ne poent bien aler en Engletière ne iront jusques à tant que li bien iront tout de commun et que il ne sera ne villains ne gentils homs, que nous ne soions tout oui" (II.212.42–45; "things can't go right in England and never will, until goods are held in common and there are no more villeins and gentlefolk, but we are one and the same," 212). Further, according to Walsingham, the sermon at Blackheath ended with Ball urging his audience

essent uiri cordati, et amore boni patrisfamilias excolentis agrum suum, et extirpantis ac resecantis noxia gramina que fruges solen opprimere, et ipsi in presenti facere festinant. Primo, maiores regni dominos occidendo, deinde iuridicos, iusticiarios, et iuratores patrie, perimendo, postremo quoscunque scirent in posterum comunitati nocuos, tollerent de terra sua. (fol. 287^r)

(to be men of courage, and out of love for their virtuous fathers who had tilled their land, and pulled up and cut down the noxious weeds which usually choke the crops, to make haste themselves at that present time to do the same. They must do this first, by killing the most powerful of the lords of the realm, then by slaying the lawyers, justiciars and jurors of the land, and finally by weeding out from their land any that they knew would in the future be harmful to the commonwealth, 547).

With a truly Langlandian flare, Ball allegorizes his audience as virtuous tillers of the land.

With a patently un-Langlandian polemical tone, however, he calls for the “weeding out” (*tollerent de terra sua*) of any potential threats to his project of social demolition. These are hardly the words of a proponent of social stasis.

Unlike Langland, Ball was a thoroughgoing revolutionary. His sadistic fantasy of “slaying the lawyers, justiciars and jurors of the land” is driven by an overarching desire to destroy and re-form law. As Jacques Derrida notes, however, “the word ‘revolutionary’ [. . .] also includes the sense ‘reactionary’—that is, the sense of return to the past of a purer origin” (“Force of Law” 281). If Ball advocated violence to human law, he did so for the sake of an unchanging divine Law. However radical Ball may have been, in his desire to return to an Edenic state of equality, he was also, in a very real sense, conservative. He was, to modify Green’s statement, both revolutionary and conservative, both Bolshevik and Luddite. Like-

wise, the Rising itself was both a revolutionary social movement and a murderous riot, engineered by a few savvy rhetoricians with a knack for capitalizing on popular discontent. While the rebels utilized and altered popular theological principles in order to assert their capacity for independent feeling and thought, their actions ultimately contributed to the institutional stigmatization of speculative theology that steadily progressed throughout England over the next four decades (Justice 193–208). Indeed, the Blackfriars' Council that officially condemned Wycliffe's teachings as heterodox was held in 1382, hot on the rising's heels.³⁸ If John Ball ushered in a new age, it was certainly not the one he had hoped for.

V. WRATH REVISED

When Wrath finally does rear his ugly head in the Confession Scene of the B- and C-texts, he flaunts his ubiquity. Although he initially identifies as a particular mendicant—"I was som tyme a frere" (B.V.138)—he immediately re-presents himself as "the Couentes Gardyner," an abstract agent capable of "grafting" dishonesty onto friars: "On lymitoures and listres lesynges I ymped/ Til þei beere leues of lowe speche lordes to plese" (B.V.139). The "leues of lowe speche" that the friars speak (or sprout) ultimately contribute to their well-known ecclesiastical rivalry with localized parsons: "And now persons han parceyued þat freres parte wiþ hem/ Thisse possessioneres preche and depravue freres / And freres fyndeþ hem in defaute, as folke bereþ witnes" (B.V.145–46). Thus Wrath exploits the mobility and influence of the mendicant orders, thereby sowing discord throughout Christendom. As an ideologue—"I, Wraþ, walke wiþ hem and wisse hem of my bokes" (B.V.148)—he corrupts his victims intellectually, causing them to "speken of spiritualté þat eiþer despiseþ ooþer"

³⁸ For a comprehensive timeline detailing the steady increase in theological censorship that took place in England during the decades following the Rising, see Kerby-Fulton xli–li. See also, Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change."

(B.V.150). Not unlike John Ball, Wrath weaponizes the “spiritualté” found in “bokes” in an effort to incite social antagonism.

Significantly, the only place that Wrath meets any resistance is the monastery (B.V.174–77). Like Augustine’s *Ordo monasterii*, Wrath’s confession suggests that strict, institutional regulation keeps antipathy at bay (Gillete 92–103). As we have seen, Wrath’s pregnant-absence from the A-text’s Confession Scene could potentially be read as a call to social action. Conversely, his confessions in the B- and C-texts suggest that social interaction renders the subject vulnerable to sinful anger. Through Wrath’s sociopathic confession, then, the B- and C-texts of *Piers Plowman* promote, not revolutionary violence, but an ethics of ascetic withdrawal.

Wrath’s ability to ventriloquize his victims threateningly blurs the borders of identity. In fact, at the apex of his absolution, the B-text conflates Wrath’s identity with that of the Dreamer: “‘*Esto sobrius!*’ he [Repentance] seyde, and assoilled me after / And bad me wilne to wepe, my wikkednesse to amende” (B.V.186–87). Although the C-text corrects this slip—replacing the aberrant first-person pronouns “me” and “myn” with “hym” and “his”—B-text manuscripts consistently collapse Wrath into the Dreamer (C.VI.168–69).³⁹ Perhaps this chain of displaced identity—connecting Langland to Wrath via the Dreamer—reflects an authorial anxiety that *Piers Plowman* itself could potentially act as Wrath’s conduit. Indeed, Wrath never reveals to his audience exactly which “bokes” he reads to his followers.

If Langland was anxious about *Piers Plowman*’s capacity to promulgate wrath, he was right to be. Despite the poet’s ambivalence regarding anger’s juridical efficacy, the figure of Piers Plowman was highjacked by fundamentalists who lacked his cautious reserva-

³⁹ According to Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H.A. Shepherd’s edition of the B-text: “The first-person pronouns here [. . .] are clearly present in the manuscripts” (73, n. 8).

tions. A great deal of ink has been spilled on the seemingly reactionary revisions that he made to the C-text in the wake of the 1381 revolt (Hudson, “A Problem Revisited”; Justice 240–44). Unsurprisingly, much of this criticism has revolved around the poet’s most (in)famous treatment of righteous anger: the Pardon-Tearing Scene.⁴⁰ In both the A- and B-texts, Langland’s eponymous Plowman angrily tears apart a pardon granted to him by “St. Truth.” Although the Dreamer initially refers to the document as a pardon *a poena et a culpa* (from guilt and punishment)—thus rendering it substantially more powerful than any actual indulgence (Minnis 68–89)—when the material text is unveiled, it turns out to contain nothing more than “Verse 41” of the Athanasian Creed: “Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam; / Qui vero mala in ignem eternum” (“And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; / they that have done evil, into everlasting fire,” A.VIII.95–96; B.VII.113–114). Despite the seemingly uncontroversial nature of this statement, upon reading the document Piers “for pure tene” pulls it “assondir” (A.VIII.101; B.VII.119).

After tearing the pardon, the Plowman recites Psalms 23.4—“si ambulauero in medio umbre mortis / non timebo mala; quoniam tu mecum es” (“even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, because you are with me”)—and announces his imminent withdrawal from pedestrian life:

“I shal cessen of my sowyng,” quod Piers, “& swynke noȝt so harde,
 Ne aboute my bilyue so besy be na moore;
 Of preieres & of penaunce my plouȝ shal ben hereafter,
 And wepen whan I sholde werche, thouȝ whete breed me faille.’ (B.VII.120–25)⁴¹

⁴⁰ For influential readings of the Pardon-Tearing Scene, see Woolf, Schroeder, Adams, Steiner 109–55 and Minnis.

⁴¹ cf. A.VIII.102–07.

By exchanging manual labor for prayers and penance the now-ex-Plowman abandons the *vita activa* for the *vita contemplativa*. In its cataclysmic impact on both Piers' character-arc and Langland's poem as a whole—Piers' ensuing argument with the Priest wakes the Dreamer, thus ending the *Visio* and ushering in the *Vita*—the Pardon-Tearing Scene possesses an undeniably revolutionary aspect. Piers' "pure tene," moreover, is clearly depicted as the affective compulsion behind his display of anti-documentary violence. Since the Middle English noun "tene" can mean anger, shame, insult, physical harm, anxiety, lovesickness or defeat, however, the exact nature of Piers' vexation is ambiguous. Although the adjective "pure" accentuates the affect's influence on Piers' actions, it remains unclear exactly what purity causes him to tear the pardon. To make matters worse, the content of the document he destroys is undeniably dogmatic and supposedly issued by Truth himself.

For over a century, critics have debated the significance of the Pardon-Tearing Scene. Some read the episode as a poignant satire of the "cheap grace" offered through the sale of indulgences (Frank 28–29). Others marshal it as evidence of Langland's semi-Pelagian tendency to emphasize the role of good works in Catholic soteriology (Adams 369). Still others read Piers' "pure tene" not as righteous anger, but as misguided frustration with the Priest's learned and valid sentiments (Lawlor 70–84). While these modes of reading the passage possess some virtue, they are all too bent on explaining why Piers does violence to such a seemingly harmless document to fully appreciate the fact that the scene's *gravitas* stems from its ambiguity (Smith 39). More satisfying is Rosemary Woolf's suggestion that Piers' act of tearing the pardon is not necessarily tantamount to a rejection of its validity, but instead mythologizes the historic shift from Judaic legalism to Christian mercy:

the traditional allegory of Church and Synagogue [. . .] when represented iconographically, Church on the right side of the Cross holds a chalice into which flows the blood from Christ's side, whilst on the left side stands Synagogue from whose hands fall the tablets of the law. This analogy is helpful because it shows that there was nothing doctrinally repugnant in demonstrating in artistic form the dispossession of the Old Law under the New Dispensation. That the Ten Commandments fall from the hands of Synagogue does not mean that they are not binding on the Christian [. . .]. Similarly the text from the Athanasian Creed can be torn up without its validity in other contexts being questioned. (74)

If Woolf is correct in reading the Pardon-Tearing Scene as mythic recapitulation of "the dispossession of the Old Law under the New Dispensation," the violence that Piers does to the pardon is indisputably analogous to that done to Christ's body during the Passion. While such an analogy might strike modern readers as odd, Emily Steiner has recently illustrated that late medieval, English poets frequently employed documentary metaphors to dramatize soteriological history. In fact, the various versions of the *Charter of Christ*, a Middle English lyric popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, depict Christ's mutilated body as a legal document (*chirographum Dei*) that is only validated when torn (Steiner 193–94).

Following Woolf, Mary Carruthers reads the Pardon-Tearing Scene as a typological rendition of Moses destroying the tablets containing the Ten Commandments in Exodus 32.19: "Cumque appropinquasset ad castra, vidit vitulum, et choros: iratusque valde, projecit de manu tabulas, et confregit eas ad radicem montis" ("As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain"). According to Carruthers, Piers' anger is

not directed at the content of the pardon, since Moses is angry, not at the tablets that he breaks, but at the idolatry practiced by the Israelites in his absence. In other words, the Pardon-Tearing Scene references a historic misdirection of anger: although Moses' is frustrated by idol-worship, his destruction of the tablets is not properly iconoclastic, since he destroys a valid signification of celestial law. As Fradenburg puts it: "Mount Sinai is given to us as a revolution in the history of the signifier" ("Making, Mourning, and the Love of Idols" 31). Despite the fact that Moses reveres the God-given message written on the tablets, he is furious with the with the signifier's capacity to detract glory from a divine referent. Importantly, Fradenburg elucidates that both extremes of Moses' love-hate relationship with the signifier involve enjoyment. Although Moses and Piers are angry at the injustices around them, the discomfort of anger is sated by their violent outbursts (Ibid).

Expanding upon Carruthers' typological analysis of the Pardon-Tearing Scene, Steiner argues that Piers' rending of the pardon refers on a literal level to a common late medieval legal ceremony in which a "notary or scribe would ceremoniously rip or, more commonly, cut an indenture in half and distribute the parts to the legal actors" and on an anagogical level to the separation of sheep from goats on Doomsday (which is also known as the Day of Wrath), to which it's content refers ("qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam; / Qui vero mala in ignem eternum," Steiner 140–41). Further, like Abraham's aborted sacrifice of Isaac, medieval exegetes commonly read Moses' breaking of the tablets as prefiguring God-the-Father's sacrifice of Christ (Holloway 195). The Pardon-Tearing Scene, therefore, inserts itself within an extant web of analogous historic moments of revolutionary violence: Abraham's would-be sacrifice, Moses' destruction of the tablets, Christ's death and "the Day of Wrath." In so doing, it also evokes violent rituals, such as the ceremonious tearing of inden-

tures, or the liturgical rending of the host at mass (Steiner 140). While the Pardon-Tearing Scene does not unilaterally allegorize any of these violent moments, it cannot help but reference them all.

Whatever Langland's reasons for creating the Pardon-Tearing Scene, he ultimately excised it from the C-text. This is most likely due to the fact that the 60,000 Rebels who invaded London in June of 1381 demonstrated an unabashed enmity towards documentary culture that was uncomfortably similar to that of the poet's Plowman (Justice 240). As both Justice and Susan Crane illustrate, "all the sources [concerned with the rising], chronicles and indictments alike, agree that the seizure and destruction of documents happened wherever rebellion did" (Justice 40; Crane 204–10). Given *Piers Plowman's* influence on the Rebel Letters and the fact that their appropriations of Langland's poem tend to be, as Justice puts it, "willful, at least tangential to and mostly at odds with Langland's purpose" (111), it is not unreasonable to suggest that at least some of the insurgents consciously re-enacted the Pardon-Tearing Scene in their many acts of anti-documentary violence. Although the scene itself hardly constitutes an explicit call for violent upheaval, the rebels nonetheless imitated the violence depicted therein, thereby appropriating the righteousness not only of Moses, but also of God himself.

"Iconoclasm," for Fradenburg, "is as much a mode of enjoyment as iconophilia; the desublimation of artefacts [. . .] can produce the *jouissance* of mass fusion just as easily as their sublimation in worship" (35). Although, anger and enjoyment initially strike us as less than compatible, I would argue that the rage shared by the rebels of 1381 was comparable to the "*jouissance* of mass fusion" that Fradenburg describes. Through their *imitatio Petri*, the Rebels were doing something very radical indeed: they were *enjoying* angry acts of violence

within the doctrinal confines of a theology centered on non-violent passivity. Unlike the liturgy surrounding the Eucharist, which evokes the Passion through an extremely regulated ritual (Rubin 49–63), the rebels actualized the sacred violence at the core of the Christian tradition within the socio-political sphere. In their many acts of iconoclasm they performed and re-performed, not Christ's passive endurance, but the violence done to his body during the crucifixion. In this light, it is not difficult to understand why Langland cut the Pardon-Tearing Scene out of the C-text: in (mis)reading it, the rebels stood "affective piety" on its head, so to speak.

Somewhat ironically, Langland violated his own text in an effort to disassociate it from the many acts of anti-documentary violence perpetrated during the Rising. In omitting Piers' anger, however, the C-text recalls the two junctures in the A-text at which wrath is left conspicuously absent. In other words, while Langland's censorship of the C-text is reactionary in every sense of the word, it also subtly alludes to the very radical sections of the A-text that Ball's *Prima epistola* misappropriated in order to provoke the Rising in the first place. In so doing, the C-text both evokes and eschews *Piers Plowman's* influence on the Rising. Although Langland's bowdlerization of the C-text is clearly tantamount to a condemnation of the anti-documentary violence perpetrated during the Rising, it is unlikely that he expected such a minor revision to completely eradicate, or even repress, his poem's causal influence on that event from English cultural memory. It is much more likely that Langland intended the pardon-tearing's absence to directly signify his newfound cautiousness regarding iconoclastic violence. Further, by de-radicalizing the C-text in the precise manner that he radicalized the A-text, Langland rendered visible to his audience the exact means by which the rebels exploited his poem in pursuit of their own violent ends. Even as it dissociates *Piers*

Plowman from the Rising, therefore, the C-text's pregnant aporia monumentalizes the somewhat tragic manner in which radical discourse produces its own reactionary censor.

VI. RETHINKING AFFECTIVE PIETY

According to Aristotle's definition, anger is always comprised of a vengeful desire to inflict reciprocal suffering on another. Anger is, therefore, patently other than compassion, which seeks to partake in the suffering of the other. As Sarah McNamer has illustrated, the Christian ideology of compassion—"cum + patior," "to suffer with"—is rooted in the premodern, gendered practice of meditating on Christ's Passion (*Affective Meditation* 11). At present, the scholarly term "affective piety" is used to refer almost exclusively to *compassionate* piety. Unsurprisingly, practitioners of compassionate piety, in their zealous empathy, tend to oppose themselves to antagonistic affects such as anger.

Julian of Norwich, for example, adamantly refuses to attribute anger to the Godhead: "I saw no manner of wrath in God, neither for shorte time nor for longe, for sothly, as to my syte, if God might be wroth a touch we shuld neither have life, ne stede, ne being" (*RL*.49.11–14). Ever the Neo-Platonist, Julian insists that, since it is contrary to peace and love, wrath must therefore be contrary to God: "wrath and frienshippe, be two contraries. For he that wastith and destroyeth our wrath, and maketh us meke and milde, it behoveth nedes to be that he be ever one in love, meke and mildd, which is contrarious to wrath" (*RL*.49.8–10). There is an undeniable difference between the ethics of compassion endorsed by Julian and the rhetoric of rage that Ball proliferated. Both, however, participate in the tradition of *imitatio Christi*. While compassionate piety calls for the imitation of Christ's Passion, the theology of anger endorsed by Ball attempts to recuperate a more active, even violent, Christ; the

Christ who zealously proclaims in Matthew 10.34 “non veni pacem mittere, sed gladium” (“I have not come to bring peace, but a sword”).

CODA: ON POSTMEDIEVAL ANGER

In her astute essay, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neocoservatism and De-Democratization,” Wendy Brown argues that, in an effort to mass-produce docile citizens, uninterested in performing the “legwork” necessary to maintain a liberal democracy, the American right employs two distinct political rationalities: neoliberal economic policy, which fetishizes individual liberty (often at the expense of morality) and neoconservatism, which champions the state’s duty to regulate morality, both at home and abroad. Since she published this essay in 2006, at the height of George W. Bush’s second presidential term, Brown’s alarmism is understandable. Despite the fact that both neoliberalism and neoconservatism remain very much with us today, however, the American public has been anything but apolitical during the six years separating 2006 from the present.

In fact, the Democratic Party’s sweeping triumph in the 2006, midterm elections was largely fueled by bottom-up, grassroots activism, as was Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential bid. Although these landmark victories gave the Democrats control of the White House, Congress and the Senate, they also provoked an oppositional, populist backlash from the far right. On February 19, 2009, less than a month after Obama’s term officially began, CNBC reporter Rick Santelli launched into an irate, on-air diatribe against the President’s Home Owner Affordability and Stability Plan, which allocated \$75 billion dollars to help up to 9 million homeowners avoid foreclosure on ill-advised mortgages. A true neoliberal, Santelli complained that the plan “rewarded bad behavior,” calling Americans who purchased high-risk mortgages “losers,” unworthy of taxpayer support. During his harangue, Santelli pro-

posed, in an ostensibly offhand manner, that Chicago have a “Tea Party,” protesting the unfair tax-hike that would supposedly result from Obama’s reckless spending. Although it is impossible to determine how spontaneous or premeditated Santelli’s rant actually was, his allusion to our country’s initial, iconic eschewal of British rule struck a profound chord with a substantial cross-section of the American public. Within days of Santelli’s rant, agitated conservatives nationwide began organizing email lists, facebook groups, private meetings and public protests, all in the newly minted name of the Tea Party (Skopcal and Williamson 1–13).

Since 2009, the Tea Party has developed into one of the most influential populist movements in recent U.S. history. Of course, grassroots activism is not solely responsible for its meteoric rise to political prominence. From its conception, the movement has been subsidized by older, wealthier national advocacy organizations such as FreedomWorks, which is chaired by the former Republican House Majority Leader Dick Armey (Ibid. 11). Citing such advantages, Nancy Pelosi and other Democrats are quick to deride the Tea Party movement as “Astroturf,” in that it claims to have grass roots, but actually does not. However rhetorically delightful, Pelosi’s metaphor is not entirely fair to the thousands of Tea Partiers nationwide who continue to zealously engage in bottom-up activism on a regular basis. Tea Partiers rally around their common distrust of the Obama administration, abhorrence of the welfare state and quasi-Evangelical reverence for America’s founding documents. More than anything, they share the fervent belief that America is currently moving in the wrong direction: away from the egalitarian principles on which it was founded and towards a dismal collapse, either into ruinous socialism or all out anarchy. In this, they are clearly indebted to a long-standing rhetorical tradition, which Sacvan Bercovitch calls “the American jeremiad.” The

jeremiad, or political sermon, takes its name from the Biblical prophet Jeremiah, who had something of a penchant for critiquing contemporary moral decay. America's earliest Puritan settlers appropriated the jeremiad in order to glorify their separatist endeavor and prevent themselves from backsliding on their theocratic principles. Bercovitch argues that, unlike the older, European jeremiad—which heaps scorn on a hopelessly static society, perpetually falling out of God's favor—the American jeremiad hopefully asserts that progress can always be achieved, somewhat paradoxically, through a return to the religious standard on which America was founded. In other words, while Americans have always self-identified as “sinners in the hands of an angry God,” to borrow John Edwards' chilling phrase, they have also always taken comfort in the fact that the ability to solicit God's favor lies in their own hands. One would be hard-pressed to find a better description of the potent concoction of hope and fear distilled in Tea Party rhetoric.

Hope and fear, however, are not the only emotions associated with the Tea Party. Since its conception, “anger” has been the emotional watchword most central to the movement. In an April, 2010 poll conducted by the *New York Times* and CBS News, participants from a smattering of political affiliations were asked: “Which comes closest to your feelings about the way things are going in Washington—enthusiastic, satisfied but not enthusiastic, dissatisfied but not angry, or angry?” While only 19% of American adults self-identified as angry, a whopping 53% of Tea-Party Supporters did so. When these Tea Partiers were asked to name the object of their anger, popular responses included “government spending,” “healthcare reform” and “an overall lack of governmental representation.” Indeed, Tea Partiers never seem to tire either of voicing their indignation at rallies or “townhall”-style meetings, or of writing it on web sites, bumper stickers, t-shirts and, of course, protest signs.

Among the most prolonged and nuanced first-hand articulations of Tea Party anger on record is a youtube clip of the Evangelical radio personality Rose Tennant literally sacralizing anti-governmental anger at the “Official Pittsburg Tax Day Tea Party” on April 15, 2010:

The left just hates what’s been happening [i.e., the rise of the Tea Party movement] and they’ve taken to namecalling. Right? The most recent criticism: we’re an angry mob. Turn around, do we look like an angry mob to you. [At this point, a male member of the crowd yells “Yeah”]. We’re being criticized for our anger; make no mistake about this. And it scares them. And it scares them not because they honestly believe we’re going to spit on someone, or because we’ve yelled out a derogatory slur, or that we wish them bodily harm, not because they believe we would do any of those things, because you know what, they know that we don’t. They know that we make them uncomfortable in their town hall meetings. They know we just might show up in Washington, at their office. That is what they know and that is what they’re afraid of. They know that we’re not going to take it anymore. So don’t let them in their fear to turn your anger into something that you should be ashamed of. Even scripture tells us that there is an acceptable anger. There is a distinction that’s made. There’s a thing called righteous anger and I think we’ve got it. When we look around us and we see the arrogance and the determination to destroy a nation that God has sanctioned, to see ourselves stripped of our God-given and constitutionally affirmed rights and liberties, we’re angry. We’re angry with a righteous anger. But scripture tells us also to be angry and sin not and our peaceable demonstrations exemplify that command.

In this alarming new twist on the American jeremiad, Tennant highjacks the wrath of God, characterizing her left-leaning opponents as sinners in the hands of an angry mob. Despite

her jingoistic rhetoric of American exceptionalism, there is nothing exceptionally American about Tennant's sentiments. I first stumbled across her tirade while doing preliminary research for chapter above. Consequently, I was quite accustomed to sifting through medieval discussions of righteous anger, which, somewhat surprisingly, occur most frequently in long, didactic treatises on the Seven Deadly Sins. Among the most famous of these is Geoffrey Chaucer's Parson's Tale, which asserts that there are two manners of ire, one good and the other wicked. Like Tennant, the Parson supports his claim by citing Psalms 4.4, "Iracimini et nolite peccare," "Be angry and do not sin," which St. Paul echoes in Eph. 4.26. For both ideologues, this Scriptural double imperative is nothing less than rhetorical "pay dirt." In just four words it forces its adherents into an ideo-affective straightjacket, by simultaneously demanding them to feel anger and stipulating that, even in anger, their actions should remain consonant with Christian ethics.

Although I personally disagree with virtually all of Tennant's political positions, I cannot help but appreciate her insistence on non-violent protest. By evoking the specter of sin in their respective discussions of righteous anger, both Tennant and the Parson attempt to safeguard against the violence that their rhetoric could potentially incite. Sadly, not all demagogues are so responsible. As the chapter above contends, the theological concept of righteous anger had much more to do with the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 than has been hitherto recognized. Like the Tea Party, the group of roughly 60,000 insurgents who caused so much trouble throughout England in the early summer of 1381 was extremely heterogeneous, consisting of a hodgepodge of Peasants, clerics, proto-Bourgeoisie artisans and under-paid, local apprentices (the graduate students of their day). Also like the Tea Party, the rebels seem to have been vexed at what they saw as unfair taxation and regulatory legislation. According to

Rodney Hilton, they were particularly incensed by their government's continued enforcement of the 1351 Statute of Laborers, which froze wages and prevented rustics from relocating in search of better work, as well as the third instantiation of the "poll tax" (144–64). In fact, the Rising was sparked in late May of 1381, when Peasants in Essex vehemently refused to pay royal poll tax collectors. Shortly thereafter, rebels from all over England marched into London through an unguarded gate, torched John of Gaunt's palace the Savoy, killed lawyers and Flemish immigrants, and ultimately demanded that the Young King Richard II abolish feudal hegemony once and for all.

Unfortunately, as Paul Freedman has demonstrated, modern scholars don't have access to many sympathetic, firsthand accounts of the Rising. The so-called winners write history books and the Rebels did not win. On the other hand, Steven Justice and other historians of the Rising suggest that a great deal can be gleaned from a series of Middle English "sound bites" contained in the otherwise Latinate *Chronicles* of Thomas Walsingham and Henry Knighton. According to the chroniclers, the Rebel leaders composed these so-called letters in order coordinate their revolutionary efforts. Among the most famous of these is John Ball's above-mentioned short lyric entitled the *Prima epistola Iohannis Balle*:

Now raigneth pride in price,
Covetise is holden wise,
Leacherie without shame,
Gluttonye without blame:
Envie raigneth with treason,
And slouth is taken in greate season;
God doe bote, for now is time. (Walsingham fol. 174^v)

As Rossell Hope Robbins has demonstrated, this verse, supposedly composed by John Ball, one the Rising's most notorious leaders, borrows heavily from an extant complaint, which was commonly recorded in mendicant Preachers' handbooks such as the *Fasciculus morum*. Truly a jeremiad, the lyric rhetorically bewails the contemporary moment, complaining that, in its decadence, English society has come to consider Deadly Sins valuable. Unlike his sources, however, Ball excludes wrath from his lyric. As we have seen, Ball's elision of wrath was rhetorical. By omitting wrath from his list of Seven Deadly Sins, Ball denounced, not English society's excess of sinful anger, but its dearth of righteous anger. In so doing, he attempted to provoke a maximum outpouring of public indignation. He was, needless to say, quite successful in this endeavor.

I would argue that Ball's lyric is not only a jeremiad, but an American jeremiad, as defined by Bercovitch. Although he complains that society has failed to live up to the moral standard implicit in the Christian doctrine of sin, by appending the phrase "now it's time" to the end of his source, Ball implies that revolutionary reform is not only plausible, but necessary. In fact, Walsingham's *Chronicle* paraphrases a sermon, supposedly delivered by Ball at Blackheath, in which the zealot poses to his audience the now-famous question: "Whan Adam delved and Eve Span, who than was a Gentleman?" According to Walsingham, Ball elaborated on this theme by asserting that "all men were by nature created equal from the beginning, and that servitude had been introduced by the unjust and evil oppression of men, against the will of God, who, if it had pleased Him to create serfs, surely in the beginning of the world would have appointed who should be a serf and who a lord." In calling for a willed return to an idealized, prelapsarian past, Ball's rhetoric is simultaneously revolutionary and

conservative. It clearly anticipates not only the American jeremiad, but also our culture's ever-enduring obsession with notions of freedom, equality and its own origin.

Similar to that of Walsingham, Jean Froissart's *Chronicle* depicts Ball opining to his flock "things can't go right in England and never will, until goods are held in common and there are no more villeins and gentlefolk, but we are one and the same." Unlike Bercovitch's European jeremiad, Ball's rhetoric is not meant to provoke repentant despair, but a revolutionary leveling of the proverbial playing field. According to Walsingham, he urged his audience "to be men of courage, and out of love for their virtuous fathers who had tilled their land, and pulled up and cut down the noxious weeds which usually choke the crops, to make haste themselves at that present time to do the same. They must do this first, by killing the most powerful of the lords of the realm, then by slaying the lawyers, justiciars and jurors of the land, and finally by weeding out from their land any that they knew would in the future be harmful to the commonwealth." Unencumbered by anxieties about wrath, Ball and his ilk imagined their anger as wholly God-given and their violent actions as entirely righteous. Although the Tea Partiers, by and large, are avowedly non-violent, the line between Tennant's righteous anger and that of Ball is all-too-fine. For example, in 2010, a Virginia Tea Party blog published what its author incorrectly thought to be the home address of Democratic Representative Tom Periello, a champion of Obama's healthcare reform. In no uncertain terms, the blog urged Tea Partiers to stop by for a face-to-face chat with a personal touch. Hours after the blog was posted, the gas-line leading into Periello's brother's suburban home was intentionally severed. Thankfully, the disastrous explosion that could have resulted from this terrorist act did not, but the episode stands as a reminder that an exceedingly thin line separates political activism from violent insurgency.

To be clear, I don't mean to suggest that the Tea Party is likely to enact a violent revolt comparable to the Rising of 1381. Nor am I claiming that the structural resemblances between Ball's rhetoric and that of Tennant are particularly unique or extraordinary. I'm sure that one could find a John Ball doppelganger in any historical time period, if she looked hard enough. Instead, I am simply sharing one way that my research as a literary historian of late medieval England has informed my understanding of our current political situation. Studying the 1381 rising has taught me, above all, that righteous anger is a potentially dangerous concept. Consequently, it is worth paying very close attention to the manner in which extremists on either side of the political spectrum are mobilizing it today. After all, we live in quite angry times.

CHAPTER 2:

BETTER LIVING THROUGH DREAD IN DEVOTIONAL LITERATURE AND BEYOND

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

— Psalms 110.10

Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate.

— Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*

I. TOWARDS A LONG HISTORY OF EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY

For well over a decade, a de facto cadre of medievalists have set themselves the formidable task of shoring up modern philosophy's hitherto unacknowledged debts to premodern ideologies.⁴² The medieval roots of existential anxiety, however, have not garnered much recent attention. This is understandable enough. Existentialism has long since fallen out of vogue in philosophical circles and, colloquially, "existential anxiety" has come to signify an oft-juvenile dissatisfaction with life's hard truths. But before it was a stock-phrase for the brooding of melancholic adolescents, existential anxiety was a hotly debated philosophical concept. Intellectual historians often credit the nineteenth-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard as its "prime mover." "Nobody before Kierkegaard," the renowned Walter Kaufmann writes, "had seen so clearly that the freedom to make a fateful decision that may change our character and future breeds anxiety" (*Discovering the Mind* 26). Arguing against Kaufmann's popular sentiment, this essay reads Kierkegaard, not as the *ex nihilo* inventor of existential anxiety, but as a modern practitioner of an ancient, dread-based asceticism. While existentialism's explicators occasionally pay lip service to Kierkegaard's premodern prede-

⁴² See, for example, Biddick; Cole and Vance; Davis; Hollywood; Holsinger; Labbie; and the essay-cluster on "The Medieval Turn in Theory" in *The Minnesota Review* 80 (2013): 80–150.

cessors,⁴³ they have expended much more effort carefully tracing and re-tracing Kierkegaard's influence on Martin Heidegger's phenomenology and their combined influence on Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism.⁴⁴ According to countless histories of Western philosophy, these three modern philosophers initiated a tradition of existential inquiry that has rendered anxiety, according to Louis Dupré, "one of the principal categories through which our epoch has come to understand itself" (111). Consequently, intellectual historians often diagnose the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as particularly anxious. For example, the editors of *Philosophy's Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking* posit: "In the nineteenth century, the affective dimension of philosophy seems to shift away from the optimism of the enlightenment into a new philosophical state of mind: the mood of anxiety" (8). Whether or not Western philosophy's mood swung from optimism to anxiety in the nineteenth century, Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre themselves would surely have disagreed with this claim since they uniformly bewailed a *dearth* of philosophical anxiety in their own times, complaining that, for the most part, their contemporaries fled anxiety at every turn.⁴⁵

This chapter examines a wide range of Middle English devotional literature alongside some canonical works of modern existentialism in order to argue that Kierkegaard and the existentialists who followed him participated in a Judeo-Christian tradition of dread-based asceticism, the popularity of which had dwindled, but never completely vanished, since the Middle Ages. For Michel Foucault, "asceticism" refers to "the more or less coordinated en-

⁴³ See, for example, Barrett, William 69–148; and Barrett, Lee 29–112.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*; Ussher; Moyn and Magurshak.

⁴⁵ For Kierkegaard, see *The Concept of Anxiety* 157. See also Grøn 152–64; for Heidegger, see *Being and Time* 234–35; for Sartre, see "Existentialism is a Humanism" 350–51.

semble of exercises that are available, recommended or even obligatory [. . .] in a moral, philosophical or religious system in order to reach a definite spiritual objective” (398). According to Foucault’s definition, modern existentialists were certainly ascetics. I would argue, moreover, that premodern ascetics were existentialists insofar as they championed introspective analysis and attributed authenticity to ostensibly negative emotions like dread and despair. By beginning to consider premodern ascetics as early existentialists and modern existentialists as latter-day ascetics, we begin to write the long history of existential anxiety as an ascetic tradition built around the ethical goal of living better through dread.

II. DREADING WELL IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

Extant Middle English sermons, confession manuals, allegorical poems, dramas and polemics suggest that medieval England was home to a host of interacting, overlapping and at times competing dread-based “emotional communities” (i.e. “social groups whose members adhere to the same valuation of emotions and their expression”) (1). Sarah McNamer has recently shown that many Middle English devotional texts functioned as “emotion scripts”—“the loosely affiliated cultural prescripts that aid in establishing and maintaining [. . .] ‘emotional communities’”—designed to facilitate deliberate performances of devout compassion (11–14). In what follows, I examine Middle English devotional texts that act as “emotion scripts” designed to solicit a certain kind of dread. Indeed, St. Anselm of Canterbury—(too) often considered the father of affective piety⁴⁶—wrote a meditation to stir up fear that was frequently translated into Middle English and is even cited by Chaucer’s Parson to describe the

⁴⁶ McNamer convincingly argues “affective meditation originally was a woman’s genre” 18, 86–115.

