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Queer Authority in Old and Middle English Literature

by

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ABSTRACT

I argue that select early English texts queer normative authorizing conventions to authorize Old English and Middle English literatures. During the European Middle Ages, Latin cultures and literatures were privileged with authority that extended to and subverted the cultural capital of the inhabitants of England at the edge of the known Western world. I identify four exceptional English texts that employ authorizing conventions to disrupt normative networks of power that traditionally privilege Latin and to authorize English literature instead. The Norman Conquest had altered the English language and social structures; still, these altered networks of power continued to marginalize English cultural identities, and thus the means by which literary authority was constructed. Among the texts I focus on, Old English texts promote Anglo-Saxon cultural cohesion, whereas Middle English texts promote the author's personal desires. Across the divide between Old English and Middle English, literary authority intersects with nonnormative genders and sexualities to encode England's marginalized orientations to dominant cultural authorities.

My first chapter focuses on Alfred's Old English translation of Boethius's Latin *Consolation of Philosophy.* The narrator is a fictionalized version of the author, Boethius, and Alfred's translation characterizes him as a Roman. Alfred situates the Roman Boethius in conversation with Wisdom, an allegorical figure whom Alfred characterized as an Anglo-Saxon mother with masculine pronouns. The dynamic between the maternal Anglo-Saxon Wisdom and her foster-child, the Roman Boethius, shifts power from Latin sources to Alfred's present Old

English philosophical contributions. In my second chapter, I argue that *Dream of the Rood* queers conventional orientations of time and space to locate Anglo Saxons at both the inception of and conclusion to salvation history. The Rood is imagined as an Anglo-Saxon warrior actively participating in Christ's passion, and thus facilitating salvation. Warning the Dreamer and the poem's audience of the looming Judgment Day, *Dream* implicates England as a geographical and temporal end. Displacing cultural centers like Rome and Jerusalem, Anglo-Saxon England is privileged within *Dream*'s reorientations of salvation narratives. Then, I work across conventional historical periodization that distinguishes Old English from Middle English to identify an emerging English literary authority in the wake of the Norman Conquest and the subsequent prestige of French in England. In my third chapter I argue that Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* narrator frustrates love conventions that are constructed around the author's presumed heteronormativity. Chaucer's narrator privileges literary learning over lived experience within a gendered hierarchical structure. He foregoes women's experiences and the possibility of participating in romantic love with female figures in favor of literary constructions that situate him within the company of other male authors with erotic implications. My final chapter argues that Margery Kempe manipulates the social and literary conventions available to her, excessively employing authorizing conventions multiple times and with hyperbolic style so that the authenticity of her experiences are simultaneously validated and undermined by the constructedness of her literary authority. Analyzing the mechanisms by which cultural authority is constructed, I locate women, queer individuals, and same-sex desires early in the English literary heritage. My work recognizes inclusion already present in English literary canons while enhancing women's and LGBTQ+ histories.

INTRODUCTION:

QUEER MEDIEVAL ENGLISH AUTHORITY

In one of the medieval texts analyzed here, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*, the narrator identifies himself as the receptive partner in relation to male authors who dominate literary traditions. The power dynamics described by Chaucer's narrator, however, are not unidirectional; they do not follow the normative path from the narrator's source texts to his present English retelling. The narrator exercises some authority, explaining that his "entent is . . . / The naked text in English to declare."[1] He renders the literature of his Latin and French influences a naked body accessible via English. Although his subject matter is heterosexual love, he employs poetic conventions to complicate the straight lines of power and to construct homoerotic intimacy with his male literary authorities. Queer representations of gender, sexuality, and orientations found in the four Old and Middle English texts analyzed here encode England's orientations to dominant classical and contemporary Roman and Anglo-Norman cultures.[2] Queer characterizations of English authority in these select texts disrupt networks of power to validate English discursive interventions.

Dominant medieval networks of power marginalize English subjects. "Networks of power" refer to the structure of cultural interactions that privilege some subjects over others

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[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition (Boston: Oxford University Press, 1987), G 85-6.
[2] Anglo-Normans were England's elite minority ruling class for over half a century following the Norman Conquest of 1066. French literature and culture maintained a privileged status that contends with English culture and political power. In the third chapter, I will address French poetic influences on Chaucer, specifically Eustache Deschamps, Jean Froissart, and Guillaume de Machaut.

depending on the dissemination of capital.[3] The normative directionality of power situates England as an island near the edge of the known world, removed from cultural centers like Rome, and eventually conquered by Norman invaders. The texts analyzed here— Alfred's Old English *Boethius*, *Dream of the Rood*, Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*—encode England's marginalization while constructing a privileged perspective within medieval networks of power by means of queer characterizations of gender, sexuality, and orientation. Alfred's Old English *Boethius* characterizes Wisdom as a masculine mother. Wisdom disrupts both the gender binary and Latin philosophical ideologies that separate the mind from the body by promoting Anglo-Saxon cultural values vested in the material realm. *Dream of the Rood* disrupts traditional orientations of Cult of the Cross narratives to privilege Anglo-Saxon England as a significant soteriological site by locating Anglo-Saxons at the center and periphery of salvation history. In *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer's narrator's citations of authority and poetic metaphors indicate his same-sex desires for male literary figures, disrupting heteronormative literary conventions while exposing the problematic gender norms of literary traditions. Finally, the fifteenth-century Christian mystic Margery Kempe performs traditional women's roles excessively, and her excessive literary conventions reveal the constructedness of sanctity, thus rendering the mystic life accessible to lay audiences.

Analyzing queer deviations requires orientation to culturally constructed norms; therefore, the following section of this introduction provides an overview of dominant cultural authorities that marginalized England and English literature during the Middle Ages. Then, the power dynamics between dominant cultural authorities and England are situated within prevalent

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[3] Yochai Benkler, "Networks of Power, Degrees of Freedom," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 724-6. I enhance Benkler's definition of networks with Sara Ahmed's descriptions of economies of accessibility that puts some things within reach and informs the directions by which cultural capital moves, informing ideology, culture, and the bodies through which these systems operate, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 107.

ideologies that impose a gender binary onto subjects. This categorization will indicate the apparatuses by which masculine domination and social hierarchies are enforced, particularly those that render England a receptive culture to dominant Latin and Anglo-Norman influences. However, as we shall see, some early English authors disrupt traditional networks of power and authorizing conventions to authorize nonnormative subjects. The final section introduces queer theoretical approaches to medieval English literary authority.

Medieval Cultural Authority

Power is not centralized in any one person or one class of people; rather, people participate in broader networks of power.[4] Power both produces and is produced by hierarchies that signify some subjects or cultural identities are advantaged or privileged over those who are dependent upon or disenfranchised by networks of power. Histories of conquest and capital afford some people positions of power, conversely marginalizing others.[5] "Cultural capital" refers to the ideas and education that operate economically within a stratified society to facilitate an advantaged social status.[6] Cultural capital, including literature, is both a cause and effect of power that authorizes cultural identities. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*, Michel Foucault outlines discourse as a means of producing, subverting, and revealing the mechanisms of power. He argues, "discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse

[4] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 98.
[5] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 148-51.
[6] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. E. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 243-4.

transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it."[7] Cultural constructions of power create normative discursive models. As power works through and on people it acquires features; it is representational. Authority is a culturally specific representation of power.

Rome, including both classical Roman culture and contemporary Roman influences, represent the dominant cultural center and thus a site of both spiritual and political authority for much of the Western Middle Ages.[8] Jerusalem also represents a cultural center—indeed, *Dream of the Rood* implies that Jerusalem is the cosmological center. Multiple sites and cultures inhabit hierarchically privileged statuses over England, and so this dissertation takes into account Jerusalem as a cultural center and French cultural influences as well. Rome and Latin literature, however, represent dominant authorities over the course of the Middle Ages, exerting significant influence over Old and Middle English literatures. Robert Bartlett notably opens *The Making of Europe* with a bird's eye view of medieval society; he describes an intricate social network that held Rome as the central hub of power:

> Lay lords maintained a network of loyalties, alliances and patterns of subordination and
> domination that made up the political world; clerics and monks were located in a web of
> institutions and hierarchies with a loose centre in the papal see at Rome. The cultural
> inheritance of this society was a mixture of Roman, with Latin as its learned language . . .
> Christian, with the pervasive presence of a scriptural, sacramental religion, and
> Germanic, as witnessed in the names, rites and ethos of the military aristocrats.[9]

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[7] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 100-1.
[8] Joseph H. Lynch, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (New York: Longman, 1992), 113.
[9] Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change 950-1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1.

Following the Roman Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity in 312, the Roman

Empire and the Christian faith became intertwined.[10] Missionaries traveling abroad carried the

Christian faith and ideas that directed converts to Rome as a spiritual and cultural center. Anglo-

Saxon Christianity, in particular, was informed by books and ideologies written in Latin and

indicating Rome as the origin and model for culture such as the rule of Saint Benedict.[11]

"Normative Christianity," as defined by Joseph L. Lynch in the context of the Western medieval

religious cultures, privileged Roman Christianity and society, authorized by cultural authorities

such as Constantine, maintained by laws, and promoted as an ideal social order across medieval

Europe.[12] The Church was the "centre of power and culture alongside political structures," and

so it is fitting that the first history of English Britain is an *Ecclesiastical History of the English*

People (Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, 731) written in Latin and heavily

influenced by Roman sources.[13] Other cultures made significant contributions to medieval

societies, but, as will become clear in chapter one, non-Roman cultural influences were

downplayed or obscured to construct stronger cultural connections to Rome.[14] Romans and non-

Roman medieval people who revered Roman culture participate in power dynamics that

authorize Rome and Latin literature as representations of power. Those who claim a Roman

heritage or who practice Latin literary skills, including English writers, participate in networks of

power that maintain Rome as a culturally constructed authority. Latin texts articulate Roman

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[10] Judith M. Bennett, *Medieval Europe: A Short History* 11th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 13.
[11] Lynch, *Medieval Church*, 55.
[12] Lynch, *Medieval Church*, 11.
[13] Richard Hogg, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Volume 1: The Beginnings to 1066*, ed. Richard Hogg, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 10.
[14] To avoid oversimplification, it should be noted that Anglo-Saxons maintained their Germanic heritages. Kristen Carella identifies strong Irish influences (originally published under the name Bryan Carella) "Evidence for Hiberno-Latin Thought in the Prologue to the Laws of Alfred," *Studies in Philology* 108.1 (2011): 25. Additionally, Byzantine and Islamic intellectual traditions enhanced medieval Europe, and this cultural exchange is more frequent following the twelfth century, Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, 271.

identities, transmitting cultural hierarchies and broadening the networks of power that privilege Latin literary heritages.

Comparatively, English texts articulate English identities and England's marginalized orientations to these Latin-dominated networks of power. England, an island at the edge of the known medieval Western world, looked to Rome as a model and cultural center.[15] Due to England's geographic location, an early history of Roman occupation, and continuous interventions and cultural influence, England assumes a marginalized orientation within dominant medieval networks of power.[16] Discourse constructs and reinforces dominant orientations to networks of power. Observing these socially constructed orientations Robert R. Edwards argues, "English writing is formulated by authors within institutions and jurisdictions who negotiate the margins rather than the center of official culture."[17] The literature and other cultural artifacts produced in England during the Middle Ages indicate processes of relation to networks of power experienced by English subjects. And so the influences of cultural authorities working through networks of power acquire directionality which produces and enforces hierarchical relationships.

Translatio studii, the translation of learning, and *translatio imperii*, the transfer of rule, are generally used as intersecting terms by scholars to describe the movement of culture, education, and power across time and space. Early English writers such as Bede and Alfred trace knowledge and power moving along an East to West trajectory from Greece to Rome to England,

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[15] Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 79; Asa Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 41.

[16] Robin Fleming. *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400-1070* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 25-8 and 30; Lynch, *Medieval Church*, 50-51.

[17] Robert R. Edwards, *Invention and Authorship in Medieval England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017), xiv.

constructing a noble intellectual heritage for England rooted in Rome.[18] Following 1066, English

speakers were ruled by the Norman aristocracy, an elite minority who imposed significant

changes that altered access to cultural capital and influenced England's vernacular.[19]

Nevertheless, later medieval scholars continued to employ *translatio studii* as a hermeneutic that

rooted their grammatical inquiries in ancient intellectual authorities written in Latin and citing

Roman authorities.[20]

Medieval Europeans generally considered Latin to be an incorruptible language used to

facilitate intellectual practices.[21] During the Middle Ages, Latin held prestige as the perfect,

structured, incorruptible language, despite the fact that Latin not only changed over time, but

also varied from place to place.[22] Latin language and literature attained a privileged status by

spreading across many parts of medieval Western Europe as a unifying vernacular. Ecclesiastical

and governmental records were predominantly written in Latin. It was the language of

philosophy, poetry, and Scripture, connecting medieval *literati* (people literate in Latin). Latin

commands authority, having accumulated a cultural currency backed by historical narratives,

spatiotemporal expansion (over lands and over generations), and communal bonds.[23] As the

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[18] Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 14; *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. Henry Sweet, Early English Text Society 45 (London, 1871). 5.25-7.4.

[19] Hogg, "Introduction," 14.

[20] Particularly in the scope of the trivium, the medieval university's curriculum, consisting of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5.

[21] Joseph Farrell, *Latin Language and Latin Culture: From Ancient to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16-7 and 52-3; Ian Johnson and Alessandra Petrina, "Introduction: Scottish *Latinitas*," in *The Impact of Latin Culture on Medieval and Early Modern Scottish Writing*, ed. Alessandra Petrina and Ian Johnson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2017), xi.

[22] K. P. Harrington, *Medieval Latin*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 195-6; Margaret Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 108. See also J. F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[23] Farrell, *Latin Language and Latin Culture*, 87-8.

language of the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church, Latin was the language of conquerors, the dominant culture.[24]

Other medieval vernaculars attempted to replicate Latin linguistic structures via grammars, or to follow similar syntactical structures in literary expressions.[25] Some English texts employ Latinate style to suppress or obfuscate historical and cultural differences for the purpose of conforming to Latin literary traditions as an authorized and thus authorizing language.[26] Rita Copeland argues that Latin literature creates a "sense of organic linkage with the textual culture of antiquity."[27] Margaret Ferguson points out that clerks (lower ranked ecclesiastics, secretaries, or scholars with literary skills) consistently regret vernacular diversity, associating it with the Tower of Babel story, which identifies linguistic variance as the result of pride leading to division.[28] Notably, in the Old English *Boethius*, Alfred strays from his Latin source text by inserting a description of God destroying the Tower of Babel, scattering the people, and dividing their speech into seventy-two different languages.[29] Latin was used among traveling pilgrims and merchants, and in institutions such as monasteries, convents, and universities as a unifying vernacular.

Anglo-Norman culture and language also exerted authority over the people of medieval England. In 1066 Duke William of Normandy (c. 1028-1087) conquered England, marking a

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[24] Harrington, *Medieval Latin*, 194. Farrell, *Latin Language and Latin Culture*, 87-89.

[25] In fact, Michael W. Herren notes that the structure of Latin was so revered as a perfect system that some medieval grammars wrestled vernacular languages to conform to Latin grammatical structures. "Latin and the Vernacular Languages," in *Medieval Latin: an Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Frank Mantello and Anthony Carl Rigg (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 126.

[26] Copeland, *Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, 106.

[27] Copeland, *Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, 106.

[28] Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters*, 95; "clerk (n.)," *Middle English Dictionary,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013, accessed January 16, 2019.

[29] *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine with Mark Griffith and Rohini Jayatilaka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35.132.

significant historical transition from the Anglo-Saxon period to the Anglo-Norman period.

Before the Normans seized England by force, William claimed that King Edward had promised

that he would accede to the throne of England.[30] Edward, however, had also bequeathed to his

brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson, the same position from the king's deathbed in January of

1066.[31] William's case was later argued before the Pope, who recognized him as the legitimate

claimant. The Normans were authorized by Roman power to rule England. Meanwhile, Harald

Hardrada, the Norwegian king, invaded England from the north in September of 1066. Later that

same month, at the Battle of Stamford Bridge, Harold Godwinson defeated and killed Harald

Hardrada. As Godwinson and his troops celebrated their victory in the north, in the south

William landed and constructed a castle at the town of Hastings. Godwinson marched south to

confront him, leaving a significant portion of his army in the north. The armies met in October;

Godwinson and his troops were defeated by William at the Battle of Hastings. The Norman

Conquerors permanently altered English culture. Under William the Conqueror, aristocratic

Anglo-Saxon men were murdered or driven out of England to prevent any threats to the throne.

Norman aristocracy married Anglo-Saxon women. Still, Norman culture did not entirely replace

Anglo-Saxon culture. In fact, Normans mostly maintained and developed the governmental

system that preceded their conquest by introducing a more detailed organizational system, the

earliest of which is Domesday Book, the most extensive record of government holdings for the

time.[32]

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[30] Kate Wiles, "A Century of Conquest," *History Today* 66.10 (2016): 11.
[31] Pierre Bouet and François Neveux, "Edward the Confessor's Succession According to the Bayeux Tapestry," in *The Bayeux Tapestry: New Approaches: Proceedings of a conference at the British Museum*, ed. Michael J. Lewis, Gale R. Owen-Crocker, and Dan Terkla (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 59-62.
[32] Catherine Hills, "Overview: Anglo-Saxon Identity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. David A. Hinton, Sally Crawford, and Helena Hamerow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11.

The Norman Conquest of 1066 is considered a significant event that facilitated the linguistic developments that distinguish Old English from Middle English due to the Anglo-Saxon mother tongue receiving French infusions. Robert Bartlett identifies the French of the Norman ruling class "as a language of conquest," in the tenth and eleventh centuries.[33] In addition to Latin, which never lost its prestige, Anglo-Norman became the language of administration and institutions in England. The marriages between Norman aristocratic men and Anglo-Saxon women fostered bilingualism.[34] Mary Catherine Davidson explains, "in late medieval England, the acquired languages of Latin and French linguistically signal minority, in-group memberships in professional, courtly, ecclesiastical and clerical groups," and so "Latin and French identify speakers and writers as members of specialized literate communities."[35] French language and literature maintained hierarchical privilege over English language and literature due to political circumstances that privileged Norman culture. Therefore, English literature and culture in England remained disenfranchised within conventions that privileged Latin, first and foremost, over French.

In medieval England, Latin and (after 1066) Anglo-Norman signify elite linguistic minorities, specifically because these were the languages of ecclesiastical and courtly professions. The English, whose vernacular was marginalized by networks of power, sometimes integrated Latin and Anglo-Norman within English sentences (intrasentential code-switching) to associate themselves with privileged literate groups; by adopting privileged modes of communication, they co-opted authority.[36] Code-switching signifies status by identifying one's

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[33] Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 96-7.
[34] Marilyn Corrie, "Middle English: Dialects and Diversity," in *The Oxford History of English*, ed. Lynda Mugglestone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 116.
[35] Mary Catherine Davidson, "Code-Switching and Authority in Late Medieval England," *Neophilologus* 87 (2003): 475.
[36] Davidson, "Code-Switching and Authority in Late Medieval England," 475-6.

access to other social groups, and so English speakers used Latin and Anglo-Norman to construct authority.[37] Over time, these code-switches became conventions, influencing broader ideologies. For example, Ferguson identifies the Norman Conquest as the historical event that forced England to conform to an evolving French political entity; consequently, French played an important role in "the development of gendered concepts of literacy and language." Languages developed gendered cultural relationships. Resistance to authorized written discourses was typically oral and gendered as feminine.[38] In their edited collection, *The Tongue of the Fathers*, David Townsend and Andrew Taylor identify gendered organizing principles imposed upon languages in medieval contexts. Their collection traces and critiques "the replication of patriarchy in the quintessentially patriarchal language of medieval high culture" by writers such as Abelard, Hildegard von Bingen, and Bernard de Clairvaux.[39] Latin literature and culture maintained homosocial bonds by means of institutionalized accessibility that privileged men, and culturally constructed connotations that represent Latin as a masculine, patriarchal language. Vernacular languages, generally characterized by fluidity and orality, were comparatively identified as feminine or "other" in relation to the masculine domination of Latin in the medieval West.[40]

As a result of these categorical identifications, normative authority establishes ideological binaries that privilege dominant cultural authorities as the masculine center, and those cultures receptive to the dominant authority, according to these binary assumptions, are associated with feminine orientations. Pierre Bourdieu describes a gendered organizing principle, informed by

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[37] Davidson, "Code-Switching and Authority in Late Medieval England," 475.
[38] Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters*, 86.
[39] David Townsend and Andrew Taylor, "Introduction," in *The Tongue of The Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin*, ed. David Townsend and Andrew Taylor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 2-3.
[40] Townsend and Taylor, *The Tongue of The Fathers*, 2.

socially constructed hierarchies, which reduces categories to a masculine-feminine binary. This

organizing principle seems to be so fundamental, nonconscious, and seamless, as to obfuscate the

socially constructed conditions by which masculinity maintains a privileged position.[41] Bourdieu

argues that various fields are organized according to oppositions, such as strong and weak, hard

and soft, active and passive, and dominant and dominated. These oppositions are understood

through bodily relations that are homologous to sex-gender oppositions. Although Bourdieu

focuses on contemporary ideologies, the gender binary he explicates is familiar to medieval

thinkers who adopted the philosophy of gender polarity developed by Aristotle, which organizes

binaries such as active/passive, perfect/imperfect, and form/matter respectively into this

pervasive male-female dichotomy.[42] Hierarchical binary relationships are gendered and

reproduced through learning processes and experiences within social structures.[43] The result is a

pervasive and limiting gender binary that perpetuates hetornormativity and essentialism. Subjects

who are informed by learning processes that reinforce heteronormativity extrapolate from

subcategories such as above and below, active and passive to reduce complex ideologies and

individuals to homogenous gendered categories. The gender binary restricts reception and

connotations of individuals, texts, and activities, as well as broader socio-political identities.

Literary epistemologies, for example, were overwhelmingly constructed by and for

men.[44] Embodied experience, on the other hand, is more commonly associated with women.[45]

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[41] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), 168.

[42] Murray, "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," 3. See specifically Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, trans. by Arthur Platt (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 729a; as well as *De generatione animalium, Physics,* and *Historia animalium.*

[43] Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 104-5.

[44] Jacqueline Murray, "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, eds. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 1.

[45] Murray, "Thinking about Gender," 1-3.

Caroline Walker Bynum observes, "*Male* and *female* were contrasted and asymmetrically valued

as intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self-control/lust,

judgment/mercy, and order/disorder."[46] Dominant medieval social structures separated masculine

literary epistemologies from feminine experiential epistemologies, organized according to the

mind-body dichotomy identified above: men are associated with intellectuality and women are

associated with carnality. Carolyn Dinshaw explains, "literary activity has a gendered structure, a

structure that associates acts of writing and related acts of signifying—allegorizing, interpreting,

glossing, translating—with the masculine and that identifies the surfaces on which these acts

reveal—the page, the text, the literal sense, or even the hidden meaning—with the feminine."[47]

Literary production and the materials of that labor are also organized according to the gender

binary that reduces the feminine to material acted upon and privileges the masculine as an

intellectual force that creates meaning. Similarly, Johanna Ziegler and Bynum identify

epistemological incongruities between male theologians' institutions of knowledge production

and women's bodily knowing. Zeigler cites thirteenth- through fifteenth-century sculptures that

depict women's "radical physicality" as an accurate portrayal of women's contemporary

devotional practices.[48] Bynum explains that the physicality of women's devotional practices, in

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[46] Carolyn Walker Bynum, "'…And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols,* ed. Carolyn Walker Bynum, Steven Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon, 1986), 257.

[47] Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 9. Dinshaw identifies a "timeless brotherhood of authors" which she traces from Adam, the first human to use language and "inventor of names" (Genesis 2:19) to Chaucer's scribe, "Adam Scriveyn." By contrast, femininity is associated with ambiguity and corrupt meaning, which Dinshaw describes as a matter of orientation to patriarchal powers that, in the Chaucerian corpus, men also perform. For example, she locates both Chaucer and his scribe, Adam, in feminine positions as they relate to corrupt literary production, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 4-5 and 10.

[48] Johanna Ziegler, *The Word Becomes Flesh* (Worcester, MA: Cantor Art Gallery, 1985), 11-14, 19, and 24-5.

the form of fasting and illness, enhanced their sense of embodiment and vulnerability.[49]

Women's embodied experiences were essential to their spirituality because, according to Bynum:

> . . . they understood that "man . . . signifies the divinity of the Son of God and woman his humanity." And they understood that both equations were metaphorical. But, given the ultimate dichotomy of God and creation, the first was only metaphorical. Man was not divinity. The second was in some sense, however, literally true.[50]

As the fourth chapter will demonstrate, Margery Kempe cites Scripture that focuses on the blessed womb and nourishment expressed by mothers. She employs carnality to authorize and defend her interventions into spiritual discourse against male representatives of the church, government, and academic institutions.[51]

The social construction of gender that associated masculinity with divinity and intellectualism, in like manner, associated femininity with carnality, and embodied experience did not necessarily favor men in every spiritual experience. Jessica Barr argues that men's intellectualism often frustrated their access to higher spiritual knowledge, whereas women's submission of the will granted them personal access to the divine.[52] Although women such as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe more personally intimate encounters with the godhead than male mystics such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* author and Richard Rolle, women's records of their experiences are circumscribed by male-dominated institutions and means of expression. The surfeit of records, scholarship, and institutions, such as the Church and universities,

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[49] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 176.

[50] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 179. Bynum is quoting Hildegard von Bingen's *Liber divinorum operum*.

[51] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS o.s. 212 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 126.52.910; Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 130.

[52] Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010), 11 and 15-18.

authorize masculine epistemologies by means of masculine hermeneutics. The gender binary controls access to knowledge and power at the level of specific individuals, as well as broader cultural orientations.

English culture's receptive relationship with the masculine domination exercised by Latin literature and Roman culture is a broader representation of the gender binary signifying England's socio-political orientation to networks of power.[53] I extend the masculine-feminine subcategories above to include processes of *translatio studii* that facilitate Roman masculine domination over receptive early English culture. Literature and literary conventions privilege Latin and French over Old and Middle English by reinforcing this masculine-feminine cultural dichotomy. In the opening pages of *Latinity and Identity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, Rebecca Stephenson and Emily V. Thornbury supply a set of binary relations that compare Latin to other medieval vernacular languages:[54]

Latin	Vernacular
. . . .	
Authoritative	Subversive
. . . .	
Unitary	Multiple
Collective	Individual

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[53] Putting gendered political relationships in modern terms, Bourdieu observes that many people identify the United States and United Kingdom as masculine and France, comparatively, as feminine; the former is associated with "hard" masculine disciplines of law and technology, whereas the latter is associated with the "soft" feminine humanities, Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 105, Footnote 39. See also Kim. M. Phillips, "Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws," *Gender and History* 19.1 (2007): 24.

[54] Distinguishing Latin from other vernacular languages is problematic considering that Latin was spoken during the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, I have supplied the chart above in its original form with the understanding that "vernacular" refers to, for my purposes, Germanic languages and Romance languages (such as Old French, which may be considered corruptions of Latin).

Masculine	Feminine
Normative	Queer . . . [55]

The editors note that this binary is a problematic oversimplification; nevertheless, this dualism

constitutes a prevalent organizational pattern that informs normative medieval ideologies, and

continues to inform later modern social categories. During the early Middle Ages this gendered

dualism illustrates the prevalent disparate power dynamic between Latin literary traditions and

emerging vernacular literatures that challenge this dualism.[56] Socio-political identities are

encoded via vernacular texts and thus influence literary authority. Latin itself represents cultural

authority. But citations of Latin texts, like the code-switching previously described, also

transferred authority from Latin to other vernaculars. Invoking the names of revered authors

connected to the dominant cultures invested works with some power simply by observing

traditional networks of *translatio studii*.

Alfred culls authority from his source texts. Some of the prestige and power that

audiences vest in Latin literary figures such as Boethius, Augustine, and Gregory are transferred

to Alfred via processes of translation. Alfred's Old English translation program transmits Latin

texts while constructing Anglo-Saxon cultural authority. The author of the proem to Alfred's Old

English *Boethius* uses the verb "wendan," meaning to turn or to alter the directions of something,

when he describes how Alfred "boclædene on Englisc wende," (turned book learning, or Latin,

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[55] Rebecca Stephenson and Emily V. Thornbury, "Introduction," in *Latinity and Identity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, eds. Rebecca Stephenson and Emily V. Thornbury (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 3.

[56] Stephenson and Thornbury, "Introduction," 4; Sara S. Poor observes the same dichotomy described above that associates Latin literature with men's intellectual practices and vernacular literatures with women's expressions, but she argues that closer attention to texts within their historical contexts disrupts such oversimplified dichotomies so that we might recover women's access to Latin literatures, "Mechthild von Magdeburg: Gender and the 'Unlearned Tongue,'" in *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, eds. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 57-59.

into English).[57] Alfred is described as "wealhstod," an interpreter or medium between different languages, situated within processes of *translatio studii*.[58] Alfred's translation program explicitly identifies Latin literature and culture as authoritative sources that are necessary for the cultivation of a unified people, and through his interventions Alfred renders this cultural capital accessible to his people.[59] His authority is translated from his source texts as well as from the very performance of translating, validating Alfred's role as both a political and spiritual leader.[60] Exhibiting similar translations of authority, in *Dream of the Rood*, the Rood acknowledges its historical origins rooted in Jerusalem, citing Roman interventions, while speaking Old English to an Anglo-Saxon whom he advises to share his mystical encounter with others, implicating the present poem within processes of *translatio studii*.

Middle English literature exhibits similar translations of authority whereby authors cite revered sources of power to bolster their interventions into literary traditions. Middle English *auctorite*, like the Modern English "authority," is the power to enforce rules or influence the thoughts and actions of others. *Auctorite* also refers to the textual authority that is composed of truth claims and literary traditions, namely those that can be attributed to a particular *auctour*.[61] The power and influence of authors and their works were ranked according to a culturally

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[57] Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine note that the proem was added at a later date, "Authorship and Date," in *The Old English Boethius* 1:141. *The Old English Boethius*, Preface.2; *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. Henry Sweet, EETS 45 (London, 1871), lines 18 and 24; "wendan," *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth*, ed. T. Northcote Toller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1898) compiled by Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichý, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 16 July 2010, bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/035069. Accessed 12 Mar. 2019.

[58] *Old English Boethius*, Preface.1; "wealh-stod," *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth*, 21 Mar. 2010, bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/034781. Accessed 12 Mar. 2019.