“anguish” of hell (*The Canterbury Tales* 10.169).⁴⁷ As we will see, however, medieval preachers did not simply regale the laity with vivid depictions of fire and brimstone in an effort to stir up fear; they also imparted to their audience an elaborate ascetic program for distinguishing between the bad and good fears, eschewing the former and performing the latter.

From the earliest books of the Hebrew Bible, Judeo-Christian theology mandates a dreadful asceticism (Sherwin 246). Hebrew scripture renders “fear of the Lord” (*yirat Adonai*) an integral component of the proper affective posture towards God: “The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever” (Ps. 18.10). In addition to demanding fear of the Lord in stark imperatives,⁴⁸ a host of Psalms and Proverbs align it with spiritual ideals like obedience and wisdom.⁴⁹ Throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Christian theologians considered fear of the Lord one of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Deriving from Isaiah 11.2–3, the Gifts—wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord—enumerate the benefits that Christians receive from God’s worldly presence (Stroud 21–41). Patristic exegetes including Augustine of Hippo (*On the Sermon on the Mount* 27) and Gregory I (320), and, later, scholastic theologians like Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (17) and Thomas Aquinas (I-II, q. 68, a. 7, reply to Objection 2) cite Ps. 110.10 (“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”) to justify organizing the gifts into an ascending trajectory, beginning at the end of the Biblical list, with the fear of the Lord, and ending at its beginning, with wisdom. Their writings on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost were widely translated

⁴⁷ For Anselm’s *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, see Anselm 221–24. For a discussion of the Middle English translations of Anselm’s text, including Chaucer’s, see Haewaerts 258–69.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Lev. 25.17, Deut. 10.12–20, Josh 24.14.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Prov. 1.7, 9.10, Eccles. 1.16–20.

into Middle English confession manuals, sermons and lyrics during the church's early thirteenth-century push to catechize the laity.⁵⁰ A Middle English confession manual known as *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, for example, depicts the gift of dread as the *deus ex machina* through which the Holy Spirit initiates the process of salvation by waking the subject from "the sleep of sin" (126–27). The famous hermit Richard Rolle, on the other hand, flouts scholastic tradition and follows the Biblical order in placing dread of God *last* in his Middle English treatise on the Seven Gifts, thereby rendering fear of God, not merely an early stage of spiritual maturation to be transcended and left behind, but also a lasting emotional engine for producing ethical behavior: "The fear of God consists in preventing us from returning to our sin through any evil enticement; and it is then that fear, holy fear, is perfected in us when we may be afraid of angering God by the smallest sin which we may be aware of, and run from it as poison [*venyme*]" (19).⁵¹ For Rolle, dread is educative and ethical—it teaches us to flee sin. Likewise, the A-text of the popular Middle English dream vision *Piers Plowman* depicts an allegorical representation of wit musing: "For dread men do the better; dread is such a teacher [*maister*] / That makes men meek and mild in their speech, / And all gentle [*kynde*] scholars to learn at school" (10.82–84).

Like the Hebrew Bible, the Christian New Testament tells its reader how to dread. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul," Christ commands, "but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10.28).⁵² Parts of

⁵⁰ The production of Middle English devotional literature flourished in the wake of 1281's Council of Lambeth, at which John Peckham, Archbishop of Canterbury mandated that parish priests catechize their flock at least four times a year (Woods and Copeland 397).

⁵¹ For the ease of the general reader, I've modernized most Middle English terms and quotations.

⁵² cf. Luke 12.5.

the New Testament, however, suggest that love ultimately overthrows fear: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear because fear torments. He that fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4.18).⁵³ Patristic exegetes like Augustine reconciled such passages with pro-dread passages from the Hebrew Bible, such as Ps. 18.10 (“fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever”) and Ps. 110.10 (“fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”) by distinguishing between servile fear of God’s retribution, which is cast out by perfect love, and chaste fear of sundering oneself from God through sin, which endures forever (*Epistle on 1 John* 516–17). While Augustine certainly prefers the latter to the former, he does not altogether denounce servile fear: “the fear of God so wounds as doth the leech's knife. [. . .] It hurts more while he is operating upon it than it would if it were not operated upon; [. . .] but only that it may never hurt when the healing is effected. Then let fear occupy your heart that it may bring in charity” (515–16). Augustine celebrates servile fear’s therapeutic capacity to elicit the love that ultimately casts it out. Instead of opposing servile fear to chaste fear, he situates the former as the beginning of the wisdom that endures forever in the latter (515).

Augustine’s distinction between chaste and servile fear was extremely popular in medieval devotional writing. In fact, the Wit of *Piers Plowman*’s B-text states: “He that dreads God does well; he that dreads him for love / And not for fear of vengeance thereby does better” (9.97–98). Medieval thinkers, however, by no means limited themselves to two types of dread. In fact, scholastic theologians often crafted elaborate taxonomies containing up to six

⁵³ Such passages were popular in medieval ascetic texts. The early Middle English psychomachia *Sawles Warde* (contained in *Anchoretic Spirituality* 209–21), for example, depicts a mob of allegorical characters including Love of Eternal Life, Joy, Caution, Measure and Strength casting out fear. As they are doing so, however, Measure adds that it is very important that people listen to Fear and promises he “will very happily be welcomed in as often as Love of Life stops talking” (220–21). Thus *Sawles Warde* is able to enjoy the fantasy of a fear-free life without entirely abandoning the Judeo-Christian tradition of dreadful asceticism. Fear is an important educator, but periodically cast out by love.

(Johnson 23–65).⁵⁴ Far from the sole province of university men, these Latinate catalogues of fear were frequently translated into Middle English, appearing not only in a variety of manuals for private devotion,⁵⁵ but also in highly public sermons. At least three Middle English versions of a Latin sermon by the famously dissenting Oxford theologian John Wycliffe outline five or six distinct types of fear: some good, some bad, some in between. Unsurprisingly, given his desire to disendow the institutional church, Wycliffe’s sermon heaps a good deal of scorn on those who fear losing worldly property, defining servile fear as fear of losing goods and chaste fear as fear of God instead of the loss of goods (294–95). Its Middle English descendants, however, are much more invested in pastoral pedagogy than anti-clerical polemic (Somerset 36–45). In fact, Helen Spenser argues that one such descendant, contained in MS. Bodley 95, constitutes a parish priest’s cautious retooling of a more openly separatist Middle English cycle based on Wycliffe’s Latin sermons (393–96).⁵⁶ The analogous taxonomies of fear in orthodox and heterodox Middle English sermons attest to dreadful asceticism’s ubiquity among late medieval England’s laity. Like a pro-freedom stance in modern American politics, a pro-dread stance in Middle English devotional culture was utterly uncontroversial.

The taxonomy of fear contained in Wycliffe’s Latin sermon is translated into Middle English as Sermon 108 of the *English Wycliffite Sermons* (273–74), from which the ostensi-

⁵⁴ See, for example, Hugh of St. Victor 377–78, Aquinas *ST* II-II, q. 19, a. 2 and Wycliffe 294.

⁵⁵ See, for example, *Contemplations of Love and Dread of God* 8–10.

⁵⁶ Spenser holds that the Bodley cycle’s scribe is more critical of friars imposing on priests’ pastoral turf than other abuses of clerical power (393–94).

bly orthodox Sermon 11 in Bodley 95 derives.⁵⁷ Sermon 11 is entirely devoted to defining six types of dread. By progressing from unholy, to less holy, to holy fears, Sermon 11 prescribes an elaborate ascetic program for dreading well that Eric J. Johnson helpfully calls a *modus timendi* (16, 65–90). It characterizes some dreads—such as “worldly dread” (i.e. fear of worldly punishment for bad behavior), “manly dread” (i.e. fear of worldly punishment for speaking the truth) and “kindly dread” (i.e. fear of worldly punishment for loving God)—as categorically immoral, citing Matthew 10.28 (“fear not them which destroy the body, but him who can destroy both soul and body in hell”) to imply that fears of worldly violence ought to be repressed and fears of infernal punishment ought to be performed. It characterizes other types of dread—such as “bondman’s dread” (i.e. fear of God’s capacity to take all that he has given) and “beginning dread” (i.e. fear of God, partially for his capacity to punish and partially out of love)—as morally imperfect, but valuable insofar as they potentially engender the morally perfect “child-like dread” (i.e. fear of God only for reverent love) (23^r–23^v). Following Augustine, medieval devotees often saw “chaste” or “childlike” dread and love, not as mutually exclusive or contradictory emotions, but as two equally important components of an ideal emotional posture towards God.⁵⁸ Julian of Norwich, for example, insists that equal measures of love and dread persist even in heaven (357–58). This utopic, loving dread appears frequently enough in the writings of career mystics and theologians like Julian.⁵⁹ Sermon 11 demonstrates, however, that members of England’s laity also aspired—or were ex-

⁵⁷ I discuss Sermon 11 rather than its analogues because it has not yet received any critical attention. For a brief discussion of a related six-part, Middle English taxonomy of fear in MS. Sidney Sussex 74, see Somerset 43–44.

⁵⁸ cf. Deut. 10.12.

⁵⁹ cf. *Contemplations of Love and Dread of God* 9–10.

pected to aspire—to dread lovingly. The five other, less valuable forms of dread that it details form a latter of ascent from sin to sanctity.

Like Sermon 11, Middle English devotional dramas idealize an eschewal of worldly fears in favor of fear of the Lord. In popular plays like the Brome Manuscript's *Sacrifice of Isaac*, Biblical characters exemplify proper dread. Therein, Abraham explicitly asserts that his dread of God trumps his horror at the prospect of killing his son:

Forsooth, son, but if I thee kill

I should grieve God right sore, I dread.

It is his commandment and also his will

That I should do this same deed. (181–84)

Later, the angel who alleviates Abraham of his dark duty (320–21) and God himself (401–02) praise the patriarch for dreading well. Moreover, God praises Isaac for dreading the divine injunction more than his own death (409–10). Already in medieval drama, Abraham's decision to fear disobeying God's imperative more than violating his ethical obligation to Isaac, which Kierkegaard calls a "teleological suspension of the ethical" in *Fear and Trembling* (83–95), stands as an exemplar both of dread's power to inform moral decisions and the moral imperative to deliberately dread well. While the ostensible purpose of such Biblical dramas is moral edification, not all medieval moralists considered drama an appropriate medium for spiritual learning. The Middle English anti-theatrical tract *A Treatise on Playing Miracles*, for example, complains that Biblical dramas do not generate, but detract from holy dread: "the playing and joking [*bourdinge*] of the most earnest works of God takes away the dread of God" (94). Once again, pundits on both sides of a cultural divide champion holy dread. On the other hand, where Sermon 11, its analogues, and *The Sacrifice of Isaac* are

pedagogical insofar as they impart a *modus timendi*, *A Treatise* is polemical insofar as it denounces drama without offering an alternative *modus timendi*.

Likewise, the Carthusian monk Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* attributes the spread of heretical denigrations of the Eucharist's efficacy to a dearth of "buxom dread" of God's capacity to work marvels and a concomitant overconfidence in the conclusions of "bodily wit" and "natural [*kyndely*] reason" among the laity (225). Employing an ironically analogous rhetoric, the Wycliffite compendium *The Lantern of Light* rails against clergy's "presumption," which it defines as "a high puffing up [*bolnyng*] of the spirit without dread of God's righteousness" (7). While Love and *The Lantern*'s author profoundly disagree about whether the laity's "bodily wit" can muster theological reasoning, they implicitly agree that all Christians ought to dread God. Indeed, most medieval devotees did, though they argued incessantly about how best to do so.

III. DREAD AND DESPAIR IN THE ANCHORHOLD

Medieval anchorites practiced an extreme form of asceticism. After being declared dead to the world, they were permanently walled into a small room adjacent to a church. Although they guardedly interacted with people from the outside world through one window and participated in the liturgy through a porthole looking into the church, by and large, anchorites turned radically away from the world and devoted themselves to a rigorous process of ascetic self-fashioning, often involving performances of dread.⁶⁰ The *Ancrene Wisse*, an early Middle English rule for anchoresses, encourages its audience to use fear to eschew temptation:

Let no one who lives the life of sublimity imagine that she will not be tempted. The good, who have climbed up high, are more tempted than the weak; and this is natural,

⁶⁰ For a detailed introduction to the anchoritic lifestyle, see Nicolas Watson and Anne Savage's introduction to *Anchoretic Spirituality* 7–32.

for the higher the hill, the stronger the wind on it. Since the hill of sublime and holy life is higher, the enemy's blasts, the winds of temptations, are greater and stronger on it. If there is any anchoress who feels no temptations, she should fear greatly that at this very point she is being all too much and all too greatly tempted. (*Anchoretic Spirituality* 114)⁶¹

As a dreadful “emotion script,” the *Wisse* asks the anchoress to re-imagine her temptations as strong winds that threaten to foil her spiritual ascension. It is precisely because there is a disjuncture between the phenomenal promise of pleasure glimpsed in temptation and the metaphysical peril it “actually” signifies that the anchoress must take matters into her own hands and deliberately perform fear of temptation's winds. Since the most dangerous type of temptation is that which is not felt as such, the anchoress ought to be extremely afraid at moments in which she feels least tempted. In order to resist temptation, she commits to a lifelong ascetic program according to which both palpable temptation and a lack thereof necessitate the immediate production of dread. Since medieval devotees considered dread and love by no means mutually exclusive, however, they would not necessarily have considered a life of perpetual dread devoid of, or even lacking in, enjoyment.

After detailing various internal and external temptations, the *Wisse* offers several strategies for managing them. Among these are a series of “dreadful thoughts,” all of which situate the anchoress in grave, physical danger: “Think what you would do if you saw the devil of hell standing openly in front of you and gaping wide at you, as he does secretly in temptation; if people cried ‘Fire! Fire!’ because the church was burning; if you heard burglars breaking down your walls—these and other similar terrifying thoughts” (*Anchoretic*

⁶¹ For the original Middle English, see *Ancrene Wisse* 68.

Spirituality 136).⁶² The *Wisse* instructs the anchoress to stamp out her unwanted desires by conjuring dreadful thoughts. For Linda Georgianna, early Middle English anchoritic texts, unlike the monastic rules on which they are modeled, tend to be “descriptive rather than prescriptive” (9). Following Georgianna, Lara Farina suggests that “[t]his shift of form—from mandate to persuasion—can be seen as a response to the freedoms of the anchorhold. Anchorites had to be primarily self-policing, and the manuals written for them sought to condition the anchor’s inner disposition as much as his/her outer actions” (39). From a secular perspective, the *Wisse*’s suggestion that jolts of deliberate fear eradicate obstacles in the anchoress’ pursuit of salvation might seem both sadistic and coercive. It is quite possible, however, that the anchoress derived a great deal of enjoyment from self-policing—sacrificing prospective, worldly pleasures in pursuit of an intensely erotic, enjoyment of God (Farina 38–39).⁶³

The writings of England’s most famous anchoress, Julian of Norwich, evince a distinct fascination with dread marked by Julian’s characteristic desire to reconcile her mystical experience with her understanding of Christian doctrine. Julian’s writings are framed within an overarching account of an intense revelation that she experienced in 1373. She composed *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* (hereafter *VS*) shortly thereafter, while the longer *A Revelation of Love* (hereafter *RL*) constitutes an elaborate revision of *VS*, on which Julian may have continued working as late as 1416 (Watson, “The Composition” 637–83). Both *VS* and *RL* contain quadripartite taxonomies of dread including “dread of affray” (i.e. fear “that comes to a man suddenly by frailty”), “dread of pain” (i.e. fear of “bodily death” and “ghostly enemies”), “doubtful dread” (i.e. “a spice of despair” that doubts God’s capacity for salva-

⁶² cf. *Ancrene Wisse* 92.

⁶³ For the enjoyment of sacrifice, see Fradenburg 12, 158.

tion), and “reverent dread” (i.e. a sublime fear that causes subjects “to hastily flee from all that is not good”).⁶⁴ All of Julian’s dreads have obvious analogues in Sermon 11, as well as other Middle English treatises on dread and devotion such as *Contemplations on the Love and Dread of God* (8–10). On the whole, however, Julian’s treatment of most forms of dread is substantially less prohibitive than those found in other Middle English texts. For example, where *RL* states that dread of affray is positive insofar as it “helps to purge man as does bodily sickness and other pain that is not sin; for all such pains help man if they be patiently taken” (117), *Contemplations* insists that “dread of man or of the world [. . .] is counted for naught” (8), and Sermon 11 vociferates that “they are false cowards that dread a manly world” (fol. 23^v). Instead of making a sharp distinction between dread of death and dread of hellish punishment, moreover, Julian makes both sub-categories of the entirely productive dread of pain, which wakes the subject out of the “sleep of sin” and steers her to “seek comfort and mercy from God.” Echoing the tradition of initial fear, Julian posits that dread of pain acts as an entrance (*entre*), enabling the subject to have contrition through the “blissful touching of the Holy Ghost.”⁶⁵ Rather than designating dread of pain as a Gift of the Holy Spirit, Julian makes it a prerequisite of any communion with the Holy Spirit, arguably placing the responsibility to fear worldly and infernal pain in pursuit of reverent dread on the subject’s shoulders.

Although Julian’s theology is generally more accepting of worldly fears than those espoused by her contemporaries, she does not exclusively idealize dread. In fact, the mystic treats doubtful dread with marked disdain in *VS*: “For I am certain that God hates all doubtful

⁶⁴ *VS*: 117–19; *RL*: 355–59.

⁶⁵ *VS*: 117; *RL*: 355.

dreads, and he wills that we have them departed from us with true knowing of love” (117). Here, Julian—who elsewhere staunchly refuses to ascribe any anger to God (269)—baldly states that God *hates* doubtful dread and he desires that Christian subjects expel it through knowing love. While she does not directly specify its proper object, by calling it a “spice of despair,” Julian associates doubtful dread with doubt of God’s capacity to forgive sin. In the conclusion of *VS*, Julian differentiates “false dread” that “travails and tempests and troubles” from “reverent dread” that “softens and comforts and pleases and rests,” asserting that the subject must “know them both and refuse the false, right as you would a wicked spirit” (118–19). On one hand, Julian’s injunction to suppress fears that God is unable or unwilling to dispense mercy is uncharacteristically censorial. On the other, by sanctioning comfortable fears and forbidding tormenting ones, Julian ensures that the subject enjoys dreading God. Julian’s relatively scathing account of despair in *VS* and parts of *RL* is probably influenced by the Augustinian hermit William Flete’s Middle English psychological tract: *Remedies Against Temptations*, which treats despair as an occupational hazard, often caused by demonic intervention, afflicting “religious specialists engaged in contemplative living” (Watson, “Despair” 345). In addition to Julian, Flete’s pathological account of despair influenced a host of Middle English devotional texts including Walter Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection*, *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Chastising of God’s Children* (Watson, “Despair” 345). If Julian’s demonization of doubtful dread is uncharacteristic, therefore, it was far from idiosyncratic.

Unlike *VS*, which demands that its audience suppress fears that God is unable or unwilling to dispense mercy, *RL* contains “a striking about-face from [Julian’s] earlier warning about doubtful dread: [in *RL*] even despair-inducing doubtful dread turns out to do good” (Banchich 339). In a subtle but crucial emendation, Julian renders God’s grace, rather than

the subject, responsible for transforming the bitterness of doubt into love: “Doubtful dread, inasmuch as it draws one to despair, God will have it turned in us into love by true knowing of love: that is to say, that *the bitterness of doubt be turned into sweetness of kind love by grace*. For it may never please our lord that his servants doubt in his goodness” (*RL* 355–56, my emphasis). While it maintains *VS*’s vituperative stance on doubtful dread, *RL* does not mandate self-censorship. As B.A. Windeatt puts it, “[t]he fuller understanding [of Julian’s third dread] explored in *A Revelation* characteristically turns upon a transformation accomplished by means of love, and through a realization that the two responses which seem at variance with each other are in truth interrelated within us” (112). In other words, *RL* renders doubtful dread a sort of affective *felix culpa*, since it is destined to be transformed into knowing love by grace. In so doing, it flies in the face of a great deal of Middle English devotional literature that condemns despair outright (Watson, “Despair” 345; Snyder 23).⁶⁶

Like Augustine, Julian distinguishes useful but imperfect fears from a reverent, loving dread of deviating from divinity. Though *RL* does not call for the out-and-out repression of any class of fear, it certainly privileges reverent dread over all others:

For there is no dread that fully pleases God in us but reverent dread, and that is full soft, for the more it is had, the less it is felt, for the sweetness of love. Love and dread are brethren, and they are rooted in us by the goodness of our maker. [. . .] And it belongs to us that are his servants and his children to dread him for his lordship and fatherhood, as it belongs to us to love him for goodness. [. . .] All dreads other than rev-

⁶⁶ In listing Julian as a Middle English opponent of despair, Watson and Snyder make no mention of the subtle shift in Julian’s discourse on despair between *VS* and *RL* acknowledged by Banchich and Windeatt. Watson’s important essay on despair provides an interesting counterpoint to my own, since he addresses the Early Modern period largely overlooked here.

erent dread that are proffered to us, though they come under the color of holiness, they are not so true. And hereby may they be known asunder. The dread that makes us hastily to flee from all that is not good and fall into our lord's breast, as the child into the mother's bosom, with all our intent and with all our mind [. . .] that dread that brings us into this working, its kind and gracious and good and true. And all that is contrarious to this, is either wrong or melded with wrong. (357)

Julian's loving dread, of course, owes a great deal to Augustine's notion of chaste fear. Like Rolle, moreover, Julian describes holy fear as a flight, but where Rolle focuses on the venomous sin from which it flees, Julian focuses on God's matronly bosom to which it flees. For Julian, knowledge of God ought to inspire infinite dread of his sovereign might and love of his consolatory mercy. Although she insists that subjects ought to perpetually dread God's fatherhood, Julian defines reverent dread as a hasty flight towards God's motherhood. In an empowering short-circuit, her hermaphroditic God eternally elicits dread as (s)he simultaneously consoles it. Hardly felt through the love with which it is necessarily comingled, Julian's reverent dread is, above all, comfortable dread.

Julian's discourse on dread, like that contained in *Ancrene Wisse*, is both constative and rhetorical: it both describes and solicits dread. As Kathryn Kerby-Fulton notes, however, Julian's prose also possesses a distinctly "forensic" dimension absent from purely didactic tracts such as the *Wisse*: in addition to defining and advocating fear, Julian narrates her experience thereof (315–23). For example, the mystic records her retrospective fear of demonic subterfuge after experiencing a vision of Christ's tormented face: "I was sometime in a fear about whether or not it was a [divinely inspired] showing. And then diverse times our Lord gave me more sight, whereby I understood truly that it was" (159). Julian's fear functions as

an emotional call for divine consolation—a call that God readily answers. By narrating her own doubtful dread successfully soliciting God’s consolatory verification of her mystical experience, Julian furnishes forensic support for her theological claim that God’s grace turns despair into love. In doing so, she anticipates the existential philosophy of Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre, all of whom glean authenticity in despair.

III. DREAD IN PRAYER

Julian’s concerns about doubtful dread are famously recorded in the mystical autobiography of her (in)famous contemporary Margery Kempe. In a well-known episode therein, God instructs Kempe to visit Julian’s anchorhold. She does and offers an account of the “many holy speeches and dalliances that our Lord spoke to her soul” so that Julian may determine “if there was any deceit in them, for the anchoress was an expert in such things” (119–20). After hearing Kempe recall her mystical experience, Julian advises her “to be obedient to the will of our Lord God and fulfill with all her might whatever he put in her soul,” provided that “it is not against the worship of God and profit of her fellow Christian, for, if it is, then it is not the moving of a good spirit, but rather of an evil spirit” (120). Both Kempe and Julian dread the possibility that their apparently revelatory experience is fabricated by deceit, but in so doing they ultimately refute its validity. By posing to themselves, each other and God the common accusation that their revelations are demonic rather than divine,⁶⁷ they court divine consolation that denies that accusation before others can launch it.

Reading more like the author of *VS* than that of *RL*, Kempe’s rendition of Julian explicitly denigrates self-doubt as follows: “A double man in soul is ever unstable and unsteadfast in all his ways. He who constantly doubts is like the flood of the sea, which is

⁶⁷ The Augustinian friar Walter Hilton, for example, warns against evil angels pretending to be good ones (1.10.209–10).

moved and born about by the wind. That man is not likely to receive the gifts of God. What creature that has these tokens, must steadfastly believe that the Holy Ghost dwells in his soul” (121). Depicting doubt as windswept water, Kempe’s Julian claims that a self-conscious repression of doubt and a self-assured faith in the veracity of her showings will provide Kempe the stability necessary to continue receiving God’s gifts. Although Margery’s Julian evokes the possibility of demonic deceit and encourages Margery to use church doctrine to measure the authenticity of her revelatory data, she clearly denigrates self-doubt to authenticate, rather than invalidate, Kempe’s mystical experience and encourage her fellow mystic to trust her revelations. Neither Kempe, nor Julian wants to suppress God’s super-egoic presence in her psyche; indeed, they draw transcendent authority therefrom. Instead, both women deliberately privilege their reverent dread of God’s voice over the skeptical dread that questions its validity.

Scholars have recently argued that Kempe sanctifies herself by actively courting negative emotions like shame and envy: I would add dread to that list.⁶⁸ The call-and-response of terrestrial self-doubt and celestial reaffirmation that Julian only briefly narrates in *RL* constitutes the veritable pulse of Kempe’s *Book*. Forever castigating herself and being castigated by others, Kempe is in constant need of Christ’s consolation, which he no less constantly supplies. For instance, upon rising to nation-wide prominence, Kempe is struck with a self-conscious dread of vainglory, but is quickly emboldened by her internal Christ:

Than she was welcomed diverse places and much was made of her. Resultantly, she had great dread of vainglory and was much afraid. Our merciful Lord Jesus Christ, worshipped be his name, said to her: “Dread not, daughter, I shall take vainglory from

⁶⁸ For shame, see Cole 155–82. For envy, see Rosenfeld.

you. For they that worship you, worship me; they that despise you, despise me and therefore I shall chasten them. I am in you, and you in me. They that hear you, hear the voice of God.” (85)

Kempe’s anxieties about vainglory somewhat ironically allow her to assert that she speaks with “the voice of God.” Her dread of enjoying her mystical celebrity solicits its own negation in Christ’s consolation. Analogous conversations occur throughout the *Book*—over its course, Christ echoes the refrain “dread not daughter” no less than twenty two times. The frequency with which Kempe’s dread solicits Christ’s consolation suggests that she, like the Julian of *RL*, considered doubtful dread a means of authenticating revelatory experience.

Julian and Margery depict dread acting like a prayer that calls to God for loving consolation. Other Middle English devotional texts also explicate loving dread’s essential role in prayer. In fact, *An Epistle on Prayer*, a fourteenth-century treatise that may have been composed by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Tixier 109), lists dread as an essential component of prayer. *An Epistle* is an “emotion script” *par excellence* insofar as it imparts an emotion-centered ascetic program for prayer. Citing Ps. 110.10, *An Epistle*’s author insists that prayer should begin with the subject meditating on her/his imminent death, which provides her/him a “special sight of the shortness of time for amendment” that engenders a “working of dread” (48–49). Dread alone, however, causes “over-much heaviness” and therefore must be tempered by the hopeful thought that prayer can deliver one to heaven (although *An Epistle*’s author duly concedes the soteriological necessity of the sacraments) (49).⁶⁹ By knitting fear of death to hope for salvation, the praying subject cultivates a “great stirring of

⁶⁹ *An Epistle* is considerably more optimistic than Anselm’s second prayer to Mary, which self-effacingly denies that prayer can have any soteriological efficacy and asserts that only Mary’s merit can win her salvation (114, 132–39).

love unto him that is so good and so merciful,” which burgeons into a “reverent affection” offered to God in prayer (50).

According to *An Epistle*, hope neither opposes, nor casts out dread, but is rooted therein. Hence, the text likens its ascetic program to a “tree full of fruit, of which dread is that part that is in the earth, that is the root, and hope is that part that is above the earth, that is the body with the bows. In that that hope is certain and stable, it is the body; in that it stirs men to works of love, it is the bows. But this reverent affection is forever the fruit” (52–53). *An Epistle*’s arboreal conceit naturalizes its tripartite method of prayer—dreading death, hoping for salvation, and loving God’s capacity to save—as an organic process of growth. Just as Margery’s Julian depicts doubt as a state of windswept instability, *An Epistle* designates hope a state of tree-trunk-like stability. In *An Epistle*, however, hope’s stability is not threatened by, but derives from dread. Rather than portray holy fear as a gift *from* God, *An Epistle* makes it the foundation of a gift *to* God, foregrounding performed dread’s spiritual productivity. Like a host of other Middle English texts, *An Epistle* is an “emotion script” choreographing a performance of dread, hope and love designed to court divinity. Their authors performed dread in an effort to talk to God.

POSTMEDIEVAL DREAD, PART I: EXISTENTIALISM’S ANXIOUS ASCETICISM

Cataclysmic social change erupted throughout Europe during the four hundred or so years that separate Julian of Norwich from Søren Kierkegaard: the Reformation decentered the Catholic Church and the Enlightenment decentered scholasticism. Yet dreadful asceticism by no means disappeared during that tumultuous period. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism repeats the mantra “we should fear God and love him” and the motto inscribed at the very front

of René Descartes' earliest notebook, the *Praeambula*, is none other than Ps. 110.10: "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Cottingham 201).

Just as Julian's writings on dread are constative, rhetorical and forensic, Kierkegaard's philosophy of anxiety is intimately bound up with his own anxious history. As a boy, he attended a radical, Moravian congregation where he listened to sermons that detailed Christ's humiliation and passion in bloody detail; sermons that, if we read them without knowing, we might well call "medieval" (Garff 12). His father, who lived in perpetual guilt after having cursed God as a poor, hungry child, transmitted his anxiety to his young son.⁷⁰ Consequently, both father and son clung to the morbid belief that Søren would die by thirty-three: the age attained by Jesus (Garff 346). In an 1848 journal entry, Kierkegaard writes: "It is terrible when I think, even for one single moment, over the dark background, which, from the earliest time, was part of my life. The anxiety with which my father filled my soul, his own frightful melancholy, a lot of which I cannot even write down. I acquired an anxiety about Christianity and yet felt powerfully attracted to it" (273). Not only does Kierkegaard approach Christianity with a mixture of dread and desire reminiscent of so many Middle English devotional texts, he resorts to an inexpressibility *topos*—essential to the rhetoric of apophatic devotion—to signify the ineffable trauma of his childhood anxiety. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard (under the pseudonym Johannis Silentio) repeatedly reimagines the Abraham story staged in the Brome Manuscript's *Sacrifice of Isaac*. In one such re-imagination, Abraham denounces himself as an idolater before drawing his knife in an effort to sacrifice Isaac's reverence for his father, thereby preserving his son's reverence for God. In another, Isaac notices that his father's non-knife-bearing hand is "clenched in despair" as

⁷⁰ Both Brennan and Clough highlight the importance of intergenerational transmissions of affect.

he approaches. As a result, Isaac subsequently loses his faith. Given the significance he attached to his father's childhood transgression, it is easy to read Kierkegaard's relationship with his father into these alternative Abrahams: one who slanders himself for his son's faith and the other whose despair destroys that faith (Garff 252–60).

By 1848, “anxiety” [Danish: *Angest*] was already a keyword in Kierkegaard's ever-expanding philosophical lexicon. His 1844 work, *The Concept of Anxiety* (hereafter *CA*)—written under the guise of Vigilius Haufniensis (Watchman of Copenhagen) and subtitled *A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*—examines, as its elaborate moniker suggests, hereditary sin from a psychological perspective. It argues against a long theological tradition of blaming original sin for producing a rupture in a previously unified human subjectivity, contending instead that human subjectivity, which synthesizes a temporal body and an eternal soul, is split by its very nature (Barrett, Lee 36–52). For Kierkegaard, anxiety derives from this fundamental split in human subjectivity and is therefore a “sympathetic antipathy”—the experience of struggling with oneself. Unlike fear, which has a definite object, anxiety occurs when the subject recognizes the radical indeterminacy of her/his future actions. Anxiety, therefore, precedes both sin and law as “freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility” (*CA* 42). As such, it constitutes nothing less than “the fundamental mode of affective self-awareness in which a person discovers the possibility of his free self-determination” (Magurshak 170).

Anxiety, for Kierkegaard, is the experience of freedom in all of its ambivalence. On one hand, anxiety educates by bringing the subject face-to-face with the abyss of possibility: “Whoever is educated by anxiety is educated by possibility, and only he who is educated by possibility is educated according to his infinitude.” (157). On the other hand, not all Kierke-

guardian anxiety is beneficial. For example, he warns against a demonic, “anxiety about the good”: “The demonic is unfreedom that wants to close itself off. This, however, is and remains an impossibility. It always retains a relation, and even when this apparently disappeared altogether, it is nevertheless there, and anxiety at once manifests itself in the moment of contact” (123). Anxiety is recognition of freedom and with freedom comes social responsibility. The demonic subject attempts the impossible feat of enclosing in on himself, destroying all inter-subjective connection to alleviate all responsibility.

In addition to demonic anxiety, Kierkegaard diagnoses “spiritlessness,” which manifests in vain attempts to evade anxiety without first experiencing it: “only he who passes through the anxiety of the possible is educated to have no anxiety, not because he can escape the terrible things in life but because these always become weak by comparison with those of possibility” (157).⁷¹ The only way to master anxiety is to descend into its maelstrom. To an imaginary representative of those who “pride themselves in never having been in anxiety,” Kierkegaard tartly replies: “If [. . .] the speaker maintains that the great thing about him is that he has never been in anxiety, I will gladly provide him with an answer: that it is because he is very spiritless” (157). The spiritless subject evades anxiety and thereby eschews freedom. By promoting educative anxiety and criticizing demonic and spiritless evasions thereof, Kierkegaard’s book on anxiety carries on a long ascetic tradition of casting dread as an essential engine for cultivating ethical behavior—better living through dread.

For Kierkegaard, the “right way” to be anxious is as a preamble to a “leap of faith” into the Christian belief that God is love. In an 1850 journal entry, he writes:

⁷¹ cf. *Fear and Trembling*, in which Kierkegaard insists: “only one who knows anxiety finds rest” 49.