[59] Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 243-4.

[60] David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 169; Nicole Guenther Discenza, *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 7.

[61] "auctoritē (n.)," *Middle English Dictionary,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013, accessed March 14, 2019.

constructed hierarchy of *auctoritas* that privileges Latin. *Auctoritas* is a Latin word meaning

power, authority, reputation, or the originator of a tradition.[62] Latin *auctoritas*, in the context of

this dissertation, refers to literary authorities and social hierarchies that extend beyond English

culture to privilege Latin as the dominant literary heritage of the medieval West. This is

consistent with Middle English sources, including Chaucer, that also employ Latin *auctoritas* to

refer to cultural authority transmitted via literature.[63] Middle English literary networks of

auctoritas are informed by Latin literary traditions. Orientations to dominant Latin literary

heritages situate English authors as receptive subjects to the dominant culture. Older texts were

valued more highly and possessed greater *auctoritas* than compositions by medieval

contemporaries.[64] *Auctores* were hierarchically arranged beginning with the Bible, followed by

the works of Church Fathers such as Augustine of Hippo and Gregory I. The medieval hierarchy

of *auctoritas* would sometimes cautiously include classical philosophers such as Plato and

Aristotle, and classical poets such as Ovid and Virgil would take precedence over writers of

historical proximity.[65] Contemporary medieval writers were admired for their appropriations,

translations, or retellings of older, established *auctores*.[66] In fact, Chaucer explicitly cites Ovid as

a primary source for *The Legend of Good Women*, and Chaucer also identifies himself as a

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[62] "auctōritas, -ātis, f.," in *A Latin Dictionary*, by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), 199-200.

[63] "auctoritas, -atis, f.," in *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ed. R. E. Latham, D. R. Howlett, and R. K. Ashdowne (London: British Academy, 1975-2013) http://logeion.uchicago.edu/index.html#Auctoritas (accessed May 6, 2019); Chaucer, *House of Fame*, 2155-8.

[64] Emily Steiner, "Authority," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 143.

[65] Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 10-11; Jan M. Ziolkowski, "Cultures of Authority in the Long Twelfth Century," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108.4 (2009): 440. 421-448.

[66] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans, eds., "Authorizing Text and Writer," in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 3-8; Morgan, "Authority," 27-33.

translator. Like Alfred, he represents himself as a receptive translator who simply mediates

between his Latin sources and his present audience, perhaps playfully obfuscating the liberties he

often takes with his retellings.[67]

The English texts analyzed here translate authority from Latin sources, and each of these

Latin source texts indicates male authority figures and masculine domination that inform the sex-

gender connotations of English discursive interventions. Alfred characterizes his personification

of Wisdom as an Anglo-Saxon mother—the medium, or "wealhstod" between his male Latin

source, Boethius, and Alfred's audience. In *Dream of the Rood*, the Rood receives authority from

Christ through their intimacy during the crucifixion—authority that is rooted in both Jerusalem

and Rome, which the Rood then transfers to the receptive Anglo-Saxon Dreamer. Similarly, in

Chaucer's Middle English *Legend of Good Women*, the narrator's explicit citations of authority

are dominated by male authors writing in Latin, such as Ovid, Jerome, and Vincent de Beauvais.

His interventions are authorized by his acknowledgment of male Latin *auctores*. Finally,

Margery Kempe associates Latin learning and literature with men. She acknowledges her limited

access to literary discourse, employing men to record her narrative, and quoting Christ's

validation of her experiences and privileged status.

In both Old and Middle English literature, authors receive authority from privileged,

Latin sources. Just as power acquires directionality through the movement of cultural influence

over time and space, cultural constructions of authority also bear gendered connotations.

Dominant cultural authorities are implicitly associated with masculine domination, representing

marginalized subjects as receptive to social control. For example, the *Boethius* and *Dream*

implicate English culture as receptive to Latin cultural influence, and this power dynamic is

represented through gendered cultural identities that perform the transference of power from

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[67] Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women*, F 1683.

masculine informative Latin sources to English recipients. But these early English authors did not passively receive their authority from dominant models. They took power, encoding their orientations to normative networks of power as queer characterizations of English literary authority.

Queering Medieval Authority

The texts analyzed in this dissertation disrupt, rather than replicate, dominant networks of power. These texts construct English authority through both cooption and reversals of literary conventions, empowering English subject positions that defy traditional hierarchies. As shown above, social dominance and cultural authority generally assume masculine connotations.[68] Queer authority, on the other hand, is a culturally constructed representation of authority that disrupts dominant, heteronormative networks of power, characterized through nonnormative genders, sexualities, and social orientations.

Queer theories provide a number of interpretive strategies through which I read these Old and Middle English representations of authority. Queer theory emerged in the 1970s through the work of Barbara Smith and Audre Lord as a result of feminists' challenges to essentialism and post-marxist critiques of sexual identity politics.[69] It also overlaps significantly with postmodernist resistances to coherent identity categories and power structures.[70] Queer theory exposes heterosexuality as a power regime that organizes categories such as masculine and

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[68] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 168.

[69] Thank you to Erik Wade for bringing to my attention the ways in which mainstream queer theory genealogies tend to neglect the contributions by Women of Color.

[70] Glenn Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xi; Rosemary Hennessy, "The Material of Sex," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose, with Andrea Bebell and Susan Potter (New York, Routledge, 2013), 135.

feminine, heterosexual and homosexual, normative and deviant.[71] These categories are culturally

constructed, historically contingent, and enforced through dominant discursive models, or

networks of power. Queerness disrupts discursive norms, usually at the site of gender and

sexuality, thus revealing the mechanisms by which norms are constructed and thus open to

interpretations and deviations. Primarily, "queer" has been used to describe sexual deviations, or

perversions, usually applicable to same-sex acts.[72] "Queer" also has a social register that

describes individuals and actions that disrupt normative social models. Some critics argue that

sexuality is a specific, essential element of queerness, but some critical interventions also locate

queerness beyond sexual specificity to identify the social construction of queer lives that deviate

from norms at multiple discursive levels.[73] For example, as we will see in the second chapter, I

read the Rood as performing a masculine Anglo-Saxon identity while embracing Christ with an

intimacy that challenges the boundaries of heternormativity. Elaborating on this encounter, I

focus on the broader rhetorical implications of queer spatiotemporalities that locate an Anglo-

Saxon subject at the center of the crucifixion. Queer orientations in *Dream* disrupt traditional

spatiotemporalities to connect Anglo-Saxons with the body of Christ and to privilege their

culture within salvation history. Queerness, and by extension queer theory, resist stability—

conceptual stability such as definitions, and institutionalized stability such as academia.

Although critics do not all employ queer theory the same way, queer approaches to texts

generally historicize genders and sexualities as cultural constructions, they interrogate

essentialism and normative models of identity, and they analyze the rhetorical consequences of

deviations and instabilities within specific discursive contexts.

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[71] Hennessy, "The Material of Sex," 134.
[72] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 161; Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose, with Andrea Bebell and Susan Potter (New York, Routledge, 2013), 18-31 (19).
[73] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 161.

Gender, sexuality, and authority are each culturally constructed; therefore, each is a process of significations open to interpretations, manipulations, and deviations.[74] Judith Butler identifies gender and by extension sexuality as culturally constructed, rather than essential, natural truths, because "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*."[75] Because gender is performative, it is "grounded in ideology with a history that extends beyond the individual."[76] Representations of power and authority are discursively produced with gendered connotations that typically enforce masculine domination and maintain the prevalent gender binary. But these discursively produced representations of power and authority are subject to multiple iterations, interpretations, and radical historicizations.[77] Queerness, a deviation from the norm, usually at the site of gender and sexuality, disrupts the discourse, exposes the constructedness of discourse, and undermines regimes of power upon which networks of dominant ideologies and ontologies are founded.

Queerness undermines "regimes of the normal."[78] Dominant discursive modes aim to oppress, or at least suppress, same-sex desires and nonbinary genders by representing those who defy the sex-gender binary as perversions of "natural" hegemonic sexuality and anatomically-observable genders. But it is difficult for queer individuals to liberate themselves entirely from the dominant culture and its significations because they are typically raised by straight families, or at least surrounded by inextricable heteronormative social structures. Attachments to

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[74] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 4.

[75] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 191. Butler's emphasis.

[76] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 520.

[77] Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" 4.

[78] Michael Warner, "Introduction," in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xxvii.

heteronormativity do not diminish one's queerness: rather, queerness is performed through failures to reproduce norms even while living through norms.[79] Internalized oppression incites struggle against the dominant discourse.[80] And so queer individuals co-opt the dominant discourse and, through a series of reversals and ruptures, express personal identities and desires, form communal bonds, and construct power by means of unique critical vantages.

Some early English authors struggled against ideological and political hierarchies that subordinated English literatures and cultures to Latin and French literatures and cultures. These authors reorient English cultural identities in their texts as privileged perspectives with unique intellectual advantages due to their marginalized orientations within dominant networks of power. They manipulate the authorizing conventions specific to the discourse in which each text participates—respective to each of the primary texts analyzed here, these include philosophy, Cult of the Cross narratives, *fin'amor* poetry, and hagiography—to construct a queer authority that privileges English subject positions. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe identifies authorship as an act of agency evident in Anglo-Saxon "narrative moments of contradiction and surprise that point us to the orchestration of agency."[81] According to Glenn Burger, queer theory is particularly well suited for

> drawing attention to an author function composed of tactics and oppositional behavior,
>
> rather than the strategies of canonicity and hegemonic definition. It can thus reveal

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[79] Sara Ahmed, "Queer Feelings," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose, with Andrea Bebell and Susan Potter (New York, Routledge, 2013), 428.
[80] Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* 43 (1987): 209.
[81] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 13.

different modes of textual production . . . ways of relating dominant authorities and the author function, author function and reader.[82]

A queer reading invites readers to acknowledge the normative structures upon which texts are predicated, with special attention to deviations from the norm or textual invitations to exercise deviant interpretive strategies. Medieval literary conventions such as the strategies of masculine domination that privilege Latin literatures and culture also maintain structures of heteronormativity. Focusing on genre, Tison Pugh explains: "writers and readers must know the rules of genre in order to play the game of literature, and heteronormative discourse thus stands as one of genre's chief rules."[83] Pugh focuses on queer disruptions to generic expectations and heteronormative ideologies as liberation.[84] He argues, "queering genre represents an active, volitional tactic that alludes to the queer as a means of resisting, if not subverting, both generic form and the audience's heteronormatively inscribed identity."[85] Expanding upon Pugh's insights, I identify authorizing conventions and dominant literary traditions that are constituted by and thus constitute heteronormativity to map the means by which these select early English texts queer oppressive networks of power to authorize English discursive interventions.

Queer authority employs authorizing conventions to privilege marginalized people while exposing networks of power as contrived. Power must be exercised; therefore, agents can manipulate networks of power for alternative purposes.[86] Agents operating within dynamic

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[82] Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation*, xiii. Burger invites audiences to forget about Chaucer's preeminent status within the early English literary canon, identified by some as "Father of English Poetry" and to appreciate the transgressive, oppositional tactics of *The Canterbury Tales* (xvii).
[83] Tison Pugh, *Queering Medieval Genres* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 2.
[84] Pugh, *Queering Medieval Genres*, 8 and 12.
[85] Pugh, *Queering Medieval Genres*, 9.
[86] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 98.

contexts reconstruct orientations and thus alter their relationship to social structures.[87] Queer

authority, according to Jack Halberstam, employs authorizing conventions to validate, and even

privilege, "nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment,

and activity in space and time."[88] Operating within traditional discursive models, queerness

exposes heteronormativity as a power regime that enforces arbitrary distinctions of genders,

sexualities, and races, while queer authority reveals the means by which dominant discursive

models potentially divert power to nonnormative subject positions.

In the four medieval texts analyzed in this dissertation, queer authority is constructed

through nonnormative representations of early English figures: disruptive genders, sexualities,

and disorientations encode the ways in which English subject positions relate to networks of

power. Queer characterizations in these texts expose the constructedness of dominant discursive

models and the networks of power they facilitate. Nevertheless, these texts employ the available,

socially-constructed authorizing conventions to disrupt networks of power and thus authorize or

even privilege queer English subject positions over traditional cultural authorities. The medieval

texts analyzed here encode the English subject position not merely as an attempt to conform to

masculine dominant discursive powers or the receptive orientation of England that is informed

by networks of *translatio studii et imperii*; instead, English authorities are represented as queer

intercessors, a narrator co-opting the discourse to facilitate same-sex desires, and a woman

pioneering radical expressions.

In the first chapter, Alfred's Old English translation of Boethius's *De consolatione*

philosophiae exhibits significant deviations from the Latin source text, particularly Alfred's

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[87] Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, "What is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103.4 (1998): 1004.

[88] Halberstam's book is originally published under the name Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

complex representations of Wisdom's genders. Wisdom is the central allegorical figure. He is at once described as a mother and encoded with masculine pronouns. Although Boethius represents his allegorical authority, Philosophy, as a woman, Boethian dualism conforms to dominant gendered binaries, privileging the masculine mind over the feminine body. But in the Old English *Boethius* Alfred characterizes Wisdom as a synthesis of these dichotomies. Alfred's depiction of Wisdom queers gender conventions, mind-body dualism, and normative models of *translatio studii* that privilege man over woman, mind over body, and Latin subjects over Anglo-Saxon subjects. Wisdom's queerness exemplifies one of Alfred's contributions to philosophy in that his synthesis of binary oppositions models harmony between mind and body. Moreover, Wisdom's Anglo-Saxon cultural identity locates Anglo-Saxons within a noble heritage of cultural transmission in accordance with Alfred's revised models of *translatio studii*. The narrator is a fictionalized version of the author Boethius, and Alfred's translation characterizes him as a Roman. Putting the Roman Boethius in conversation with Anglo-Saxon Wisdom, Alfred reverses power from Latin sources to Alfred's philosophical contributions, authorizing his Old English text and Anglo-Saxons as rightful innovators within Latin intellectual traditions.

In the second chapter, *Dream of the Rood* queers conventional orientations of time and space to locate Anglo-Saxons at both the inception of and conclusion to salvation history. The Rood, or cross, is envisioned as an Anglo-Saxon warrior actively participating in Christ's passion and thus facilitating salvation. Warning the Dreamer and the poem's audience of the looming Judgment Day, *Dream* situates England as a geographical and temporal end. The Rood's anachronistic Anglo-Saxon identity destabilizes traditional True Cross narratives that privilege Jerusalem and Rome and marginalize borderlands like Anglo-Saxon England. *Dream* facilitates Anglo-Saxon connections to Christ by queering conventional orientations to time and

space. Queer space disrupts normative conventions to connect marginalized subjects with figures and events; queer space can also privilege a specific site or community that is typically marginalized by hegemonic models of spatiality. Disrupting linear, chronological models of time that privilege the past and spatial orientations that locate power at cultural centers puts Anglo-Saxons normally on the geographic edge in close proximity with cultural authorities associated with Rome and Jerusalem. *Dream* disrupts normative orientations to construct Anglo-Saxon England as a key site for salvation history.