[I]t is a severe education, the education from inborn anxiety to faith. [. . .]. He, in whose soul there is an inborn anxiety can [. . .] easily have even a visionary idea of God's love. But he cannot make his relation to God concrete. If his idea of God's love has a deeper root in him, and if he is piously concerned, before all else, to nourish and preserve it, his life can in many ways, and for a long time, continue in the agonizing suffering: that *in concreto* he does not receive the impression that God is love (for anxiety continues to overwhelm him and prevents him from seeing the danger, the trial, the temptation, etc. from the right side, which is that it exists in order that he shall endure it) whereas he only holds and clings the more firmly to the thought: but all the same God is love. That is a sign that he is reared to faith. Thus to keep firmly hold of the thought: God is love, is the most abstract form of faith, is faith *in abstracto*. And then, in time, he will succeed in achieving a concrete relation to God. (377–78)

Here, Kierkegaard depicts a tortured subject (presumably himself, though he sticks to the third person) wrestling valiantly with his anxiety-producing freedom to doubt that God is love—Julian's doubtful dread. This particular anxiety, which prevents the subject from achieving concrete faith in God's love, is clearly akin to the Christian concept of despair, with which Kierkegaard was endlessly fascinated. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard writes: "The possibility of this sickness [despair] is man's advantage over the beast; to be aware of this sickness is the Christian's advantage over natural man; to be cured of this sickness is the Christian's blessedness" (15). Like the Julian of *RL*, Kierkegaard considers the experience of despair a *felix culpa* as long as it is ultimately alleviated by a concrete faith in God's love. Just as Julian assures her audience that God's grace will transvaluate doubtful dread into love, Kierkegaard assures himself that to have overcome either despair or anxiety

about one's capacity for despair, is better than to not have felt it at all. Both Julian (or at least the Julian of *RL*) and Kierkegaard recuperate doctrinally sacrilegious despair as an obstacle for the heroic Christian to overcome in his/her quest for authenticity.

POSTMEDIEVAL DREAD, PART II: ANXIETY AFTER KIERKEGAARD

In a famous footnote to his magnum opus *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger acknowledges past exponents of anxiety (German: *Angst*) including Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther and Kierkegaard, who he hails as “the man who has gone farthest in analyzing the phenomenon of anxiety” (235, n. 4). Though his note elides the Middle Ages entirely, here and elsewhere, Heidegger respectfully references Augustine's distinction between servile fear and chaste fear, which, as we have seen, was extremely influential throughout medieval Europe.⁷² For Heidegger, Augustine's chaste fear and Kierkegaard's anxiety are both predecessors of his own concept of anxiety. Perhaps due to his affiliation with the National Socialists, Heidegger does not mention Augustine's Hebrew predecessors, but Kierkegaard had no problem doing so. He writes in *CA*: “It is usually said that Judaism is the standpoint of the law. However, this could also be expressed by saying that Judaism lies in anxiety” (103).

An avid reader of Kierkegaard, Heidegger likewise considered anxiety not only emotional evidence of an enlightened, or authentic, worldview, but also a mode of analyzing existence and therefore, as Simon Critchley puts it, “the philosophical sentiment *par excellence*.” Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger bewails the scarcity of popular anxiety and the even greater scarcity of philosophical analyses thereof: “Even rarer than the existential fact of ‘real’ anxiety are attempts to interpret this phenomenon” (235). Nevertheless, Heidegger believed anxiety fit “to take over a methodological function *in principle* for the existential ana-

⁷² cf. *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* 222–26.

lytic” (235). Modifying Kierkegaard, for whom the object of anxiety is the lack of predetermination afforded by the subject’s radical freedom, Heidegger makes anxiety’s object the non-being of death (295). For Heidegger, we can only glean the immense value of our own existence by anxiously anticipating our totally individualized, totally inevitable fall into non-existence (233). Echoing *An Epistle of Prayer* hundreds of years later, Heidegger insists that dread of death is an essential component of authenticity (cf. Yalom 187–203).

Modifying Heidegger in turn, Jean-Paul Sartre casts the object of anxiety (French: *angoisse*), not as the subject’s eventual non-existence (to which s/he only has partial access), but as his/her radical obligation to others (*Being and Nothingness* 531–53). Where Heideggerian *Angst* reveals an absolute breach between self and other, Sartrean *angoisse* reveals the subject’s inescapable ethical responsibility to others (Moyn 292–93). For Sartre, anxiety prompts us to ask of every potential action: “What would happen if everyone did so?” If the answer is unfavorable, anxiety dictates that the action ought not to be performed (“Existentialism is a Humanism” 351). Despite his obvious debt to Kierkegaard’s concept of educative anxiety, Sartre differs from his Danish precursor in absolutely denying the existence of an *a priori* metaphysical order. For Sartre, all providential beliefs, including and especially those regarding an afterlife, constitute instances of “bad faith” in which the subject eschews her responsibility to simultaneously behave ethically and define the parameters of ethical behavior (“Existentialism is a Humanism” 357). Nevertheless, Sartre, like Kierkegaard and Heidegger, defines anxiety as the emotional aspect of an authentic worldview.

Following Julian and Kierkegaard, Sartre recuperates despair, which he defines as the condition in which “we limit ourselves to a reliance upon that which is within our wills, or within the sum of the probabilities which render our action feasible” (“Existentialism is a

Humanism” 357). Unlike those of Julian and Kierkegaard, Sartre’s despair is never transvaluated into loving faith; it remains perpetually the very feeling of authenticity insofar as it marks the subject’s proper resignation towards things beyond the scope of her/his control: “Beyond the point at which the possibilities under consideration cease to affect my action, I ought to disinterest myself. For there is no God and no prevenient design, which can adapt the world and all its possibilities to my will” (“Existentialism is a Humanism” 357). It is difficult to imagine a statement more antithetical to Julian’s worldview, or Kierkegaard’s for that matter, than Sartre’s emphatic denial of divinity. Where the Julian of *VS* condemns any doubts regarding God’s omnipotent love, Sartre condemns any belief therein. Despite this considerable ideological chasm, Sartre, for all his vehement atheism, radicalizes, rather than recants, Christian recuperations of despair. Like Julian and Kierkegaard, Sartre was primarily interested in working through and learning from feelings of hopelessness, rather than outlawing them. If he renounced Judeo-Christianity, he did not relinquish, but conserved Judeo-Christian asceticism’s project of making meaning out of dread and despair.

Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre not only bewailed the rarity with which their contemporaries were anxious about the right things (or, more properly, the right no-things), but also presented their philosophy as a corrective—a means of cultivating proper anxiety. In so doing, they produced “emotion scripts” designed to erect “emotional communities” in which subjects deliberately strive to be “anxious in the right way.” Sartre went the furthest in this endeavor by laying substantial groundwork for an anxiety-centered existential psychoanalysis, which has been actualized by Rollo May, Irvin Yalom and Mick Cooper, and continues

to be practiced to this day.⁷³ Following Kierkegaard, May's teacher Paul Tillich distinguishes between existential anxiety (i.e. the authentic experience of freedom) and neurotic anxiety, which occurs when existential anxiety is eschewed (64–69). Following Tillich, May erected an existential psychotherapy to treat anxiety, not as pathological, but as an enlightened response to the basic tenants of existence. Instead of viewing uncomfortable feelings like anxiety and despair through the lens of pathology, existential therapists help their patients work through and learn from anxiety (May 205–40; Yalom 29–74; Cooper 6–34, 147–151). In so doing, they carry into the twenty-first century a tradition of dreadful asceticism as old as Western culture.

Although existential psychotherapists continue to help patients adapt to and learn from their anxiety, they are a scant minority. Mainstream psychiatrists generally “measure” anxiety through diagnostic surveys such as the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), which asks subjects to rate twenty-one psychosomatic symptoms associated with anxiety—including racing heart, fear of the worst happening, trembling, fear of losing control and fear of dying—on a scale of discomfort ranging from 0 (it did not bother at all) to 3 (I almost could not stand it) (Beck et al). Like the Julian of *VS*, the BAI renders uncomfortable anxiety pathological. I do not want to call into question mainstream psychiatry's practice of assuaging unbearable anxiety through a combination of therapeutic and pharmacological means. To do so would be cruel. With the Julian of *RL* and the existential therapists who follow her, however, I think it is also crucial that we help ourselves and others burdened with uncomfortable anxiety find (or create) meaning therein. Now more than ever, we must repeat Sartre's maxim: “We cannot escape anxiety, because we *are* anxiety” (*Being and Nothingness* 82, emphasis original).

⁷³ For Sartre's initial blueprint of existential psychoanalysis, see *Being and Nothingness* 557–75.

Anxiety is not a disease to be cured, but evidence of an authentic struggle to live well. For millennia, Western subjects have anxiously defined the parameters of ethical behavior while simultaneously struggling to remain therein and we are no different. In this venture, history can help us only as precedent: it would make no sense to adopt Julian's particular brand of dreadful asceticism, or Kierkegaard's, or even Sartre's. To do so would be to eschew our own anxiety-producing freedom. Like our predecessors, we must perpetually decide for ourselves how to live better through dread.

POSTMEDIEVAL DREAD, PART III: THE POLITICS OF FEAR IN WYCLIFFE, HOBBS, SCHMITT

In the thirteenth chapter of the *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes mythologizes a pre-political, "state of nature" as follows: "during the time [that] men live without a common power to keep them in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man" (62). In Hobbes' well-known political origin myth, the "state of nature" is tantamount to a "state of war"; humanity's condition prior to the genesis of the state—which Hobbes metaphorizes as the Leviathan—is one in which every individual is locked in perpetual conflict with every other. Since humans, for Hobbes, are besmirched by original sin and thereby predisposed to violence, the "state of nature" is always shot through with a ubiquitous fear: "in such a condition," he writes, "every man has a right to everything, even to one another's body. And therefore, as long as this natural right of every man to everything endureth, there can be no security to any man" (66). When this atmosphere of fear reaches a "tipping point" of intolerability, the Leviathan—a bestial body politic—is born. It is at this precise moment, in other words, that each member of a given locality surrenders a modicum of natural freedom to the Leviathan's sovereign head in an effort to alleviate the pre-political paranoia permeating the "state of nature." As the emotional matrix out of which

the body politic is born, fear is given pride of place in Hobbesian state theory. As Carl Schmitt puts it in his 1938 study of Hobbes, “the terror of the state of nature drives anguished individuals together; their fear rises to an extreme; a spark of reason flashes; and suddenly there stands in front of us a new god” (92).

For many political historians, Hobbes’ pessimistic image of a lawless “state of nature” stands as the *locus classicus* of a conservative tradition in political science. Indeed, both Hobbes and Schmitt mobilize the specter of an anarchic fear in order to denigrate “the state of nature” and apotheosize state power as the only functional anodyne to the horror of a pre-political world. In other words, according to the tenants of classical conservatism, the state is always already ensconced in a “war on terror.” This is not to say, however, that the birth of sovereign power entirely evacuates the state of fear. Instead, the movement from the pre-political to the political is accompanied by a shift in which the anxiety pervading the state of nature is transplanted into an equally pervasive fear of the state itself. As Roberto Esposito puts it:

Once tested, fear never abandons the scene. It is transformed from ‘reciprocal,’ anarchic fear, such as that which determines the state of nature [. . .], to ‘common,’ institutional fear, what characterizes the civil state [. . .] It is reduced but doesn’t recede.

Fear *is never forgotten* [. . . it] is a part of us; it is we outside ourselves. It is the other from us that constitutes us as subjects infinitely divided from ourselves. (23)

According to this formulation, fear emblemizes the fundamental rupture in subjectivity that both necessitates and justifies politics as such; for Esposito, fear both precedes and produces politics: “[f]ear isn’t only at the origin of the political,” he writes “but fear is *its* origin in the literal sense that there wouldn’t be politics without fear” (22).

The theoretical trajectory that links Hobbes, Schmitt and Esposito is, of course, frequently placed in contradistinction to a parallel line of thought associated with the “liberal tradition.” Indeed, in John Locke’s refutation of Hobbesian state theory, the “state of nature” is not synonymous with the “state of war.” Although the Lockean state of nature is

a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence: though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession [. . .]. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: [. . .] that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions. (191)

Thus Locke’s “state of nature” is governed by a transcendent, God-given set of moral imperatives, which are made manifest to humanity by both the intellectual faculty of reason and the emotional faculty of empathic love. For the liberal, then, the task of the state becomes, above all, to protect and maintain this “law of nature” by bolstering humanity’s natural inclination towards love with the force of manmade law. Thus both “classical liberalism” and “conservatism” have recourse to the production of anthropological etiologies in order to offer contradictory theories of the state’s purpose relative to the individual. The operative distinction between the state theories of Hobbes and Locke, then, is that the Hobbesian “state of nature” is a fear-filled dystopia, whereas its Lockean counterpart is a utopian community in which empathy and love bind together the pre-political community.

Despite the fact that each of these political etiologies come into being during the early centuries of modernity, many historians tacitly root the tradition of classical liberalism in Western Europe’s Protestant Reformation. The largely under-interrogated, hegemonic narra-

tive goes something like this: the medieval Catholic Church—a paragon of institutionalized authority—holds the populous of Europe in a stranglehold. Eventually, rampant corruption and abuse within the church bring the situation to a head and a popular revolution gloriously de-institutionalizes spirituality, placing it back into the hands of the people. Insofar as the divide between classical liberalism and conservatism is all-too-frequently conflated with that between institutionalism and individualism, it might seem obvious that Reformers—those champions of a personalized relationship to Scripture—ought to be considered proto-liberal, whereas their Catholic opponents ought to be seen as proto-conservative. However, as scholars such as Eamon Duffy and James Simpson have been at pains to remind us, such an overly simplified analogy does little more than institute a prosthetic origin for the “liberal tradition,” thereby reaffirming a sense of Protestant triumphalism already too engrained in our understanding of the past. In fact, in his recent work *Burning to Read*, Simpson argues that the English Reformation is hardly “at the root of liberal values,” but is, instead, “at the root of fundamentalism” (33). For Simpson, the iconoclastic zeal of early Reformers actually engenders its own opposition, thereby initiating the cycle of fundamentalist, religious violence that mars Europe over the course of the Reformation.

Following Simpson’s lead, the first contention of the present paper is that, when left unchecked, the historiographical presumptions rooting liberalism in Reform and conservatism in its Catholic opposition bleed back into our understanding of premodernity. The fourteenth-century, English theologian John Wycliffe, for instance, has long been lauded as “the morning star of the Reformation.”⁷⁴ In fact, Ann Hudson’s seminal study of the Wycliffite heresy is aptly entitled *The Premature Reformation*. I would argue that, in what amounts to a

⁷⁴ See John Laird Wilson’s book *John Wycliffe: Patriot and Reformer; The Morning Star of the Reformation*.

largely unconscious act of historiographical displacement, contemporary scholars frequently characterize Wycliffe as a revolutionary champion of individual liberties: “the morning star,” not only of the Protestant Reformation, but of the liberal tradition as well. Indeed, such an association is somewhat appealing to left-leaning thinkers who tend to romanticize revolution: many of Wycliffe’s followers, after all, were burned at the stake for their counter-institutional convictions. However, the fact remains that Wycliffe himself died at home, under the protection of powerful secular patrons such as John of Gaunt, and was an outspoken proponent of justifications of secular power not dissimilar to those that become cornerstones to classical *conservative* thought. The remainder of this paper contends that even within the premodern antecedents of Reformation ideology, a nascent state-centered fundamentalism is palpable and ought to be recognized as such. It does so by shoring up a distinctly proto-conservative strain of thought in Wycliffe’s tract on kingship, *De Officio Regis* and suggesting that Wycliffe’s emotion-based justification of secular kingship ultimately seeks to subordinate the public’s intellectual faculties to the dictates of state power even more thoroughly than does Hobbes’ *Leviathan*.

Shortly after beginning *Tractatus de officio regis*, Wycliffe evokes the long-standing, exegetical tradition, which situates *timor domini* (the fear of God) as the first of “seven gifts of the Holy Ghost.” According to Wycliffe, since the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and Scripture tells us that the secular King is “God’s vicar on earth,” one must honor the secular King insofar as one fears God (4). Although Wycliffe begins by fastening the Scriptural mandate to fear God to the political mandate to honor the king, shortly thereafter he argues that “every servant of a secular lord must be bound subject to him not only by the worldly fear of loss of goods, but by the spiritual fear of everlasting reward” (5). Unlike Hobbes and

Schmitt, who configure the Leviathan as “a new, [manmade] God,” the sovereign head of which is to be feared by the public in exchange for alleviating the public’s fear of itself, Wycliffe uses Scripture to argue that the secular king is to be feared “spiritually,” although he operates at a complete remove from the ecclesiastical structure that the heresiarch sought to disendow.

Since the true pope is, according to Wycliffe’s definition in *Tractatus de ecclesia*, not a leader appointed by the established church, but none other than the holiest man currently living—a superlative which cannot be practically recognized by any earthbound individual—the secular king is the public figure most clearly endowed with verifiable, God-given authority (560–63). The subject, therefore, owes allegiance to the king, not only because the latter is capable of effecting worldly loss, but also because he is imbued with a conspicuous, “royal likeness to God” by virtue of the fact that he has been predestined to the divinely-mandated office of kingship. As Wycliffe goes on to put it, “the spiritual fear of the King God’s Vicar is the reflection of our spiritual of God Himself” (*Tractatus de officio regis* 5–6). Thus for Wycliffe, as for Hobbes, Schmitt and Esposito, fear is the affective baseline undergirding the allegiance that a given individual owes to the state. Wycliffe, however, does not offer a Hobbesian anthropology of state power, but zealously asserts that the affective wellspring of political authority is a conglomerate of spiritual and worldly fear. Wycliffe is not interested in hypothesizing an originary, pre-political “state of nature” in an effort to understand the manner in which the state comes into being; nor is he interested in reifying a divide between secular and spiritual power that inevitably places two institutional formations—the church and the state—at odds with one another. Although Wycliffe does differentiate the task of the churchman to that of the statesman (and even assures his audience that the former is une-

quivocally the more perfect of the two), he subtly justifies the secular king's sovereign power on both worldly and spiritual grounds, thus undermining the tendency of Catholic rhetoric to attempt to coerce secular rulers in the name of spirituality.

Hobbes, on the other hand, situates the sovereign power wielded by the Leviathan as a critical term in the social contract that allows humanity to escape a warlike, anxiety-ridden "state of nature." For Hobbes, then, it is due to worldly circumstances that obedience and fear are due to the sovereign. This comes to the fore in Hobbes' excursus on miracles in the thirty seventh chapter of the *Leviathan*, in which he argues that the sovereign, as God's lieutenant and the rightful head of the church, has the authority to determine whether or not a given event ought to be classified as miraculous. Although such a spiritually driven interpretation of sovereign power is certainly in line with Wycliffe's alternately terrestrial and celestial justification of kingship, at the culmination of his chapter on miracles, Hobbes undermines his claim to a spiritually-justified kingship by introducing a distinction between "public" and "private" faith. "A private man," Hobbes asserts,

has always the liberty (because thought is free) to believe or not believe, in his heart, those acts that have been given out for miracles, according as he shall see what benefit can accrue, by men's belief, to those that pretend or countenance them, and thereby conjecture whether they be miracles or lies. But when it comes to confession of that faith, the private reason must submit to the public, that is to say, to God's lieutenant. (201)

By distinguishing between a register of private belief and one of public confession, Hobbes (perhaps unwittingly) endorses a psycho-political distinction between interior convictions and exterior confessions.

According to Schmitt, Hobbes' theorization of a psychic interiority that can never be subjected to state power, "because thought is free," opens the door for later liberal philosophers to apotheosize this individuated realm of interior freedom precisely as that which ought to be defended by the state at all costs. "[A]t this place," Schmitt writes,

at the zenith of the sovereign power that brings about the unity of religion and politics, occurs the rupture of the otherwise so complete, so overpowering unity, the decisive point, concerning miracle and belief, that Hobbes evades. Concerning the question of the belief in miracles, he made his non-eradicable, individualistic proviso [. . .]. At this point enters the differentiation between inner faith and outer confession into the political system of the *Leviathan*. Hobbes declares the question of wonder and miracle to be a matter of 'public' in contrast to 'private' reason; but on the basis of universal thought—because thought is always free—he leaves to the individual's private reason whether to believe or not to believe [. . .]. The distinction between private and public, faith and confession, [. . .] is introduced in a way from which everything else was logically derived in the century that ensued until the rise of the liberal constitutional state. (55–56)

For Schmitt, then, at the moment in which Hobbes theorizes the rupture between the public and the private, he inadvertently sets the stage for the rise of the liberal democratic state.

Thus the archconservative Schmitt sees Hobbes' distinction between public and private as the "seed of death that destroyed the mighty leviathan from within and brought about the end of the mortal god" (57). Hobbes' psychological misstep, therefore, reopens the very rift between institution and individual that the latter sought to close in equating the "state of nature" with a "state of war." With the rise of liberal democracy, the state is put into the service of defend-

ing the individual freedom of thought that Hobbes cedes to the “private” realm. This re-authorization of the individual comes at the price of de-authorization of state power, in that it nullifies the affective displacement in which the fear inherent in “state of nature” is transferred to a fear of sovereign power. Schmitt worries that if a private realm in which individuals are free to agree or disagree with a given sovereign decision is thought to exist then subjects will inevitably cease to recognize their complicity within the Leviathan as a whole. Given the chance to disagree with the state, subjects will forget that they have empowered the sovereign *a priori* in exchange for the alleviation of the pre-political fear endemic in the state of nature.

Like Hobbes, Wycliffe allows for the subject to disagree with the decision of the secular sovereign at moments in which the latter’s decree does not align itself with Christian law. Unlike Hobbes, however, Wycliffe never explicitly mandates a rupture between outward confession and inward belief. For Wycliffe, the king ought to be feared on both worldly and spiritual grounds; but, insofar as the spiritual always trumps the worldly, when a secular king commands one to break explicitly stated scriptural law, the command ought not to be obeyed. Although this distinction might seem, at first glance, to render Wycliffe’s justification of secular sovereignty weaker than that of Hobbes, it allows for no aporia between outward confession and inward belief and thereby leaves intact Wycliffe’s fear-based, political theology. In other words, although the king, for Wycliffe, can break divine law and thereby substantially diminish the affective charge justifying his sovereignty, as long as he remains an adherent to God’s law, he ought to be feared as God is feared. In order to ensure that the king adheres to God’s law, Wycliffe tellingly places theology in the service of the state. He argues that it is the task of the theologian to advise the secular ruler as to what does and does not constitute

heresy. “It is necessary,” Wycliffe writes, “for the security of the kingdom that there shall be theologians able to discern what is heresy and to discover the real power of the King and the blasphemous excess of power by which Christ’s pretended Vicar [the Roman-Catholic pope] claims to control Kings” (*Tractatus de officio regis* 125). Although this move does not contradict Wycliffe’s contention that spiritual concerns take precedence over worldly ones, it does situate the theologian as a sort of bureaucrat, whose function is to maintain state power. Furthermore, Wycliffe advocates that theology be practiced in order to not only guide the state morally, but also determine who the sovereign can and cannot punish on moral grounds.

By way of conclusion, I’d like to leave you with what seems to me to be a profound historical irony. In 1401, England’s new Lancastrian King Henry IV vetted a parliamentary statute entitled *De heretico comburendo*. The act sanctioned the burning of heretics on specifically affective grounds: “if any person [insists] upon [. . .] wicked preachings, doctrines, opinions, schools, and heretical and erroneous informations, [. . . they shall] before the people in a high place be burnt, that such punishment may *strike fear into the minds of others*” (*Statutes of the Realm* 128, emphasis mine). Written explicitly into this insidious piece of legislation is the rhetorical intent to halt the dissemination of heterodox beliefs through the spectacular utilization of a governmentally actualized fear: the fear that any spoken or written deviation from orthodoxy will lead directly to horrific physical torment. Thus, this piece of secular legislation employs a theological judgment regarding what is or is not heretical; just as Wycliffe himself would have it, the Lancastrian law subordinates theology to the state, configuring it as a bureaucratic mechanism. In short, the juridical rationale justifying the early Lancastrian law that caused many of Wycliffe’s followers to be burnt is perfectly in line with Wycliffe’s own ideas about the state power: not only does *De Heretico Combruedo*

explicitly rely on the proto-conservative contention that sovereign power is justified in wielding a weaponized fear, it also employs theology in order to bolster and justify secular power. Viewed in this light, Wycliffe is neither an anti-institutional defender of individual liberties, nor an early proponent of the secularization of the state. Instead, his counter-Catholic tendencies are balanced by a concomitant spiritualization and strengthening of the concept of secular power. From this angle, Wycliffe can be seen for exactly what he is: an intellectual antecedent to the very draconian logic that was violently deployed against his own followers less than two decades after his death. It is therefore crucial that students of premodernity begin to explore the ways in which Wycliffe's zealous iconoclasm and anti-institutionalism—which many in the academic left often find so romantic in his thought—are at least partially responsible for initiating a cycle of fundamentalist, religious violence that would mar Europe for centuries after his death.

CHAPTER 3:

DREAD, LOVE, AND THE BODIES OF *PIERS PLOWMAN* A.10, B.9, AND C.10

INTRODUCTION: DREAD AND LOVE IN MIDDLE ENGLISH DEVOTIONAL LITERATURE

For the authors and readers of a multitude of Middle English devotional literature, love and dread were essential aspects of an ideal emotional posture vis-à-vis divinity: not only must the Christian devotee burn with love for God, s/he must also dread his/her freedom to deviate from God through sin. Neatly delineating this ascetic project, the refrain of a Middle English lyric in MS Digby 102 enjoins its reader to “knowe thyself, loue God, and drede” (*Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems* 1–6). By tying the Delphic imperative to a dual directive to love and dread God, its author suggests that psychic introspection and ascetic performances of love and dread are vital elements of ethical behavior. Forged in this emotional milieu, *Piers Plowman* likewise treats love and dread as vital components of Christian devotion. As we will see, however, one cannot speak of the theology of dread and love in *Piers Plowman*, but only the *theologies* of dread and love scattered throughout its many versions. This chapter analyzes the mercurial treatment of dread and love across the corresponding accounts of Wit’s body-as-castle allegory in the major versions of *Piers Plowman* (A.10, B.9 and C.10). Before delving into this task, however, it briefly surveys the profound interrelation of love and dread in a range of Middle English devotional literature.

By theorizing the relation between dread and love, Middle English devotional texts taught their audience how to feel towards God and each other. Many such texts treat dread of God as a regulator of behavior. The famous hermit Richard Rolle, for example, asserts that “drede of God” compels the devotee to “fle syn as venym” (“The Seven Gifts” 19). Like Rolle, the author of the aptly named *Contemplations of Dread and Love of God* insists that

proper, Christian dread is necessarily directed at the devotee's capacity to sunder him/herself from God through sin (8, ll. 13–25). *Contemplations* and other pastoral texts cite Matthew 10.28—“And fear not fear them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell”⁷⁵—to demand that devotees deliberately privilege fear of breaking divine law over fear of breaking human law.⁷⁶ Where they treat dread of God as a mode of behavioral regulation, Middle English devotional texts treat love as the emotional glue holding the world together. The anchoress Julian of Norwich, for example, famously receives a vision of creation's entirety as “a little thing the quantity of a haselnot [hazelnut],” which “lasteth and ever shall, for God loveth it” (139, ll. 7–13, cf. 69, ll. 1–16). This revelation furnishes forensic evidence for Julian's emotional ontology, which holds divine love to be the root and ground of all being.⁷⁷ For Julian, Rolle and other Middle English mystics, the height of devotion is returning God's love and dreading sin's capacity to cause its cessation. If Middle English devotional texts treat dread and love as equally essential, however, they do not necessarily treat them as easily analogous. For example, where *Contemplations* enjoins the devotee to dread God instead of other people, it demands that s/he love God, not instead of others, but *through* the act of loving neighbors and enemies (14).⁷⁸ In short, Middle English devotional texts treat love and dread as equally essential, but

⁷⁵ See also Luke 13.4–5.

⁷⁶ *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, 8, ll.10–15. See also, *Fasciculus Morum* 327. On the other hand, for an example of political writing produced in fourteenth-century England that *does* enjoin its audience to fear the king as s/he fears God (though less so), see Wycliffe, *Tractatus de officio regis* 4, ll. 20–30.

⁷⁷ For Julian's use of forensic support for her theological assertions, see Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion* 315–23.

⁷⁸ cf. *The Book of Vices and Virtues* 144, ll. 5–11.

distinct emotions, which the devotee must simultaneously direct at a variety of (meta)physical objects in an elaborate ascetic performance designed to cultivate ethical action.

Sometimes, to be sure, Middle English devotional texts oppose dread to love. A dramatic example of this comes at the end of the early Middle English anchoritic manual *Sawles Warde*, when a host of allegorical characters including Love of Eternal Life cast out Fear (186).⁷⁹ In so doing, the characters of *Sawles Warde* enact 1 John 4.18: “Fear is not in love [Vulgate: caritas], but perfect love casts out fear because fear has pain. And he that fears is not perfected in love.” Despite the fact that he is ultimately expelled, Fear plays a crucial, soteriological role in *Sawles Warde*’s allegory of the body: he informs the other characters about the pains of hell in graphic detail (169–74).⁸⁰ In casting Fear out, Love of Eternal Life and company do not entirely renounce chastening fears of fire-and-brimstone, though they do place dread and love at odds. According to Measure, Love of Eternal Life must displace Fear, but the latter will be welcomed back into the fold whenever the former is silent (186).⁸¹ *Sawles Warde*, therefore, advocates an ascetic program in which the devotee oscillates between dread and love, rather than simply transcending the former for the latter in a single, revolutionary mood swing (Watson, “The Methods and Objectives” 143).

A.10: DREAD, SUFFERING, ETHICAL ACTION

Let us turn now to *Piers Plowman* A.10, which, like *Sawles Warde*, is a psychomachia (battle of spirits): an allegory of the devotee’s struggle for sanctity against sin. As such, it constitutes an extended meditation on the human body’s (usually) innate capacity to behave well.

⁷⁹ For Modern English see *Anchoretic Spirituality* 220–21.

⁸⁰ For Modern English see *Anchoretic Spirituality*, 213–15.

⁸¹ For Modern English see *Anchoretic Spirituality*, 221.

A.10 begins with the dreamer-narrator Will meeting Wit shortly after setting off on his quest to find Dowel, Dobet and Dobest, who together represent a tripartite hierarchy of ethical action. When asked where to find them, Wits A, B and C, launch into a body-as-castle conceit popular in Middle English didactic literature and “strikingly similar” to that in *Sawles Warde*.⁸² There are, however, major differences between the two. For example, where Will is Wit’s flighty wife in *Sawles Warde*, Will is the narrator and protagonist of the markedly voluntarist *Piers Plowman*.⁸³ In *Piers Plowman*, moreover, Wit is both the narrator of the body-as-castle conceit and a character therein: Sire Inwyt, who is not the castle’s owner, but its steward. The castle, Caro (flesh), belongs to a duke named Dowel, but was built by Kynde (God-the-Father) in order to protect Anima (spirit) from the lascivious advances of the devil, a “proud prykere of Fraunce, Princeps huius mundi” (1–8). Unlike *Sawles Warde*, Wit’s body-as-castle conceit does not dramatize love casting out fear; though, as we will see, Wit C implicitly casts fear out by eliding the dread-centered devotional program endorsed by Wit A and modified by Wit B.

According to Wit’s patriarchal allegory, to do well is to perpetually engage in a psychic battle against sin over the possession of the utterly passive, feminized Anima. Dowel’s underling, Sire Inwyt, administers Caro with the help of his sons, Sirs See-well, Say-well, Hear-well, Work-well-with-your-hands and Go-well (19–21). By making Sire Inwyt Dowel’s agent on the ground, Wit A characterizes wit as the foremost engine of ethical behavior. Un-

⁸² For the similarity between Wit’s speech and *Sawles Warde* see *Anchoretic Spirituality* 210–12. For other examples of the body-as-castle conceit see *Ancrene Wisse* 146; *Richard Morris’ Prick of Conscience* 161, ll. 5820–29; *The Castle of Perseverance*; and Chaucer’s “Tale of Melibeus” in *The Riverside Chaucer* 217.

⁸³ *Sawles Warde* 166. For Modern English see *Anchoretic Spirituality* 211. For voluntarism in *Piers Plowman*, see Bowers 41–60; Simpson, “From Reason to Affective Knowledge” 7; and Zeeman 64–108.

like Anima who resides in the heart: “Inwyt in þe heuid is & an help to þe soule, / For þoru3 his connyng is kept caro & anima / In rewele & in resoun, but reccheles it make” (49–51).

In a self-aggrandizing gesture, Wit makes Sire Inwyt a sovereign, psychic agent whose “connyng” guides the feminized soul to ethical action. By aligning femininity with static passivity, on the one hand, and masculinity with rational activity, on the other, Wit A’s self-important auto-allegory, which is not much changed in B and C, relays a series of stale gendered binaries.⁸⁴ As we will see, however, Wit A does not exclusively ascribe the capacity to generate ethical behavior to a masculinized rationality.

Thankfully for modern readers, Wit A’s misogynistic body-as-castle conceit quickly gives way to a much less conventional attempt to locate ethical responsibility for the actions of those in whom Sire Inwyt is weak or absent. Inwyt is bound, Wit A claims, in a certain physiological circumstance: “whan blood is bremere þanne brayn” (56). This is the condition of “sotis” (drunkards), “3onge fauntes” (infants), and “folis” (the mentally disabled), all of whom lack the capacity to guide their behavior towards ethical ends (58–59). While the devil easily sways drunkards, who purposefully drown Inwyt in ale, he has power over neither the mentally disabled, nor infants, for whom family, friends and the church are responsible (59–75). On the other hand, Wit A insists that everyone who possesses “wys vndirstonding / Is chief souereyn ouer hymself his soule to 3eme [govern]” (71–72). For Wit A, then, with “inwyt” comes ethical responsibility, both for one’s own actions and for those of relations lacking “inwyt.”

At this point, Wit A launches into his first celebration of dread’s spiritual utility. Sire Dowel, he reiterates, “is a duc þat destroyeþ vices” (76), whose primary objective is to “sauip

⁸⁴ See Robertson, who argues that Wit’s flat portrait of *Anima* is surpassed by the initially abject, toothless *Anima* who Will meets in B.15 and C.16.

þe soule þat synne haþ no miȝt / to routen ne to resten ne roten in þin herte” (77–78). Dowel’s martial maneuvers against Sire princeps huius mundi represent the ascetic activity constantly necessary to repress vicious impulses. Doing well, put simply, is actively combatting the urge to sin. While Wit A has hitherto assigned the ethical responsibility to do well to the rational faculty represented by Sire Inwyte, he re-assigns it here to a patently emotional faculty: fear of God.

And þat is dred of god, dowel it makip.

It is begynnyng of goodnesse god for to douten.

Salamon it seide for a soþ tale: Inicium sapiencie timor domini.

For doute men doþ þe bet; dred is such a maister

þat he makip men meke & mylde of here speche,

And alle kynde scoleris in scole to lerne. (79–84)

Dread, according to Wit A, is educative. Rather than portraying emotion as entirely distinct from reason, Wit A portrays fear as a mode of judgment essential for rational decision-making. For Wit A, reason does not trump, but requires emotion.⁸⁵ In support of this contention, he cites Ps. 110.10, which situates fear of God (timor Domini) as the beginning of wisdom through experience (sapiencia).⁸⁶ Like Wit A, Middle English devotional texts frequently cite Ps. 110.10 to tout fear’s capacity to generate wisdom. In his *Commentary on the Psalter*, for example, Rolle writes: “[God’s] name that is vertu and myght, is [. . .] agheful [awful] til wickid men that thai be rad. For thorgh drede thai may cum til wisdome that is, til

⁸⁵ In this, Wit anticipates modern neuroscientists who claim that our ability to make rational judgments relies on our ability to make emotional judgments. See Damasio, *Descartes’ Error* 41, 66–67.

⁸⁶ Robertson 167.

sauoure of gastly swetnes” (396).⁸⁷ Just as Rolle makes dread of God the means through which wicked people cultivate wisdom, Middle English sermons, confession manuals and mystical tracts frequently depict dread awakening devotees from “the slepe of syn.”⁸⁸ Wit A’s image of didactic dread, therefore, was anything but idiosyncratic in late medieval England’s dread-obsessed devotional culture.

Where Wit A likens Dowel to the performance of a relatively ambiguous “dred of god,” he makes Dobet an awareness of God’s capacity for violence: “Þanne is dobet to ben ywar for betyng of þe ʒarde, / And þerof seiþ þe sauter, þe salme þou miʒt rede: / Virga tua & baculus tuus ipsa me consolata sunt” (85–87). To be sure, Wit A’s account of Dowel as dread of God prompts us to associate this “betyng of þe ʒarde” with divine punishment. Wit A, however, culls his Latin quotation from the famously funereal Psalm 22.4, which confidently asserts faith in divine *protection*, rather than fear of divine *punishment*: “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.” Throughout the Vulgate Old Testament, the Latin nouns “baculus” and “virga” both signify, among many other things, an instrument of divine protection (Isaiah 10.5) and one of divine punishment (Ps. 89.32), as does the Middle English “ʒarde” into which Langland translates one or both of them.⁸⁹ According to Wit A, then, doing better entails an awareness of God’s sovereign capacity to wield violence to protect and

⁸⁷ See also *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, 8–9, ll. 1–5, 40–44; *A Pistle of Preier* 49, ll. 6–10; and “Sermon 108” in *English Wycliffite Sermons* 274, ll. 24–26.

⁸⁸ See, for example, *The Book of Vices and Virtues* 126, ll. 15–24; and *The Writings of Julian of Norwich* 117, ll. 5–10; cf. 355, ll. 5–10.

⁸⁹ The Middle English, Wycliffite Bible renders Ps. 22.4’s “virga tua et baculus tuus” as “thi yerde and thi staf.” For the semantic valence of ʒarde, see *MED* s.v. ‘yerd’, n. (2), especially def. 1b, a and b.

punish his subjects, both of which can be described as an instance of “betyng of þe ȝarde.” Where the latter is a species of fear, the former is one of hope. By capitalizing on the polysemy of “baculus”/“virga” and “ȝarde,” Wit A craftily situates fear of divine punishment and trust in divine protection as two aspects of an ideal emotional posture vis-à-vis divinity.

Wit’s account of Dobest as a clean conscience aptly triangulates his account of Dowel as dread of God and Dobet as a fuller awareness of many uses of God’s “ȝarde” (89–93). Where Wit A presents both Dowel (fear of God’s punishment) and Dobet (fear of God’s punishment tempered by faith in his protection) as future-oriented evaluations of prospective actions, he presents Dobest as a retrospective evaluation of past deeds with “clene consience” (89). For Wit A, then, a devotee can do no better than fearing God, hoping for mercy and looking back on her/his past unburdened by guilt. While he concedes that conscience must counsel “accordyng holy chirche” (91), Wit A’s emphasis on self-judgment implies that the production of ethical behavior is foremost a matter of the devotee using her/his internal understanding of God’s moral standards to deliberately fear breaking God’s law in the future and simultaneously judge whether s/he has done so in the past. In support of his celebration of the subject’s internal moral compass, Wit A cites the popular legal maxim “intencio iudicat hominum” (“intention assigns moral status to the actions of a person”) (90b),⁹⁰ thereby echoing his earlier assertion that those who do not possess “inwit” are not responsible for their actions since they do not sin intentionally.

In addition to expounding the emotions that one ought to perform in order to do well, Wit A discusses those one ought to eschew. He insists, for example, that his audience immediately staunch all anger at public slander: “Whatso men worden of þe, wrappe þe neuere”

⁹⁰ For a justification of this translation see Vaughan, *Piers Plowman: The A-text* 185, n. 91.

(96). For Wit A, those who are “ywar for betyng of þe 3arde” and therefore confident that divine justice will ultimately right all wrongs do not experience anger, which constitutes a bodily desire to redress worldly inequities.⁹¹ Instead, they patiently maintain social stasis: “Hold þe stable & stedfast & strenþe þiseluen / To be blissid for þi beryng, 3e, beggere þei3 þou were” (114–15). If Wit A’s demonization of social mobility is incongruous with our modern values, it is not uncommon for Middle English devotional literature. Indeed, his assertion that subjects ought to embrace the discomforts of their particular walk of life as so many acts of *imitatio Christi* accords well with both pain-embracing, affective piety and pain-consoling, Boethian stoicism, both of which helped medieval devotees better tolerate the throes of their oft-uncomfortable lives.⁹² While Wit A initially presents doing better as at least partially a matter of summoning consolatory hope, he goes on to explicitly associate it with suffering, rather than bliss: “Þus in dred liþ dowel, and dobet to suffre, / For þoru3 suffraunce se þou mi3t how soueraynes ariseþ” (118–19). Though Wit A glorifies suffering, he also tantalizingly insinuates that upward social mobility comes to those who do not seek it. Just as Wit A’s God avenges those who do not act out of anger, he elevates those who do not seek to elevate themselves.

Despite his ascetic program focus on negative feelings—fear (Dowel) and suffering (Dobet)—its result (Dobest) is positive enough:

And þus of dred & his dede dobest arisiþ,

Which is þe flour & þe fruyt fostrid of boþe.

⁹¹ Other sections of *Piers Plowman*, such as the “confession of the Seven Deadly Sins” and “the pardon tearing scene,” seem to endorse, or at least glorify, righteous anger. See Chapter 1 above.

⁹² For a comparison of the dialectic of dread and consolation apparent in both *A Pistle of Preire* and Chaucer’s *Boece* see Ian Johnson, “Walton’s Heavenly *Boece*” 159–61.

Riȝt as a rose, þat red is a swet,
 Out of raggit rote and a rouȝ brere
 Springeþ & spedip, þat sourcerus desirip,
 Or as whete out of weed waxip, out of þe erþe,
 So dobest out of dobet & dowel gynneþ springe
 Among men of þis molde þat mek ben & kynde.
 For loue of here louȝnesse oure lord ȝiueþ hem grace
 Such werkis to werche þat he is wiþ paied. (121–30)

Just as a rose springs from a rough briar, Dobest (ethical action) springs from fear and suffering. If the devotee filters all of her/his potential actions through fear of divine punishment and suffers worldly indignities without anger, grace will enable her/him to perform holy works. Recall that *A Pistle of Preier* likens its tripartite program for prayer—consisting of fear of hell, hope for salvation and love of God—to a fruit-bearing tree (*Deonise Hid Divinite* 52, ll. 15–23). In a surprisingly similar conceit, Wit A likens his tripartite program for behaving well—consisting of didactic dread, suffering of worldly indignities and ethical action—to a rose-bearing bush. Like that of *A Pistle*, Wit A’s devotional program is designed to grow positive actions out of negative feelings.

For the remainder of A.10, Wit complements his discussion of the positive effects of holy dread with a detailed account of the negative effects of sinful love, particularly extra-marital procreation. The conditions in which a child is conceived, he argues, have a direct effect on the child’s character. Where all legitimate members of the social order’s every echelon—“Kinges & knȝites, & alle kyne clerkis / Barouns & burgeis, & bondemen of tounes” (137–38)—issue through procreation in wedlock, anti-social subjects—“fals folk &

feiples, þeuis & leiþeris” (139)—are “conseyuid in cursid tyme as kaym was on Eue” (140). Once again, Wit carefully delegates ethical responsibility for worldly evil. He blames Adam and Eve for conceiving Cain “in cursid tyme” (148), holding them accountable for Cain’s sins, as well as those of his descendants. Extending his earlier argument that parents and friends are responsible for the actions of the “fauntis and folis” around them, Wit A holds parents responsible for the extended consequences of unsanctioned procreation (205–15). Nevertheless, he condemns bastards as “[v]ngracious to gete loue or any good ellis’ and utterly damned unless ‘god giue hem grace here to amende” (205–15). While his stated distaste for bastards is certainly unsavory from a modern perspective, it was, once again, utterly conventional in late medieval England.⁹³ Wit A’s underlying rhetorical purpose, moreover, is to besmirch, not bastards for being themselves, but their parents for loving unlawfully.

In the final lines of A.10, Wit shifts back to his account of the devotional value of negative feelings by reiterating his definition of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest: “Þanne is dowel to dreden, & dobet to suffre, / And so comiþ dobest aboute, and bringeþ doun mody, / And þat is wykkide wil þat meny werk shendiþ” (216–18). Here, Wit A equates Dowel with the act of dreading, recalling his earlier portrait of Dowel as a fearful schoolmaster; Dobet with the act of suffering, recalling his earlier insinuation that those “ywar for betyng of þe ȝarde” willingly suffer worldly indignities; and Dobest as a capacity to repress wicked desires that endanger good works. As we have seen, his pain embracing, pleasure distrusting ascetic program accords well with those described in other Middle English devotional texts. On the other hand, Wit A has less to say about the positive devotional value of love than many of his

⁹³ See Warner, *The Lost History of Piers Plowman* 11–13, which points out that Langland’s invective against bastards has analogues in Deuteronomy and 1 Corinthians, as well as myriad Middle English and Anglo-Latin texts contemporary to *Piers Plowman*. John Ball purportedly condemned bastards as well.

contemporaries. Although Wit A does not explicitly privilege dread over love, he certainly focuses on the positive attributes of the former and the negative attributes of the latter.

B.9: DREAD, LOVE, CONDEMNATION

Like Wit A, Wit B allegorizes the Christian devotee's struggle to behave well. Wit B, however, substantially magnifies Wit A's penchant for denouncing those who fail to do so. For example, where Wit A briefly insinuates that the devil can easily control drunks, Wit B boldly proclaims that gluttons worship their bellies instead of God and thereby serve Satan, who will soon possess their souls in hell (61–64). Although he does not explicitly say so, Wit B is clearly bent on stirring servile fear in womb-worshipping gluttons, thus awakening them from the sleep of sin. Indeed, Wit B is a good deal more preoccupied with the potential woes of the afterlife than Wit A. He portends, for example, that neglectful godparents will “purchase penance in purgatorie” (79). Unlike Wit A, who outlines an ascetic program for dreading well by theorizing how dread ought to inform ethical action, Wit B, like Fear in *Sawles Warde*, solicits fear of hellfire in order to stifle immoral behavior. The former makes dread a teacher, the latter teaches through dread. Indeed, Wit B even expresses his own dread of the divine retribution due to both commoners and clergy for their love of jesters and their resultant uncharitable treatment of the poor: “The commune for hir vnkyndenesse, I dred me, shul abyge / Bisshopes shul be blamed for beggeres sake” (91–92). Wit B's complaint about Christians' widespread indifference to poverty suggests that the agent(s) responsible for revising A into B did so less to explain dread's devotional function and more to frighten members of an uncharitable community into helping their impoverished neighbors.

Directly after his rant on the painful, long-term consequences of enjoying wealth and ignoring poverty, Wit B launches into a mid-passus definition of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest:

He dooþ noȝt wel þat dooþ þus, ne drat noȝt god almyȝty,

Ne loueþ Salomans sawes þat Sapience tauȝt:

Inicium sapiencie timor domini.

That dredeþ god, he dooþ wel; þat dredeþ hym for loue

And dredeþ hym noȝt for drede of vengeaunce dooþ þefore þe bettre. (95–98)

Wit B, unlike Wit A, offers an Augustinian ascetic program in which painful, servile fear should be surpassed by a more loving, chaste fear. Despite his penchant for threatening reminders of hell's fire-and-brimstone, Wit B privileges a reverential, loving dread of God over a tortured, servile fear of hellfire, implying that the former develops into the latter on the road to spiritual perfection. Unlike Wit A, therefore, Wit B locates some devotional value in positive emotion, though he by no means renounces Wit A's focus on either the positive value of negative emotion or the negative value of positive emotions.

Where Wit A offers a relatively universal psychomachia, Wit B seems to be more condemnatory of particular community's particular ills. Indeed, though his mid-passus, Dowel-Dobet-Dobest triad is no less a devotional program for ethical living than that of Wit A, it is largely presented in support of a polemic on the ills of timewasting, rather than as a straightforward account of dread's devotional function. According to Wit B, those who dread God do well, those who dread him lovingly without fearing punishment do better and those who do so constantly do best: "He dooþ best þat wiþdraweþ hym by daye and by nyȝte / To spille any speche or any space of tyme" (99–100). Where Wit A's mid-passus triad makes Dobest a clean conscience, Wit B's makes Dobest an aversion to wastefulness, thereby neatly complementing his vilification of japery with a valorization of thriftiness. In so doing, he evinces a distinct concern in the perils of time wasting largely absent from A.10.

In his largest elision of material from A, Wit B forgoes his predecessor's apotheosis of social stasis, as well as his vision of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest as the root, briar and flower of a rosebush (A.10.91–130). As we've seen, this passage showcases A.10's central theme: that ethical action grows organically out of dread and suffering. Given his embrace of an Augustinian distinction between uncomfortable, servile fear (Dowel) and comfortable, chaste fear (Dobet), it makes sense that Wit B omits Wit A's contention that "in dred lip dowel and dobet to suffre" (118). In lieu of A's floral metaphor, Wit B launches into a speech on the importance of marriage largely, though not entirely, identical to that of his predecessor. Wit B's most substantial addition to Wit A's harangue on extra-marital procreation consists of a preemptive rebuttal of a somewhat obvious exegetical critique of his contention, shared with Wit A, that Adam and Eve's sinful, premarital conception of Cain caused the mass-destruction effected in Noah's flood (147–56). Where Wit A makes no mention of Ezekiel 18.20—"the son will not bear the iniquity of the father, neither will the father bear the iniquity of the son"—Wit B incorrectly attributes the passage to the Gospel (148), only to disagree with it and uphold Wit A's polemic against extra-marital procreation (150–57). If Wit B is more willing to advocate positive emotions than Wit A, he is equally if not more worried about their potential for engendering moral turpitude.

Wit B is closest to Wit A when the latter is at his most patriarchal, as he is at the beginning of A.10, and his most condemnatory, as he is at the end of A.10, in which he attributes all of the world's evil to illicit love. Wit B, moreover, is decidedly more eager to condemn others, particularly timewasters, for lacking servile dread of hellfire. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Wit B's ascetic program, while still dread-based, is more optimistic about the devotional value of positive emotions than that of his predecessor. Consequently, critics have

read Wit B's theology of loving dread as an emotional middle ground between Wit A's emphasis on the devotional value of dread and Wit C's emphasis on the devotional value of love. Supporting this theory is the apparent fact that Wit B adds a love-oriented, Dowel-Dobet-Dobest triad—present in C, but not A—to his reproduction of Wit A's final, dread-suffering-fighting-sin triad:

Dowel, my deere, is to doon as lawe techep:
To loue and to lowe þee and no life to greue;
Ac to loue and to lene, leue me, þat is dobet;
To 3yuen and to yemen boþe yonge and olde
To helen and to helpen, is dobest of alle. (202–05)

Consequently, in modern editions of the three versions of *Piers Plowman*, A.10 culminates in a pro-dread triad, B.9 in a pro-dread triad and a pro-love triad, and C in a pro-love triad.

Recently, however, Lawrence Warner has questioned whether modern editions of B accurately represent an authentic draft of *Piers Plowman* composed after A and before C. Warner upholds that an ur-B once existed as an intermediary between A and C, but claims that there is little evidence that it circulated nearly as widely as did its predecessor and successor.⁹⁴ Kane and Donaldson's Athlone edition of B is based on two extant manuscript families, W~M and RF, both of which are based on the now-lost B_x. Several lines—among them Wit's final, pro-love triad—that are contained in Kane and Donaldson's edition of B are extant in W~M,⁹⁵ but not in RF.⁹⁶ Warner argues that these lines were not in B_x, but were

⁹⁴ Warner, *The Lost History of Piers Plowman* 14. Warner's suppositions are critiqued in Burrow and Turville-Petre 153, n. 38.

⁹⁵ See Langland, *The Piers Plowman Electronic Archive*, vols 2 (W.9.213–16) and 5 (M.9.213–16).

added to the W~M family from an early version of C.⁹⁷ If Warner is correct, Langland originally wrote these lines while composing C and, years later, a scribe copying B_x with recourse to an early version of C (or at least loose pages thereof) —call him the post-C redactor— made the decision to include Wit C’s pro-love triad in his version of B without excluding B_x’s pro-dread triad. It is highly unlikely that Langland himself performed this editorial move after composing the pro-love and relatively dread-less C.10. Through his combinatory editing, the post-C redactor cleverly aligned the affective theology espoused at the end of Wit B’s speech with that espoused by his mid-passus triad, thereby not only influencing *Piers Plowman* as we know it today, but also inadvertently strengthening the commonly held contention that modern editions of A.10, B.9 and C.10 chronicle one man’s gradual shift from dread to love.⁹⁸ Taking seriously the acts of extra-authorial agents like the post-C redactor advances our understanding of *Piers Plowman*’s production beyond ‘the romantic idea of Langland’s process of poetic composition as a long, sustained act of passion over many years’,⁹⁹ to a more nuanced account of the vast network of author(s), patrons, scribes and editors responsible for producing *Piers Plowman*.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ See Langland, *The Piers Plowman Electronic Archive*, vols 1 (F. 9.198–99) and 7 (R.6.321–22).

⁹⁷ Warner, *The Lost History of Piers Plowman* 27–28.

⁹⁸ Of course, Langland could have retroactively made Wit B a more definite intermediary between Wits A and C, as long as he was comfortable, as he may well have been, with multiple, emotionally dissonant versions of *Piers Plowman* circulating simultaneously.

⁹⁹ Trigg, “Langland’s Tears” 44.

¹⁰⁰ See Hanna; Horobin, “Jon Cok and his Copy of *Piers Plowman*”; and Middleton, “Making a Good End.”

Like the pro-love triad, most of Wit B's additions to Wit A's conclusion are those that Warner attributes to a scribe copying B_x with access to an early version of C.10.¹⁰¹ These tend to be of a less condemnatory and more amorous nature. In addition to appending the above-quoted, pro-love triad to the pro-dread triad carried over from A.10 into B_x, the post-C redactor also enjoins young people to enjoy marital sex while they can (182–88). While this passage does not deviate from Wit B's condemnatory tone, it balances Wit B's condemnation of unlawful enjoyment with a celebration of virtues of love borrowed from Wit C. Once again, the post-C redactor drew from C.10 to balance, rather than undermine, Wit B's theological agenda. Just as Wit B makes loving dread the Dobet to dread's Dowel, this passage lauds subjects who lawfully love each other out of fear of extra-marital sex's intergenerational repercussions. Although an edition of B_x without these post-C additions would not be radically different than the Athlone edition of B, it would be substantially less celebratory of lawful love, suggesting that Langland's actual middle draft between A and C (if such a thing ever existed) was much more like A and less like C than we have hitherto supposed.

C.10: LOVE, FEARLESSNESS, EVANGELISM

Wit C's brand of emotional asceticism is quite a bit simpler than those of his supposed predecessors due mainly to the fact that he replaces much of the pro-dread rhetoric of A.10 and B.9 with new content emphasizing the devotional value of love, which segues neatly into his complementary harangue about the dangers of sinful love. While Wit C does add some formal coherence to his speech by limiting his discussion of affective theology to love, in so doing he foregoes Wit A's nuanced allegory of dread's organic growth into ethical action and Wit B's proclamation that those who pay for entertainment while poor people are hungry

¹⁰¹ For a complete list of these changes, see Warner, *The Lost History of Piers Plowman* 27.

lack sufficient dread of God. On a pedagogical level, Wit C's simplicity is troubling: by conflating living well and loving well, he leaves no room for negative feelings in spiritual life. As we've seen, however, a great deal of Middle English devotional ideology is designed to transform the negative feelings that are always abundant in human life into spiritually productive action. Wit C, on the other hand, mandates compulsory love. In some respects, then, Wit C, who neglects to sanction negative emotions, seems markedly uncompassionate, compared to Wits A and B, both of whom teach their audience to turn bad feelings into good behavior.

C.10 does not begin with Wit's speech, as do A.10 and B.9, but with material analogous to A.9 and B.8: the beginning of the Vita. After bickering with some friars, Will falls into a dream in which Thouhte introduces him to the Dowel, Dobet and Dobest triad for the first time. While the beginning of C.10 is largely analogous to A.9 and B.8, it includes two unique lines concerning dread. First, when describing Dobest—who, for Thouhtes A, B and C, bears the “bisshopis crose” that guides men to good with its hooked end and punishes sinners with its pointed end—Thouhte C insists that Dobest must *not* dread the sinners he punishes: “Ac dobest sholde drede hem nat but do as god hihte: Nolite timere eos qui possunt occidere corpus &c” (99). Although he quotes only the beginning of Matthew 10.28 (“Do not fear those who kill the body . . .”), the passage's oft-cited conclusion (“ . . . but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell”) expressly commands devotees to fear God. Like Augustine (not to mention Wits A and B), Thouhte C does not associate doing well with a lack of fear, but with appropriately directed fear. In addition to citing Matthew 10.28, Thohte C beseeches Wit C to explain what Dowel, Dobet, Dobest “drede and doute” (127). While Wit C never explicitly answers Thohte C's question, his reit-

eration of Wits A and B's fearful descriptions of the dire consequences of unloving marriages and extra-marital love can easily be read as indicative of Wit C's opinions regarding the appropriate objects of dread for devotees.

Despite his undeniable focus on love, Wit C is bitterly condemnatory. Although he initially lauds humanity's Godliness—"Man is [Kynde] most lyk of membres and of face / And semblable in soule" (157–58)—he warns that sin obscures it like clouds obscure the sun:

And as thow seest the soone sum tyme for cloudes
May nat snyne ne shewe on schalkes on erthe,
So let lecherye and other luther synnes
That god seweth nat synnefole men and soffreth hem mysfare,
As somme hangeth hemsulue and oþerwhile adrencheth.
God wol nat of hem wyte bute lat hem yworthe,
As þe sauter sayth by bynnefole shrewes:

Et dimisi eos secundum deideria eorum. (159–65)

In a horrifying inverse of an affective theology that prompts devotees to feel compassion for Christ's suffering, Wit C paints a picture of a horrifyingly unsympathetic God idly watching as sinful men hang and drown themselves. For Wits A and B, dread is a bodily agent of moral regulation: it keeps devotees close to God and away from sin. Wit C, on the other hand, focuses on sin's capacity to obscure divinity's light. Although he focuses on positive feelings, Wit C is hardly more optimistic than his predecessors.

Continuing his rant against those undeserving of their Godliness, Wit C condemns sinners who are rich in material wealth, but lacking "goddes grace" (167). They love "catel" (i.e., material goods) more than Kynde "that alle kyne thynges wrouhten / The which is loue

and lyf þat last withouten ende” (168–70). Just as Thohte C uses Matthew 10.28 to express exactly how (not) to fear, Wit C expresses how (not) to love by condemning those who love worldly goods and lauding those who love Kynde (i.e., God’s eternal love). Although Wit C’s preferred mode of affective devotion is love, rather than fear, his discourse on bad lovers (lovers of material wealth) is as condemnatory as anything Wit B has to offer.

Unlike Wit B, who demands that the church care for “[f]auntes and fooles” (68–73), Wit C follows Wit A in attributing responsibility for “fauntokynes” and “foles” to both “frendes” and “holy churche” (C.10.183–85; cf. A.10.58–70), though he does not specify, as does Wit A, that the church should step in where friends and family fail (A.10.68–70). Omitting Wit B’s elaborate attempt to shame uncharitable Christians by unfavorably comparing them to Jews (84–90), Wit C stitches his discourse on “fauntokynes” and “foles” directly to a reproduction of Dobest in Wit B’s mid-passus triad (B.9.99–100), which Wit C recasts as Dowel:

Ac fauntokynes and foles þat fauten inwit
 Frendes shal fynde hem and fram holye kepe
 And holy churche helpe to, so sholde no man begge
 Ne spille speche ne tyme ne myspende noyther
 Meble ne vnmeble, mete noþer drynke.
 Ac thenne ded we alle wel, and wel bet zuy, louye
 Oure enemyes enterely and helpe hem at here nede.
 And zut were best to be aboute and bryng hit to hepe
 That alle landes loueden and in on lawe bileuede. (183–91)

Initially, Wit C's statement at 185b, "so sholde no man begge," seems to optimistically prophesize that poverty will fade into the past when friends and holy church take responsibility for those lacking "inwit." The subsequent lines, however, retroactively reinterpret this statement as the first in a string of imperatives directed at those hoping to do well. According to Wit C, Dowel, like Wit B's Dobest, is to "spille" neither speech, nor time, nor goods; Dobet is to love enemies; and Dobest is to evangelize. Wit C's ascetic program, therefore, is markedly more focused on the devotional value of love-driven social action than either Wit A or Wit B, especially if Warner is correct that modern editions of B.9 contain several particularly loving lines that the post-C redactor added to B_x from C.

Wit C expressly insists that Dobest entails evangelizing *fearlessly*. Just as Christ was "robbed and ruyfled or he on rode deyede / And seth he les his lyf for lawe sholde loue wexe" (195–96), Bishops—who, according to Wit C, are responsible for carrying out Dobest's evangelical mission—must risk bodily integrity to proliferate the law of love:

Prelates and prestes and princes of holy churche

Sholde doute no deth ne no dere 3eres

To wende as wyde as þe worlde were

To tulie þe erthe with tonge and teche men to louye. (197–200)

Dreading neither death nor poverty, Wit C's churchmen are obligated, not only to love well, but also to teach others to do so. We cannot characterize Wit C, however, as completely against dread, but only against the fear of bodily death. In this, he is ideologically aligned with Thohte C's citation of Matthew 10.28, though he neglects to mandate fear of the Lord. Wit C, therefore, is interested in neither advancing nor refuting a fear-based devotional pro-

gram, but in advancing an alternate, love-based program designed to produce a self-expanding community of fearless, evangelizing lovers.

Wit C's re-fashioned mid-passus triad segues quite neatly into his diatribe on the importance of marrying for love: "Hoso lyueth in lawe and in loue doth wel / As this wedded men þat this world susteyneth" (203–04). After following Wit B in misattributing Ezekiel 18.20 to "the gospel" only to argue against it, Wit C favorably alludes to the "contemporary legal practice [. . .] of escheating to the crown the goods of convicted felons and denying inheritance": "For though þe fader be a frankeleyn and for a felon be hanged / The eritage þat þe eyer sholde haue is at þe kynges wille" (240–41). Despite his penchant for touting love's devotional value, Wit C's insistence that the children of sinners inherit their parents' sinful attributes just as the heirs of criminals are forcefully deprived of their land is undeniably cruel. Despite omitting Wit B's condemnations of uncharitable Christians, moreover, Wit C expands Wit B's condemnation of those who marry for money rather than love:

And thogh he be louich to loken on and lossom abedde,
A mayde and wel ymanered and of gode men yspronge,
Bote he haue oþer goed haue wol here no ryche.
Ac lat her be vnlouely and vnlofsum abedde,
A bastard, a bond oen, a begeneldes dohter
That no cortesy can, bute know late here be
For riche or yrented wel, thoh he be reueled for elde
Ther ne is squier ne knyhte in contreye aboute
That he ne wol bowe to þatbonde to beden here an hosbonde
And wedden here for here welthe and weschen on þe morwe

That his wyf were wexe or a walet ful of nobles. (259–69)

Wit C condemns men who neglect attractive but poor maidens of good stock in favor of wealthy but loathsome bastards and bondwomen. His attacks on those who subvert social order by marrying across class lines recalls both Wit A's social conservatism and Wit B's condemnatory tone. Despite his increased emphasis on love's devotional value, Wit C maintains and expands the critiques of sinful love launched by his predecessors with one exception. Perhaps Langland's advanced age while composing C accounts for the fact that Wit C does not proclaim, as do Wits A and B, that "[i]t is an vncomly couple, by crist! as me þynkeþ, / To yeuen a yong wench to a yolde feble" (A.10.186–87; B.9.165–66).

According to Warner's hypothesis that B_x lacked a final pro-love triad, that triad originally appeared at the end of C.10:

And thus is dowel, my frende, to do as lawe techeth:

To louye and to loue the and no lyf to greue;

Ac to louye and to lene, leef me þat is dobet;

To 3eue and to 3eme bothe 3onge and olde,

Helen and helpen, is dobest of alle.

For þe more a man may do, by so þat a do hit,

The more he is worthy and worth, of wyse and goed ypresed. (301–07)

Wit C's final triad is emphatically extroverted: social at every level. Dowel is to love others and to avoid grieving them, Dobet is to love and help others, and Dobest is to give and tend to young and old. On the one hand, Wit C's love-based devotional program seems preferable to the dread-based programs of his predecessors. After all, Wit C mandates only positive emotions. On the other hand, Wit C has little to say about devotional value of negative emo-

tions. As we have seen, Wits A and B do not mandate negative emotions out of sadism, but in order to help devotees make sense of and properly direct the negative feelings. By forgoing their discourse on dread and valorizing fearless love, Wit C leaves no room for negative emotions in Christian devotion.

CONCLUSION: THE BODIES OF PIERS PLOWMAN A.10, B.9 AND C.10

Each of *Piers Plowman*'s Wits presents a distinct ascetic program detailing those emotions that the devotee ought to perform and those s/he should eschew in order to cultivate ethical behavior. To summarize briefly: Wit A emphasizes the devotional value of negative feelings like dread and suffering, as well as the negative consequences of seemingly positive, but sinful feelings like illicit love. According to Warner's hypothesis, the next version of *Piers Plowman* to be produced was B_x (i.e., B as we now know it, excluding the lines from C added by the post-C redactor). Wit B_x omits much of Wit A's emphasis on the devotional value of suffering and alters his mid-passus triad to advocate an advancement from servile fear to chaste dread à la Augustine, but does not temper his final pro-dread triad with a corresponding pro-love triad, as does Wit B. In many ways an inverse of Wit A, Wit C emphasizes the devotional value of love, as well as the dangers posed by cowardly dread. Though they are all different, the emotional proclivities expressed by each version of Wit has analogues within medieval England's rich ecosystem of dread- and love-based ascetic theologies.

As mentioned above, the apparent progression from dread to love across A.10, B.9, and C.10 has been cited to support the theory that *Piers Plowman* A, B and C as we know them today represent one author's poem in three consecutive drafts (Lawler 96). During the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries alone, however, a host of scribes copied all three versions of *Piers Plowman*, often deliberately amalgamating them and even adding to them

on occasion. As we have seen, the post-C redactor drew from Wit C to fashion Wit B_x into Wit B. Presumably Langland (if such a person even existed) was not responsible for these changes, since he had long since converted his theology of dread to one of love. The post-C redactor had access to and knowledge of B_x.9 and C.10. He intentionally instilled C.10's loving theology within B_x.9 without giving up the latter's Augustinian discourse on dread. In so doing, he personalized *Piers Plowman*, inscribing his own bodily leanings into a small section of the poem's material body—its manuscripts. Although *Piers Plowman*'s extant body probably bears the trace of the monumental effort that one historical body poured into writing and rewriting it hundreds of years ago, it also bears the trace of a great deal of extra-authorial labor through which the poem's scribes synchronized *Piers Plowman* with their bodies and vice versa. We need not abandon belief in Langland to celebrate the efforts of those equally historical bodies that continued to alter the body of *Piers Plowman* long after his death.

Turning from authorship to audience, matters become infinitely more complex.¹⁰² It is impossible to speak with much certainty about the kind of “emotional community,” or even the “emotional communities,” that *Piers Plowman* produced.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, a multitude of medieval devotees certainly read and copied the various versions of Wit's psychomachia and it is equally impossible to imagine them doing so without Wit's allegory of the body influencing the way they conceptualized and conducted their own ascetic battles against Sire princes huius mundi. It is likely, moreover, that at least some of *Piers Plowman*'s earliest readers were, like its scribes, familiar with multiple versions of the poem and could therefore read

¹⁰² For the early audience of *Piers Plowman* see Middleton, “The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*”; and Horobin, “Manuscripts and Readers of *Piers Plowman*.”

¹⁰³ Rosenwein defines “emotional communities” as “social groups whose members adhere to the same valuation of emotions and their expression” (“Problems and Methods” 1).

the affective theologies of several Wits against one another as we have in this essay.¹⁰⁴ Since their conception, the ascetic theologies of dread and love endorsed by the various Wits of *Piers Plowman* have coexisted in a center-less network of difference and deferral, governed by the laws of *mouvance*.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, the most we can say with certainty about *Piers Plowman*'s impact on the bodies of its audience members is that it was and continues to be characterized by the same play of *différance* that governs the poem's textual body.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Justice and Kerby-Fulton, 'Langlandian Reading Circles and Civil Service'.

¹⁰⁵ For *mouvance* see Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics* 40–76.

¹⁰⁶ For "différance," an amalgamation of 'difference' and 'deferral', see Derrida, "Différance."

CHAPTER 4:

ENVYING HEAVENLY BLISS IN FITT 7 OF *PEARL*

INTRODUCTION

While medievals were unfamiliar with the term “emotional intelligence” (Goleman 3–12),¹⁰⁷ they nevertheless were acutely invested in the ethical project of helping themselves and others cultivate a “healthy” emotional disposition through willful acts—a project that undergirds the modern “emotional intelligence movement.”¹⁰⁸ Of course, any standard of “emotional intelligence,” whether tacit or explicit, is a cultural construct and therefore biased towards the ideals of those with the privilege to construct culture. Indeed, medieval scholastic theologians (not unlike modern theorists of emotional intelligence) jealously guarded their privilege, not only to imply when and where their audience ought to experience a given emotion, but also to define emotion itself, as well as its role in the *psychomachia* of everyday life.¹⁰⁹ In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, scholastic theologians such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham increasingly espoused a voluntarist theology according to which emotions are indirectly controllable and, consequently, “one can learn to feel them in a proper manner by forming habits which change the conditions of the passions.”¹¹⁰ For voluntarists, acts of volition are capable not only of managing involuntary emotional reactions, but also of chang-

¹⁰⁷ According to Goleman’s mixed model, “emotional intelligence” is a complex network of competencies involving self-awareness, self-regulation, social skill, empathy and motivation. Although it has gained considerable popularity in both academic and popular circles, the concept of emotional intelligence has met with substantial criticism. See, for example, Edwin A. Locke 425–31.

¹⁰⁸ See Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities* 1–31; McNamer, *Affective Meditation* 119–206; and Somerset, “Excitative Speech” 59–79.

¹⁰⁹ Knuuttila 177–255.