The first two chapters analyze Anglo-Saxon contributions to cultural networks dominated by Latin. The *Boethius* and *Dream* construct literary authority that attempts to validate and promote Anglo-Saxon cultural identities beyond the immediate text. The Middle English texts on the other hand, Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and Kempe's *Book*, construct literary authorities that facilitate an author's personal desires. In these texts, English literary authority intersects with nonnormative genders and sexualities to encode England's marginalized orientations to dominant cultural authorities across the periodization that separates Old English from Middle English. The cultural authorities and networks of power, however, change in the wake of the Norman Conquest.

Chapter three examines Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* narrator, who frustrates love conventions that are constructed around the author's presumed heteronormativity. He participates in the homosocial bonds of authorship, but indications of his same-sex desires queer poetic conventions. Homosocial networks facilitate homoerotic desires. Chaucer's narrator participates in a gendered debate between epistemologies of masculine literary authority and feminine experience. He devotes himself to each epistemology in turn, but his attempts at participating in masculine conventions of literary authority are hindered by his inauthentic

intimacy with feminine subjects. He foregoes women's experiences and the possibility of participating in romantic love with female figures in favor of literary constructions that situate him within the company of other male authors with erotic implications. Building on the insights of Dinshaw, Pugh, and Britton J. Harwood, I identify same-sex desires in Chaucer's *Legend* as a rhetorical characterization that interrogates poetic conventions and textual validity.

In the final chapter, Margery Kempe authorizes herself and her *Book* according to the medieval discursive conventions of saints and mystics; however, Margery Kempe's authorizing conventions are excessive. Margery's analogues to women's roles in hagiographies and the frequency with which these conventions appear in her *Book* are overly abundant. This excessiveness draws attention to the mechanisms by which literary authority is constructed, both in *Book* and within broader discursive models in which Margery participates. Margery Kempe performs motherhood, wifehood, virginity, mysticism, and sanctity in excess of her social class and the exemplars who may have informed her text. She employs authorizing conventions multiple times and with hyperbolic style, and so the authenticity of her experiences is simultaneously validated and undermined by the constructedness of her literary authority. Her text exposes the performativity of identity categories and opens the mystical life to participation.

This dissertation does not seek to provide a singular representation of queer authority that runs continuously through each chapter; rather, queer authority emerges within specific contexts, shaped by culture and genre. Queerness is an instability of identity, an ensemble of knowledges, and thus "a site of struggle, not a monolithic discourse."[89] Each chapter treats one specific example of queer authority that emerges through textually specific conditions. Still, a broader view of this project allows us to observe similarities between Old and Middle English texts

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[89] Hennessy, "The Material of Sex," 135.

respectively, the similarities that defy periodization, and the disjunctions and idiosyncrasies that individuate each text as a literary force of queer power.

Medieval studies needs more explicitly inclusive scholarship. As we shall see, the Middle Ages and later scholarly approaches have privileged straight white Christian male perspectives. A prominent Anglo-Saxon scholar has ridiculed queer theory and referred to feminism as a fog that obfuscates critical inquiry.[90] White supremacists marched in Charlottesville, Virginia donning medieval paraphernalia.[91] My scholarship is my activism. This dissertation complicates medieval canonical texts and literary figures by identifying queerness at the inception of the English literary heritage. It also enhances women's and LGBTQ+ histories that often neglect the Middle Ages.

This dissertation adds nuance to medieval English literary canons and medieval histories by combining traditional scholarship, close-reading practices, and queer and feminist theories to identify nonnormative constructions of power and authority. It is about English subjects using gender and sexuality to explore their orientations to dominant networks of power, and the means by which gender and sexuality can disrupt those networks to authorize marginalized voices. But this is not meant to be read as an imperialist argument in support of English triumphalism despite early obstacles to the formation of a national identity. Queer constructions of authority ought to expose networks of power and authorizing conventions as contrivance. The objective of this dissertation is to observe the means by which marginalized people employ normative structures

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[90] Allen J. Frantzen, "How to Fight Your Way out of the Feminist Fog," https://web.archive.org/web/20160313185240/http://www.allenjfrantzen.com/Men/femfog.html. *Allen J. Frantzen* (accessed 1 January 2016).
[91] Helen Young, "White Supremacists Love the Middle Ages," *In the Middle*. http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/08/white-supremacists-love-middle- ages.html (accessed 29 August 2017); Paul B. Sturtevant, "Leaving 'Medieval' Charlottesville," *The Public Medievalist*. https://www.publicmedie- valist.com/leaving-medieval-charlottesville/ (accessed 29 August 2017); Andrew B. R. Elliott, "A Vile Love Affair: Right Wing Nationalism and the Middle Ages," *The Public Medievalist.* https://www.publicmedievalist.com/vile-love-a air/, (accessed 29 August 2017).

to empower disenfranchised people. The later standardization, nationalism, and colonialism that

the English imposed upon other people represents conformity to dominant networks of power

and further evidence that cultural domination is destructive; even without war *translatio studii*

implicitly connotes *translatio imperii*.[92]

This study brings to the fore nonnormative, underrepresented agents of power who

contribute to the early English literary tradition. Women's roles are still largely overlooked in

early English literary canons, particularly during the Anglo-Saxon period. Here we see

authorship as a collaborative process that extends beyond individuals putting pen to paper,

whereby Wisdom, as a maternal figure, contributes to nation-building within the Alfredian

reformation. Similarly, Margery Kempe uses her authority as a spiritual mother to enact pastoral

care beyond her immediate family. Identifying same-sex desires in the Chaucerian corpus also

enhances LGBTQ+ histories that often lack medieval exemplars. Analyzing queer constructions

of authority in medieval English literature exposes deviant constructions of authority within their

historical contexts, while demonstrating the inclusiveness that is already inherent to our English

literary canons.

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[92] Foucault argues that power is a repressive force initially rooted in war, but later, when political peace is achieved, such peace is actually a reinscription of the effects of war exercised through social institutions. The repressive forces of war are continued by means of political systems; Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 89-91.

CHAPTER ONE:

ALFRED'S QUEER WISDOM IN THE OLD ENGLISH *BOETHIUS*

Introduction

Alfred's translation of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*, the Old English

Boethius, exhibits significant deviations from his Latin source text—perhaps none so widely

excused and neglected as the complex representations of Wisdom's genders. Wisdom is the

central allegorical figure, described as a mother and encoded with masculine pronouns. Reading

Wisdom's characterization in the context of Boethian dualism, the Old English *Boethius* situates

Wisdom's male-female synthesis between dichotomies that traditionally privilege the mind over

the body and other culturally constructed dichotomies, like the dichotomy that privileges Latin

over Anglo-Saxon language and culture. Informed by these power disparities, Wisdom

represents a confluence of masculine and feminine associations as well as a mind-body

continuum. Wisdom's queerness exemplifies one of Alfred's contributions to philosophy in that

his synthesis of binary oppositions models harmony between mind and body. Moreover,

Wisdom's Anglo-Saxon cultural identity locates Anglo-Saxons within a noble heritage of

cultural transmission, authorizing Alfred and his people within broader traditions of intellectual

reception and cultivation.

Portions of this chapter were presented at the 2019 MLA Annual Convention in Chicago as a paper titled, "Queer Contradiction: The Masculine Mother of Mind and Body in Alfred's *Boethius*." Thank you to the organizers, the Old English Forum of the MLA, to my fellow panelist, and to the attendees for encouraging queer approaches to Anglo-Saxon studies.

Queerness—a term that actively resists definition—is a challenge or disruption to heteronormative social conventions, particularly power structures that are rooted in hierarchical privileging of cisgender masculinity over femininity and nonnormative experiences of gender and sexuality.[1] A queer reading recognizes that the normative structures upon which texts are predicated are merely culturally constructed, and that these norms do not indicate essential truths. Texts are open processes, employing epistemology and representation to form meanings.[2] Focusing on epistemology as a source of power in the contexts of Alfred's text encourages a queer reading of the central figure, Wisdom. Judith Butler describes postmodern uses of the word "queer" as a means of reclaiming the word from heteronormative authorities who rely on identifying queerness for the purpose of bolstering a dominant "straight" culture that in effect seeks definition through negation because it lacks epistemological foundations.[3] Alfred would not have been familiar with queer in this way, but his text exhibits the same anxiety over competing epistemologies and the emergence of an Anglo-Saxon subject position that is authorized by queer orientations to dominant cultural authorities. Butler describes:

> If the term "queer" is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes.[4]

The power of queerness, then, derives from its creative potential to recognize divergent forms of power that maintain traces of previous ideologies and identities, while employing them towards

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[1] See David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62; Glenn Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xi; and Aristea Fotopoulou, "Intersectionality Queer Studies and Hybridity: Methodological Frameworks for Social Research," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13 (2012): 19.

[2] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.

[3] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 169-173.

[4] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 173.

radical new ends. This, in essence, describes the queerness of Wisdom: he registers the Latin literary heritage that facilitates the present text and its cultural context in the Alfredian corpus, while deploying a maternal identity with specifically Anglo-Saxon signifiers. Compared to the Latin Philosophia, the Anglo-Saxon Wisdom represents a redeployment from the prior usage of his allegorical representation in Boethius's Latin text. Butler observes this redeployment in contemporary significations of queerness, but I observe this same phenomenon in Alfred's early medieval text. Wisdom disrupts normative interpretations by frustrating the gender binary. Ironically, Wisdom's disruption of normativity consists of synthesizing conventionally discrete categories: male and female, mind and body. Wisdom destabilizes normativity in the text by emphasizing the constructedness of cultural identities, and he manipulates cultural constructions of power to divert authority to Anglo-Saxons.

Beginning with an overview of Boethius and his text, *De consolatione philosophiae*, henceforth referred to as the *Consolation*, the first section outlines the Latin literary tradition as a dominant cultural authority that identifies power with masculinity. Then, focusing on Alfred's Old English translation program, Alfredian representations of Wisdom are situated within this tension between Latin and Anglo-Saxon cultural authorities. Finally, Wisdom in the Old English *Boethius* is identified as Anglo-Saxon, wielding a distinctly English literary authority, and promoting intellectual unity in Alfred's immediate audience.

Boethius's *Consolation* and Systems of Masculine Domination

Alfred's source text was composed in Latin by Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, a Roman intellectual and political figure of the early sixth century. He served as consul and was later appointed to Master of Offices (*magister officiorum*; head of all government and court

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services) by King Theoderic the Great. In addition to his civic duties, Boethius's personal goal

was to render the Greek works of Plato and Aristotle accessible to a Latin-literate audience.

Among Boethius's contemporaries, his ability to read and translate Greek was enviable.

Constantinople was known for Greek education, which Theoderic and Symmachus, Boethius's

caretaker and later his father-in-law, both enjoyed.[5] But Boethius was so skilled in his Greek that

some scholars, like Pierre Courcelle, thought Boethius must have studied with someone fluent in

Greek like Ammonius at Alexandria.[6] Because most of his contemporaries were limited to Latin,

Boethius wanted to render the Greek foundations of intellectual history more accessible. Indeed,

Boethius transmitted ancient logic to medieval philosophers, including "the metaphysics of

substance and semantics of common names which could be extracted from Boethius's

commentaries on the *Isagoge*, *Categories*, and *De interpretatione*, his account of conditional

propositions in *De hypotheticis syllogismis*, and his treatment of topical argumentation in *De

topicis differentiis*."[7] But in 523 he was imprisoned by Theoderic for suspicion of treason.[8]

Confined to a cell in Pavia, far from his wife and two sons, he reflected on his disastrous fall

from happiness, and composed his own philosophy: *De consolatione philosophiae* (*The

Consolation of Philosophy*).[9] Boethius, having been eprived of his library, constructed

Consolation from his recollection of texts, resulting in an elegant blend of Platonic and

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[5] John Moorhead, "Boethius' Life and the World of Late Antique Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 13-33.
[6] Pierre Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and Their Greek Sources*, trans. Harry E. Wedeck (Harvard University Press, 1969), 272-330.
[7] Christopher J. Martin, "The Logical Textbooks and Their Influence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 56.
[8] See John Marenbon, *Boethius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Moorhead, "Boethius's Life and Late Antique Philosophy," 28-9; and S. J. Tester, "The Life of Boethius" in *Boethius*, ed. S. J. Tester (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), xi-xv.
[9] *Boethius: De consolatione philosophiae;* and *Opuscula theologica,* ed. Claudio Moreschini (Munich: K.G. Saur Verlag GmbH, 2005). I cite Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* by book.prose.line number or book.meter.line number, indicating meters with an M. All translations of the Latin and Old English are mine.

Aristotelian philosophies synthesized via Boethian transmission. Similarly, Alfred later employs his authority and translation program to construct a bridge from foundational Latin texts to his Anglo-Saxon compatriots. In his crowning work, Boethius details the appearance of Philosophia, the allegorical woman who fostered him. During this visit, in his final days, Philosophia's intellectual ascent raises the prisoner's mind above the confines of his cell, his body, and the material realm. The discourse unfolds as a dialogue between Philosophia and Boethius, the prisoner.

As Philosophia conducts her curative program for Boethius, audiences are encouraged to empathize with and thus assume the prisoner's role, to inhabit the text and apply the moral philosophy to their daily life, thus participating in Philosophia's program of enlightenment.[10] After book one, prose four, in which Boethius reflects briefly on his own political life, the historical identity of Boethius's literary characterization is greatly diminished, and, apart from a few interjections, the identity of Philosophia's patient becomes less distinct, creating a space within the text for audiences to participate. Although the dialogue between Philosophia and Boethius is intimate, she speaks to a multitude of participants. She refers to her intellectual followers collectively, for example, when she describes being assaulted by ignorant fools: "Itaque nihil est quod admirere si in hoc vitae salo circumflantibus agitemur procellis . . . At . . . securi totius furiosi tumultus . . . " ("And so it is no wonder that in this sea of life we are buffeted by storms . . . but . . . we are safe from all of their tumult . . . " I.3.11 and 14). The audience is invited to join the safety of Philosophia's ranks. The subject position of the prisoner within the text is open to any audience who feels confined by corporeal restraints—like the later King Alfred under threat of the Vikings—and therefore any participant in the intellectual exercises

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[10] Robert McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 213 and 264.

constructed by Philosophia participates as one of her patients. Siobhan Nash-Marshall argues

that although the doctrine of participation remains undefined within the Boethian corpus,

participation is nevertheless a key concept in Boethian philosophy.[11] He encourages audiences to

participate in the intellectual cultivation constructed over the course of the *Consolation*, and,

ultimately, participation in basic textual interpretation and introspection—which I will identify as

the Boethian dialectic—leads audiences to more sophisticated levels of understanding that

renders, "Omnis . . . beatus deus . . . participatione," ("every happy man [is] divine by

participation," III.10.25). It is therefore necessary at times to refer to Philosophia's plural

prisoners to include the participating audience of Boethius's text.

Philosophia identifies herself as the ageless leader of intellects, guiding humans to pursue

timeless, spiritual happiness. She is opposed to Fortuna, who represents the flux of earthly goods

and the transience of happiness that is rooted in the material realm. Philosophia's curative

program raises Boethius's intellect not only above the prison that keeps him, but also she raises

him above the corrupt world in which he is embroiled. Philosophia's discourse identifies the

transience of the material realm with Fortuna, an allegorical figure who governs Creation

according to the principles of her whirling wheel of fortune. Fortuna is described as a monster

(II.1.3), a blind goddess (II.1.11), and Philosophia encourages her protégé to reject Fortuna,

along with faith in earthly delights, explaining, "Si perfidiam perhorrescis, sperne atque abice

perniciosa ludentem." ("If you tremble at her treachery, then spurn and reject her game of

destruction." II.1.12). Fortuna is further disempowered as she is only represented by Philosophia.

Fortuna is not a character who actually appears in the narrative of the *Consolation*; rather, her

perspective is performed by Philosophia, who puppets Fortuna as a way of bringing her

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[11] Siobhan Nash-Marshall, *Participation and the Good: A Study in Boethian Metaphysics* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2000), 3.

perspective and arguments to bear on Boethius's accusations that the material realm is cruel. Jon

Whitman explains that this prosopopoeia indicates Philosophia's subordination of Fortuna by

robbing her of her voice.[12] Similarly, even before audiences encounter Philosophia or Fortuna,

Boethius is beset by the Muses, feminine allegorical figures who are with the prisoner even

before the opening lines of *Consolation*. As they direct Boethius to articulate his grief,

Philosophia calls them "scenicas meretriculas" (theatrical whores, I.1.8), and demands that they

"meis[] eum Musis curandum sanandumque relinquite!" (leave him to my Muses to cure and to

care for him, I.1.11). Insulting and banishing the Muses of poetry, Philosophia performs an

important distinction in Boethian values regarding literary production: sentimental poetry is

harmful. It renders Boethius's *stilus* (pen, I.1.1) *infructuosis spinis* (sterile thorns, I.2.9).

Devoting his creative energies to philosophical discourse is far more fruitful. Literary genres,

like other binaries in *Consolation*, are located within either the material realm or the intelligible

realm, the body or the mind. Sylvia Huot analyzes the poem that opens *Consolation* as a song

> . . . replete with bodily imagery: Boethius's face is wet with tears, his eyes stream, his
>
> hair is prematurely grey, his skin loose and sagging, his body weakened (*CP* 1.M1.1-12).
>
> This is a poetic discourse that constructs the self not only as dominated by desire and
>
> pain, but as determined by the frailties of the flesh . . . The mad theatricality of the Muses
>
> that is condemned so strikingly by Philosophy is thus associated with an imprisonment in
>
> the body, a confusion of the body with the self, whereby the miserable victim of Desire
>
> can only act out, through bodily symptoms, the condition of impotence and loss.[13]

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[12] Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 115-6.

[13] Sylvia Huot, ""Guillaume de Machaut and the Consolation of Poetry," *Modern Philology* 100.2 (2002): 192-3.

Sentimental poetry, informed by the artistic Muses, is superficial—even harmful—because sentimental poetry exacerbates one's attachment to earthly goods, even when it is positive, fostering emotional attachments to transitory things. Philosophia and the literary endeavor she inspires for Boethius are curative and productive because philosophical matters as literature promote intellectual cultivation for and beyond the self. Poetry leads one deeper into one's feelings of desire and thus their own lack, but a philosophical text codifies one's personal understanding of philosophical matters and transmits the discourse to others, leading one to a more complete understanding—completion being a perfect attribute associated with divinity (III.10).

The Muses and Fortuna's subordination to Philosophia indicative of the Boethian dualism that informs much of the literary and philosophical content of the *Consolation*, privileging the mind over the body. For example, Philosophia has fashioned her own dress, and she wove into the fabric the Greek letters Π and Θ, connected by an embroidered staircase (I.1.5). Boethius does not elaborate on these symbols here, but most agree that *Pi* signifies practical philosophy, or that which is derived from observations made from the material realm, and *Theta* signifies theoretical philosophy, which he describes more thoroughly in his two commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge*.[14] Practical philosophy is concerned with experience and the natural laws that order the material realm, which corresponds to Fortuna. Philosophia's role is to educate humans and to draw them upwards to the abstract reasoning of theoretical philosophy.

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[14] Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5; Catherine E. Léglu and Stephen J. Milner, "Introduction: Encountering Consolation," in *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Catherine E. Léglu and Stephen J. Milner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2; S. J. Tester, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 132, fnt. a; Moorhead, " Boethius's Life and Late Antique Philosophy," 23; James J. O'Donnell, *Boethius Consolatio Philosophiae Notes* (Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr Commentaries, 1990), 2, n. 4.

Consolation further distinguishes between the material realm and the intelligible realm, a distinction that corresponds neatly to mind-body dualism. The material realm is the earthly, lower realm that is inhabited by bodies, and is susceptible to the wheel of Fortuna, therefore the material realm is marked by constant change and corruption. The intelligible realm on the other hand is the higher realm of ideas, in the Platonic sense of immutable perfect forms, to which Philosophia directs her pupils. Fortuna and practical philosophy are subordinate to Philosophia and theoretical philosophy. Fortuna and Philosophia are located within a hierarchy that privileges Philosophia, the mind, and intellectual practices over Fortuna, the body, and earthly goods.

Boethius's mind-body dichotomy corresponds to social hierarchies that privilege masculinity, and thus, in the context of the *Consolation*, the mind. Boethius's prevalent separation of mind from body organized according to the masculine-feminine model outlined by Pierre Bourdieu, cited in the introduction to this dissertation.[15] According to this prevalent ontology, the intelligible realm, and the purview of the mind, are implicitly gendered masculine; conversely, the material realm, and matters of the body, are implicitly gendered feminine. Organizing subjects into culturally constructed systems of opposition, and even attributing gender to them, appears to be seamless, and so foundational to our experiences, thus obfuscating the very apparatus by which masculinity maintains a privileged position.[16] The gender binary that maintains masculine domination is culturally constructed, observable across many cultures, seemingly monolithic, and informs other binary models. Mind-body dualism is so pervasive that much of Western thought, informed by Neoplatonism, has inherited these binary oppositions, but as Leslie Lockett argues "Western views of the mind-body relationship are neither 'natural' nor

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[15] Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 104-5.
[16] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 168.

'objectively true' but culturally constructed and idiosyncratic."[17] Nevertheless, Boethian dualism

maintains the gender binary, which influences the transmission and reception of the *Consolation*.

The gender disparity observed by Bourdieu is evident in the social circumstances and

citations of authority in Boethius's text as he describes the conditions that characterize his own

family, and thus the gender connotations that organize networks of knowledge and power.

Following his imprisonment, Boethius's wife, Rusticiana, is described as loathing the conditions

of her life, languishing in misery, and breathing only for her beloved Boethius (II.4.6). This

description of Rusticiana conforms to conventional expressions of grief associated with women

in Latin poetry.[18] Nevertheless, exhibiting the influence of patriarchal social conditions, "good"

women are expected to care for men; the states of their lives are determined by the men they

support, and their loyalty to them. Men, on the other hand, like Symmachus (Rusticiana's father),

Boethius, and his sons, also named Symmachus and Boethius, participate in sociopolitical

institutions and intellectual achievements (II.4.7). The gender dichotomy that privileges men and

subordinates women is apparent in the circumstances surrounding the historical Boethius.

Patriarchal powers are also evident in the epistemological sources facilitating Philosophia's

curative program; although Philosophia—an allegorical woman—maintains a position of

privilege over the course of Boethius's text, she relies on the intellectual contributions of men,

and explicit citations of their names, to validate her authority. She cites Plato (I.4.5 and III.9.32),

Socrates (I.4.24), Cicero (V.4.1), Euripides (III.6.1), Anaxagoras and Zeno (I.3.9). She refers to

the experiences of Orpheus (III.m12.40-51), Agamemnon, and Hercules (IV.m7.1-35). Finally,

she directs audiences to the one true good, who is a masculine God. Men comprise the sources

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[17] Leslie Lockett, "Embodiment, Metaphor, and the Mind in Old English Narrative," in *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English,* ed. David Herman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 59.

[18] Aaron M. Seider, "Catullan Myths: Gender, Mourning, and the Death of a Brother" *Classical Antiquity* 35.2 (2016): 280.

and subjects of intellectual and cultural authority, and women as abstractions act as mediators who can be accessed, possessed, and shared among men.

Philosophia herself is transparently composed by a male author who renders her body a text to be read, interpreted, and enjoyed by himself, within the narrative as a character and beyond as the fruit of his textual production. Women as abstract virtues are subject to patriarchal systems of subordination. Boethius does not express any desires to have sex with Philosophia, but this is not beyond the realm of possibility. To the contrary, Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing argue that the feminine personification of Philosophia, "is no woman. . . . [because] the patristic imaginary disciplines and crafts for symbolic use a female body evidently perceived to be otherwise indiscriminate and out of control."[19] Philosophia's myriad intersecting identity categories and allegorical nature result in multiple relations to the prisoner and his audience. She is beloved by the prisoner as far more than just a maternal figure; she is his instructor, physician, and intimate familiar. Imagery regarding Philosophia is suggestive as she comes to Boethius's bed to revive his faculties, laying on hands like a physician, with erotic potential (I.2.5). He notices early that other men have torn her clothing from her body even before he recognizes who she is (I.1.5). Léglu and Milner interpret this scenario as the "erotics of being ministered to by an attractive lady over whom others have previously fought."[20] Then, she turns Boethius away from the *infructuosis spinis* (sterile thorns) of overly emotional poetic lamentations to her own *fructibus rationis* (fruits of reason) (I.2.9). She observes things in Boethius have "in tumorem perturbationibus influentibus induruerunt" ("hardened into a swelling having been influenced by disturbances," I.5.12). Meanwhile, she continues to tantalize her patient with ambiguities such as, "quanto ardore flagrares si quonam te ducere aggrediamur agnosceres!" ("how you would

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[19] Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 157.
[20] Léglu and Milner, "Introduction: Encountering Consolation," 12.

burn with desire if you knew where I am going to lead you!" III.1.4). Beyond her relationship

with Boethius, she is disseminated to male-dominated audiences. Homosocial relationships

transmitted through literature between male intellectuals are normalized—or at least

obfuscated—as heterosexual desire for Philosophia's contrived feminine body. Patriarchal

powers implicitly exercise dominance through diffuse means. Within *Consolation* and its cultural

context, authority is male-dominated and Latin.

Boethius himself represents masculine authority and networks of power. He is, quite

simply, a patriarch. Anglo-Saxons were probably familiar with him as Saint Severinus, a church

father, as he is described in the *vitae* that would have been available to Alfred during his

translation process because they were included in transmissions of Boethius's *Consolation*. In

the *vitae*, Boethius is depicted as a righteous hero against the wicked: "Cum uero theodoricus rex

uoluit tyrannidem exercere in urbe ac bonos quosque ex senatu neci dare, boetius uero eius dolos

effugere gestiens. . ." (When King Theoderic wanted to exercise tyranny in the city and to

sentence good men of the senate to death, truly Boethius quickly [eschewed] these devices. . .).[21]

According to this account, Boethius defended good people against a tyrant. Indeed, Alfred's own

rendition of Boethius's life describes:

> Se Ðeodric wæs Amulinga; he wæs cristen, þeah he on þam Arrianiscan gedwolan
>
> þurhwunode. He gehet Romanum his freondscipe swa þæt hi mostan heora ealdrihta
>
> wyrðe beon. Ac he þa gehat swiðe yfele gelæste and swiðe wraðe geendode mid
>
> manegum mane; þæt wæs toeacan oðrum unarimedum yflum þæt he Iohannes þone
>
> papan het ofslean. . . . [Boetius] ongan he smeagan and leornigan on him selfum hu he

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[21] *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolationis libri quinque*, ed. R. Peiper (Leipzig: Teubner, 1871), *vita* I, page xxx.

þæt rice þam unrihtwisan cyninge aferran mihte, and on ryhtgeleaffulra and on rihtwisra

anwealde gebringan. (1.6-11 and 17-19)[22]

Theoderic was an Amuling; he was Christian, but he persisted in the Arian heresy. He

promised the Romans his friendship so they must be honored with their old rights. But he

kept that promise very poorly, and ended with many crimes; in addition to his other

countless evils, he ordered Pope John to be killed. . . . Boethius began to think and to

study in himself how he might rid the kingdom of that unrighteous king, and to bring

power to those of right belief and the righteous.[23]

Theoderic is a heretic. Boethius dies for his faith alongside the pope. He is a good Christian who

champions the faith and promotes righteousness through his texts. By the accounts available to

Anglo-Saxons, Boethius is a noble Roman patriarch, who represents the dominant Latin

intellectual culture.

Latin literature and learning exert masculine domination over other medieval vernacular

cultures, specifically Old English. Latin language and culture itself evokes reverence because of

its longevity relative to other medieval languages and because of its connections to institutions of

power like the Roman empire and the Catholic church. The ancient Roman Empire stretched

beyond present-day Europe to include portions of Africa and Asia; it lasted from 27 B.C.E. to

about 400 C.E. Latin language and literatures attained a privileged status by spreading across

medieval Europe as the unifying vernacular of the West. In the wake of Roman conquest and the

subsequent reverence for Roman culture, church, government, and records were predominantly

written in Latin. It was the language of medieval civilization. Moving across national borders

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[22] Old English quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, edited by Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine with Mark Griffith and Rohini Jayatilaka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[23] Late Modern English translations of Alfred's Old English text are my own.

and connecting medieval *literati*, well-educated and literate people, with an ancient heritage,

Latin seemed spatiotemporally unhindered. Christian tradition privileges Hebrew, Greek, and

Latin because these were the languages used by God. Latin, borrowing from Hebrew and Greek,

maintaining associations with classical literature, and codified by a seemingly incorruptible

linguistic structure that was presumed to move soundly across spatiotemporal borders, had

accrued an air of intellectual incorruptibility.[24]

     Latin is associated with intellectual practices, the life of the mind, and like the dualism

described above, masculine domination. Latin commands authority because it is a cultural

currency backed by historical narratives, spatiotemporal expansion (over lands and over

generations), and communal bonds. Latin is the language of philosophy, poetry, and Scripture.

As the Roman empire spread over the West, Latin was the language of the conquerors, the

dominant culture. Latin is a symbol of the cultural authority that has been accumulated through

historical experience. Although he limits his observations to his contemporary social

circumstances, Bourdieu acknowledges the gendering of international relations according to the

gendered organizing principle that informs the dualism discussed above.[25] Similarly, in the

medieval period, Latin was identified as intellectual and incorruptible—qualities generally

associated with masculinity. Vernacular languages, or "mother tongues," were identified with

oral transmission, thus corporeality, and change—qualities generally associated with

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[24] As previously cited in the introduction, Michael W. Herren notes that some medieval grammars emulate Latin grammatical structures as a model for other medieval vernacular languages, "Latin and the Vernacular Languages," in *Medieval Latin: an Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Frank Mantello and Anthony Carl Rigg (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 126. Latin, of course, did change. See Margaret Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 108.

[25] For example, Bourdieu specifically identifies modern United States and United Kingdom as masculine and France as feminine because the former is associated with "hard" masculine disciplines of law and technology, whereas the latter is associated with the "soft" feminine humanities, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 105, Footnote 39.

femininity.[26] Latin exerts masculine domination over mother tongues like the Anglo-Saxon vernacular, a gendered orientation that is reinforced by the reception of intellectual traditions across cultures.