¹¹⁰ Knuuttila 256–86.

ing the subject's emotional disposition and, resultantly, her subsequent emotions. In this regard, their ideas live on to this day. Modern psychologists, for example, often treat phobia by prompting patients to willfully confront feared objects in order to gradually reduce their emotional aversion thereto.¹¹¹

In medieval England, of course, explorations of the relationship between the will and emotion were certainly not the sole province of lofty, Latinate scholastics. With the skyrocketing of literacy rates in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a new brand of devotional literature—Nicholas Watson's "vernacular theology"—flourished throughout England, much of which directly assesses the extent to which willful acts can dictate one's emotional disposition.¹¹² Given the prominence of voluntarist ideas in late medieval England, I understand Cotton Nero A.x—containing *Pearl*, *Patience*, *Cleanness* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*)—as a series of exemplary narratives designed to help their audience willfully construct an ethical emotional disposition. Yet these narratives tend to portray, not characters who un-problematically emote ethically, but ones who struggle to emote well: *Pearl*'s dreamer erratically swings from melancholia, to bliss, to dread, to envy and back to melancholia; characters in *Cleanness* are violently punished for their "unlawful" enjoyment; Jonah learns that patience amounts to willfully enduring anger at God; and Gawain is compelled by a love of his own life, and concomitant fear of losing it, to withhold the green girdle from Bertilak on the third and final day of their "exchange of winnings game," though he eventually re-ingratiates himself both to Bertilak and denizens of his own homo-social habitus, Ar-

¹¹¹ Parsons and Rizzo 250–61.

¹¹² For vernacular theology see Watson, "Introduction: King Solomon's Tablets," 1–14; and Gillespie 401–20.

thur's court, through two public displays of shame.¹¹³ According to these narratives neither positive feelings (bliss, mirth and love), nor uncomfortable feelings (envy, fear, anger and shame) are extraneous bodily conditions to be avoided, obfuscated or repressed. Instead, they are valuable—if potentially dangerous—ecstasies and adversities to be worked through in order to achieve a more finely tuned emotional disposition. In compiling these narratives, Cotton Nero A.x vies to teach us, not only how (not) to willfully craft emotional relationships with terrestrial and celestial others, but also that the capacity to emote ethically is not an innate character-trait, but an art-form that we must deliberately cultivate through a lifelong process of trial-and-error. The pedagogical character of these narratives, therefore, accords well with scholastic and voluntarist devotional programs that hold willful acts capable of habituating the passions.¹¹⁴

The process of trial-and-error through which Cotton Nero A.x's characters struggle to emote well is nowhere more pronounced than in *Pearl*, much of which is spent detailing either the dreamer's mercurial emotional state or the pearl-maiden's critique thereof. Some critics argue that the dreamer successfully accomplishes the work of mourning over the course of *Pearl* (e.g., Astell, "Mourning and Marriage" 121, 134–35). Others read him as obstinately refusing, right up until the end of the poem, to auto-affect an identificatory shift from a melancholic, courtly lover of the pearl-maiden to a universalist, Christian lover of the corporate church (e.g., Aers, "The Self Mourning"). While in some ways opposed, these two critical strains both presuppose that the pearl-maiden's didactic agenda is to coax the dreamer

¹¹³ For in-depth analyses of the political uses of misogyny in *SGGK*, see Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies* 107–36; and Schiff 72–99.

¹¹⁴ For Thomas Aquinas' scholastic account of the relation between passions and habit, see *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 59. a. 1–5.

from a melancholic obsession with his lost love-object to an acceptance of his loss. To the contrary, I argue below that the dreamer evinces exactly this brand of acceptance in the poem's seventh fitt and that the pearl-maiden subsequently does everything in her power to render the dreamer desirous, even envious, of her existence in a celestial world characterized, ironically enough, by a complete lack of envy. Envy, according to medieval preaching manuals, consists of "sadness about someone else's happiness and glee about someone else's ruin or adversity" (*Fasciculus morum* 149). Of course, the pearl-maiden neither explicitly tells the dreamer to be sad at her happiness, nor implies that he ought to be. On the other hand, she neither tells him to be happy for her happiness, nor implies that worldly subjects are capable of such a sympathetic identification with heavenly bliss. Instead, she implies that terrestrial subjects ought to endure, or work through, their inevitable envy of the endless, communal bliss enjoyed by celestial subjects in order to comprehend, rather than transcend, the ontological gap between a worldly life replete with envious desires and a heavenly afterlife entirely bereft thereof.

Where jealousy involves "the sense that someone else is receiving more attention and affection from one's love object" (Akhtar 155), envy entails discomfort with another's good fortune and is therefore a sort of anti-love. Unlike preaching manuals which unequivocally condemn envy, *Pearl* does not outlaw this anti-love and even encourages it insofar as it fuels a desire to perform the requisite good behavior in order to get to heaven. Rather than castigating envy as a necessarily sinful hatred of the good, *Pearl* proposes a point of identity between discomfort with another's good and the ethical project of eschewing sin. In *Pearl*, envy can be ethical. Envy, from the Latin *in-videre*, signifies a negative form of vision. Hence, the eyes of Dante's envious are sewed shut with iron wire (Canto XIII, ll. 67–72). Since

Pearl characterizes the envy felt by a terrestrial, Christian devotee towards those already enshrined in heaven as potentially productive, we might therefore read the overt and complex visual aesthetics of *Pearl*'s depiction of the New Jerusalem as designed to overcome the logistical difficulties of envying celestial and therefore invisible others.¹¹⁵

COMMENTARY PART I: THE DREAMER SPEAKS

By the beginning of *Pearl*'s seventh fitt, the dreamer has already been twice rebuked by his interlocutor, the pearl-maiden: first for presuming to be permanently, rather than temporarily, united with his lost object (257–76), and again for his melancholic reaction to her first rebuke, which she condemns as blasphemous (289 – 324). Fittingly, then, the sixth fitt's concatenation word is “deme,” which can alternately mean judge, consider, ordain or condemn (*MED*, s.v. “demen”). As with the poem's other fitts, the seventh begins by echoing the previous fitt's concatenation word:

Thenne demed I to þat damyselle:

“Ne worþe no wraþe vnto my Lorde,

If rapely I raue, spornande in spelle.” (361–63)¹¹⁶

Although the pearl-maiden assigns the right to make judgments exclusively to God in the final line of the sixth fitt—“Al lys in Hym to dyȝt and deme” (360)—, in the first line of the seventh fitt the dreamer adopts the position of the judge (“demed I”). Of course, his somewhat presumptuous judgment could certainly be taken as an example of the dreamer's continual misapprehension of the pearl-maiden's lessons, which A.C. Spearing and his followers

¹¹⁵ I am deeply indebted to Nicola Masciandaro for many of the points in this paragraph.

¹¹⁶ All quotes from the poems of Cotton Nero A.x are taken from the fifth edition of Malcolm Andrew's and Ronald Waldron's *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

find comic (Spearing 149–52). On the other hand, it can just as easily be read as an assertion of the categorical difference between the ontological position of the pearl-maiden, who openly speaks as God’s proxy and can therefore easily respect his rightful place as universal judge, and the dreamer, whose distance from divinity forces him to constantly engage in a speculative, if not blasphemous, evaluations of God’s will.

The dreamer’s judgment is often translated into the jussive mood: “Let the Lord not be wrathful / If I hastily speak foolishly, stumbling in speech.”¹¹⁷ Such constructions are frequent enough in Middle English to amply justify this translation. It is possible, however, to read the statement in the deductive mood, signifying something like: “It is not worth my Lord’s wrath” According to the former translation the dreamer meekly beseeches God not to be angry with him; according to the latter he confidently declares that God will not. This ambivalence is emblematic of the dreamer’s terrestrial predicament. God monopolizes the right to “to dyȝt and deme,” but often opts against making either the grounds or results of his judgments readily apparent to terrestrial subjects, leaving the dreamer to simultaneously speculate that God would not be angry with him for speculating and enjoin God not to be angry with him for speculating. The wrath of God, of course, is a recurring theme throughout Cotton Nero A.x, especially in *Cleanness* and *Patience*. Eric J. Johnson brilliantly argues that *Cleanness* and *Patience* equip their audience with a *modus timendi* (mode of fearing) according to which worldly subjects ought to perpetually dread God’s judgment without presuming to know exactly what that judgment entails (65–90 for *modus timendi*, 91–206 for *Cleanness* and *Patience*). Likewise, Lawrence Clopper, David Wallace and David K. Coley all argue that the God of Cotton Nero A.x, for all his apparent anthropomorphism, is utterly foreign to

¹¹⁷ See, for example Casey Finch’s translation in *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet* (3rd ed.) 361, ll. 367–69.

the humans whose fate he controls entirely.¹¹⁸ Clopper, for example, argues that Cotton Nero A.x deliberately mis-anthropomorphizes God in order to demonstrate “that those who imagine God to be an irrational or arbitrary being suffer from a profound misconception of the absoluteness and otherness of God at the same time that they fail to recognize God’s merciful, covenantal relationship with mankind” (Clopper 1). Whether or not Cotton Nero A.x as a whole inspires hope that it is possible to either understand or predict God’s oscillation between wrath and mercy, it certainly depicts terrestrial existence as a continual and dangerous effort to do so, an effort in which the dreamer partakes through his speculative judgment.

The dreamer excuses himself for his potentially unwise speech by describing the emotional condition from which it arose:

“My herte watz al wyth mysse remorde,

As wallande water gotz out of welle.

I do me ay in Hys myserecorde.” (364–66)

When read in tandem, the first two above-quoted lines constitute a simile through which the dreamer accounts for his melancholic disposition: Emptiness (“mysse”) afflicted his heart with remorse (“remorde”), which flowed out uncontrollably through his speech, just as rushing water flows out of a well. Interestingly, however, the second two above-quoted lines make a very different simile: Just as rushing flows out of a well, the dreamer throws himself at God’s mercy. Once again, the ambivalence of these lines expresses the maddening indeterminacy of all the dreamer’s worldly actions. His emotional state compels him to simultaneously revel in sadness at worldly loss and to abandon himself to God’s mercy. For the dreamer, however, this coincidence is by no means paradoxical—as long as his expressions

¹¹⁸ Clopper 1–18; Wallace 93–104; and Coley, “Remembering Lot’s Wife” 342–63; and “*Pearl* and the Narrative of Pestilence” 209–62.

of grief end in an appeal for God's mercy they cannot be sinful, since, according to his understanding of Christian soteriology at this point in the poem, it is better to have sinned and repented than to have never sinned at all.¹¹⁹

Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron posit that these lines allude to Ps. 21:15: "I am poured out like water; and all my bones are scattered. My heart is become like wax melting in the midst of my bowels." Just as *Pearl's* dreamer alternately complains of his internal emptiness and entreats God to mercifully forgive the hasty speech his suffering engenders, the narrator of Ps. 21 oscillates between desperate complaints that God has forsaken him and dogged faith that the same God will deliver him from peril. Both narrators dramatize a worldly wavering between sinful despair at God's incomprehensibility and penitential faith in God's mercy. Indeed, Middle English devotional writings frequently associate both sinful and penitential emotions with effusive wells. The author of *Jacob's Well*, for example, likens the pre-penitential subject's body to "a schelde pytt" (a shallow pit), filled with "þe dedly watyr" of sin, and proposes to render it, through "long labour," a "deepe welle," flowing with the waters of God's grace (1–3). According to *Jacob's Well*, therefore, the heart-well can either gush penitential desires or Deadly Sins. The dreamer's problem in *Pearl* is that he has no way of being certain exactly what gushes out of him when he emotes.

After throwing himself at God's mercy, the dreamer segues somewhat abruptly from his declarative, perhaps even performative, display ("I do me ay in Hys myserecorde"), to an imperative address directly to the pearl-maiden, enjoining her to stop rebuking him, comfort him and pitifully reflect on her culpability for his melancholic state:

"Rebuke me neuer wyth wordez felle

¹¹⁹ The pearl-maiden thoroughly refutes this view in Fitt 12.

Þa3 I forloyne, my dere endorde,
 Bot kyþez me kyndely your coumforde,
 Pytosly þenkande vpon þysse:
 Of care and me 3e made acorde,
 Pat er watz grounde of alle my blysse.” (367–72)

According to the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*), the dreamer’s use of the adjective “felle” marks the pearl-maiden’s “wordez” as violent, angry or cruel (*MED*, s.v. “felle”). Under the same sub-definition (5b), the *MED* lists a line of *Cleanness* in which Daniel refers to the damning figures written on Belshazzar’s wall as “felle sazes” (1737), which suggests that the dreamer—like Daniel and unlike Belshazzar—has a sense of the damning nature of the celestial message that he receives, though he—unlike Daniel and like Belshazzar—seems to have no desire to heed it. Instead, he rearticulates his melancholic grief by defending his right to “forloyne,” or wander astray. To exemplify its entry on “forloinen,” the *MED* can only muster the above-quoted usage and two from *Cleanness*: The first describes God’s knowledge that the antediluvian humans “forloyned fro þe ry3t wayez” (282), which causes him to flood the world; and the second describes God’s wrath at the Jews of Jerusalem who “forloyn her fayth and folw3ed oþer goddes” (1165), which causes him to allow Belshazzar’s father, Nebuchadnezzar, to ransack Solomon’s temple (*MED*, s.v. “forloinen”). For the *Pearl*-poet, it seems, “forloyn”-ing can and often does mark an unforgivable crime worthy of God’s wrath. Despite this ominous valance, *Pearl*’s dreamer tries to have his cake and eat it too, so to speak, when he asks to “forloyn” without being rebuked by “wordez felle.” If these lines, once again, can be taken to signify the dreamer’s aloof misapprehension of his relation to celestial others, they can also be read as a tacit admission of his grief’s illegality and a not

un-humble request that the pearl-maiden allow him to work through his grief, rather than eschew or repress it for fear of divine retribution.

The dreamer asks-demands for the pearl-maiden to comfort him “kyndely.” The semantic valence of the Middle English “kynde,” of course, is much wider than that of its modern counterpart, “kind.” In addition to benevolence, it also signifies nature and the natural order (*MED*, s.v. “kynde”). In fact, “kynde” can even be used, as it is in *Piers Plowman*, as a name for God.¹²⁰ The dreamer’s appeal to the pearl-maiden’s kindness, then, suggests that the natural, even God-like, thing for the pearl-maiden to do is to give him the comfort he feels he deserves. Extending his request-injunction, he asks her to meditate with pity (“[p]ytosly”) on the fact that she, who once was the “grounde” of all his bliss, has accorded him with “care,” which can mean, among other things, sorrow, pain, fear, grief or lovesickness. The dreamer’s ostensibly theological call for pity recalls the rhetoric of courtly love: If the male lover is tortured by lovesickness, it is only right that the female object show him pity by reciprocating his love, be she willing or not, dead or alive. This is, of course, insidious logic. As David Aers points out, it is precisely through this courtly logic that Troilus at once ensnares Criseyde in the ethical responsibility to love him and eschews his own responsibility for his love-afflicted actions:

[J]ust as Troilus blamed the imprisoned Criseyde for his grief, telling her she remains responsible for his survival, or for his death, even so the narrator in *Pearl* blames the dead human being, the ground of all his bliss, for abandoning him to his lonely mourning In this familiar courtly language the lost object fulfills the traditional feminine role of nurturing life source; she is the man’s essential physician without

¹²⁰ See for example, *Piers Plowman: The A Version* (ed. George Kane) 10, 1–45; cf. B.9.1–60 and C.10.128–55.

whom his life becomes a disease, a nightmare of emptiness and tormented dreams, the state which was explored by Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde* and in the *Book of the Duchess* and, in its more self-righteously violent outcomes, by Shakespeare in *Othello*. (Aers, “The Self Mourning” 57)

The dreamer *tries* to force the pearl-maiden opposite himself in an uneven gender binary in which the lady is ethically obligated to auto-affect love for the male courtly lover, who is free to “forloyn” to his heart’s content, ethically responsible for neither his own actions, nor, even more alarmingly, their effect on the lady’s existence. But does he succeed in doing so?

Continuing his project of assigning the pearl-maiden culpability for his emotional state, the dreamer characterizes her as a source of intermittent and unpredictable pleasure and pain, not unlike the Boethian world:

“My blysse, my bale, ȝe han ben boȝe,
Bot much þe bygger ȝet watz my mon;
Fro þou watz wroken fro vch a woȝe,
I wyste neuer quere my perle watz gon.

Now I hit se, now leȝez my loȝe.” (373–77)

The dreamer’s “blysse”/“bale” dichotomy anticipates *SGGK*’s narrator’s description of Britain’s constant oscillation between “blysse and blunder” (18). Despite her heavenly status, the dreamer continues to conflate the pearl-maiden with *his* worldly emotions about her. Indeed, he calls her neither “the source of my bliss and bale,” nor “the object of my bliss and bale,” but simply “my bliss and bale.” In so doing, the dreamer recalls *The Book Duchess*’ equally melancholic black knight, who identifies his lost love as “my worldes blysse” (*The Riverside Chaucer* 333, l. 209). Unlike Chaucer’s black knight, however, the dreamer finds (tempo-

rary) happiness in being reunited with his lost love. While Aers reads the dreamer as obstinately clinging to a courtly worldview for his entire dream, the above-quoted lines hint at progress: “From the time you were delivered (‘wroken’) from each and every torment (‘vch a woþe’),” the dreamer says, “I was unaware where my pearl had gone.” He initially did not know that the pearl-maiden had found such blissful relief, though he now does. When he expresses his own relief, then, the dreamer is not just reveling in being temporarily reunited with his lost love, but also in finally knowing something about where his lost pearl had gone. If he sometimes speaks as a courtly lover, utterly unconcerned with his lady’s subjectivity beyond whether or not she assuages his discomfort, the dreamer struggles to establish a less self-centered, un-envious relation to the lady by expressing his happiness at hers.

Equipped with his newfound optimism, the dreamer tries to end his argument with the pearl-maiden. He does not exculpate her for her role in producing his worldly pain, but he reiterates his call for comfort in a manner simultaneously courtly and theologically astute:

“And quen we departed we wern at on;
 God forbede we be now wroþe;
 We meten so selden by stok oþer ston.
 Þaȝ cortaysly ȝe carpe con,
 I am bot mol and manerez mysse;
 Bot Crystes mersy and Mary and Jon,
 Þise arn þe grounde of alle my blysse.” (378–84)

Although he begins by recalling the past, worldly love that he once shared with the pearl-maiden (“we wern at on”), the dreamer employs this recollection to justify his present desire for both parties to abandon their anger and accomplish something productive in the immedi-

ate future of their rare, even miraculous, meeting. As we've seen, in Cotton Nero A.x, wrath is a judgment of guilt, occurring when a subject—be it man or God—recognizes a transgression. When he calls for himself and the pearl-maiden to mitigate their anger, therefore, the dreamer expresses, at the least, his desire to stop blaming the pearl-maiden for the sadness her absence has caused. Despite this un-Troilus-like ambition, the dreamer does not abandon his courtly parlance. To the contrary, he acts most Gawain-like when he modestly declares himself deficient in both speech (“mol”) and manners. Just as Gawain repeatedly declares himself rhetorically inept to Bertilak’s lady (1241–47), the dreamer employs a hyperbolic self-deprecation in order to enjoin the pearl-maiden to expand his worldview by speaking her mind. If only Troilus, Palamon and Arcite did the same.

Having already opened himself up to his lady’s sovereign discourse, the dreamer strikingly designates Christ’s mercy, Mary, and John, rather than the pearl-maiden, as the ground of all his bliss. These lines (383–84) present a challenge both to critics who read the dreamer as comically doltish and theologically obtuse and to those who read him as progressing, over the course of *Pearl*, from a courtly lover to a corporate Christian. Falling somewhere in between these two views, Aers writes off the dreamer’s act of re-grounding his bliss in Christian icons as “a purely tactical concession, a formulaic compromise to facilitate both the continuation of the conversation and his own concerns within it. Nevertheless,” Aers concedes, “it does lead into a question that did not occur to Troilus, to Palamon and Arcite, to Othello, or to Leontes: a question about *her* life” (“The Self Mourning” 64). Although Aers pays too short shrift to the potential causal connection between the dreamer’s invocation of John and his later vision of the New Jerusalem (culled, as it is, directly from John’s account thereof in Revelation), he recognizes that, at this point in the poem, the dreamer makes a

most un-Troilus-like acknowledgement of his lover's interiority by asking her to recount her personal history. But does this make the dreamer less a courtly lover than Troilus, or simply a more ethical courtly lover than Troilus, one capable of willfully forging a more egalitarian, inter-subjective love? As scholars of romance and hagiography often note, courtly discourse and Christian ideology are rarely, if ever, mutually exclusive in medieval texts (Smith, Elizabeth 1–36). While the dreamer's act of re-grounding his bliss in Christ, Mary and John can be read as a means to prolong his lavishly polite, almost flirtatious, conversation with the pearl-maiden, could not it also be understood as a sublime moment, albeit a rare one in *Pearl*, in which courtliness and holiness complement, rather than contradict, each other? Can we read the dreamer as neither clinging to a courtly ethos, nor transitioning to devotional one, but struggling to love the pearl-maiden in manner satisfactory to both? Do his efforts signify his desire (or the poet's) to un-problematically conflate these two distinct yet inextricably intertwined ideologies?¹²¹

If the dreamer evinces progress by trying to reconcile his courtly leanings with Christian devotion, he cannot easily disregard the emotional dissonance between himself and the pearl-maiden:

“In blysse I se þee blyþely blent,
 And I a man al mornyf mate.
 Ȝe take þeron ful lyttel tente,
 Þaȝ I hente ofte harmez hate.” (385–88)

Here the dreamer back-peddles, even regresses, to a courtly complaint about the pearl-maiden's heavenly indifference to his worldly struggles. He cannot help but read within her

¹²¹ For an elaboration of this reading see Gross 79–92.

over-determined happiness—she is blithely blended with bliss—a lack of compassion (“ful lyttel tente”) for his burning pains (“harmes hate”). Yet he goes on to soften his accusation by reiterating his desire to avoid quibbling with her and learn from her instead:

“Bot now I am here in your presente,
I wolde bysech, wythouten debate,
Ȝe wolde me say, in sobre asente
What lyf Ȝe lede erly and late,
For I am ful fayn þat your astate
Is worþen to worshyp and wele, iwysse;
Of alle my joy þe hyȝe gate,
Hit is in grounde of alle my blysse.” (389–96)

Despite the pearl-maiden’s apparent inability or unwillingness to share his pain, the dreamer dramatically asserts his happiness (“I am ful fayn”) at her heavenly “astate.” Though he makes no explicit mention of envy, the spectral possibility that he might be sad at the pearl-maiden’s happiness lurks behind his assurances to the contrary. Indeed, his earlier distinction between his own mourning and the pearl-maiden’s un-compassionate bliss arguably provokes his later insistence that he is gladdened by her high estate. If the latter statement of shared bliss partially offsets the former statement of emotional dissonance, it does not completely negate the dreamer’s initial complaint. Indeed, the question remains: If he can be happy with her celestial happiness and sad at her terrestrial absence, why can’t she be happy with her celestial happiness and sad at his terrestrial sadness? This is the dreamer at his most volatile—he swings from utterly dejected and introverted (“mornyf mate”) to joyously blissful and extroverted in eleven lines flat (385–96). And yet his mood-swing is more willful than

erratic. It is as if he insists on their shared happiness in a voluntarist effort to actualize it.

COMMENTARY PART II: THE MAIDEN SPEAKS

Although he tends to eschew culpability for his grief, the dreamer nevertheless makes willful efforts to mitigate the pearl-maiden's anger, as well as his own, through courtesy; efforts that she vocally appreciates:

“Now blysse, burne, mot þee bytyde,”

þen sayde þat lufsoum of lyth and lere,

“And welcum here to walk and byde,

For now þy speche is to me dere.” (397–400)

The maiden begins by wishing for the dreamer to encounter bliss, or, more precisely, for bliss to encounter him. However ostensibly positive, her blessing (or blissing) is not the ringing endorsement it at first seems. First of all, it implies that the dreamer's best, if not only, hope for obtaining worldly bliss is pure luck—if bliss finds him. Second, it curiously trivializes, or at least temporalizes, the dreamer's immediately prior declaration that his bliss is grounded in her heavenly status. Through her vocalized hope for his future happiness, the pearl-maiden gently reminds the dreamer that, as a terrestrial subject, he cannot simply ground his bliss in her celestial status to ensure its permanence. Likewise, in welcoming the dreamer based on her appreciation of his “speche,” she implies that his current bliss too is not only precarious, but also contingent upon her continued approval. Far from offended by the dreamer's courtly rhetoric, the pearl-maiden mandates that he sustain it.

Extending her rather passive-aggressive acclamation of the dreamer's apologetic proposal, the pearl-maiden praises his newfound meekness and retroactively diagnoses their previous antipathy as rooted in his pride:

“Maysterful mod and hyze pryde,
I hete þee arn heterly hated here.
My Lorde ne louez not for to chyde
For meke arn alle þat wonez Hym nere.” (402–04)

The pearl-maiden’s warning that a tyrannical mindset (“[m]aysterful mod”) and high pride are hated in heaven all too clearly implies that the dreamer is in constant danger of evincing these attributes, even as it congratulates him for ceasing to do so. Through it, she recalls her previous scathing, even mean-spirited, tripartite rebuke of the dreamer’s desire to cross the water separating them and live with her happily ever after (289–324). Spearing justifies the pearl-maiden’s sharp retorts as characterized by “deliberate and necessary harshness,” holding that the dreamer “has no hope of gaining further understanding unless he can be shocked out of his fool’s paradise” (Spearing 150–51). Of course, such harsh didacticism is everywhere in Cotton Nero A.x. Even so, if we consider her primary rhetorical agenda to guide the dreamer to a state of meek acceptance, it is difficult to explain why, after he has painstakingly evinced just such an acceptance, the pearl-maiden continues to lecture him that God hates pride. After all, she does so in the process of ostensibly praising him for finally exiting his prideful “fool’s paradise.” It is equally difficult, moreover, to miss the blatant hypocrisy in her warning that God does not love those who “chyde,” which can mean criticize, complain or grumble, but also rebuke—an action quite integral to her own didactic *modus operandi*. Yet if we consider the pearl-maiden’s rhetorical aim to stoke the dreamer’s envy by repeatedly, if implicitly, highlighting the radical difference between the temporariness and contingency of his bliss with the permanence and certainty of her own, these rhetorical choices become much more explicable.

If the pearl-maiden's reply contains plenty of scornful undertones, it also conveys a tantalizing promise that the dreamer will be rewarded with further revelations for his good behavior. Once again, however, she stresses that his mystical experience and perhaps even the state of his soul depends on his adopting the diminutive, passive and eerily blank emotional posture that is meekness:

“And when in Hys place þou schal apere,
Be dep deuote in hol mekenesse.
My Lorde þe Lamb loues ay such chere;
þat is the grounde of alle my blysse.” (405–08)

Of course, the pearl-maiden's mandate that the dreamer adjust his emotional disposition (“chere”) to one of meekness is perfectly in line with Christian ideology, as is her opposition of meekness to pride: Following their Latin antecedents, Middle English preachers' manuals frequently cast “mekenesse” as the affective antidote for pride.¹²² While her theology is perfectly doctrinal, in recalling a pride/meekness binary reminiscent of those contained in manuals used by confessors to prescribe certain behaviors and proscribe others, the pearl-maiden is perhaps more authoritarian than consolatory. For George Edmondson, the cumulative effect of the pearl-maiden's doctrine “is to underscore the radical incommensurability between the mediated, language-bound world of the dreamer and the realm of limitless *jouissance* beyond the river” (55). Hence, her injunction that the dreamer must continually affect meekness and repress pride carries with it the implicit reminder that she, who has already achieved heavenly bliss, need not worry about such tricky cognitive and emotional adjustments. According to the vice/virtue system that opposes pride to meekness, the dreamer's relation to

¹²² See, for example, *The Book of Vices and Virtues* 130–43.

the pearl-maiden ought not be one of envy, but one of charity (*caritas*).¹²³ Yet how can he feel charitably towards an interlocutor who ceaselessly reminds him of that he is not even capable of comprehending her bliss and status?

For Edmondson, the pearl-maiden exemplifies Jacques Lacan's S(Ø): the signifier of the Other's desire. The Lacanian subject desires nothing more than to fulfill the desire of some Other, be it God, Justice or, for the courtly lover, the Lady. S(Ø), not unlike the related "objet *a*," signifies that unknown entity with which the subject could sate the Other's desire (46–48). Hence, *Pearl* begins with a prince deriving pleasure from enclosing a pearl in gold (40–43). The syntax of the pearl-maiden's description of her heavenly predicament exemplifies the primal fantasy of finding completion in completing the Other. Her bliss is grounded in the fact that her lord the lamb loves when his subjects evince devout and meek cheer. Her happiness is therefore based in God's reciprocal happiness with her meekness. Together, they form a closed circuit in which meekness motivates love, love motivates bliss, and bliss motivates meekness. Across the river, however, the dreamer remains in a world where meekness often leads to immense physical suffering and bliss often leads to gluttony or lust. By enjoining the dreamer to be meek when he enters the lamb's presence, however, the pearl-maiden hints that he will someday cross the river into the land of plentitude and *jouissance*. Of course, the game of evoking a sublime afterlife in order to mandate earthly meekness and passivity—so reviled by Friedrich Nietzsche—is fundamental to Christian ideology.¹²⁴ The pearl-maiden's rhetoric is striking, not for its ingenuity, but for the uncompassionate coolness with which she juxtaposes her bliss to the dreamer's pain.

¹²³ See, for example, *Fasciculus Morum* 175–99.

¹²⁴ For Nietzsche's critique of Christianity see *On the Genealogy of Morals* 67–118.

After laying down the law to the dreamer, the pearl-maiden begins to satisfy his request by recounting the details of her life after death:

“A blysfyl lyf þou says I lede;
þou woldez know þerof þe stage.
þow wost wel when thy perle con schede
I waz ful ȝong and tender of age.” (409–12)

The maiden begins her account firmly entrenched in a first person/second person dynamic with the dreamer, oscillating between “you” and “I.” In so doing, she recalls the closed identificatory circuit between father and daughter in worldly life, but also emphasizes the ontological split currently separating them. Curiously, however, at the moment when she most clearly identifies herself as the dreamer’s dead daughter, she names herself, not in the first person, but in the third (“thy perle”), suggesting both that she is currently a categorically different entity than that the dreamer mournfully remembers and that she is no longer *his* pearl. Used repeatedly throughout Cotton Nero A.x, “scheden” signifies splitting or sundering (*MED*, s.v. “scheden”). While it is most frequently employed to denote the separation of rain or snow from clouds, it is also used to describe Gawain’s axe sundering the “schyre grece” between the skin and bone of the green knight’s neck (425). The sudden violence of the green knight’s decapitation recalls that which separated the infantile pearl-maiden from her father. Like the latter violence, moreover, the former proves to be temporary—what was “schede” will be made whole again.

Despite the opaque causality characterizing her initial description of the rupture that separated father from daughter (“thy perle con schede”), in the following lines we learn that the pearl-maiden is not severed by an unknown agency, but taken to marriage by the lamb:

“Bot my Lorde þe Lombe, þurȝ Hys godhede,
He toke myself to Hys maryage,
Corounde me quene in blysse to brede
In lenghe of dayez þat ever schal wage.” (413–16)

Here, the I/you dynamic of the previous lines gives way to a him/me dynamic that details the mystical marriage between the lamb and pearl-maiden. Of course, images of crowned virgins married to Christ in heaven are fairly frequent in Middle English literature. The Early Middle English treatise on virginity, *Hali Meidhad*, for example, displays heavenly virgins forming a circle around the Godhead, surrounded by a larger circle of chaste widows and a still larger circle of faithful wives. While the dreamer’s account of his vision of the New Jerusalem (721–1153)—in which the pearl-maiden is one of 144,000 virgins surrounding the lamb—is certainly reminiscent of *Hali Meidhad*’s account of Christ’s polygamous marriage to all the women of heaven, the pearl-maiden’s earlier description of her mystical marriage to Christ is strikingly monogamous. Indeed, when she relates that the lamb crowned her queen “in blysse to brede / In lenghe of dayez that ever schal wage,” she might be saying, as the *MED* suggests, that she is to remain in a state of eternal, marital bliss, though she also might be saying that she and the lamb procreate (“brede”) in heaven for eternity (s.v. “breden”). While I don’t want to suggest that the pearl-maiden copulates with the Lamb of God in heaven, I do find her choice of words telling, especially given her familiarity with the literalist and materialist hermeneutic with which the dreamer has approached his vision thus far.

Having forced the dreamer into the margins of his own narrative, the pearl-maiden continues to describe her mystical union with the lamb, further blurring the ontological line between herself and God and emboldening that between herself and the dreamer:

“And sesed in alle Hys herytage
Hys lef is. I am holy Hysse.
Hys pyese, Hys prys; and Hys parage
Is rote and grounde of alle my blysse.” (417–20)

Upon marrying the lamb, the pearl-maiden is put in possession (“sesed”) of his entire inheritance (“herytage”). Here, legal language is employed to describe the pearl-maiden’s transformation into heaven’s queen. Patricia Margaret Kean notes that the legality with which the innocent pearl-maiden is saved contrasts the surplus grace required to save those stained by sin, suggesting to both audience and dreamer, once again, a categorical difference between the dreamer and herself (187–88). Inverting her earlier, third-person self-identification as the dreamer’s pearl, the pearl-maiden now refers to herself as the lamb’s loved one (“[h]ys lef”). She then asserts that she is “holy Hysse,” a punning phrase that implies both that she is entirely (wholly) in his possession and that she is sanctified (holy) as a result. The next line—in which she evokes the lamb’s value (“pyese”), nobility (“prys”) and inheritance (“parage”)—can be read in apposition to the prior line, meaning that the pearl-maiden herself constitutes God’s value, nobility and inheritance. On the other hand, it can also be read as the subject of the final line of her speech, meaning that the lamb’s value, nobility and inheritance are the ground of all her bliss. Following Edmondson, I would argue that neither meaning is correct, but that, in evoking both together, the pearl-maiden once again enacts the potent fantasy in which the subject finds completion and bliss in providing the lacking Other that which he lacks. But the subject for whom this fantasy is realized is the pearl-maiden and, by explaining how the dreamer’s worldly loss is tantamount to her heavenly marriage, she renders the dreamer’s tragic narrative of which he is the protagonist a comedy of which she is the pro-

tagonist and he plays an inferior male lover that she casts off for a better man . . . or lamb. If the pearl-maiden's account of her death and mystical marriage does not explicitly enjoin the dreamer to envy her, it offers him no clear route to finding charitable happiness in her bliss. To the contrary, it brings him face-to-face with the fact that his bliss was sacrificed for hers and God's superior bliss—both incomprehensible and unavailable to him—even after he has already made vocal attempts to move on by grounding his bliss, first in Christ, Mary and John and then in her incomprehensible heavenly estate. To put the matter colloquial, the pearl-maiden, at least as I read her, deliberately rubs it in—"it" being her static, eternal bliss.

CONCLUSION

Whether or not she does so in an effort to rouse the dreamer out of a state of acceptance and into one of envy, her speech has exactly that effect on him. In the beginning of the eighth fitt—whose perhaps ironic concatenation word is "cortayse"—the dreamer explicitly expresses his dissatisfaction, or at least disbelief, that the pearl-maiden has usurped Mary as the queen of heaven (421–32). This, in turn, inspires the pearl-maiden to launch into the parable of the vineyard in order to once again draw attention to the ontological chasm between earthly subjects, like the dreamer, who cannot help but experience envy and heavenly subjects, like herself, whose bliss multiplies with the recognition of the bliss of others (501–72). Indeed, the dreamer glimpses the pearl-maiden for the last time immersed in a huge crowd of pearl-laden virgins (1129–52). His vision of the New Jerusalem offers the dreamer, as Sarah Stanbury brilliantly argues, a fantasy of returning to the female body, which promptly evaporates the moment he tries to actualize it (33). As Aers reminds us, the dreamer causes his vision to collapse around him by acting on a literalist interpretation thereof ("The Self Mourning" 58). I am less eager than Aers and Spearing to blame the dreamer for his hermeneutic

shortcomings and I think *Pearl* itself is too. The lesson that the pearl-maiden ultimately bestows on the dreamer is that life is an ever-fluctuating series of thoughts, experiences and emotions. The terrestrial subject cannot simply choose not to be envious because she “knows” envy is a sin, but she can practice, again and again, working through her sinful emotions and thoughts in an effort to produce more positive ones. There is no end to this struggle except in death and no skipping directly thereto. In the end, then, the pearl-maiden does not teach the dreamer how to feel, but forces him to develop the ability to willfully learn from his feelings and, in so doing, to take responsibility for them.

The difficulty of emotional life is omnipresent in Cotton Nero A.x, as is a profound appreciation of bliss, be it worldly or heavenly. Just as *Pearl*'s dreamer oscillates between “blysse and bale” and *SGGK*'s narrator describes Britain as a bastion of “blysse and blunder,” the narrator of *Patience* instructs us to “[b]e preue and be pacient in payne and in joye” (525), calling patience “a nobel poynt þa3 it displese ofte” (531). Amidst all its graphic depictions of human suffering, there is even bliss in *Cleanness*, though the bulk of it is either prelapsarian (260) or paradisiacal (177–79). In Cotton Nero A.x, the project of living well is reducible to neither a pure pursuit of pleasure, nor a world-denying abstinence therefrom. Living well involves working through emotions, negative or positive, strategically. Had *Pearl*'s dreamer awoken immediately after grounding his bliss in Christian ideology and knowledge of his lost loved one's celestial bliss, it would be easy enough to read the poem as a sort of morality play in which the dreamer exemplifies how to grieve well. The pearl-maiden, however, is more interested in keeping the dreamer grieving, envious and altogether upset than alleviating his grief. Ironically enough, it is by vividly depicting a world beyond emotional fluctuation that the pearl-maiden keeps the dreamer's moods swinging.

CHAPTER 5:

SHAME AND CHIVALRY IN *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*

Shame need not crouch
In such an Earth as Ours —
Shame — stand erect —
The Universe is yours.

—Emily Dickinson

Recent years have seen an explosion of critical interest in medieval emotionality. Barbara Rosenwein's work, for example, explores how a common ideology of emotion produces psychosomatic synchronization in groups. In order to better discuss medieval cultures of emotion, Rosenwein coined the influential term "emotional communities," which she defines as "social groups whose members adhere to the same valuation of emotions and their expression" ("Problems and Methods" 1).¹²⁵ Likewise, Sarah McNamer demonstrates that performances of compassion, particularly for Christ's suffering body, were vital to various devotional communities throughout medieval Europe (*Affective Meditation* 11–14).¹²⁶ These communities considered compassion and the will to be mutually informative—compassion communicates the suffering of others to the will, and the will performs compassion through ascetic, meditative acts. Building on this important work, I argue that a great deal of the flourishing of Middle English literature produced in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England is profoundly invested in producing, maintaining and critiquing a wide variety of emotional communities, including the imagined, chivalric community of knighthood. In addition to ideologies of love, fear and anger, a common ideology of shame banded medieval knights

¹²⁵ cf. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities* 23–27, 164–67, 188–89.

¹²⁶ McNamer convincingly argues "affective meditation originally was a woman's genre" (*Affective Meditation* 18, 86–115).

together. In this chapter, I argue that the chivalric romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (hereafter *SGGK*) portrays shame as a reparative emotion, essential to the process of socialization through which the denizens of Camelot produce and maintain the fragile bonds holding together Arthur's court.

I. RETROSPECTIVE, PROSPECTIVE AND COMMUNICATIVE SHAME

Packed with emotion-words from “blysse” to “wrathe,” Middle English romances portray emotions as psychosomatic, ethical judgments that compel characters to either exemplify or deviate from a socially constructed standard of chivalric behavior. In Middle English romance, emotion is not only evidence of moral exemplarity (or lack thereof), but also a crucial component of the psychosocial process of becoming-moral. Rather than simply portraying emotionally literate heroes battle emotionally illiterate anti-heroes, these medieval “pulp fictions” often depict characters learning to behave ethically through a highly emotional process of trial-and-error.¹²⁷ Crucial to this learning process is shame: the uncomfortable experience of perceiving oneself or another outside of the confines of social acceptability (OED, s.v. “shame,” Def. 1a).¹²⁸ As Mary C. Flannery points out, the semantic valence of the Middle English *schame*, like that of its Modern English descendent, is exceptionally wide: “as well as describing dishonor itself, it can refer either to the emotion resulting from an awareness of dishonor or disgrace, or to the anticipation of dishonor” (166). *Schame*, therefore, denotes both “retrospective shame” (Latin: *pudor, rubor*)—the experience of a perceived breach in social acceptability (MED, s.v. “shame,” Def. 3)—and “prospective shame” (Latin: *verecundia*): the perpetual, mind-body process of avoiding future shame (MED, s.v. “shame,” Def.

¹²⁷ For a discussion of failure's role in Arthurian romance, see Haight, especially her chapter on *SGGK*, 17–76. See also, Nicola McDonald's “Polemical Introduction” 1–21.

¹²⁸ cf. MED, s.v. “shame,” Def. 3.

2). As distinct as they are, these two aspects of shame are profoundly intertwined in lived experience. After all, our shameful memories always already inform our decisions regarding how best to avoid future shame (Deonna 10–12). Of course, sometimes avoiding future shame is, or ought to be, more a matter of extricating oneself from an oppressive social group than one of conforming to that group’s rigid behavioral strictures. Nevertheless, we often *want* to maintain our membership in the emotional communities to which we belong and our capacity to recall past shame in order to avoid future shame is essential for doing so.

Shame’s functionality, however, is by no means limited to the Pavlovian conditioning through which retrospective shame informs prospective shame. Shame also maintains and defends our social bonds by communicating our dismay to others, or the dismay of others to us. For Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, shame is rooted in infantile experience, particularly at:

the moment when the circuit of mirroring expressions between the child’s face and the caregiver’s recognized face [. . .] is broken: the moment when the adult face fails or refuses to play its part in the continuation of the mutual gaze. [. . .] The protoaffect shame is thus not defined by prohibition [. . .]. Shame floods into being as a moment, a disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication. Indeed [. . .], shame is itself a form of communication. Blazons of shame, the “fallen face” with eyes down and head averted—and, to a lesser extent, the blush—are semaphores of trouble and at the same time of a desire to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge. (36)

Though it enforces social prohibitions later in life, shame is originally a distress signal designed to maintain vital, communicative bonds that we perceive to be threatened. Following Sedgwick, this chapter argues that *SGGK* repeatedly depicts shame, not only conditioning

characters' actions through a process of negative reinforcement, but also bolstering communal bonds by conveying the shamed character's personal discomfort to the other members of his emotional community. *SGGK*, therefore, is underwritten by a multi-faceted, social psychology of shame that anticipates and amalgamates the insights of behavioral psychology, attachment theory and affect theory.¹²⁹

While its prescience is certainly remarkable, *SGGK*'s psychology of shame also participates in a "vernacular voluntarism": my term for the surge of interest in the complex interplay between emotion and volition traversing several genres of Middle English literature. *SGGK* portrays shame as neither purely intentional, nor purely unintentional. Instead, it offers a nuanced, narrative account of the complex interaction of volition—both subjective and sovereign—and shame in the process of chivalric socialization that constitutes and maintains Arthur's court. For the *Gawain*-poet, the chivalric subject can neither completely avoid shame, nor completely control its impact on his identity, though he can publically perform shame as a reparative request to re-socialize in the wake of a social trauma. I read Gawain's shameful confession to the court at the end of the poem, therefore, as a rhetorically successful, symbolic-semaphoric performance through which Gawain re-integrates himself into his imagined, emotional community. Far from alienating him from his king and fellow courtiers, Gawain's shame ultimately strengthens the communicative and identificatory bonds connecting him to Camelot.

II. COURTING WONDER, COURTING SHAME

For Sedgwick, positive feelings of interest-enjoyment and negative feelings of shame are two faces of our unified desire to commune with others: "Without positive affect, there can be no

¹²⁹ For the difference between behavioral psychology and attachment theory, see Bowlby. For a compelling introduction to affect theory see Gregg and Seigworth.

shame: only a scene that offers you enjoyment or engages your interest can make you blush” (116). *SGGK* depicts three moments in which blood shoots to a character’s face for shame, all of which occur when the subject’s enjoyment and interest in communal belonging are threatened: after Arthur hears the Green Knight’s scornful assessment of his court (317–18), after Gawain finds out the Green Knight is aware of his chivalric transgression at Hautedesert (2371–72), and directly before Gawain launches into his tortured account of that transgression to Arthur’s court (2503–04). For Valarie Allen, shame is always already social in *SGGK*:

Each blush in *SGGK* [. . .] occurs before the gaze of another. Shame requires an audience, occurring only once one *sees* that one is being looked at. It forms a crucial stage in the construction of self-awareness, an abysmal moment in which one sees oneself being seen being seen; reflections are reflected in the reflections of eyes. Shame constructs subjective identity not as autonomous entity but as being-in-relation. (198)

SGGK certainly depicts shame as the traumatic, “abysmal moment” that Allen describes—one in which society gets under our skin, making pure individuality impossible. Anticipating Sedgwick, however, the poem also depicts shame as social in the sense that its discomfort spreads to those who have witnessed another’s disgrace. Consequently, shame often solicits recuperative compassion from such onlookers, thereby re-establishing imperiled bonds of social communion. As Allen puts it, “a blush puts back together a body shamed by having lost its honorable integrity” (196). In *SGGK*, shame is traumatic and reparative, conditioning and communicative.

Prior to shame’s eruption into the poem, *SGGK* carefully attends to both the embodied nature of chivalric politics and the central role of wonder—an amalgam of interest and

enjoyment—therein. Indeed, the poem self-identifies as an “outrage awenture of Arthurez wonderez” (129). Etymologically, both “outrage” and “awenture” signify an encounter with otherness, a movement into the unknown.¹³⁰ Likewise, “wonder” constitutes a psychosomatic enchantment with the unknown. Medieval philosophers considered wonder a profoundly generative awareness of unawareness that provides “a stimulus and incentive to investigation” (Bynum 3).¹³¹ In addition to casting the story to come as a fount of wonder, *SGGK*’s narrator sets his scene in a Britain replete with “warre, wreke and wonder” since Brutus’ founding thereof, thereby marking wonder’s centrality to the arch-history of British politics after Troy.¹³²

After alluding to the mythic originator of British rule, Brutus, *SGGK*’s narrator opens on Brutus’ most famous descendent, Arthur, in his “first age,”¹³³ brimming with youthful energy and wonder-lust:

He watz so joly of his joyfnes, and sumquat childgered.

His lif liked hym ly3t; he louied þe lasse

Auþer to longe lye or longe sitte,

So bisied him his 3onge blod and his brayn wylde. (86–89)

[He was so merry in his mirth and somewhat childlike in his manner; his life pleased him well; he loved little either to lie long or to sit long, so busied him his young blood and wild brain.]¹³⁴

¹³⁰ MED, s.v. “outrage,” Def. 1b; “aventure,” Defs. 4 and 5.

¹³¹ cf. Plato’s notion that wonder is “the beginning of philosophy” (155).

¹³² For an account of *SGGK*’s allusions to Troy, see Federico 34–47.

¹³³ For the medieval discourse on the three ages, see the earlier, alliterative work *The Parlement of Thre Ages*. See also Schiff 96–97.

SGGK's Arthur is certainly young and more than a bit hyperactive, but that does not necessarily make him a bad sovereign. Refuting critics who read the narrator's description of Arthur as pejorative, Aisling Byrne suggests "Arthur's disinclination to 'longe lye or to longe sitte' may bespeak a refusal to rest easy in the comforts offered by the court and could point to the sort of vitality that is a necessary part of chivalric life" (69). In addition to indulging in displays of conspicuous consumption, *SGGK*'s Arthur solidifies his sovereignty by *delaying* hedonistic feasts and their soporific aftereffects until his boyish hunger for amazement has been satisfied. He therefore refuses, not only to eat until everyone has been served, but also to begin major feasts until he is informed of some "mayn maruayle" (94). A commonplace in Arthurian romance, this biopolitical power play forges a link between Arthur's body and the body politic of which he is the head by rendering his own youthful hunger for wonder tantamount to the court's mundane but altogether pressing hunger for food and drink. In *SGGK*, however, the enjoyment that stems from political belonging proves both fragile and dangerous, and heads of political bodies and body politics are rarely as secure as they seem.

As L.O. Aranye Fradenburg points out, the Green Knight far exceeds Arthur's modest desire to hear talk of the marvelous, leaving king and court firmly enrapt in wonder (23). Indeed, the Green Knight makes the court suddenly aware of their unawareness of the meaning behind his hue—"vch mon had meruayle quat hit mene myȝt such a hew lach" (233) ["everyone marveled what it might mean that a knight and a horse could have such a color"]—and of the nature of his errand: "Al studied þat þer stod, and stalked hym nerre / Wyth al þe wonder of þe worlde what he worch schulde" (237–38) ["All were amazed who stood there, and stalked nearer to him with all the wonder in the world what he would do"]. After the Green

¹³⁴ All Modern English translations of *SGGK* are my own, made with reference to the *MED*.

Knight asks to speak to Camelot's governor, the court's stunned amazement at his hue runs the risk of being reinterpreted as fear, which is antithetical to the courage for which the knights of Camelot are already famous. A deft affective politician, the Green Knight deprives the court of the luxury of continued, passive wonder by challenging its denizens to "the beheading game," which forces them to either live up to their reputation for pride ("sourquydrye"), ferocity ("gryndellayk") and resentment ("greme") or suffer shame for failing to do so (311–12).

III. FIRST BLUSH: BODY POLITICS

SGGK's first blush occurs after the Green Knight interprets the king and court's astonished silence at his challenge as a dearth of knightly courage: "al dares for drede withute dynt schewed!" (315) ["all tremble with dread before a blow is delivered"]. His damning critique of the court's emotional atmosphere, which he caps off with a thunderous laugh, solicits a whirlwind of emotions from Arthur and his courtiers:

Wyth þis he lazes so loude þat þe lorde greued;

Þe blod schot for scham into his schyre face

and lere;

He wex as wroth as wynde,

So did alle þat þer were.

Þe kyng, as kene bi kynde,

Þen stod þat stiff mon nere. (316–322)

[With this the Green Knight laughed so loud that Arthur grieved. The blood shot for shame into his fair face and cheek. He waxed angry as wind, as did all that were there. Naturally bold, the king then approached that haughty man.]

The Green Knight's traumatic rhetoric leaves both Arthur and the court grieved, blushing and angry. For McNamer, the court comically shadows the young king's elaborate mood swing, thereby demonstrating Arthur's biopolitical control over his courtiers: "The striking image of the collective face of the court instantly flushing red in shame and anger in imitation of their king exposes a top-down model of affective production as one of Camelot's primary fictions. Here in Camelot, emotions are produced by fiat" ("Feeling" 252). While *SGGK*'s narrator certainly shows deference to Arthur's sovereignty by recounting his emotional reaction to the Green Knight's slight first, he does not explicitly state that the courtiers become angry because Arthur does. Arthur's blush is clearly communicative of his distress, but it is not necessarily the only reason the court partakes therein. Indeed, the Green Knight does not direct his attack at Arthur personally, but at "Arþures hous" and "þe Round Table" to whom he issues his challenge (309, 313). Since the Green Knight addresses the court as a unified community, it stands to reason that they would respond as such. Instead of depicting a comically dictatorial Camelot in which top-down political unity manufactures a top-down emotional unity, *SGGK*'s narrator depicts a *de facto* emotional community, bonded together by common anger and shame, undergirding and buttressing Camelot's top-down political system. Indeed, Camelot's foremost metonymy, "þe Round Table," facilitates an egalitarian, rhizomatic emotional politics in which every knight can see, and be seen by, every other knight's face. Surely a rectangular table at which all subordinates look to the head better befits an arboreal, top-down model of affective production.¹³⁵

Driven by anger, Arthur rejects the Green Knight's indictment that the court is paralyzed by fear of his challenge—"I know no gome þat is gast of þy grete wordes" (325) ["I

¹³⁵ For the difference between arboreal and rhizomatic systems, see Deleuze and Guattari 3–25.

know no man that is afraid of your great words”]—and takes up the ax himself. Visibly unimpressed, the Green Knight strokes his beard and adjusts his coat “wyth countenance dryȝe” (335) [“with cool countenance”]. In her study of gesture in *SGGK*, Guillemette Bolens points out:

The Green Knight’s gestures [in the wake of Arthur’s acceptance] are remarkably banal. In their banality lies their force. [. . .] The Green Knight expresses kinesically that King Arthur does not represent any danger. [. . .] In the social script operating in [*SGGK*] this attack is more detrimental than a deathblow, since it strikes at the heart of a society that grounds its legitimacy in the value of its king. (127)

By acting cool, collected and perfectly unthreatened by Arthur’s visibly emotional acceptance of his challenge, the Green Knight flouts Arthur’s sovereignty, as well as the prevailing ideals of all of those who derive their sense of political identity by subjecting themselves to it. Though the Green Knight’s gestures contradict the biopolitical fiction that Arthur’s blood, like that of his relative Brutus, is infused with the right to rule, Gawain soon heeds the distress signal conveyed in the young king’s blush by rhetorically re-asserting the sovereignty innate in Arthur’s blood. In a *tour de force* of modesty and flattery, Gawain politely pleads that, since he is the weakest and least intelligent knight at court, he ought to accept the Green Knight’s challenge in his infinitely more valuable sovereign’s stead (341–61). He goes on to proclaim that he is only valuable insofar as he is related to Arthur: “for as much as ȝe ar myn em I am only to prayse; / No bounté but your blod I in my bodé knowe” (366–67) [“I am only to praise forasmuch as you are my uncle. I know no other nobility than your blood in my body”]. Gawain derives his self-worth from the fact that he shares Arthur’s blood—the very blood that, moments ago shot to the sovereign’s face for shame. In his re-

quest that Arthur allow him to play the beheading game, a political rhetoric of blood answers the semaphoric display of blood in Arthur's blush. Blood calls; blood answers.

While the beheading game initially appears to be a suicide mission, the Green Knight proves capable of a miraculous *re*-capitation that gives Arthur another dose of the astonishment for which he hungered and sends Sir Gawain on an (apparent) suicide mission of his own. For Mary F. Godfrey, the Green Knight's ability to survive after being decapitated has important political implications: "the Green Knight calls into question the fabric of all court societies: their dependence on their kings and the positions meted out to the courtiers in attendance. This critique reaches its apogee in his paradoxical beheading—the spectacle of the mutilated, yet still empowered body" (69–70). For Godfrey, the Green Knight's spectacle metaphorically undermines, not only the efficacy of one of medieval sovereignty's favorite forms of deadly violence, decapitation, but also the top-down model of politico-emotional sovereignty that McNamer attributes to *SGGK*'s Camelot (92–93). After all, if bodies can operate independently of heads, who needs a head? On the other hand, after being decapitated the Green Knight's body continues to act in concert with, though at a remove from, its head. The Green Knight's spectacle, then, does not so much pose a threat to Arthur's sovereignty as it shores up the fact that Camelot's ostensibly top-down body politic, in which the head dictates the thoughts and feelings of all other appendages, is undergirded and buttressed by a rhizomatic, egalitarian emotional community that can survive estrangement, as Gawain must in the challenge to come.

IV. SHAME AND SEXUALITY

In addition to its three public, signifying blushes, *SGGK* also depicts Gawain *concealing* his shame's communicative function. On the first morning of the "exchange of winnings game,"

Gawain awakens to a “littel dyn at his dor,” which heralds the unexpected entrance of the Lady “loflyest to beholde” (1183–87). Upon her approach, “þe burne schamed, / And layde hym doun lystyly, and let as he slepte” (1189–90) [“the man grew ashamed, and laid down cunningly, pretending to sleep”]. Here, Gawain experiences prospective shame: the Lady’s approach sets off an emotional alarm signaling a heightened potential for disgrace. As Mark Miller points out, Gawain’s shame and concomitant feigned sleep is simultaneously defensive and prolonging:

Lying down and pretending to sleep is in some sense a defensive gesture: Gawain does not know what is going on, so he waits to see what happens before deciding what to do. But waiting to see what happens is also a “lysty,” desiring act here. One might think, on reading the further fact that as Gawain lies down in this way he does so in shame, that he is nursing some illicit sexual hope or goal, and that that is what he is waiting for and ashamed of. But that would be to miss the way both his desire and his shame are bound up in a gesture of deferral and prolongation. What Gawain does here [. . .] is to avoid anything that would confer a definitive meaning on his or the Lady’s actions, in order to remain in the delicious suspension of flirtatious innuendo. (236)

Once again, Gawain’s shame functions to maintain the bonds of communal enjoyment, this time between himself and the Lady, whose company furnishes the knight considerable mirth. While prospective shame helps Gawain to enjoy the Lady’s presence without disgracing himself, it leads him to feign sleep, thereby inhibiting his shame’s communicative function. Of course, if the Lady believes Gawain to be asleep, she cannot empathize with the sense of moral danger that her presence stirs in him. Then again, since her goal is to lure an unknow-

ing Gawain into an ethical double bind, she might well use an empathic recognition of his prospective shame to rhetorically disable the knight's sense of danger without removing the "actual" danger—actual, at least, from the perspective of the chivalric order—that it forebodes. Indeed, the Lady repeatedly exclaims that Gawain ought to be ashamed of his unwillingness to discuss matters of love or offer her kisses. Just as his internal, prospective shame helps Gawain continue enjoying the Lady's company; her external accusations of shame force him continue to do so.

While Gawain's shame in the bedroom prolongs "the delicious suspension of flirtatious innuendo" between knight and Lady, it also reminds the knight of his social bond with Bertilak and, by extension, the entire homo-social order of knighthood. In fact, Lawrence Warner posits that, when describing Gawain's third day of flirting with the Lady in his bedroom, the narrator explicitly states that Gawain must avoid danger to his chivalric reputation by thinking *more* about Bertilak than his Lady (263–65). For Warner, lines 1768–69 of *SGGK*—"Gret perile bitwene hem stod, / Nif mare of hir knyzt mynne—which have long taken to mean "Great peril stood between them [i.e. Gawain and the Lady] / Unless Mary is mindful of her knight," actually mean "Great peril stood between them, / If he [Gawain] were not thinking more of her knight [Bertilak]." For *SGGK*'s narrator, it seems, the homosocial bond between Bertilak and Gawain ought to trump any heterosocial or heterosexual bond between Gawain and the Lady.

As Carolyn Dinshaw points out, however, the exchange of winnings game's rules allow Gawain to enjoy heterosexual encounters with the Lady, so long as he also engages in analogous homosexual encounters with Bertilak. By eliding, but not foreclosing on, the fact that Gawain could rightfully have sex with *both* husband and wife, *SGGK* implies that the

knight's rejection of this option "goes without saying" and thereby participates in "a broad heterocultural strategy of unintelligibility" (223). It is a tacit, prospective shame that forces Gawain to carefully only show the amount of physical affection to the Lady that his heteronormative ideology allows him to show Bertilak later. Dinshaw's Foucaultian reading of *SGGK* recognizes both a containing, heteronormative ideology at work in the poem and an opportunity to subvert this ideology "in the practice of reading, in constantly queering the text" (223). One way of doing so, I think, is to point out the profound difficulty that an unspoken, heteronormative ideology places on Gawain's "shame system" during the exchange of winnings game. If *SGGK*'s narrator and the poem itself implicitly promote the constant use prospective shame to prohibit homosexual acts, the poem also exposes the manner in which prohibitive, heteronormative ideologies utterly complicate shame's capacity to engender ethical behavior. After all, it is in the bedroom that Gawain lands himself in an ethical double bind by promising the Lady to keep the Green Girdle after he already promised Bertilak to exchange all of his winnings upon the latter's return to Hautedesert. Had he not been so preoccupied using prospective shame to avoid a homosexual encounter with Bertilak, Gawain might well have used employed it to anticipate and avoid his monumental shame before the Green Knight and, later, Camelot's king and courtiers.

V. SECOND BLUSH: SHAME, SELF-LOATHING, SCAPEGOATING

SGGK's second blush occurs after Gawain has absconded from Hautedesert with the Green Girdle. When he neglects to trade the Green Girdle for the thieving fox on the third round of the exchange of winnings game, Gawain believes it imbued with apotropaic magic and therefore "a juel for þe jopardé þat hym iugged were" (1856) ["a jewel for the jeopardy for which he was judged"]: his upcoming New Year's meeting with the Green Knight's ax. While the

Green Girdle's supposed power to ward off death is wonderful in the sense that its *modus operandi* is utterly unknown to Gawain, the knight hopes it will imbue determinacy into a profoundly indeterminate future—especially where his head's juncture with his body is concerned. He soon discovers, however, that during his stay at Hautedesert, Bertilak and his Lady were not simply the purveyors of mirth he believed them to be, but also assessors of “trawþe” and that they judged him imperfect. Despite the fact that the Green Knight's overall assessment of Gawain is resoundingly positive—(2364–65) “[a]s perle bi þe quite pese is of prys more, / So is Gawayn, in god fayth, bi oþer gay knyȝtez” [“as pearls are more precious than pees, so much greater is Gawain, in good faith, than other merry knights”]—he asserts that Gawain lacked “lewté” (loyalty) in absconding with the Girdle, which he deems a comparatively minor transgression since it was committed in the interest of self-preservation: “ȝe lufed your lyf—þe lasse I yow blame” (2368) [“since you loved your life, I blame you less.”]

The Green Knight's revelation sends Gawain into a whirlwind of emotion rivaling that of Arthur in Fitt I. First, he stands in contemplation, trembling with anger: “Þat oþer stif mon in study stod a gret whyle, / So agreed for greme he gryed withinne” (2369–70) [“Gawain stood stiff in thought for a great while, so grieved with anger/shame that he trembled within”]. Up to this point in *SGGK*, the noun “greme” has signified the ferocious boldness befitting a knight. Recall, for example, that Arthur is deeply ashamed in Fitt I when the Green Knight accuses his court of lacking “gryndellayk and [. . .] greme” (312). Since it is directed at his own past indiscretion, however, Gawain's “greme” at the Green Knight's revelation cannot be readily translated into martial action. Consequently, his puffed up anger quickly shrinks into retrospective shame: “Alle þe blode of his brest blende in his face, / Þat al he schrank for schome þat þe schalk talked” (2371–72) [“All the blood in his breast rushed

into his face and he shrank for shame for the words the other man talked”]. When he finally musters words, he curses his own cowardice in taking the Green Girdle and his covetous desire to keep it, both of which compel him to betray his knightly nature (2379–84), and launches into his famous “anti-feminist diatribe” (2407–28), a litany of Biblical men beguiled by women, whose precedent Gawain evokes to validate his own wrongdoing:

And alle þay were biwyled

With wymmen þat þay vsed.

Þa3 I be now bigyled,

Me þink me burde be excused. (2425–28)

[Since these men were tricked by the women who they used, I think my person should be excused for having been beguiled.]

Where Gawain previously blames the abstract vices cowardice and covetousness for engendering his “sor3e” (sorrow), his scapegoating speech locates the “wyles of wymmen” at the root thereof (2415). By resolving to love and distrust women—“[t]o luf hom wel and leue hem not” (2421)—Gawain attempts to convert his retrospective shame into prospective shame. In so doing, however, he elides the memory of his own ethical failure—which consists, not of trusting a woman, but of agreeing to two conflicting promises—and thereby undermines his retrospective shame’s capacity to inform prospective shame.

If Gawain’s anti-feminist diatribe mitigates his harsh, retrospective self-loathing, it does so only temporarily. In fact, he subsequently resolves to keep the Girdle, not as a testament to the Lady’s unethical behavior or that of ladies in general, but to his own:

[. . .] in syngne of my surfet I schal se hit ofte,

When I ride in renoun, remorde to myseluen

þe faut and þe fayntyse of þe flesche crabbed,
How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylþe;
And þus, quen pryde schal me pryk for prowes of armes,
þe loke to þis luf-lace schal leþe my hert. (2433–38)

[as a sign of my surfeit/sin I shall see it often, when I ride in glory it will remind me of the fault and the feebleness of the vicious flesh. How vulnerable it is to being enticed by filthy teachings. And thus, when prowess of arms pricks me to pride, the sight of this love-lace shall humble my heart.]

Since he simultaneously saw the girdle as a “juel for þe jopardé þat hym iugged were” and believed himself ever afraid of “trecherye” and “vntrawþe” (2382–84), Gawain’s faith in prospective shame’s capacity to ethically regulate his behavior is shaken. He does not, however, give up on prospective shame altogether, but adopts the Girdle as an external reminder of the necessity to perform it all the more willfully in the future. If retrospective shame’s capacity to inform prospective shame is fallible, it is still fundamental to the project of engaging the world ethically.

The efficacy of Gawain’s shame does not lie solely in the fact that his retrospective perception of it will prevent similar ethical transgressions in the future; his blush clearly communicates distress to the Green Knight, complimenting his verbal plea for forgiveness:

I biknowe yow, knyzt, here stulle,
Al fawty is my fare;
Letez me ouertake your wylle
And efte I schal be ware. (2385–88)

[I recognize that I have fared poorly sir, but let me back in your favor and I shall be more wary hereafter.]

Gawain assures the Green Knight that his retrospective shame will become prospective shame (“efte I schal be ware”), even if the latter forgives him. His plea vocalizes the three intertwined functions—retrospective, prospective and communicative—that his shame simultaneously accomplishes. Although the Green Knight readily accepts his apology—“Pou art confessed so clene, beknownen of þy mysses, / And hatz þe penaunce apert of þe poynt of myn egge” (2391–92)—Gawain refuses his offer to return to revel at his castle and be accorded his wife. Instead, he asks the Green Knight to give his regards to the Lady of Hautedesert and her aged companion “[þ]at þus hor knyzt wyth hor kest han koynly bigyled” [“who beguiled their knight with their clever stratagems”] (2413). While we can certainly read this as moment in which retrospective shame informs prospective shame (fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice . . .), it is equally possible that Gawain, satisfied that the Green Knight has accepted his apology, is simply eager to return so Arthur’s court can do the same.

It is ultimately unclear whether or not Gawain’s vow to “never trust a woman” outlives his enraged, anti-feminist diatribe. In any event, *SGGK* gives us no reason to believe that following that policy would do anything to allow Gawain to avoid future shame. After all, it is the Green Knight’s hyperbolically masculine rhetoric that initially entrains Gawain into his adventure at Hautedesert, though the Green Knight conveniently enough attributes his own subterfuge to the wiles of a woman, or, as he calls her a “goddess”: Morgan le Fay. Just as Gawain blames his mistakes on the wiles of a woman, so too does the Green Knight. As Randy P. Schiff demonstrates, both the Green Knight and Gawain nervously apologize to each other for subordinating their allegiance to the homo-social order of knighthood to their

respective transgender alliances, thereby simultaneously venting the *Gawain*-poet's misogynist anxieties about contemporary female sovereignty in the midlands of England during the Hundred Years' War and fantasizing about a world in which treachery among men can be easily attributable to the wiles of women (89–93).¹³⁶ While I by no mean disagree with this astute reading, it is worth mentioning that *SGGK* narrates Gawain's misogynist scapegoating simultaneously bolstering the communicative function of Gawain's blush and undermining the process through which Gawain's retrospective shame at committing himself to an ethical double bind might prevent him from avoiding similar pitfalls in the future. Perhaps despite his intentions, the *Gawain*-poet illustrates the disastrous consequences of shame inspired by misogynist and homophobic ideologies.

VI. THIRD BLUSH: SHAME, SOCIALIZATION, SOVEREIGNTY

By far the most intentionally driven of the three, *SGGK*'s third and final blush occurs after Gawain returns to Camelot and reveals to the court the “nirt of þe nek” [“scar on his neck”] from the Green Knight's gentle punishment (2499), causing him groan “for gref and grame” [“for grief and pain”] and his face to redden for shame: “þe blod in his face con melle” (2502–03). The Middle English Dictionary cites the *Gawain*-poet's use of *melle* here as an example—tellingly, its sole example—of a Middle English author using the verb *medlen* to mean “to work, have an effect” (MED, s.v. “medlen,” Def. 2f). While the *Gawain*-poet does not use the verb *medlen* elsewhere, he repeatedly employs the verb *melen* to mean “to speak, talk” (MED, s.v. “melen,” Def. 1a).¹³⁷ It is much more probable, then, that the *Gawain*-poet meant “[t]he blood *spoke* in his face,” rather than “[t]he blood *worked* in his face,” by the

¹³⁶ cf. Ingham 107–36.

¹³⁷ See *SGGK* 543, 974, 1280.

phrase the “[b]e blod in his face con melle,” though he might well have intentionally punned on both of these potential readings of *melle*. A visual symbol of Gawain’s retrospective shame, his blush successfully solicits the king and court’s compassion—it speaks to them.

Just as Gawain’s blush before the Green Knight furnishes semaphoric support for the knight’s rhetorical apology, his blush before the court precedes a verbal apology. Having grievously recounted his misadventure to the court, Gawain brandishes the Green Girdle and declares:

Bis is þe bende of þis blame I bere in my nek,
Bis is þe laþe and þe losse þat I laȝt haue
Of couardise and couetyse þat I haf caȝt þare;
Bis is þe token of vntrawþe þat I am tan inne,
And I mot nedeȝ hit were wyle I may last;
For mon may hyden his harme, bot vnhap ne may hit,
For þer hit oneȝ is tachched twynne wil hit neuer. (2506–12)

[This is the badge of the blame that I bear on my neck. This is the injury and the loss that I have invited. The sign of the cowardice and covetousness that I caught abroad. This is the token of the treachery that I was discovered in and I must wear it as long as I live, for a man may hide his fault, but he may never undo it; it can never be sundered from where it has once attached.]

While the physiological signifiers of his blame—his blush and the nick on his neck—will fade, the blame itself will not (at least according to Gawain) and he must therefore resort to the Girdle to externally signify his past shame. For Gawain, the Green Girdle is a prosthetic extension of his retrospective-prospective shame system. The knight dons the Girdle to keep

himself and others perpetually mindful, not only of his historical disgrace, but also of the fact that it originated in a dearth of prospective shame. Although Gawain's need for the Girdle suggests that, by the end of *SGGK*, the knight no longer trusts his psychic capacity to eschew future shame by recalling past shame, it also suggests that he is committed to trying to do so more deliberately in the future.