Alfred's Authority and Anglo-Saxon Orientations to Power

More than 300 years after Boethius's execution, Alfred was born around 849 to Æthelwulf, king of the West Saxons. As the youngest son of six children, Alfred witnessed infighting between his brothers and their father, and eventually, the deaths of every one of them. Their people, the Anglo-Saxons, confronted massive invasions by Viking forces, the Danes, who destroyed property, wiped out families, and enslaved many. The Danes had conquered East Anglia in 869, before Alfred's succession, and from this locale they strategically conquered more lands. After gaining York and Mercia in 874, they turned their assault towards one of the last remaining strongholds of the Anglo-Saxons, Wessex. Alfred succeeded to the crown in 871. Seven years later, in 878, Alfred was forced into hiding and guerilla warfare tactics. Meanwhile, he suffered an unidentified intestinal ailment that caused him great pain. Despite these setbacks, Alfred succeeded in warfare and political compromise against Viking forces, and his rigorous reformation of military, economic, and educational reforms are remarkable.[27]

Perhaps Alfred, who witnessed so much destruction, took comfort in Boethius's explanation that even the injustices of the material realm are still governed by divine rule (IV.3-4). Alfred interpreted the Vikings' increasing hostility and their turn towards settlement as a plight delivered by God. Anglo-Saxons were being punished for having lost their intellectual

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[26] Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters*, 85-6; Kenneth Charlton, *Women, Religion and Education* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 142-53; and Catherine E. Karkov, "The Mother's Tongue and the Father's Prose," *Parallax* 18.3 (2012): 28.

[27] See Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 116-118.

culture. In the preface to Alfred's translation of Gregory's *Liber pastoralis* (Cotton Tiberius B. xi) he describes the social context in which he translates these Latin texts. He addresses his bishops, regretting that

> Swa clæne hio wæs oðfeallenu on Angelkynne ðætte swiðe feawe wæron behionan
>
> Humbre þe hiora ðenunga cuðen understandan on Englisc, oððe furðum an ærendgewrit
>
> of Lædene on Englisc areccan. . . . [Ð]a gemunde ic eac hu ic geseah, ærþæmþe hit eall
>
> forheregod wære and forbærned, hu þa cirican geond eall Angelkynn stodon maðma and
>
> boca gefylda and eac micel menigu Godes ðeowa and þa swiðe lytle feorme ðara boca
>
> wiston, forþæmþe hie heora nan wuht ongietan ne meahton, forþæmþe hie næron on
>
> hiora ægen geðeode awritene. (3.13-16 and 5.8-13)[28]
>
> So thoroughly had [learning] fallen off in England that there were very few this side of
>
> the Humber who could understand their services in English, or even translate a letter
>
> from Latin into English. . . . Then I remembered how I saw, before it was all devastated
>
> and burned, how the churches through all England stood filled with treasures and books,
>
> and also a great many of God's servants. Yet they knew very little use for the books,
>
> because they could not obtain an understanding of anything of the [books] because they
>
> were not written in their own language.[29]

According to Alfred's overview, secure dominion is a matter of might and mind. To save themselves from the Vikings, and to maintain their hold on Wessex, Alfred's people needed intellectual revivification alongside military reform. The best way to maintain power within the material realm was to cultivate affluence within the intelligible realm. And so Alfred spearheaded a translation program to address his people's Latin deficiency and to connect them

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[28] *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. Henry Sweet, EETS 45 (London, 1871).

[29] All translations of Old English and Latin excerpts are mine.

to Latin texts—much like Boethius had attempted to connect his contemporaries to earlier Greek texts.

At the end of the ninth century, King Alfred translated Boethius's Latin *Consolation* into West Saxon.[30] The Alfredian translation program also includes Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, Augustine's *Soliloquies*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, and Psalms 1–50. Alfred's renaissance inspired the additional compositions of Gregory's *Dialogues* by Bishop Wærferth of Worcester, the anonymous West Saxon translation of Orosius's *History Against the Pagans*, the anonymous translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, and the founding entries of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.[31]

Whether or not Alfred actually translated Boethius's *Consolation*, and the parameters of his authorship, is a matter of debate. Malcolm Godden has argued that Alfred did not actually write anything himself, but that the texts issued under his name were merely authorized by him. He explains that the author of the Old English *Boethius* must have been intimately familiar with the Latin text and the Latin glosses, and he must be proficient enough read Boethius's dense arguments and render them eloquently into the mother tongue of the Anglo-Saxons. Citing Asser's *Vita Alfredi*, Godden argues that this simply would not have been possible if we accept that Alfred did not begin to translate Latin until he was thirty-nine years old. Godden concludes

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[30] The extent to which Alfred participated in the translations attributed to his name is debatable, and I treat this matter more carefully below.

[31] Attributions of these texts are also not without contention. Malcolm Godden argues that the translator of the Old English *Orosius* must have relied on a glossed copy of the Latin text that originates from the East Frankish kingdom of the late ninth century, rather than late antique sources, and therefore the Old English *Orosius* cannot be attributed to Alfred's renaissance, "The Old English *Orosius* and its Sources," *Anglia-Zeitschrift für englische Philologie* 129.3 (2011) 297-320. Similarly, Sharon Rowley argues that the Old English version of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* exhibits concepts and discourse that diverge from the source text significantly, but also bear no similarities to those associated with Alfredian texts—specifically that it fails to contribute to a master narrative of the English nation. Rowley identifies this translation as the work of a lone writer of the West Midlands who was familiar with the Alfredian corpus, but not a contributor to it, *The Old English Version of Bede's* Historia Ecclesiastica (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), 51-56.

that Alfred merely authorized the texts, and that if we acknowledge this, then scholarship is freed

from a royalist interpretation that is too preoccupied by the authority of the king as writer.[32]

Godden and Irvine explain that we cannot reliably assume that Alfred is the author of these texts

because the prefaces that give him attribution seem to have been written after his reign.

Additionally, no contemporary texts attest to Alfred's authorship of the *Boethius*. And, assuming

that the Old English *Pastoral Care* is indeed the work of Alfred—for which Godden and Irvine

acknowledge there is more substantial evidence, although they are not entirely convinced—the

linguistic and stylistic similarities that it shares with the *Boethius* are not sufficient.[33] Paramjit S.

Gill, Tim B. Swartz, and Michael Treschow employ a quantitative approach to the language and

style of the Alfredian corpus, concluding ultimately that Alfred did indeed translate *Pastoral*

Care, *Consolation*, and *Soliloquies*, but not *Psalms*.[34] Janet Bately, however, argues that their

sample is too small and that their study fails to consider distribution patterns in relation to the

content of the Latin source texts and available Old English diction. Bately maintains that Alfred

did not work alone, but that he is the unifying author behind the Old English translations of

Pastoral Care, Consolation, Soliloquies, and *Psalms*.[35] Bately acknowledges that Alfred

conferred with his learned entourage, but ultimately he approved the final translations. Some

variations appear across texts, or even within the same work, but these may be evidence of the

continued evolution and refinement of Alfred's style. Also, Bately explains, we ought not to

forget the fact that he was king—his obligations did not afford the same swaths of time to

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[32] Malcolm R. Godden, "Did King Alfred Write Anything?" *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007): 1-23.
[33] Godden and Irvine, "Authorship and Date," in *The Old English Boethius* 1:141-3.
[34] Paramjit S. Gill, Tim B. Swartz, and Michael Treschow, "A Stylometric Analysis of King Alfred's Literary Works," *Journal of Applied Statistics* 34 (2007): 1251-8.
[35] Janet M. Bately, "Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything?: The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited," *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009): 189-215.

translate passages at length. Finally, we can observe lexical, syntactical, and stylistic similarities that unite the Old English *Pastoral Care*, *Boethius*, and *Psalms*.[36]

I acknowledge that matters of authorship are complicated and that Alfred's physical act of putting ink to paper is probably more limited than our contemporary concepts of authorship might presume. It is far more likely that Alfred's translations are heavily informed by his circle of scholars. Alfred is responsible for organizing the scholars and directing their tasks. His social, political, and literary goals guide them. Alfred participated in the translation process. Finally, he authorized the texts that were developed under his name. The content of the *Boethius* suggests Alfred's personal affinity for the text, particularly his treatment of kingship and proper rule. In the case of the *Boethius* in particular, I want to add that the matter of kingship and proper rule, with which the Old English is especially interested, is evidence that this text was not only translated by Alfred, but that it is a text with which he resonated, perhaps given the difficult circumstances shared by the destitute prisoner and the downtrodden king. Transmissions of power via literary production are explicitly connected to the king. The texts that comprise the Alfredian corpus represent a significant source of cultural authority that contributes to the emergence of an English identity, inviting further consideration of Alfred's literary construction of an English cultural identity.[37]

The Old English *Boethius* survives in two forms: The earliest is the B Manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 180), a prose translation of the late eleventh or early twelfth century. The preface to the C Manuscript (London, BL Cotton Otho A.vi) explains that the B text was composed first, then Alfred converted the appropriate sections into Old English alliterative

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[36] Janet M. Bately, "Alfred as Author and Translator," in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. Nicole Guenther Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 113-142.
[37] Malcolm R. Godden, "Did King Alfred Write Anything?" 18.

verse.[38] The C text mimics the prosimetric style of the Latin *Consolation*, exhibiting much of the same lexicon and very little variation from the B text.[39] The B Manuscript is the closest extant version of Alfred's original composition, although the preface attributing the text to Alfred is most likely a later addition. Parallel diction in both the B and C texts indicates that they either share a source, or that one is the source for the other. Godden and Irvine explain that the prose version of the B text must be prior because prosaic diction and syntax frequently occur in the meters of the C text resulting in metrical irregularities.[40] I limit my observations to the B text because it is more likely to reflect Alfred's original composition, and because it bears a distinctly original Anglo-Saxon claim to cultural authority.

Alfred's translation program transmits Latin texts while constructing Anglo-Saxon cultural authority. Audiences are explicitly informed by the preface to the B text that Alfred's translation takes some liberties as "hwilum he sette word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgite, swa swa he hit þa sweotolost and andgitfullicast gereccan" ("sometimes he set it down word for word, and sometimes sense for sense, just as he could most clearly and most intelligibly translate it," Preface 2-4). Alfred does indeed deviate from his source text, inflecting the discourse with distinctly Anglo-Saxon references. For example, the *Boethius* is explicitly Christian, including numerous biblical citations, whereas the original *Consolation* is theologically ambiguous, referring to the divine in Neoplatonic terms. Additionally, Alfred's text includes nautical

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[38] A fragment of a single leaf, the Napier Fragment, is speculated to be the earliest known copy of the *Boethius*. It was reported and transcribed by A. S. Napier in 1886 as the last leaf in Bodleian MS Junius 86, and was probably used for binding before this. Walter J. Sedgefield reported the leaf missing in 1898. Godden and Irvine, "The Manuscripts of the OE *Boethius*," in *The Old English Boethius* 1:34-5.

[39] Discenza, "The Old English *Boethius*," in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. Nicole Guenther Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 200; and Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, "The Composition of the Metres," in *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), I:80-134.

[40] Godden and Irvine, "Authorship and Date," in *The Old English Boethius* I:80-82.

metaphors that are not present in the Latin text to illustrate some of the philosophical

discussions, and various omissions and alterations appear to be composed with his immediate

Anglo-Saxon audience in mind (addressed below). In "The Making of *Angelcynn*: English

Identity before the Norman Conquest," Sarah Foot argues that one of the ways King Alfred

united the English people was to build on the work of Bede and to promote the term *Angelcynn*,

thus establishing a common cultural identity in language. Alfred employs literature to construct a

unified cultural identity for his people that supports and surpasses his immediate political

ambitions. Foot explains:

> The word *Angelcynn* is first found in one Mercian charter of the 850s from Worcester,
>
> where it was used to distinguish those of English origin from foreigners and was
>
> apparently synonymous with the Latin *Angli*. But it becomes common only in the last two
>
> decades of the ninth century when it appears in a variety of texts associated with the
>
> Alfredian court, notably in works which were part of the king's programme of
>
> educational reform and revival. This implies that it was not chosen unwittingly but,
>
> together with the subject matter of the texts themselves, it was part of an attempt to
>
> promote a nascent conception of one people.[41]

Alfred's literary program constructs a cultural foundation authorized by the king. Some critics

have acknowledged the limits of Alfred's translation program—that it was intended for young

men of the nobility—but Foot argues that Alfred's reforms were intended to extend beyond the

immediacy of a rarefied court society. His texts were read by free men of means, but they were

composed for the benefit of all of his people. Specifically, Alfred's law-code demanded a

swearing of oaths to instill a shared Englishness across a wider audience. Furthermore, the

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[41] Sarah Foot, "The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity Before the Norman Conquest," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 29-30.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was initiated by his court to codify a shared identity for the diverse

people of Wessex, and later contributions would extend the Chronicle's reach beyond this

border, recognizing the expansion and dominion of the English people well after Alfred's

reign.[42]

Alfred's Old English translations cull power from cultural centers like Rome to authorize

his own right to rule. He locates himself within noble heritages by quoting the laws of Moses and

the early laws of the separate kingdoms of Kent, Mercia, and Wessex. His literary production

includes an Anglo-Saxon law code that unites the kingdoms under his lordship.[43] Ross Smythe

observes that Alfred combines the Hebrew law of Moses with his own updates in his law code,

Domboc, because Alfred understood his authority to come directly from God.[44] Some of Alfred's

authority is translated from his source texts as well as from the very performance of translating.

David Pratt explains that the role of the translator implies a written record of reading, and so the

present text is authorized by the image of an active king, reading, replicating, and

communicating directly with his people.[45] Pratt treats the Alfredian corpus as a tool for his

authority. He explains,

> The transformative capacity of literacy has long been identified in its status as a mental
>
> technology, powerfully open-ended in its effect on thought and behavior. This was

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[42] Sarah Foot, "The Making of *Angelcynn*," 37. Foot acknowledges that English nationhood did not evolve in a linear fashion from its textual roots in Bede's work and its impetus in Alfred's translation program; the shared identity only became permanent under the rule of Edgar, Foot 47.

[43] Sarah Foot, "The Making of *Angelcynn*," 30.

[44] *Domboc*, or "book of judgments," was composed late in his reign, as a legislative text that combines Mosaic and apostolic law with a code attributed to King Ine of Wessex, and Alfred's own laws. Alfred's *Domboc* survives in: "E" Cambridge, Corpus Christi College; "Ot" British Library Cotton Otho B.xi; "G" British Library Cotton Nero A.i; "Bu" British Library Burney MS 277; "B" Corpus Christi College 383; and "H" *Textus Roffensis*; Ross Smythe, "King Alfred's Translations: Authorial Integrity and the Integrity of Authority," *Quaestio Insularis* 4 (2003): 112.

[45] David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 169.

inherent in the character of royal discourse, controlling mental processes as the primary

function of authorship.[46] . . . Alfredian theatre lay in its exploitation of literacy as a form

of mental technology, extending beyond direct interaction to include more open-ended

priorities of wisdom and self-restraint.[47]

Nicole Guenther Discenza explains that the Old English *Boethius* is an important text for

Alfredian reform and education because as he renders the Latin text accessible to an Anglo-

Saxon audience by means of the vernacular. Alfred's culturally sensitive imagery enriches his

audience while authorizing himself as a political and spiritual leader.[48] Through his translation,

Alfred transfers Boethius's prestige to himself, and he passes cultural capital from his source to

his readers, rendering himself a conduit for wisdom. Cultural capital refers to the ideas and

education that operate economically within a stratified society to facilitate an advantaged social

status.[49] Latin learning and culture is one particular example of cultural capital that has been

acquired, employed, and disseminated because of the reverence with which it is traditionally

treated. Alfred's transmissions of knowledge and power construct an Old English literary

heritage by which power disseminates from Latin authorities to authorize Anglo-Saxon culture.