Like *SGGK*'s blushes, the Girdle is also communicative—a call for the compassionate consolation directed at the denizens of Camelot. Like the blushes, moreover, the Girdle's communicative function works “like a charm” (albeit one whose apotropaic power lies, in part, in its ability to remind viewers that charms are not always what they seem):

þe kyng confortez þe knyzt, and alle þe court als
Lazen loude þerat, and luflyly acorden
þat lordes and ladis þat longed to þe Table,
Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue,
A bende abelef hym aboute of a bryzt 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)

[The king comforted the knight, as did the entire court. They laughed loud at him and lovingly decided that lords and ladies that belonged to the Table, each member of the brotherhood should wear a baldric: a silk band of bright green worn about him, for the sake of that knight, as a sign of respect. They decided that he who wore it possessed the renown of the Round Table and was honored ever after.]

Arthur and the courtiers of Camelot once again transvaluate the Girdle, this time from a badge of personal shame (at least from to the perspective of the homosocial order that Gawain slighted by promising the Lady to break his promise to Bertilak), to a symbol of Gawain's belonging to that that order and the collective honor thereof. Arthur's decision to elevate Gawain's shame to honor in Fitt IV complements his desire to be astounded by the unknown world in Fitt I. If Arthur's court is designed to court wonder, it must also readily forgive shame, which is nothing more than wonder under duress. *SGGK*'s ultimate act of sovereignty is also one of socialization: the Girdle, like a blush, strengthens Gawain's imperiled communal bond to Camelot. *SGGK* celebrates both Gawain's public performance of shame and Arthur's concomitant sovereign decision to transvaluate a threat to Gawain's courtly belonging into a strong identificatory bond between king, knight and court. Sovereign is s/he who turns shame to honor.

It is certainly difficult to picture Gawain lowering his inhibitions and joining the court's bacchanalian revelry immediately after delivering a harangue on the indelible nature of "blame." It is understandable, therefore, that some critics read the Gawain of the end of the poem as akin to Young Goodman Brown (or Old Badman Brown) at the end of Nathaniel Hawthorne's story: a paranoid puritan unable to trust himself or others to avoid satanic sin (203–05). McNamer, for example, contends that the knight's retrospective regret that he loved his life over his honor permits a:

disidentification with Gawain when he rejects what the audience has been led to experience as a core value. Instead, listeners can identify with Arthur and the courtiers at the romance's end, thus imagining, in their own lives, a similar conversion experi-

ence, in which the greenness of loving one's life tempers the gold of rigid chivalric *troth*." [emphasis original] (256)

While McNamer is not wrong to recognize a dissonance between Gawain's guilt-ridden public apology and the celebratory forgiveness of Arthur and the courtiers, her assertion that *SGGK* prompts its audience to dis-identify with Gawain is hard to swallow, especially since Arthur transmutes the Girdle into a signifier of communal identification. Why would *SGGK* prompt its readers to dis-identify with Gawain only to prompt them to identify with Arthur and the courtiers, who are bent of re-identifying with the traumatized Gawain?

Conversely, other critics read *SGGK* as valorizing Gawain's guilt. Robert L. Kindrick, for example, argues that *SGGK* stages Gawain progressing from a shame-honor value system to guilt-innocence value system: While Gawain initially acts as though his failure to surrender the Green Girdle on the third night of the exchange of winnings game is inconsequential as long as it remains unknown to anyone except the Lady, after the Green Knight reveals that this transgression is public knowledge, he adopts the revised opinion that "the true knight is personally committed to a sense of integrity which includes the chivalric ideals. Only the recreant knight acts in accordance with the standards of chivalry simply to meet public expectations" (32).¹³⁸ For Kindrick, as for McNamer, Gawain's guilt differentiates him from the king and courtiers who do not seem to partake in his torment. While both McNamer and Kindrick are certainly correct that Gawain's emotional relation to his past at Hautedesert and, by extension the Green Girdle, is categorically different from those of his

¹³⁸ cf. Wasserman 80.

king and peers,¹³⁹ both pay short shrift to the considerable lengths king, court and *SGGK* itself go to answer Gawain's call for communal compassion.

The Order of the Garter's Old French motto—"Hony soyt qui mal pence" ["Shamed be him who thinks ill of it"]—appears at the end of *SGGK*'s sole manuscript-attestation in Cotton Nero A.x, though it seems to have been written in a different hand than that which recorded the romance. Like many critics before her, Stephanie Trigg suggests that the its presence constitutes "strikingly concrete evidence [. . .] that at least one reader thought that the romance referred directly to the Order of the Garter, and wanted to assert or underline that connection" (61). According to the Order's foundation myth, Edward III caught a group of knights sniggering at a lady whose blue garter had slipped down her leg while dancing and, uttering the Order's motto for the first time, he elevated the lady's garter from a signifier of shame to one of the highest renown. "It is easy," Trigg writes,

to see the correspondences between [*SGGK*] and the Garter myth. [. . .] However, there are substantial differences between the two stories. The two objects in question—one a green and gold girdle, and the other a blue garter—enjoy very different narrative trajectories. One starts its ritual life as a secret gift invested with magical properties that is the key prop in an elaborate moral test; and the other is a piece of underwear that accrues ritual significance only through a daring act of royal willpow-

¹³⁹ cf. Pearsall, who argues, somewhat romantically, that Gawain's ostracized status at then *SGGK* brings to the fore his essential humanity:

There is nothing to be done, no action which will cleanse and renew his humiliated self, no person, however well-disposed, who will properly understand what has happened to him, but the quality he has found in himself is the quality in individuals that we have become accustomed to believe constitutes them in their essential individual humanity as distinct from their animal or their social being. (361)

er. The final scenes of [*SGGK*] which show how a sign of shame can be converted to a sign of honor, offer the strongest connection between the two stories. (61)

Like the uncannily similar Garter myth, *SGGK* portrays shame and sovereignty working together to strengthen imperiled social bonds. *SGGK* is about shame's role in socialization, at least insofar as it provides a powerful portrait the complex interaction between willful shame, salvific sovereignty and socialization that produced and maintained an imagined, chivalric, emotional community.

CONCLUSION: FEELING GOOD ABOUT FEELING BAD IN COTTON NERO A.X

In addition to *SGGK*, Cotton Nero A.x contains *Pearl*, an elaborate dream vision in which the narrator encounters his dead daughter, now a crowned queen of heaven; *Cleanness*, an alliterative homily on divine retribution; and *Patience*, a re-telling of the book of Jonah. Critics have long argued over why *SGGK*—an ostensibly secular romance—is bound up with these works of religious devotion. Although I can offer no definitive answer to this immense question, I would like to conclude by suggesting briefly that, like *SGGK*, the devotional works in Cotton Nero A.x are closely attuned to the importance of so-called negative emotions to day-to-day human existence. As we have seen, *SGGK* depicts shame as crucial to closely related processes of ethical decision-making and socialization. Likewise, *Pearl* depicts envy as both inevitable and useful: the Dreamer not only envies his daughter's heavenly enjoyment, but also ultimately realizes that the terrestrial subject's proper emotional position *vis-a-vis* the celestial subject is *always* envy. As Eric J. Johnson demonstrates, moreover, *Cleanness* instills within its audience a *modus timendi* (mode of fearing) focused on divine, rather than human, retribution (16–17). Finally, *Patience* defines its eponymous virtue as the endurance of discomfort: “Forþy penaunce and payne topreue hit in syȝt / Þat pacience is a nobel poynt,

þa3 it displese ofte” (531–32) [“Therefore penance and pain prove the fact that patience is a mark of nobility, though it’s often displeasing”]. All of Cotton Nero A.x’s poems prompt their audience to embrace and, where possible, render deliberate the many ways in which negative emotions mold the contours of identity. This is not to say, however, that Cotton Nero A.x endorses a brand of emotional asceticism in which practitioners perform bad emotions and repress good ones. Just as *SGGK*, evinces a great appreciation from mirth, wonder and love, so do *Pearl*, *Cleanness* and *Patience*. All of these poems depict emotions, whether positive or negative, as crucial and definitive components of the human experience.

CHAPTER 6:

COURTLY LOVE HATE: SADOMASOCHISTIC PRIVILEGE IN *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

On the subject all the historians agree: courtly love was, in brief, a poetic exercise, a way of playing with a number of conventional, idealizing themes, which couldn't have any real concrete equivalent. Nevertheless, [. . . t]he influence of these ideals is a highly concrete one in the organization of contemporary man's sentimental attachments, and it continues its forward march.

— Jacques Lacan (148)

. . . we are far from inventing a new “formula” capable of replacing the matrix of courtly love.

— Slavoj Žižek (*The Metastates of Enjoyment* 109)

Courtly love has not timed out. It is revocalized whenever the relationship between *jouissance* and submission to the signifier is historically repositioned.

— L.O. Aranye Fradenburg (*Sacrifice your Love* 20)

I. ŽIŽEK'S COURTLY LOVER AND THE SPECTER OF SADISM

Courtly love is not dead. Courtly love keeps marching. Courtly love is undead. Not only do we remain courtly lovers, we also remain intent upon analytically unearthing the courtly roots of modern romance. We recognize courtly love's undead presence, but cannot kill it because courtly love expresses the framework through which we enjoy submitting to a master signifier, be it a Lady, a state, the objective of creating an ideal future or the objective of conserving the values of the past. Like most zombies, courtly love is not pretty. It is no coincidence that courtly love's undead presence in our culture is gleaned foremost through a psychoanalytic hermeneutic designed to recognize and work through the consequences of psychic trauma. Indeed, our repetition of the analytic dictum “courtly love is undead” follows the logic of posttraumatic signification. We are always already traumatized by courtly love.

Slavoj Žižek's oft-anthologized essay on courtly love has done as much as any theoretical work to acknowledge courtly love's undead presence in modern culture. Therein,

Žižek revives Lacan's understanding of courtly love through a series of incisive readings of cinematic subjects who are simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by love-objects elevated to the dignity of the Thing. Žižek's Lacanian courtly lover both pursues and evades the Lady since either consummation with or separation from the traumatic kernel of the Real with which she is imbued would be utterly unbearable: "the paradox of the Lady in courtly love ultimately amounts to [. . .] the paradox of *detour*: our 'official' desire is that we want to sleep with the Lady; whereas in truth, there is nothing we fear more than a Lady who might generously bend her will to ours" (96). This paradoxical push-pull of conscious attraction and unconscious repulsion causes the courtly lover to continuously circle the Lady—a sentient being turned "inhuman partner" in the courtly subject's mind—at the "safe" distance of courtship.¹⁴⁰ Courtly love, however, is hardly safe.

It is now commonplace for medievalists to point out that the works of literature usually held to express the "original" ethos of courtly love hardly adhere to the Lacanian-Žižekian model.¹⁴¹ Lacan's famous troubadour poem from the perspective of a knight whose Lady orders him to lick her ass turns out to be highly idiosyncratic (Mann 93, n. 21). More common are stories like Chaucer's Miller's Tale that joyfully portray a rube *unwittingly* kissing his would-be lover's bare ass and thereafter complaining that his lady has grown a beard (*The Riverside Chaucer* 75, ll. 3729–46). In such stories, deferral takes on a new meaning. We can neither simply reduce the figure of the courtly Lady in medieval romance to an inhuman automaton generating random injunctions, nor reduce the process of courtly love to one of con-

¹⁴⁰ Lacan originally dubs the Lady an "inhuman partner" in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 150.

¹⁴¹ See Bruce Holsinger 75–83. Mann 92–94; for a more favorable analysis of Lacan's engagement with medieval troubadours see Labbie 129–36.

stant deferral. As Jill Mann demonstrates, seminal works such as Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose* and Andreas Capellanus' *De amore* celebrate long-delayed sexual consummation with blatant triumphalism (Mann 104–10). If medieval courtly lovers really were terrified that their Lady would “generously bend her will” to theirs, this certainly did not stop them from partaking in sex, often without the consent of their partner.¹⁴² If she did not bend her will, he might bend it for her. True, courtly love often involves a masculine display of passivity,¹⁴³ a performed surrender of the aristocratic male will to aristocratic women. But the aristocratic men who invented and performed courtly passivity on other occasions used violence to exploit, extort and rape those around them. Capellanus, to give a famous example, advises aristocratic men to show the utmost deference to aristocratic ladies and rape unwilling peasant women (149–50). Medieval courtly lovers were rarely, in actuality, nice guys, but they frequently pretended to be nice guys (or at least passive guys) in an effort to convince aristocratic women to sleep with them.

Žižek provocatively compares the medieval courtly lover to Gilles Deleuze's bourgeoisie masochist who guiltlessly enjoys patriarchal privilege at every moment except during a carefully pre-regulated period of masochistic play, in which he enjoys suffering at the hands of his victims (*Metastases of Enjoyment* 91–94). From this perspective, the courtly lover's feigned subordination to the Lady constitutes an unconscious attempt to compensate for his day-to-day impingements on the agency of others. Courtly love, in other words, functions as a sort of patriarchal safety valve through which the aristocratic male vents his unconscious guilt without surrendering any actual power. On one hand, the Deleuzian-Žižekian di-

¹⁴² For an account of rape culture in medieval England see Dunn 52–81.

¹⁴³ For an argument against the courtly lover's passivity see Mann 104–10.

agnosis of the medieval courtly lover as masochistic brilliantly explains why powerful men in a violently patriarchal era would enjoy adopting a servile demeanor towards women. On the other, it somewhat obfuscates (as does much medieval courtly literature) the sadistic violence perpetrated by medieval and modern courtly lovers alike. Sadism, Žižek argues, is not an inversion of masochism: “Sadism follows the logic of institution, of institutional power tormenting its victims and taking pleasure in its victim’s helpless resistance” (*The Metastases of Enjoyment* 91). Sadism and masochism are both forms of enjoyment bound up with privilege. The former enjoys lording power over the less privileged by causing them suffering; the latter enjoys temporarily surrendering power to the less privileged and suffering in a prescribed manner at their hands. None of Žižek’s cinematic courtly lovers explicitly toe the line between sadism and masochism. None of them renounce the role of courtly lover for that of courtly hater. As I’ll try to demonstrate in this chapter, however, the courtly lover’s masochism always carries with it an implicit threat of mutating into violent sadism. If sadism, according to Žižek, “is at work in the obscene superego underside that necessarily redoubles and accompanies, as its shadow, the ‘public’ Law,” then the masochist becomes a sadist when he stops enjoying feigning subjugation to the less privileged and starts enjoying inflicting suffering upon them (*Ibid.*). As Capellanus’ dual advice to rape peasants and defer passively to aristocratic ladies demonstrates, medieval courtly lovers used class distinctions to enjoy both sadism and masochism. They were sadomasochists. Masochism cannot help but evoke the specter of sadism because the masochist always already possesses the privilege to turn into a sadist on a whim.

For Žižek, courtly love is not dead, but it was born. A dutiful Marxist, he historicizes courtly love, locating its origin in thirteenth-century Europe and (in)famously arguing that

“[i]t is only with the emergence of masochism, or the masochistic couple, toward the end of the [nineteenth] century that we can now grasp the libidinal economy of courtly love” (Ibid. 89). There is, of course, some validity to Žižek’s proverbial contention that “history has to be read retroactively,” which he somewhat ironically attributes to Marx, a great predictor of future revolutions (Ibid.). From a strictly historicist perspective, however, it is dangerous to privilege our retrospective diagnosis of historical subjects over the self-understanding of those subjects who actually inhabited it. Žižek implies that premodern subjects uncritically complied with the strictures of courtly love, which they invented but could not diagnose. The discourse of courtly love and its psychic effects, however, have been subject to diagnosis since courtly love’s premodern conception. Dante Alighieri, for example, condemns Paolo and Francesca to the inferno for reading about and imitating Lancelot and Guinevere’s affair (80–81, ll. 127–42). Pastoral theologians, moreover, often associated courtly love with the sin of lechery, warning that any man who cherishes a lady (even his wife) too much is, as Geoffrey Chaucer’s Parson puts it, an idolater (*The Riverside Chaucer* 318, l. 859). Devotional discourses vituperated courtly discourses precisely because the latter prompt subjects to elevate a terrestrial Lady, rather than a celestial God, to the dignity of the Thing. The nineteenth century did not invent masochism (though it might have invented the word for it). Medieval subjects were zealous masochists most obviously in the Catholic Church’s system of confession and penance, which equated suffering with spiritual (and soteriological) gain. In the wake of the Black Death, radically masochistic sects of flagellants arose who, in the words of the chronicler Jean Froissart, “scourged themselves with whips of hard knotted leather with iron spikes [. . . and] made themselves bleed very badly between the shoulders and some foolish women had cloths ready to catch the blood and smear it on their eyes, say-

ing that it was miraculous blood” (*Chronicles* 111–12). These flagellants deliberately lacerated themselves in a courtly display of love for God. Like Deleuze’s masochist, they hurt themselves for their sins; they just did so with more self-awareness.

In addition to devotional discourses, self-negating romances known as anti-romances de-sublimate courtly love only to sublimate chaste love of God or love of chivalric brotherhood:¹⁴⁴ although Lancelot is the best knight, his courtliness prevents him from transcending the category in the Grail quest (the paradigmatic anti-romance), as does his son Galahad;¹⁴⁵ and in *SGGK* the Lady’s appeals to courtliness turn out to be so many traps in a female orchestrated scheme to test Gawain’s loyalty to the ostensibly homosocial order of knighthood (2445–78). Rather than disprove that Žižek’s model of courtly love was at work in the Middle Ages, their preference for anti-romance proves that medieval subjects transcended the strictures of courtly love by extending its very logic of sublimation and deferral. Unlike the Lady, who is after all a sentient being rendered an “inhuman partner” only within the courtly lover’s psyche, the transcendental signifier “God” and the historical signifier “Christ” cannot be completely accessed from a worldly perspective, but can only be glimpsed “through a glass darkly” (though this Pauline maxim did not stop medieval mystics from communing with both signifiers regularly).¹⁴⁶ The metaphysical glass separating terrestrial subjects from a celestial God is functionally analogous to the carceral glass separating the imprisoned Fergus from his visitor Dil at the end of *The Crying Game* (1992), which Žižek reads as ena-

¹⁴⁴ For the term “anti-romance” see Bercovitch, “Romance and Anti-Romance” 30–37.

¹⁴⁵ Though Lancelot definitively fails the grail quest in the original Old French grail romance, Lancelot’s quest for the grail in Sir Thomas Mallory’s Middle English version “may be construed as a semisuccess.” See Armstrong 145.

¹⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:12.

bling, rather than restricting, their courtly love (*The Metastases of Enjoyment* 104–05).

If courtly love is masochism incognito, Christian devotion is doubly so. I would argue, moreover, that both Christian devotion and courtly love entail a *sadomasochistic* relationship with a love-object elevated to the dignity of the Thing. If it at first seems odd to attribute sadism to Christians, recall the zeal with which they constantly regard Christ's suffering, the radical redemption they believe to have gained therefrom and the spiritual benefit some continue to attribute to meditating thereon. Of course, many Christians will claim that there is a categorical difference between the savage sadism with which Roman citizens watched gladiators die or modern teenagers watch *The Many Faces of Death* and the devout compassion with which medieval Christians meditated on Christ's suffering and modern Christians watch Christ suffer in Mel Gibson's modern "mystery play" *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).¹⁴⁷ We might respond, however, that any line between devout compassion and sadistic voyeurism is inevitably blurred upon gleaning the uncanny similarities between medieval hagiography and brutal modern horror films such as *Saw* (2004) and its sequels. The range of moral values to which we assign our enjoyment of different fantasies of suffering is remarkable indeed.

While Žižek's work on courtly love is extremely valuable insofar as it recognizes the undead medieval discourses haunting modern structures of enjoyment, it too readily deprives medieval subjects the capacity to enjoy diagnosing their own courtly-devotional economy of (de)sublimation and the sadomasochism it entails. Moreover, Žižek's courtly lover lacks the propensity for sadistic violence evinced both in medieval courtly literature and aristocratic life. As I will try to demonstrate in the next section, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Crisey-*

¹⁴⁷ *The Many Faces of Death* is a series of Mondo documentaries consisting entirely of video footage of people dying.

de contains a critique (or at least the potential for a critique) of courtly love analogous but not identical to Žižek's. Chaucer, I claim, was a Žižekian. Unlike Žižek's courtly lover, however, Chaucer's Troilus manifests a penchant for sadistic, militarized violence all too common in courtly lovers, medieval and modern. Although Chaucer's Troilus initially elevates Criseyde to the dignity of the Thing, when faced with the prospect of de-sublimating Criseyde and re-sublimating another Lady, he instead assumes the position of superegoic sadist bent on imposing retributive suffering upon Diomedes in service of the Trojan state and rides willingly to his death, eager to take as many Greeks down with him as possible. Courtly love is indeed an undead presence in contemporary culture and so is the sadistic violence of those who renounce it. Unlike Chaucer's Troilus, most courtly lovers do not have a war raging at the gates of their city in which they can readily sacrifice themselves on the altar of military glory after becoming disillusioned with courtly love. As we will see, Troilus sans siege is a frightening entity indeed.

II. COURTLY LOVE HATE IN *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is an (anti)romance insofar as it offers both one of the most sublime medieval accounts of the vicissitudes of courtly love and one of the most stunning medieval de-sublimations thereof. In fact, L.O Aranye Fradenburg influentially suggests that, since "*Troilus and Criseyde*'s enjoyment is caught up [. . .] in the *objet a* as (sentient) object of exchange," the poem is characterized by "a constant oscillation between sublimation and desublimation" (*Sacrifice Your Love* 203). The characters of *Troilus and Criseyde* are compelled to constantly sublimate and de-sublimate each other because they elevate each other to the dignity of the Thing, to which they are consciously attracted and by which they are unconsciously repulsed. *Troilus and Criseyde* shows lovers simultaneously exchanging love-

objects and recoiling in horror as they are exchanged as love-objects in an emotional economy of fortune in which one character's bliss corresponds to another's remorse.

Though Chaucer is deeply mired in a culture of courtly love, his attitude toward that culture is ambivalent. He is simultaneously courtly love's most eloquent proponent and its most dour critic. Paradoxically, it is Chaucer's very ambivalence regarding courtly love that renders him a Žižekian courtly lover *par excellence*. Every time he wants out, they pull him back in. Chaucer's narrator's ambivalence about courtly love is felt early in *Troilus and Criseyde*:

For I, that God of Loves servantez serve,
Ne dar to Love, for myn unlikilynesse,
Pryen for speed, al sholde I therefore sterve,
So fer am I from his help in derknesse.
But natheles, if this may don gladnesse
Unto any lovere, and his cause availle,
Have he my thonk, and myn be this travaille (15–21).

The narrator characterizes himself not as a courtly lover but as a servant of courtly lovers. As such, he does not dare pray to the God of Love for success, even though neglecting to do so might kill him. Although his non-prayer is presented to us in the form of a humility *topos*, we can detect a certain aggression undergirding the narrator's ostensibly humble refusal to pray to the master signifier Love. Instead, he obsequiously thanks any lover who might find delight or advancement through his narrative labor. In adopting the role of servant of servants of Love, Chaucer's narrator quietly eschews the role of Love's servant. This is far from the only time that one of Chaucer's narrators defines himself at odds with the God of Love: in

Parliament of Fowles, Scipio Africanus explicitly identifies Chaucer's narrator as *not* "Loves servaunt," since he has lost his taste for love (159–60); and the narrator of *The Legend of Good Women* is chastised by the God of Love for writing none other than *Troilus and Criseyde* (228–316). Yet it is worth noting that the narrator's servile self-description—"I, that God of Loves servantez serve"—subtly alludes to the Pope's title: "servant of the servants of God."¹⁴⁸ On one hand, Chaucer's narrator is a bumbling outsider in the religion of courtly love. On the other, he is its high priest. Ambivalence is all.

Chaucer's narrator is analogous to Žižek's courtly lovers in that he is simultaneously infatuated with and repulsed by a love-object elevated to the dignity of the Thing, but he elevates the master signifier Love, rather than a sentient Lady. Consequently, he enjoys the God of Love's scorn as much as his affection. The narrator's aggressive undertone is not lost on the God of Love. "The unthreatening cuteness or desexualized gallantry," Fradenburg writes, "of the Chaucerian narrator does not fool the God of Love. He knows that the narrator is after something that belongs to him, and we should believe him" (*Sacrifice Your Love* 233). The narrator's diminutive self-portrait masks a servile aggression somewhat akin to Nietzschean *ressentiment*. Just as the initially white crow of Chaucer's Manciple's Tale eagerly awaits his chance to bring down his master's house by speaking truth to power,¹⁴⁹ the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* vents his servile aggression towards the God of Love by shoring up exactly how the passive male courtly lover displaces responsibility for his erratic, lovesick actions onto the Lady who "caused" them by spurning him. "Unlike the traditional masculine subject," Holly A. Crocker and Tison Pugh write, "whose ability to act in relation to others situ-

¹⁴⁸ See *Troilus and Criseyde* (ed. Barney) 7, n. 3.

¹⁴⁹ See Fradenburg, "The Manciple's Servant Tongue" 85–115.

ates his identity, Troilus is defined more extremely by his immuring passivity” (84). The fantasy of the courtly lover is one of absolute freedom from responsibility to act. In other words, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* illustrates that the male courtly lover’s enjoyment depends on a passive eschewal rather than an active exercise of sovereignty. Of course, that passive eschewal of responsibility is not strictly passive, but an affected social performance only available to very privileged, male subjects. As such, it produces a gendered ethical dynamic that displaces responsibility from men to women. The male courtly lover’s mantra is: “Return my love or there’s no telling what I’ll do!” He is an emotional terrorist. In this light, the “great works” of courtly love—Capellanus’ *De amore* and de Lorris and de Meun’s *Romance of the Rose*—are nothing more than medieval equivalents of “pick-up artist” books through which modern men teach each other tricks for manipulating unwilling women into sex.¹⁵⁰ Like masochistic courtly love, this more aggressive, arguably sadistic practice of courtly love remains quite alive today.

The ambivalence between servility and sovereignty in *Troilus and Criseyde* is nowhere more explicit than in the scene of Troilus’ initial encounter with the God of Love. The narrator introduces Troilus strutting at the head of a homosocial military assemblage and scornfully denigrating lovers who cede their sovereignty to another (other than the Trojan state, of course) (183–210). Troilus’ pride, however, angers the God of Love who promptly subjugates the knight to Criseyde and himself. Troilus is always already subordinated to the law-of-the-Father: even a king’s son is a son. The God of Love rips him out of his role as a militaristic ego-ideal and places him in the new role of courtly lover: “That Love is he that alle may bynde, / For may no man fordon the lawe if kynde” (237–38). Troilus trades one

¹⁵⁰ The archetypal pickup artist text is Neil Straus’ *The Game*.

form of submission for another, or rather is forced to balance two. In Troilus' subjugation (or at least the narrator's first account thereof) Criseyde's agency is completely displaced onto the God of Love. Not for the last time, powerful men appropriate Criseyde's agency. Indeed, this early displacement of agency foreshadows that through which the Trojan parliament trades Criseyde to the Greeks for Antenor, though during the latter dispute, Hector at least complains: "We usen here no here no women for to sell" (182). Chaucer's Criseyde is the daughter of a traitor and a widow who may or may not have children. When Troilus initially falls in love with her she is shrouded in mourning attire (132–33). Whether or not this takes some part in Troilus' initial attraction to Criseyde is an open question, but once Troilus is in the throes of love her "weedwes habit" becomes an obstacle to his happiness (170). He quickly enlists Criseyde's creepy uncle Pandarus to help him alleviate his lovesickness. Like the narrator, Pandarus is eager to serve love's servants, though he is himself a spurned lover (though we never learn by whom). He begins his task as a go-between by seducing Criseyde on Troilus' behalf, trying to put her "in the mood": "Do wey your barbe, and shew youre face bare; / Do wey your book, rys up, and lat us daunce, / And lat us don to May som observaunce" (110–12). In a series of succinct imperatives Pandarus orders Criseyde to cast off her widow's habit ("barbe"), throw down her book (a romance on the siege of Thebes, timely subject matter for a besieged Trojan) and dance in the name of religious deference to May.

Like the narrator, Pandarus is an ambivalent figure. He is potentially, as Jessica Rosenfeld argues, "the poem's problematic spokesperson for an earthly happiness that might evade the Law of the Father, trick Fortune at her own game, and might disturb our convictions that earthly happiness, because necessarily fleeting, is a foolish or even impossible pursuit" (Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment* 152). On the other hand, Pandarus' actions often

smack of more unsavory (incestuous and compulsory) forms of desire and enjoyment. Indeed, Criseyde's Theban romance, among other details surrounding the poem's treatment of Pandarus and Criseyde's relationship, hints toward a specter of incestuous rape (Rushton 147–60). Critics less generous than Rosenfeld have therefore read Pandarus as a walking knot of incestuous and voyeuristic desire shrouded in patriarchal privilege (Ibid. 148–52). While the poem does not clearly state that Pandarus molests Criseyde or watches Troilus and Criseyde have sex, it strongly leads us to ask these uncomfortable questions. If Pandarus endorses the evasion of the unenjoyable aspects of the Law of Father (predominantly that love hurts), he also represents the obscene enjoyment animating that Law. Pandarus reminds us, as Fradenburg puts it, that “the big Other does not even care about its own rules when its *jouissance* is at stake” (*Sacrifice Your Love* 212). Pandarus is not unlike Žižek's postmodern superego that endlessly enjoins us to enjoy. Anything but a proponent of endless deferral, Pandarus taunts those around him into enjoying immediately, before it is too late. Anticipating a great many of Shakespeare's sonnets, he warns Criseyde that old age devours beauty by the hour: “Think ek how elde wasteth every houre / In ech of yow a partie of beautee” (393–94). An aesthetic, rather than reproductive, biological clock is ticking and Criseyde cannot afford an endless deferral of romantic enjoyment. She must love now while someone, a king's son no less, will love her back.

After unsuccessfully appealing to her anxieties about ageing, Pandarus appeals to Criseyde's compassion, claiming that Troilus will die of love sickness and he himself will die of pity if she refuses to return the lovesick knight's affections. When Criseyde attempts to refuse this unfair ethical burden, Pandarus disavows his un-amorous niece: “I se wel that ye sette lite of us, / Or of oure deth!” Pandarus' death threats impinge directly on Criseyde's

agency. Perhaps here more than anywhere in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the uneven gender dynamic of courtly love is most obvious. Troilus is afforded the leisure of eschewing the responsibility for maintaining his life when he is subjugated to love, but that agency must be relocated and Pandarus' rhetoric delivers it directly to Criseyde, who thereafter internalizes it: "And if this man sle here hymself—allas!— / In my presence, it wol be no solas" (459–60). It is Criseyde's compassion, her capacity to be not just Love's servant (as Troilus is) but also the servant of Love's servants that causes her to assume Troilus' responsibility.

Unlike Troilus, to whom the poem grants the privileged position of involuntary victim of love, Criseyde is forced to carefully ponder whether she ought to love or not, weighing the evidence of her senses, emotions and social experience. She possesses the empathic awareness necessary to engender a sense of ethical responsibility and therefore recognizes that all decisions must be made with both self and other in mind. In other words, Criseyde experiences Sartrean *angoisse* without fleeing from it in "bad faith." Indeed, critics have rightfully lauded Criseyde's sense of existential responsibility to the other. For J. Allan Mitchell, Criseyde's act of knowingly subordinating herself to the ever-unpredictable dictates of an other (Troilus) constitutes the ethical act par excellence, since the poem endorses a proto-Levinasian ethics according to which "ethical choices can be as much a matter of passive discovery and acceptance as of positive self-determination" (42). Mitchell's reading is valuable insofar as it shores up Criseyde's knack for balancing emotion and volition, ethical responsibility and the pursuit of happiness. As we have seen, however, Crocker and Pugh demonstrate that Troilus' "radical passivity" both affords and is afforded by the prince's privileged social status. Is Criseyde not ethically heroic precisely because she takes on the responsibility to act under duress that Troilus has the luxury to quietly ignore? In rendering

Criseyde's acquiescence to Troilus ethically heroic, moreover, Mitchell pays rather short shrift to the more troubling aspects of her consent. "*Troilus and Criseyde* makes a powerful contribution to the literature of rape," Fradenburg argues, "not by clarifying consent, but by showing its difficulty" (*Sacrifice Your Love* 208). The process through which Criseyde falls in love with Troilus emblemizes the profound ambivalence of her consent and the notion of consent in general. Troilus is instantly subjugated to love, Criseyde falls in love gradually based on visions of Troilus returning from battle (645–65), a dream in which an eagle violently exchanges her heart for Troilus (925–31), and the fearful compassion solicited by Pandarus and Troilus' aforementioned death threats. Although Criseyde ostensibly consents to Troilus' sexual advances, we are never fully certain whether love compels her to do so or she compels herself to do so out of a sense of ethical responsibility for Troilus-Pandarus' well being (as if the self-serving and altruistic motives behind any given decision could ever be neatly extricated). If Criseyde consents based on concern for the joint well being of Troilus and Pandarus, how much does that count as consent?

The narrator curiously elides the task signifying Criseyde's consent. Prior to consummation, Criseyde, the narrator tells us, "opned hire herte and tolde hym hire entente" to the singing of a nightingale (1233–39). While there's plenty of reason to follow Mitchell in celebrating Criseyde's radical passivity, it would be wrong to neglect the manner in which Troilus' passivity—his promise to die if unloved by Criseyde—impinges upon Criseyde's decision to consent to his love. Even though Criseyde has already chosen to love Troilus, he continues to imply that she has no choice but to consent: "Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is non!" (1208). Those are not the words of a subject who respects his love-object's infinite alterity. The nightingale reminds some of Ovid's Philomela, who is transformed into a nightin-

gale after using art to revenge her rape (*Metamorphoses* 134–42). “It is possible to hear,” Fradenburg writes, “behind Criseyde’s inaudible (to us) voicing of her ‘entente,’ the mutilated mouth of Philomela. [. . .] The possibility of Criseyde’s rape is spoken in *Troilus and Criseyde* through intertextual haunting” (*Sacrifice Your Love* 226). Elaborating Fradenburg’s work, Patricia Clare Ingham reminds us that the nightingale that alludes to Philomela’s trauma during Troilus and Criseyde’s sex scene can also be heard on the morning that a lovesick Pandarus sets about courting his niece in Troilus’ name. For Ingham, Pandarus’ lovesickness animates his vicarious courtship: “Pandarus will deflect his wounding onto Troilus (and, not coincidentally, Criseyde); but this is not only repetition, but also redirection. The earlier wounding is relived by passing it on, duplicating the event not on his own flesh, but on the flesh of another” (“Chaucer’s Haunted Aesthetics” 236). Traumatized by love, Pandarus is compelled to relive his trauma vicariously through Troilus. He is a traumatized traumatizer. Whether Troilus and/or Pandarus rape(s) Criseyde, the process through which the two men wear down her initial resistance is disturbing. Criseyde’s situation is not unlike one described by Žižek in his essay on courtly love:

One of the most painful and troubling scenes from David Lynch’s *Wild at Heart* [1990] is also comprehensible only against the matrix of the logic of suspension that characterizes courtly love. In a lonely motel room, Willem Dafoe exerts a rude pressure on Laura Dern: he touches and squeezes her, invading the space of her intimacy and repeating in a threatening way “Say fuck me!,” that is, extorting from her a word that would signal her consent to the sexual act. (*The Metastases of Enjoyment* 101)

Unlike Dafoe’s character, Troilus does not abruptly step away and politely refuse the offer immediately after managing to coerce a “barely audible” statement of consent. If Troilus re-

sembles Dafoe's character in that he "wants to extort the inscription, the 'registration,' of her consent in the field of the big Other," he also wants to and does enjoy having sex with Criseyde. It is telling that for all its interest in narrating the rude pressure that Troilus and Pandarus apply to Criseyde, *Troilus and Criseyde* refuses to register her consent in the field of the big Other.

In the wake of her transfer to the Greek camp, Criseyde makes the fateful decision to succumb to Diomedes's active advances and forsake Troilus, though she is prophetically aware that doing so will earn her a lasting literary reputation for unfaithfulness: "Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende, / Shal neyther ben ywritten nor ysonge / No good word, for these bokes wol me shende" (1058–60). When weighing Criseyde's case, it is impossible to overstate the ethical significance of the parallel between the widow's initial "decision" to mourn her lost husband and love Troilus on the one hand and her later decision to mourn Troilus and love Diomedes on the other. Criseyde never wanted to mourn her husband in the first place. She never wanted to reinvent herself, but learning to re-cathect her love ultimately enables her to secure future happiness in the Greek camp by loving Diomedes (despite suffering some prophetic shame at her lasting reputation for infidelity). Troilus and Pandarus deliberately force her out of a melancholic state by holding her accountable for their lives.¹⁵¹ After the Trojan senate trades Criseyde for Antenor and Troilus sits on "ful of angwissh and grisly drede" but doing nothing to prevent it (155), she repeats the process exactly as Pandarus taught her to, mourning a lost love-object for a new one before she is too old to love or be loved again. How can such analogous shifts in object-love lead to such dramatically different social reactions? After hearing that Criseyde has traded Troilus for Diomedes, Pandarus vows:

¹⁵¹ For the classic account of mourning as a healthy psychic reaction to loss and melancholia as a pathological reaction to loss see Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" 237–58.

“I hate, ywys Cryseyde; / And, God woot, I wol hate her evermore!” (1732–33). How can he hate his niece for doing the very thing he just pressured her into doing, the very thing for which he fashions himself the spokesperson? Because the big Other breaks its own rules in pursuit of *jouissance*. Of course, Troilus, unlike Criseyde’s husband, remains alive and in love with Criseyde, but in order to love Troilus she would be forced to endure love at a distance: the Žižekian courtly lover’s *modus operandi*. Criseyde opts to love an accessible object that can love her back, but she also regrets doing so. For Crocker and Pugh, “Criseyde’s recognition that she made the wrong choice when she traded Troilus for Diomedes prevents the affair from becoming a homosocial struggle over a passive object of desire” (92). Criseyde is ethically heroic, not just for her radical passivity, but also because she accepts the responsibility to act and its inherent danger of acting regrettably.¹⁵² She is ethically heroic because she refuses to be either the Žižekian courtly lover or his Lady.

Symbolizing her exchange of lovers, Criseyde gives Diomedes a brooch that Troilus had given her: an object that Žižek might call a Hitchcockian MacGuffin¹⁵³ When he sees Diomedes wearing the brooch, Troilus finally abandons hope of regaining Criseyde, taking Diomedes’s possession of the brooch as evidence of Criseyde’s infidelity (1654–66). But the brooch is also evidence of Criseyde’s willingness to draw an overt analogy between her love for Diomedes and her prior love for Troilus. What if Criseyde gives Diomedes the brooch because she knew Troilus would see it? What if she gives Diomedes the brooch in an effort to teach Troilus, as he taught her, to cure his melancholia through mourning a lost love-object a

¹⁵² For arguments for Criseyde’s ethical superiority see Koppelman 97–14; and Beck (Christian) 143–212.

¹⁵³ For Žižek’s account of the MacGuffin see *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan* 6–8.

taking a new one? Of course, Chaucer's poem does not permit us to answer these questions definitively. We can, however, read Diomedes's broach as a sort of an encoded letter to Troilus, one meant to draw his attention to his own indirect role in facilitating Criseyde and Diomedes's love by insisting that she mourn her husband in the first place. Although Žižek has yet to write on Chaucer's poem, he writes about a similar scene of communicative betrayal in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (*In Defense of Lost Causes* 26–29, 81–82). Therein, Ulysses brings Troilus to the Greek camp and allows him to look in on Cressida flirting with Diomedes. After Diomedes leaves, Troilus overhears Criseyde address him, though she is ostensibly unaware of his presence:

Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee,

But with my heart the other eye doth see.

Ah, poor out sex! This fault in us I find:

The error of our eye directs our mind.

What error leads must err. O then conclude:

Minds swayed by eyes full of turpitude. (*The Norton Shakespeare* 1990, ll. 107–12)

For Žižek, “[t]he key question to be raised here is: what if Cressida had been all the time aware of being observed by Troilus and just pretended to be thinking aloud alone? [. . .] The general lesson of this is that, in order to interpret a scene or an utterance, sometimes, the key thing to do is to *locate its true addressee*” (*In Defense of Lost Causes* 82, emphasis original). In Žižek's example, the fictional and the actual addressee are one and the same person; the ambivalence lies in whether Cressida pretends to be unaware that she is actually addressing Troilus, or actually is unaware of his presence and simply believes herself to be apostrophizing him. We find this same ambivalence in the broach that Chaucer's Criseyde gives to Dio-

mede. Is it a signifier of Criseyde's lack of care for Troilus' feelings? Or is it a hidden message meant to explain to Troilus that she has moved on and he ought to as well? Is its true addressee Diomedes or Troilus (or both)? While neither Chaucer's poem, nor Shakespeare's play permit us far enough into Criseyde/Cressida's interior to determine her actual addressee, both make it difficult for us to judge her decisions, just as it is difficult for her to decide what to do in any given situation.

If Criseyde does intend the broach as a call for Troilus to mourn, he certainly does not accept it as such. Despite his earlier desire to make Criseyde mourn her dead husband, Troilus is unwilling to mourn his lost love-object and elevate a new Lady to the dignity of the Thing. He quite simply will not practice what he preached. If Criseyde learns over the course of *Troilus and Criseyde* to abandon a melancholic attachment to a lost love-object, mourn that object and subsequently love a new object, Troilus like the Black Knight of *The Book of the Duchess* is paralyzed in anguish over a permanently unavailable love-object (*Riverside Chaucer* 346, ll. 1298–333). Unlike the Black Knight, however, Troilus does not abandon the prospect of enjoyment in despair, but elevates the Trojan state to the dignity of the Thing and, consequently, channels the monumental energy he devoted to loving Criseyde into satiric hatred of the Greek invaders. "Troilus' submission to the Trojan state," Fradenburg reminds us, "represents not a conflict between enjoyment and duty but the enjoyment of duty itself" (*Sacrifice Your Love* 205). Indeed, Troilus goes immediately from blaming an absent Criseyde for all of his pain to relishing in the prospect of inflicting pain on Diomedes:

“. . . I se that clene out of youre mynde

Ye han me cast—and I ne kan nor may,

For al this world, withinne myn herte fynde

To unloven yow a quarter of a day!
I cursed tyme I born was, weilaway,
That yow, that doon me al this wo endure,
Yet love I best of any creature!”

“Now God,” quod he, “me sende yet the grace
That I may meten with this Diomede!
And trewely, if I myght and space,
Yet shal I make, I hope, his sydes blede.
O God,” quod he, “that oughtest taken heede
To fortheren trouthe and wronges to punyce,
Whi nyltow don a vengeaunce of this vice?” (1695–708)

In the liminal space between stanzas, Troilus jumps from a masochistic-melancholic enjoyment of pining for a lost love-object to a sadistic-aggressive lust for vengeance. Like Othello’s handkerchief, Troilus’ broach appears in the possession of another man, thereby traumatizing the jealous male (Othello-Troilus) and causing him to switch instantly from a masochistic courtly lover to a sadistic purveyor of vengeful violence. Troilus does not simply translate his frustration at losing Criseyde into a blanket hatred of all invading Greeks—he wants Diomede, he wants to make his (in)sides bleed, to turn him inside out. Troilus’ sadistic fantasy of mangling Diomede is bound up closely with his sense of transcendent justice. He reminds God (it is unclear which one) of his duty to advance truth and punish wrongs and even goes so far as to reprimand him for not yet exacting vengeance for “this vice.” But of what vice does Troilus speak? What has Diomede done that he himself did not? Troilus pos-

sesses the big Other's privilege and therefore does not have to tolerate even his own rules when they conflict with his sadistic *jouissance*.

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Cory James Rushton notes, "Chaucer plays most explicitly with the gap between courtly love and male aggression" (153). There is no logic behind Troilus' belief in the divinity backing his righteous anger. The big Other is on his side and if the big Other is not on his side, the big Other is wrong. Troilus assumes the big Other's role of righting all wrongs: the role of the Žižekian sadist. As such, he is something like Leonard (Private Pyle) from the opening act of Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), in which a walking superego of a drill sergeant drives the initially inept Leonard to kill himself and his tormenter with mock-military precision. "I don't think Leonard can hack it anymore," Private Joker muses shortly before Leonard's paroxysm, "I think Leonard's a Section 8" ("Section 8" is military parlance for a subject unfit to serve due to mental instability). "It don't surprise me," Private Cowboy replies. According to Žižek, Leonard lacks the "proper ironic distance" from military ideology necessary for an "efficient soldier." He identifies too closely with the "obscene military rituals" meant to suture the soldier's sexual enjoyment to the enjoyment attained by submitting to a superegoic state: "if you get too close to it," Žižek exclaims in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, "if you over-identify with it, if you immediately become the voice of this super-ego, it's self-destructive. You kill people around you. You end up killing yourself." The obscene drill sergeant of *Full Metal Jacket* is not unlike the God of Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*, both conflate subordination to a homo-social order with heterosexual enjoyment. Like Leonard, Troilus resumes the sovereignty stripped from him by the God of Love and becomes, in his own mind, a God-like purveyor of punishment.

Unlike Leonard, Troilus does not turn on the military organization that made him.

Nevertheless, he resolves to die for the Trojan cause—“Myn owen deth in armes wol I seche” (1718)—and kills thousands of Greeks (but not Diomedes) before being killed (somewhat ingloriously) by Achilles (1800–06). Troilus deliberately “goes out” in a spree of semi-militaristic, semi-vengeful, semi-suicidal violence. He is therefore a sadomasochist and the boundary between his masochism and his sadism is as thin and hollow as that separating two stanzas of a poem. True, he does not go Section 8. But are Troilus’ killings morally laudable because they were accomplished within the symbolic parameters of proper military service? Do Greek lives matter? In Chaucer’s Tale of Melibee—one of the two Canterbury Tales that he assigns to his narrative surrogate—the heroic *parrhesiastes* Prudence argues doggedly against violence, even against those who have invaded her home and violated herself and her child (*Riverside Chaucer* 217–39). If Chaucer explicitly identifies with a moral philosophy centered on non-violence in *The Canterbury Tales*, how are we to take the fact that his narrator lionizes Troilus’ vengeful slaughter of thousands of Greeks in *Troilus and Criseyde*? Toward the poem’s conclusion, the disembodied, sublimated Troilus triumphantly floats up through the spheres of heaven, de-sublimating Criseyde and the entire world in a frenzy of anti-romantic laughter (1814–34). Troilus is ultimately happy. Never mind the thousands of people he just killed. They do not fall under the narrator’s jurisdiction, which consists of Troilus’ love, not his hate. But is Troilus’ masochistic love not bound up inextricably with his sadistic hate? If Žižek is right that we should take seriously the undead nature of masochistic courtly love, should we not also take seriously that of sadistic courtly hate?

III. COURTLY LOVE HATE IS UNDEAD: THE TWISTED WORLD OF ELLIOT RODGER

Anger occurs when the subject believes himself to have been wronged. Anger marks a moment of ethical failure that proves subjects have an ethical code to be violated: the exception

that proves the rule. From an evolutionary perspective, anger anticipates ethics, since our brain's emotional systems evolved long before the relatively recent prefrontal cortex, which is necessary for complex ethical reasoning (Panksepp 187–205). Anger is the visceral older brother of ethics and he is not moving away from home any time soon; hence stoic philosophy's long preoccupation with anger management, which is exemplified in Chaucer's Tale of Melibee. Anger, Lacan writes in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, constitutes a "reaction of a subject to a disappointment, to the failure of an expected correlation between a symbolic order and the response of the real. In other words, anger is essentially [. . .] expressed in a formulation of Charles Péguy's [. . .]—it's when the little pegs refuse to go into the little holes" (103). We can be relatively certain that Lacan is well aware of the phallic nature of Péguy's "little pegs." Indeed, male sexual frustration—"when the little pegs refuse to go into the little holes"—is the root-cause of some of our culture's most vitriolic and dangerous anger. Such displays are often also driven by envy or jealousy, which we can think of as certain types of anger, occurring when the subject believes himself unrightfully excluded from a sphere of *jouissance* surrounding his (would-be) love-object and a rival or series of rivals. Everyone's having fun without me: fun that I should be having. Shakespeare's aforementioned tragedy *Othello* teaches us the violence of which jealousy, that "green-eyed monster," is capable. *Troilus and Criseyde* teaches us what a courtly lover becomes after disavowing love out of anger and jealousy: a courtly hater.

Troilus spends most of *Troilus and Criseyde* a thoroughly masochistic, thoroughly passive subject of the God of Love, but he eventually rejects courtly love along with the notion that the big Other will correct all "injustices" against him. Like Leonard in *Full Metal Jacket*, he assumes the position of the militaristic super-ego and becomes a suicidal killing

machine fueled by vengeful jealousy and patriotic zeal. Unlike Leonard, however, Troilus does not go Section 8, but inflicts violence only on the invading Greeks. The object of Troilus' jealous anger (Diomedes) coincides roughly with the object of the Trojan group-body's anger (the Greeks). Consequently, both the Trojan state and his narrator can celebrate Troilus' sadistic violence as heroic. If Lacan and Žižek are correct that masochistic courtly love marches on, does it still periodically lapse into sadistic-militaristic hate? The answer, unfortunately, is unequivocally yes. If the masochistic courtly lover is undead, so is the sadistic courtly hater: the angry, envious ex-lover out for blood.

Elliot Rodger, I claim, was one such courtly hater. On May 23, 2014, Rodger terrorized Isla Vista, the “student ghetto” adjacent to the University of California, Santa Barbara. After stabbing his two roommates and their overnight guest, Rodger got in his black BMW and shot no less than six people and struck at least seven others with his car. In total, he killed six people and injured thirteen others before committing suicide. Rodger left behind a series of short videos and a 140-page autobiographical manifesto, *My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger*, which detail his reasons for engaging in the killing spree that he called “the Day of Retribution.” Above all, Rodger was angry with women who did not freely offer themselves to him as sexual objects and envious of the other young men who he believed to be hoarding all the world's *jouissance*, leaving him only suffering and pain. This gendered mixture of anger and jealousy translated into potent sadistic hatred of both men and women (135–37). Obsessed with losing his virginity, Rodger moved to Isla Vista and attended Santa Barbara City College with great sexual expectations: he was going to live in Isla Vista, the utopic capital of Southern Californian *jouissance* (77–83). When his expectations failed to materialize, when the “little pegs refused to go into the little holes,” tragedy ensued.

One of the many shocking aspects of *My Twisted World* is how little Rodger says about his actual attempts at courting women. Although he was obsessed with his virginity he was, like Troilus, completely unable to express his love to the women for whose company he so yearned. Unlike Troilus, however, Rodger had no Pandarus, no pimp to procure him a woman without him having to broker the deal himself, though he did have a series of counselors paid to spur his social life (119–28). Rodger seems to have sought male advice for courting women in the form of the aforementioned community of so-called “pickup artists”: self-described outcasts who trade coercive and altogether disturbing techniques for tricking women into sex. One such technique is “negging,” or purposefully deriding a woman on the assumption that *she* is a masochist who will be attracted to such derision (Strauss 151–52). If Rodger ever sought to belong to the pickup artist community there is no record of him doing so, though there is an extensive record of his vitriol toward that community, which he expressed on the anti-pickup artist forum (PUAhate.com), which is inhabited by radical misogynists, left disenchanting, angry and jealous after the pickup artist community’s advice failed to trick women into sex as advertised.¹⁵⁴ In *My Twisted World*, Rodger describes discovering PUAhate.com (“a forum full of men who are starved of sex, just like me”), becoming depressed based on its contents (“it shows just how bleak and cold the world is due of the evilness of women [*sic*]”), and sending the link to his parents, who sadly failed to examine the website closely (117–8). Misogynist ideology did not corrupt Rodger, or drive him to violence, but it did show him that he was not alone in his jealous anger.

Rodger and other such men self-identify as “incels,” short for “involuntary celibate,” i.e. those who desire sex but do not have it. They congregate online on a subreddit called

¹⁵⁴ In the wake of Rodger’s killings PUAhate.com is now defunct.

ForeverAlone.¹⁵⁵ For many (though not all) of these men, volition alone (their desire for sex) should be enough to manifest willing female sexual partners. They believe they ought to be the privileged recipients of female sexuality and bewail that they are not, that the little pegs just won't go into the little holes. Consequently, incels often see themselves as lacking sex only due to female cruelty. Women are not fulfilling their obligation to have sex with worthy incels. On the dating website OkCupid, for example, one can indicate whether or not "there are circumstances in which a person is obligated to have sex with you?" Such a repugnant question is necessary only because some people answer "yes."¹⁵⁶ Rodger certainly believed he deserved sex: in *My Twisted World*, he repeatedly refers to himself as a "magnificent gentleman" (90, 109, 118 and 133) He rejects, however, the lifestyle of the "kind gentleman": "Everything my father taught me was proven wrong. He raised me to be a polite, kind gentleman. In a decent world, that would be ideal. But the polite, kind gentleman doesn't win in the real world. The girls don't flock to the gentlemen. They flock to the alpha male" (28)/ Later in *My Twisted World*, when reflecting upon purchasing the Glock 34 semiautomatic handgun he used on the Day of Retribution, he writes: "After I picked up the handgun, I brought it back to my room and felt a new sense of power. I was now armed. Who's the alpha male now, bitches? I thought to myself, regarding all of the girls who've looked down on me in the past" (113). It is no coincidence that Rodger decides to move to Santa Barbara upon seeing *Alpha Dog* (2006): a movie about a young, privileged male turned murderer (77).

Rodger's problems with anger management were manifest long before the Day of Retribution. *My Twisted World* details two separate occasions on which he became so livid at

¹⁵⁵ For an account of Rodger's self-identification as an "incel" on the web see Woolf (Nicky).

¹⁵⁶ For an excellent account of a sadly defunct Tumblr detailing the OkCupid profiles of self-identified "nice guys" who answer "yes" to such questions see Baker (Katie).

couples evincing public displays of affection that he spilled a beverage on them (coffee and iced tea) before running away (87–88). He recalls a long series of social interactions in which hearing about the sexual activities of another man, or seeing another man successfully interacting with women drove him into a fit of rage (20, 29, 47, 55, etc.). After happening upon images of teenagers having sex on the internet, Rodger experiences “extreme feelings of envy, hatred and anger towards anyone who has a sex life,” which transform readily into sadistic desires to halt the pleasure of others:

I began to have fantasies of becoming very powerful and stopping everyone from having sex. I wanted to take their sex away from them, just like they took it away from me. I saw sex as an evil and barbaric act, all because I was unable to have it.

This was the major turning point. My anger made me stronger inside. This was when I formed my ideas that sex should be outlawed. It is the only way to make the world a fair and just place. If I can't have it, I will destroy it. That's the conclusion I came to, right then and there. (57)

In several of these accounts he recalls being particularly angry that men of other races (Rodger's father was English and his mother Malaysian) fornicated with white women in his stead. In one such instance, a black college student tells Rodger he lost his virginity at thirteen. Rodger later recalls his angry internal monologue as follows: “How could an inferior, ugly black boy be able to get a white girl and not me? I am beautiful, and I am half white myself. I am descended from British aristocracy. He is descended from slaves” (84). In addition to blacks, Rodger denigrates Hispanics (89–90) and Asians (121) clearly favoring his white ancestry over his Asian heritage. Rodger saw himself as immersed in a “war on women.” Hitler-like, he fantasizes a “final solution” in which the vast majority of women are sys-

tematically starved to death in “concentration camps” as he looks on from the vantage of a giant throne (136–37). But he backs away from his gynocidal fantasies, admitting their implausibility. He settles instead for planning the Day of Retribution, which he originally imagined as involving much more killing and torture than he actually accomplished (135–36).

Both Rodger and Troilus grew up in positions of privilege. Although Rodger was hardly a prince, he grew up in the suburbs of Los Angeles. His parents divorced and vied for his affection as divorced parents do. He drove a black BMW 328i coupé of which he was extremely proud and relished in buying and shrouding himself in designer clothing (94–110, 128–32). Despite their privilege (or perhaps, as Žižek and Deleuze would have it, because of it), both Rodger and Troilus obsess over their own suffering at the hands of unwilling women. Like Troilus, Elliot Rodger believed in an ordered universe of which he was the center. Before committing to the Day of Retribution, Rodger wholeheartedly believed that he was destined to win the lottery and acquire sexual gratification without effort by virtue of his vast wealth (104–05). He spent \$700 on tickets in one drawing (104), and drove from California to Arizona to buy tickets in another (111). Upon losing he sunk into desperate crying fits, unable to comprehend why the universe that was supposed to love him was causing him to suffer (112). Why can't I win the lottery and attract women to have sex with me? Why isn't Diomedes dropping dead for stealing Criseyde from me? Both lovers stop loving, stop trusting the big Other to right all their wrongs and, Leonard-like, take matters into their own hands. Both knowingly ride to their death with no desire to live beyond a desire for vengeance against the men who supposedly prevented their happiness. Of course, Troilus does not intentionally kill women, unlike Rodger who imagined killing an entire sorority and would have, had their house not been locked (132). Troilus does not even kill civilians, but only the

Greeks who stole his girlfriend and want to break into Troy and steal everything else from him. Rodger is Troilus-like only insofar as he channels his masochistic frustrations into sadistic violence. Žižek is quite correct that the courtly lover is undead, but his exemplary courtly lover is entirely too innocent: a passive, ineffectual rube, unable to decide whether he is attracted to his Lady or repulsed by her. He pays too little attention to the equally undead courtly hater: a murderous masochist turned sadist and there's no telling what he will do.

CONCLUSION:

TEACHING FEELING

The pages above explore Middle English literary texts that consistently portray ethics as a patently emotional affair. The introduction rehashes recent neuroscientific discourses that similarly assert the centrality of emotion in processes of ethical decision-making, as well as other contemporary theoretical and historiographic accounts of emotion. Chapter 1 argues that Middle English rhetorics of righteous and sinful anger played an important role both in sparking the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and in retroactively reevaluating the dangers of uninhibited anger in the uprising's posttraumatic wake. The second chapter discusses Middle English discourses on dread that suggest that devotees in late medieval England conceptualized the ascetic project of dreading well as integral to the ethical project of living well. The third chapter argues that the three successive versions of *Piers Plowman*, as we know them today, contain three strikingly different theologies of love and dread. Rather than reading these as evidence of one man's gradual movement from a theology of dread to one of love, it reimagines the production of *Piers Plowman* as a densely intersubjective affair that engendered a network of differing (and deferring) theologies of love and dread. Chapter 4 turns to the famous Middle English elegy *Pearl*, arguing that the Pearl-maiden does not prompt the dreamer to happily share in her celestial estate, but instead stirs his envy of her heavenly bliss, suggesting that terrestrial devotees ought to work through, rather than eschew, their envy of their celestial loved ones. Chapter 5 focuses on another poem solely attested in Cotton Nero A.x: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. While critics often read Gawain's shame at the end of the poem as sundering him from his fellow courtiers, I read Gawain's shameful confession to the court as profoundly and successfully reparative of the homosocial, chivalric

habitus wounded by Gawain's life loving transgression. Moving next to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chapter 6 builds on a scholarly tradition that reads Troilus as a masochistic courtly lover, arguing that, at the poem's conclusion, Troilus spontaneously transforms into a sadistic courtly hater. Since masochistic courtly love and sadistic courtly hate constitute different responses to social privilege, the courtly lover always already possesses the potential to morph suddenly into a courtly hater, as does Chaucer's Troilus when he channels his disappointment at having lost Criseyde's love into vengeful, militarized violence against any and all Greeks. Below, by way of conclusion, I discuss some of the pedagogical implications of my research into Middle English ideologies of emotion, focusing particularly on the vexed question of how one might ethically teach medieval cultures of compassion.

...

For years, I've been haunted by the phrase "emotional intelligence," both in my research on and teaching of Middle English literature. On the one hand, I find the phrase extremely useful in justifying not only the importance of literature, but also the relevance of teaching literature. Indeed, I've come to appreciate and revere the way that some Middle English texts teach their audience—indeed have taught me—to take seriously and learn from emotional judgments while still maintaining an awareness of emotion's propensity to incite rash, regrettable decisions. On the other hand, my studies in Middle English ideologies of emotion have made it abundantly clear (to me at least) that standards of emotional intelligence are cultural constructs and therefore dictated by biased individuals possessing the privilege to construct culture: the so-called winners who write the history books. Of course, any such standard should be taken with a sizable grain of skeptical salt. We need to think deeply, and to teach

our students to think deeply, about how judgments regarding emotional intelligence reinforce unfair social structures.

Medieval literature, therefore, presents us with at least two pedagogical opportunities: First, by teaching medieval texts with the benefit of hundreds of years worth of hindsight, we can help our students recognize that any standard of emotional intelligence is always already tied up in Foucaultian knowledge/power and prompt them to think more critically about the subtle ways that their own cultural biases inform their judgments regarding emotional intelligence. Secondly, teaching medieval texts can also demonstrate to students how emotional pedagogy (i.e., teaching others to be taught by emotion) enriched the lives of medieval subjects, as it can enrich our own lives. The trick is to help students recognize that cultural bias always informs judgments about emotional intelligence without burdening them with a paralytic skepticism that prevents them from fostering emotional attachments to medieval texts.

To my mind, among the biggest problems with popular discussions of emotional intelligence is that they too often sideline ethics. Indeed, the term “emotional intelligence” has found much more acceptance in the world of neoliberal business culture than in that of clinical psychology (Goleman x–xvii). While psychologists accuse the term’s foremost popularizer, Daniel Goleman, of uncritically gathering a loosely correlated set of capacities and skills under the umbrella of “emotional intelligence,” plutocratic executives frequently hire him to make themselves and their employees more emotionally intelligent (Goleman 3–12).¹⁵⁷ Problematically, Goleman tantalizes such executives with the prospect of increased

¹⁵⁷ According to Goleman’s mixed model, “emotional intelligence” is a complex network of competencies involving self-awareness, self-regulation, social skill, empathy and motivation. Although it has gained considerable popularity in both academic and business-oriented circles, the concept of emotional intelligence has met with substantial criticism. See, for example, Locke, “Why Emotional Intelligence is an Invalid Concept.”

profits, rather than that of possessing more ethical employees, which, in many cases at least, translates into less profits. Executives who forgo the latter for the sake of the former demonstrate that emotional intelligence is not always put to ethical use. Some serial killers, for example, are extremely good at controlling their own emotions and manipulating those of others for the sake of the most perfidious ends. I'd imagine Bernie Madoff was, in his prime, quite adept at such dissimulations as well. And yet, Goleman's emotional intelligence movement is not simply a front for making predatory businessmen more successfully predatory by offering them insight into the emotional lives of others. He also co-writes books with the Dalai Lama, which advocate pedagogies designed to produce and expand compassion (*Destructive Emotions* 1–20). It's hard to disagree with Goleman here. Indeed, a dearth of compassion *is* a common trait amongst serial killers, predatory businessmen and school shooters. Goleman and the Dalai Lama, moreover, are not alone in their call to teach compassion; more academically renowned figures like Martha Nussbaum argue for the political necessity of expanding compassion all to narrow scope, particularly through art and literature (*Political Emotions* 137–60).

We should, I think, get rid of the term “emotional intelligence” and its diagnostic counterpart “emotional quotient” or EQ. Like all ideological standards designed to stratify the human community, emotional intelligence is in the eye of the beholder and is therefore inextricably bound up with the beholder's ethical perspective. We cannot afford, however, to leave a gaping void in the cultural space that they used to occupy. I propose that instead of ranking students according to emotional intelligence, we start teaching them emotional ethics. Unlike emotional intelligence, emotional ethics is not a set of skills and competencies, but an intersubjective practice through which subjects deliberately engage emotion in an ef-

fort to make the world a better place for themselves as well as others. Emotional ethics is not simply a matter of rendering emotion voluntary or subject to cognitive control. It's also a matter of recognizing the ways that emotion always already undergirds ethical decision-making. Indeed, there arguably would be no ethics without emotion.

Emotion's role in ostensibly rational decision-making is sadly clarified in people who lack the capacity to recognize or experience certain emotions and are consequently plagued with social difficulties. According to Damasio's Somatic Marker Hypothesis those of us without such rare ailments make decisions through recourse to emotional memories of good and bad experiences. Recall from the introduction that, in his book on Spinoza, Damasio imagines "dire scenario" in which "humanity had dawned with a population deprived of the ability to respond toward others with sympathy, attachment, embarrassment, and other social emotions that are known to be present in simple form in some nonhuman species." "I suspect," Damasio writes, "that in the absence of social emotions [. . .] even on the unlikely assumption that other intellectual abilities could remain intact, the cultural instruments we know as ethical behaviors, religious beliefs, laws, justice, and political organization either would not have emerged, or would have been a very different sort of intelligent construction" (*Looking for Spinoza* 156–57). Although it's true that complex cognition occurs in the neocortex—that engorged, relatively recent section of the human brain unmatched in most, though not all, other species—it also involves the limbic system: the much older seat of emotion and emotional memory common to the brains of most higher mammals. There is, therefore, a neurological distinction to be made between emotional judgments and cognitive judgments, but we should always keep in mind that our cognitive faculties grew out of and

evolved in tandem with our emotive faculties. Not simply an archaic hindrance to cognition, emotion is the root of cognition and, by proxy, ethical decision-making.

Of course, Damasio oversimplifies intellectual history by ascribing body-mind and emotion-reason dualism to Renee Descartes' error. Like a host of nostalgic medievalists, Damasio turns Descartes into a scapegoat, punished for a long history of Western culture subordinating emotion to reason that stretches back through premodernity. Nevertheless, medieval texts often depict ethics as an emotional process, rather than a cognitive process hindered by emotion, and can therefore help us teach our students to practice emotional ethics more deliberately than they always already do. For the remainder of this conclusion, I'll explore how teaching medieval discourses on one particular emotion, compassion, might help us to do just that. Any student of affective piety knows that medieval Christians designed scores of devotional texts to generate compassion for Christ by narrating his suffering in gruesome detail. As McNamer argues, these texts and others acted as emotion scripts, the performance of which solidified compassion-based emotional communities. In addition to building communities, medieval devotees built themselves by performing compassion. In such performances, they quite literally inscribed Christian ideology on their bodies and brains, internalizing a standard of emotional intelligence structured around Christian ideals of compassion.

Upon a generous reading, medieval Christians used affective meditation on Christ's suffering to enhance their capacity for compassion and, in so doing, fueled subsequent compassion for actual, living people. Upon a less generous reading, medieval Christians ironically ignored the suffering of others in order to meditatively conjure compassion for Christ. Indeed, meditating on the crucifixion did not only evoke compassion from medieval Christians,

it also evoked hateful resentment of the Jews. I think we should equip our students with both the generous and the less generous readings of medieval cultures of compassion, prompting them to think critically about compassion's complex relation to their day-to-day ethical decisions. Although I have not yet had the opportunity to teach such a class, I can imagine (or meditate on) an undergraduate class on medieval compassion in which students read "The Wooing of our Lord" (*Anchoretic Spirituality* 245–58) next to Chaucer's treatment of the Prioress in *The Canterbury Tales*.

I'd begin with "The Wooing," prompting students to imagine a medieval community of nuns bonded together by textually solicited compassion. I'd share with them McNamer's observation that the manuscript pages containing the sole attestation of "The Wooing" are disproportionately worn, suggesting that its earliest audience touched and cried on them regularly (*Affective Meditation* 215). Without delving too deeply into the scholarly debate over whether affective piety was empowering or disempowering for medieval women, I'd suggest to students that it was both: sometimes a platform on which women could appropriate Christ's transcendental authority; sometimes an authoritarian mechanism for reducing women (and men) to unthinking automatons. But I would not stop at speculating on the historical uses of compassion. I would ask students to think about the ways that the pop songs to which they compulsively listen with their friends bond them together into an emotional community, though not necessarily an ethical one. I would also show students that ethicists still practice affective meditation today by introducing them to Peter Singer's famous essay "The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle," which posits that our un-thought failures to provide unseen children charity are tantamount to so many refusals to save a drowning child for fear of ruining one's new shoes. As Nussbaum points out, compassion's scope is typically narrow,

so Singer's hypothetical thought experiment (or meditation) is designed to generate compassion for the suffering of people who are otherwise out of sight and therefore out of mind. Despite the explosion of communicative technologies through which we're living, such modern-day affective meditations remain crucial to ethical praxis.

I'd move next to Chaucer's Prioress, whose portrait in the General Prologue triggers us to question, not whether or not she is compassionate, but whether or not her compassion is ethical (or, at least, as ethical as it could be). Chaucer's narrator tells us that the Prioress directs compassion towards mice caught in traps and her hungry lapdogs. If compassion also drives her to help the poor and hungry, we certainly do not hear about it. The Prioress' Tale simultaneously solicits compassion for Christian suffering and sadistic enjoyment at Jewish suffering. Sadly (for a modern audience at least), this obviously racist tale leaves the Canterbury pilgrims all too impressed, immersed in a haze of wonder. Chaucer's Prioress embodies, therefore, medieval culture's idealization of compassion, but Chaucer's parodic treatment of her registers a certain distrust for *unethically* directed compassion. I would explain to my students that hateful compassion is still with us today and not only in anti-Semitism. I would ask them to consider the ways that the Bush administration used compassion for the suffering of the victims of the 2001 attacks on New York City to stir up anti-Islamic sentiment and justify directing unprovoked aggression at Iraq.

In concluding my hypothetical class I would try to impress upon students that they need to be vigilantly skeptical of discourses on compassion, but they still need to cultivate, engage, and critically direct compassion. Is the appropriate object of compassion rats in traps, lap dogs, Jewish gurus who died more than two thousand years ago, drowning children or starving Africans? Instead of telling them where they should direct their compassion, I would

beseech them to decide for themselves. For homework, or maybe even during a quiet moment at the end of class, I would ask them to meditate on where they direct their compassion, from whom they withhold compassion, how compassion already informs their ethical decisions and how it might inform them differently in the future. By not only teaching, but assigning medieval practices of meditation, I hope, not to make students more emotionally intelligent, but to make them better practitioners of emotional ethics.

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