Alfred employs narrative to transfer power from his sources to his people, following

traditional models of *translatio studii*. The introduction to this dissertation traces the traditional

dissemination of knowledge and power along an East to West trajectory from Greece to Rome to

England, so that England identifies a noble intellectual heritage rooted in Rome. Informed by this

model, Alfred, in his preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, imparts cultural capital that

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[46] Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, 166.

[47] Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, 179.

[48] Nicole Guenther Discenza, *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English* Boethius (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 7.

[49] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. E. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 243-4.

originates with Gregory the Great, is carried over by Augustine of Canterbury, and taken up by Alfred before he transmits his texts to his people. This *translatio studii* draws on religious authorities to validate Alfred's power as the divinely inspired leader of his people.[50] With the *Boethius*, Alfred's authority as translator and philosopher is carried over from his Latin source text, and presumably, the Roman author, Boethius. Alfred employs literature as a technology of power to equip his audience to actively participate in noble intellectual practices. Alfred constructs a literary culture of *Angelcynn* that emerges from dominant centers of power like Rome and Jerusalem, a noble heritage that is communicated, not merely by blood, but by practice: "ælces monnes god and his æþelo ma on þam mode þonne on þam flæsce" ("All of a man's good and nobility is more in the mind than in the flesh," 30.32-33). This same expression is repeated eighteen lines later, only more emphatically, as Wisdom insists that "ryhtæþelo bið on þam mode næs on þam flæsce" ("true nobility is in the mind, it is not in the flesh," 30.49-50). The content of Alfred's translation connects Anglo-Saxon audiences to Roman cultural capital. This connection is fostered by intellectual cultivation and identification, rather than any direct line of descent carried through blood.

Moreover, Alfred's particular *translatio studii et imperii* situates his kingdom within a prophetic narrative that privileges Anglo-Saxons. According to Daniel 2, 7, and 8, history will be divided into four world empires, ushering in the Final Judgment that shall leave only the New Jerusalem. These particular passages from Daniel are metaphorical, respectively supplying images of a statue made of four metals, four beasts, and a ram with up to four horns at one time. The empires to which these images refer are a matter of debate. The Old English *Orosius* associated with Alfred's court, but no longer thought to have been translated by him, identifies

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[50] Nicole Guenther Discenza, "Alfred's Verse Preface to the *Pastoral Care* and the Chain of Authority," *Neophilologus* 85 (2001) 625-633, at 626.

Babylon, Greece, Carthage, and Rome as the four world empires of Christian prophecy.[51] In his

Preface to the Old English translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, King Alfred alludes to the

legend of the four world empires, explaining that,

> Ða gemunde ic hu sio æ wæs ærest on Ebreisc geðiode funden, and eft, ða hie Creacas
>
> geliornodon, ða wendon hie hie on hiora agen geðiode ealle, and eac ealle oðre bec and
>
> eft Lædenware swæ same, siððan hie hie geliornodon, hie hie wendon eala ðurh wise
>
> wealhstodas on hiora agen geðiode. (5.25-7.4)[52]
>
> Then I remembered how the law was first rendered in the Hebrew language, and
>
> afterwards, when the Greeks learned it, they translated all of it into their own language,
>
> and also all other books. And later the Romans did just so; after they learned them, they
>
> translated all of them through wise translators into their own language.

Alfred identifies a system of *translatio studii et imperii* that follows the same course mapped by

the world empires cited in *Orosius*, and he identifies his translation project as the fourth

participant in this literary translation of power. England's intellectual heritage, however, may not

conform so neatly to the traditional East to West model of *translatio studii et imperii* that Alfred

attempts to codify. Kristen Carella has traced Alfred's method of translating authority to

Hiberno-Latin influences that he would have encountered in the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*,

a Latin collection of canon law, excerpts from Scripture, and Irish synods and penitentials, which

demonstrates the ways in which synods could be composed beyond the Roman church to modify

ecclesiastical law to meet the idiosyncrasies of a people.[53] Informed by the Hiberno-Latin

translatio studii et imperii—a slight detour from the normative East-West model—Alfred was

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[51] *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Bately, EETS 6 (London, 1980), 36.12-16 and 132.24-133.28.
[52] *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. Henry Sweet, EETS 45 (London, 1871). 5.25-7.4.
[53] This article was published under the name Bryan Carella "Evidence for Hiberno-Latin Thought in the Prologue to the Laws of Alfred," *Studies in Philology* 108.1 (2011): 25.

divinely inspired to alter laws to render them relevant and accessible to his people. In his preface to his translation of Augustine's *Soliloquia* he describes his literary production like building a house from the material provided by Church Fathers (1-14). Despite this detour from traditional models, Alfred cites the transmission of knowledge from east to west, originating in Israel, moving through Greece, taken up by Rome, and ending in Britain, alluding to the legend of the four world empires that comprise Christian history. Fabienne Michelet explains that Alfred situates Britain "on par with Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome" by including his own realm as the last of the four empires.[54] And because the British Isles mark the western edge of Christian dominion, his kingdom stands as the resolution to Christian history, with potentially eschatological implications (to which I will return in the following chapter on *Dream of the Rood*).

Mommie Queerest: Speaking the Father's Prose with the Mother Tongue

Reimagining Boethius's allegorical figure, Philosophia, Alfred constructs Wisdom as a mother whom he describes with masculine pronouns. Wisdom is simultaneously masculine and maternal, representing a confluence of patriarchal Latin culture associated with masculine domination, and Anglo-Saxon culture and mother tongue taught by mothers in the home. Wisdom's queer representation combines Latin patrilineal epistemologies with Anglo-Saxon matrilineal sources of learning to facilitate Alfred's political objective: locate his people within networks of *translatio studii et imperii* to facilitate the maintenance and expansion of his kingdom.

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[54] Fabienne L. Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 158-59. Michelet identifies Jerusalem as one of the four world empires in the quotation above; I have supplied Babylon in brackets to adjust.

In the *Consolation*, Boethius the prisoner is visited by Philosophia, who asks "Tune ille es, ait, qui nostro quondam lacte nutritus, nostris educatus alimentis in virilis animi robur evaseras?" ("Are you not he, she said, who was once nourished by our milk, reared with our food, emerged into the strength of a virile mind?" I.2.2-3). Philosophia is a maternal figure, responding to the developing needs of her protégé in both practical and intelligible matters: she nourishes the corporeal needs of her wards before attending to their intellectual development. Her maternal approach to her pupils' corporeal, then intelligible, development is implied by the characterization and metaphors within the text, including Philosophia's immediate restorative measures: First Philosophia lays on hands before she helps her patient recollect, then aspire to greater knowledge.

Alfred's rendition of this allegorical figure is named Wisdom, and *he* is also represented as a mother:

Adrigde þa mines modes eagan and hit fran bliðum wordum hwæðer hit oncneowe his foster*modor*. Mid þam þe ða þæt mod wið bewende, þa gecneow hit swiðe sweotele his agne *modor*, þæt wæs *se* wisdom ðe hit lange ær tyde and lærde. Ac hit ongeat *his* lare swiðe toterenne and swiðe tobrocene mid dysigra hondum. . . . [Wisdom] sæde þæt *his* gingran hæfdon *hine* swa totorenne þær þær hi teohhodon þæt hi *hine* eallne habban sceoldon. (3.10-18; emphasis added)

He dried my mind's eyes and asked with joyful words whether it knew his fostermother. Then when that mind turned around towards [him], then it knew very clearly his own mother, who was Wisdom, who had instructed and taught it long before. But it (Mind) saw that *his* teaching was terribly torn and dreadfully broken by the hands of fools. . . .

Wisdom said that *his* students had torn *him* like this; they supposed that they might have

all of *him*.

When the mind, or prisoner, turns and recognizes its *fostermodor*, this mother is described with

the masculine demonstrative pronoun *se,* and the masculine personal pronouns *his* and *hine*.

Alfred alters the grammatical gender of his allegorical figure, rendering Wisdom a

grammatically masculine mother. This detail is generally excused by scholars because the

masculine pronouns agree with the masculine gender of the Old English noun *wisdom*. Still, the

proximity between maternal characterization and masculine pronouns in the first textual

appearance of Wisdom disrupts traditional gender categories. Alfred would have avoided this

conflict, Discenza notes, if he had adopted the feminine *Gesceadwisnes*, meaning discernment,

for his allegorical figure. Indeed, he occasionally does. Wisdom is called *Gesceadwisnes* at 9.15,

10.28, 21.18-9, 23.17, 27.14, and 29.15-6. But Alfred does not employ these momentary

references to synthesize the allegorical figure's observable gender with the grammatical gender

imposed upon him throughout the narrative.[55] *Gesceadwisnes* operates in apposition to Wisdom,

adding variation to the means by which he is signified, similar to the ways in which the prisoner

is also referenced throughout the text as the historically specific *Boetius,* the more general *Mod*,

or Mind, and the slippery first-person pronoun *ic*, that allows audiences to substitute themselves

for the "I" of the narrative.

Even if Wisdom's maternal characterization is carried over from Philosophia's

characterization in the Latin source text, the introduction of masculine pronouns proves

problematic for Alfred's immediate audience, consisting of ecclesiastics, and aristocrats and their

children.[56] As I discussed in the previous section, Alfred's preface to *Pastoral Care* anticipates a

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[55] Discenza, *The King's English*, 89 n. 18.
[56] David Pratt, *Political Thought of King Alfred* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 308.

contemporary audience unfamiliar with his source texts because Latin literacy and learning had

fallen into disrepair among his people. Alfred anticipates a contemporary audience who has no

previous knowledge concerning Philosophia, nor her character traits, including gender and

communal identity as mother and teacher. Interpreting Alfred's representation of Wisdom, then,

does not require familiarity with the characterization of Philosophia, upon whom Alfred's

characterization is based. Wisdom's representation is removed from a literary heritage that might

resolve the paradoxes of his genders. The liberties that Alfred takes are not apparent to the

audience who is unfamiliar with the *Consolation*. Alfred's contemporary audience might assume

that he is reliably conveying the content of Boethius's text.

The queerness of Wisdom's characterization is consistent in at least one other text

composed by Alfred. Wisdom is also described as an allegorical figure who invites disruption of

traditional identity categories in Alfred's translation of Augustine's *Soliloquia*. Here, the

pronouns are consistent with the traditional gender roles of Wisdom's characterization. Alfred

describes an erotic encounter with Wisdom that is *not* heteronormative:[57]

> Hu ne wost ðu nu þæt ælc þara manna þe oðerne swiðe lufað, þæt hine lyst bet þaccian
>
> and cyssan ðone oðerne on bær lic, þonne þer þær claðas beotweona beoð? Ic ongyte nu
>
> þæt (þu) lufast þone wisdom swa swiðe, and þe lyst hine swa wel nacode ongitan and
>
> gefredan þæt þu noldest þæt ænig cla ð betweuh were. Ac he hine wyle swiðe seldon
>
> ænegum mæn swa openlice ge(e)awian. On ðam timum þe he ænig lim swa bær eowian
>
> wile, þonne eowað he hyt swiðe feawum mannum. Ac ic nat hu þu hym onfon mage mid

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[57] Boethius's original literary relationship with Philosophia is heteronormative, comparatively, despite her being an allegorical figure because the gender roles and directions of desire correspond to heteronormative social patterns.

geglofedum handum. Ðu scealt æac don bær lic ongean, gyf ðu hine gefredan wilt.

(*Soliloquies* 75.20-76.8)[58]

How do you not know now that all those men who strongly love another are best pleased

to touch and to kiss the other on the bare body rather than where there are clothes

between them? I understand that you love Wisdom very much, and that you desire to

know him and to feel him naked; that you do not want any clothes between you and the

man. But he will seldom show himself so openly to any man. In those moments when he

will show any limb so bare, then he shows it to very few men. But I know not how you

can take hold of him with gloved hands. If you want to touch him, you must also place

your bare body against him.

Alfred's rendition of the pursuit of wisdom is embodied, amorous, and homoerotic. He refers to

the allegorical figure with masculine pronouns, *he* and *hine*, in quick succession, emphasizing his

masculine grammatical gender, and he describes the pursuit of wisdom as bare, male bodies,

pressed against one another, compelled to *cyssan* (to kiss) and to *þaccian* (to stroke).[59] Even

Alfred's omissions prove provocative: Discenza notes that it is probably for the best that "Alfred

omits Augustine's passage condemning men who dress as women, II.30."[60] Denying any

potential homoeroticism in Alfred's translation, Allen J. Frantzen explains that chastity, in

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[58] The parenthetical portions of the Old English, explains Thomas Carnicelli, indicate some of the many gaps in the manuscript that may be due to either a careless transcription by the scribe or corruptions in the scribe's exemplar, *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies*, ed. Thomas A. Carnicelli (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 2.
[59] Alfred also uses the verb *ongitan* meaning "to know." *Ongitan* fits neatly with the allegorical figure of Wisdom and the human longing to acquire knowledge, but *ongitan* is employed elsewhere in Old English texts with the biblical sense of sexual intimacy: In the Blickling Homilies, for example, Mary confesses, "ic nænigne wer ne *ongeat*" ("I have *known* no man," 1.72; emphasis added). The Blickling Homilies were copied in the tenth century, and so they were probably written after Alfred's translation program, but this connotation is consistent. *Ongeat* implies carnal knowledge in some cases, and in Alfred's *Soliloquies* male thinkers seek knowledge of the masculine body of Wisdom.
[60] Discenza, *The King's English*, 184 n18 to 89.

Augustine's text, is important for one's pursuit of wisdom, and that because sexual contact

between men is forbidden in Anglo-Saxon culture, Alfred employs masculine figures to convey a

pure pursuit of Wisdom with no explicit sexual overtones.[61] Frantzen's denial of Alfredian

homoeroticism is cursory. Why would Alfred deliberately change the gender of the allegorical

figure from his source text, only to bury the moral regarding chastity—which Augustine makes

explicit—within a metaphor that must be teased out by an audience who is generally unfamiliar

with these texts and their moral stipulations?[62] Ironically, Frantzen has argued against queer

approaches to literature because they implement too many intellectual acrobatics; but in this

instance, Frantzen exhausts more mental energy trying to restrict Alfred's metaphor to normative

interpretations.[63] Cultivating wisdom by means of the Alfredian corpus is intimate, intense, and,

at times, (homo)erotic.

In the Old English *Boethius*, Wisdom's intimacy with the prisoner is of a more friendly

nature. Representing a male compatriot, Wisdom markedly alters the power dynamic evinced by

his teacher persona to create camaraderie with the prisoner, as well as with the contemplative

Anglo-Saxon audience. Ruth Waterhouse and David Pratt agree that the characters of the

Boethius, when compared to the Latin *Consolation*, are friendlier and thus more appealing to the

audience.[64] His reason for conducting the philosophical program is to earn the love of his protégé

(22.38). Discenza observes Wisdom's affection for the prisoner increasing over the course of the

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[61] Allen J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 104.

[62] Alfred's Old English *Boethius* is inconsistent regarding the matter of chastity. For example, the Latin *Consolation* is forthright concerning the chastity of Rusticana, Boethius's grieving wife, but Alfred drops the matter of her devout chastity from his translation. Elsewhere, however, Alfred's translation deviates from his source text to explain that a woman suffers the pain of childbirth for having taken pleasure in sex (31.10-13).

[63] Frantzen, *Before the Closet.* 5.

[64] Ruth Waterhouse, "Tone in Alfred's Version of Augustine's *Soliloquies*," in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 47-85, at 48; and David Pratt, "The Political Thought of King Alfred," 276.

text.[65] Additionally, when Wisdom describes human attempts to understand divine foreknowledge, he explains that such inquiry is the work of "us" (39.211-213), suggesting intellectual equality with the prisoner.[66] Anne Payne interprets this to mean that Wisdom possesses less authority than Philosophy because their shared experience renders Wisdom's status attainable.[67] Although his camaraderie with the prisoner renders Wisdom more accessible, Wisdom maintains his authority over and above humans in a hierarchy of being; after all, he is still *heofencund*, or heavenly (3.2). Rather than a distant, Latin, godlike entity, Wisdom speaks with the prisoner, tête-à-tête, in English, and he practices the meditative ascent along with him, observing common limitations like the inability to grasp divine understanding. He conforms to the physical limitations of humans, unlike Philosophia. Alfred's Wisdom is no mere abstraction. He is made personable, sympathetic, and loveable.

Still, it is striking that Alfred did not simply omit the maternal characterization of his allegorical figure—especially because Wisdom is referred to as a mother so briefly and in such close proximity to masculine pronouns. Why keep this detail if it might confuse some audiences? Elsewhere, Alfred alters much of his source text. He omits theoretical discussions that are cumbersome, or he alters them to reflect the values of his people. For example, the Old English *Boethius* does not exhibit the same sharp distinction between practical philosophy and theoretical philosophy, and the material realm is not rejected entirely, as it is in *Consolation*, due to the Alfredian ideology that wealth and wisdom are inherently connected.[68] Similarly, the explanation of the tripartite soul in *Consolation* is rendered in terms of the three faculties described by Alcuin

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[65] Discenza, *The King's English*, 72.
[66] Discenza, *The King's English*, 71 and 75.
[67] Anne Payne, *King Alfred and Boethius: An Analysis of the Old English Version of the Consolation of Philosophy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 116.
[68] Discenza, "Wealth and Wisdom: Symbolic Capital and the Ruler in the Translational Program of Alfred the Great," *Exemplaria* 13.2 (2001): 449-450.

in the Old English translation.[69] Finally, divine providence and matters of chance are treated with less sophistication in the *Boethius*, and many other theories and arguments are completely omitted.[70] If Alfred altered so much of his source text to render the literature accessible to his people with minimal confusion, why would he not also omit the allegorical figure's maternal relationship with the prisoner to conform to traditional gender categories and reduce the potential for confusion? Or Alfred could have consistently described Wisdom with feminine pronouns for the sake of simplicity.

Locating Wisdom's queer characterization in Alfred's synthesis of other Boethian binary oppositions, I argue that the maternal masculinity of Wisdom is rhetorically significant. Lees and Overing interpret "Knowledge, as popularized by Alfred in his English version of Beothius . . . is modeled as a both universal . . . and male . . . [T]he feminine, however, misogynistically construed as the material embodiment of knowing in the classical text, has virtually no role to play in the vernacular text."[71] On a related note, Renée Trilling argues against conventional approaches to Old English grammatical constructions based on her observations of masculine pronouns in *Beowulf* that refer to Grendel's mother; Trilling explains that "the substitution of a masculine pronoun for a physically feminine body can be understood as the triumph of gender over sex, and that when grammar replaces or attempts to alter nature, something very significant is taking place."[72] Contrary to Lees and Overing's reading, Wisdom's maternal characterization reflects Anglo-Saxon education practices for very young children, and this characterization

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[69] See Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 2:385.

[70] See Discenza, "The Old English Boethius" in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. Nicole Guenther Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 210-223; and Paul E. Szarmach, "Alfred, Alcuin, and the Soul," in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmissions in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*, eds. Robert Boenig and Kathleen Davis (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 133-139.

[71] Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 163.

[72] Renée R. Trilling, "Beyond Abjection: The Problem with Grendel's Mother Again," *Parergon* 24.1 (2007): 16.

facilitates the Anglo-Saxon audience's identification with Wisdom. His masculine grammatical

gender, on the other hand, signifies the significant rhetorical replacement of gender for sex

described by Trilling, which indicates a Latinate authorizing convention applied to an Anglo-

Saxon mother. Alfred's Wisdom, as both maternal and masculine, represents the confluence of

patrilineal Latin learning with matrilineal Anglo-Saxon learning. His grammatical masculinity

aligns Wisdom with patriarchal forms of power, like church fathers and the male-dominated

institutions of Latin learning and culture. His masculine pronouns invite associations with these

masculine sources, as well as with kin, fellow compatriots, and even Alfred as the king behind

the text. Wisdom's maternal characterization, on the other hand, validates Alfred's translation

through a familiar authority figure, the mother. The maternal figure represents an Anglo-Saxon

source of cultural authority, because Wisdom as mother recalls an earlier biblical tradition that

resonates deeply with Anglo-Saxon ideology. Discenza explains that allusions to the Old

Testament render Wisdom's maternal characterization more Anglo-Saxon:

> The similarities between Old Testament Wisdom and Philosophy may have led Alfred
>
> not only to name his character *Wisdom*, but also to give that character some of the other
>
> attributes of the Wisdom of the Old Testament. *De consolatione* calls Philosophy a nurse:
>
> "nostro quondam lacte nutritus" ("once nursing on my milk," I pr. ii. 2), but the Wisdom
>
> Books present Wisdom as a mother. The *Boethius* combines the two to describe Wisdom
>
> as a "fostermodor" ("fostermother," 8.27 [3.12]) and the narrator's "agne modor" ("own
>
> mother," 9.1 [3.14]) who "tyde 7 lærde" (raised and taught," 9.2 [3.14]) him. Adoption
>
> by Wisdom may have been suggested by the Psalms; the Paris Psalter addresses God: "þu
>
> eart fultumiend þara þe nabbað nawðer ne fæder ne modor" ("You are a helper for those
>
> who have neither father nor mother," 9.34). Sirach speaks of the "sapientia filiis"

("children of Wisdom," 4:12), and according to Matthew, "iustificata est sapientia a filiis

suis" ("Wisdom is justified by her children,").[73]

Recalling an Old Testament allegory, Wisdom culls power from Latin and biblical sources while

drawing on Anglo-Saxons' familiarity with biblical allegorical representations of Wisdom.

Most Anglo-Saxon children were educated in the home by their mothers, therefore

Wisdom resonates with traditional Anglo-Saxon experience: Discenza explains that Wisdom is a

maternal figure because this relationship with an educator is more familiar to Anglo-Saxons who

were educated in the home.[74] Susan Irvine explains, "Alfred, in explicitly defining Wisdom as

mother, acknowledges and highlights the role of the mother as a teacher and instructor. Wisdom

and motherhood are inextricably linked."[75] For Anglo-Saxon youths, mothers are the first

teachers. Access to the word, and thus cultural capital, is facilitated by mothers. Drawing on the

cultural authority of maternal figures, Wisdom resonates with Anglo-Saxon audiences'

experience of learning and literacy. Dockray-Miller identifies Anglo-Saxon mothers as teachers

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[73] Discenza, *The King's English*, 89. Discenza's citations of the *Boethius* refer to Sedgefield's edition; now Godden and Irvine's edition should be used. I have supplied the updated citations to Godden and Irvine's edition in brackets next to Discenza's original citations.
[74] Discenza, *The King's English*, 72.
[75] Susan Irvine, "Rewriting Women in the Old English *Boethius*," in *New Windows on a Woman's World: Essays for Jocelyn Harris*, 2 vols., eds. C. Gibson and L. Marr (New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 2005), 2.488-501. Alfred's translation takes liberties to introduce women's experiences, specifically mothers, into the philosophical discourse. Some references to women are merely translated from his source text, like Rusticana (Boethius's wife, who is not properly named in Alfred's translation), or Eurydice (Orpheus's wife). But three additional references to women are original to the Old English text. Wisdom explains that a woman might die while birthing her child (31.16-19), and that women are made to suffer the pain of labor because they take pleasure in sexual intercourse (31.9-12). Neither of these appears in *Consolation* Book III prose seven. Finally, the prayer concluding Alfred's translation, appended later and therefore not attributed to Alfred, cites Mary. This prayer identifies a Christian tradition that Boethius's *Consolation* only ambiguously references and also signifies how the text might be received, perhaps by a diverse audience that includes women. The addition of mothers to Alfred's text, then, suggests that mothers are vital to the composition of an English national identity. The prayer appears in Walter John Sedgefield's edition, rather than Godden and Irvine's. See *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. Walter John Sedgefield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899) 149. 11-26.

specifically because they "nurture and teach [children] in the customs of their culture."[76] Anglo-Saxon mothers dispense cultural capital; they induct Anglo-Saxon subjects by introducing their children to the traditions of their people, popular narratives, and social comportment. Wisdom as mother, therefore, recalls the familiar first teacher for many Anglo-Saxons among Alfred's audience.[77]

Very little historical evidence concerning Alfred's own mother, Osburh, is available. We know that she was the daughter of one of Æthelwulf's trusted thanes, and she was most likely the mother of all of Æthelwulf's children. Her death is not recorded, but she is believed to have died around 852. Asser's *Vita Ælfredi*, written in 893, provides a vignette of Osburh.[78] Catherine Karkov interprets Alfred's relationship with his own mother as a representation of the power disparity between Latin and Old English.[79] In one particular vignette, Asser describes,

Cum ergo quodam die mater sua sibi et fratribus suis quendam Saxonicum poematicae

artis librum, quem in manu habebat, ostenderet, ait: 'Quisquis vestrum discere citius

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[76] Mary Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 5.

[77] The small percentage of youths who received further education in monasteries and nunneries did so around the age of ten, Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 55-6 and 240.

[78] London, British Library, Cotton Otho A.xii. This manuscript, circa 1000, is now lost. Whether or not Asser actually wrote *Vita Alfredi* is also a matter of debate. Vivian Hunter Galbraith first doubted the common attribution to Asser, suggesting a tenth century composition by Leofric instead—but hardly any scholars accept this; see "Who Wrote Asser's Life of Alfred?" in *Introduction to the Study of History*, edited by V. H. Galbraith (London: C.A. Watts, 1964), 88-128. Alfred Smyth observes that it contains phrases that match literature composed after Alfred's death in a style that is consistent with Byrhtferth's. It should be noted that Smyth's book has incited much ire from scholars because it is long, repetitive, and asserts claims for which there is no evidence to bolster other arguments aimed at discrediting some of his contemporaries; see his *Alfred the Great* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and *Medieval Life of King Alfred the Great: A Translation and Commentary on the Text Attributed to Asser* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 202-210. Simon Keynes denies the attributions of Asser's piece to Byrhtferth, and he is offended by Smyth's accusations that historians would uncritically maintain a narrow standardized model that dismisses interrogation in support of traditional practices, "On the Authenticity of Asser's *Life of King Alfred*: *King Alfred the Great* by Alfred Smyth," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 47.3 (1996): 529-551.

[79] Karkov, "The Mother's Tongue and the Father's Prose," 27.

istum codicem possit, dabo illi illum.' Qua voce, immo divina inspiratione, instinctus, Ælfredus, et pulchritudine principalis litterae illius libri illectus, ita matri respondens, et fratres suos aetate, quamvis non gratia, seniores anticipans, inquit: 'Verene dabis istum librum uni ex nobis, scilicet illi, qui citissime intelligere et recitare eum ante te possit?' Ad haec illa, arridens et gaudens atque affirmans: 'Dabo', infit, 'illi.' Tunc ille statim tollens librum de manu sua, magistrum adiit et legit. Quo lecto, matri retulit et recitavit.[80]

One day his mother showed to him and his brothers a certain book of Saxon poetry which she held in her hand and said, "Whoever among you is able to learn this book most swiftly, I will give it to him." Invigorated by these words, or by divine inspiration, and allured by the beautiful initial of this book, Alfred got ahead of his brothers, who surpassed him in years though not in graces, and he replied to his mother, saying, "Will you truly give this book to the one among us who is able to understand and recite it before you the soonest?" She confirmed, happy and smiling, "I will give it to him." Immediately taking the book from her hand, he visited his teacher and he studied the book. Having learned it, he returned to his mother and recited it.[81]

Karkov argues that Alfred disposes of his mother's influence to compose a prose literary style that reflects patriarchal Latin literary forms: Alfred gains instruction from male tutors; later, he learns to translate Latin from his circle of male scholars; and finally, the books that Alfred cites as necessary for the enlightenment of all men are written in Latin, which is inherently tied to

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[80] *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), chap. 23.
[81] This translation is my own. Additionally, Asser may appear to contradict himself in *Vita Alfredi*, because in the account cited above Alfred seems to have learned to read as a boy, rather than much later in life as detailed by Asser. Focusing on the verb *recitavit*, "he recited," I am in agreement with Pratt's argument that the emphasis here is on memorization and recitation, rather than the fully realized ability to read. Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred*, 88-90.

patriarchal forms of power like church fathers. This contrasts with the English book of poetry

that is passed to him by his mother. Karkov notes the absence of women from the literary project

of nation-building. Ultimately, according to Karkov, Alfred rejects his mother and the mother

tongue to embrace the fatherly Latin prose.[82] But Alfred enlists his mother tongue to transmit

complex thought—albeit out of necessity, but is necessity not the mother of invention?—

demonstrating the power of the Anglo-Saxon vernacular. Moreover, Alfred maintains the

maternal qualities of his central allegorical figure, so that wisdom is disseminated in the mother

tongue by a mother. Wisdom's characterization resonates with Anglo-Saxons who received

English cultural capital—like Osburh's book of poetry—in the home from their mothers, as their

first encounter with cultural authority. Anglo-Saxon mothers perform a vital role in cultivating

cultural identity. Replicating this experience, Wisdom directs the contemplative audience to

cultivate their intellects. Wisdom invites identification with Alfred's people through a shared

Anglo-Saxon subject position, thus transferring his literary authority to the Anglo-Saxon cultural

identity within philosophical discourse and literary production. Acknowledging the importance

of Wisdom's maternal characterization is essential to understanding the nuances of Alfred's

innovations and to fostering an inclusive field of medieval studies. Because much of the

literature that survives the European Middle Ages is influenced by patriarchal forms of power it

is difficult to read the roles of women in masculine dominated societies. Early scholarship on the

Middle Ages has failed to appreciate the roles of women in Anglo-Saxon society; indeed, the

field was dominated by male scholars privileging male experience.[83] Helen Bennett has argued

that Anglo-Saxon warrior society renders masculinity itself the only class, excluding women

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[82] Karkov, "Mother's Tongue and Father's Prose," 28-29.
[83] Mary Dockray-Miller, "Old English has a Serious Image Problem," *JSTOR Daily* (May 3, 2017) accessed 10 June 2017.

from nation-building.[84] But Alfred's representation of Wisdom suggests that Anglo-Saxon mothers are essential to his process of cultivating a unified culture, and Marie Kelleher suggests a parallel definition of power that recognizes one's ability to direct others.[85] As an Anglo-Saxon mother, Wisdom represents an Anglo-Saxon intellectual authority who Alfred employs to facilitate an emerging English identity, and Wisdom's maternal role challenges patriarchal sources of power like Latin literature and culture that have colonized intellectual practices in the West. Reading Wisdom as a representation of the mother-as-teacher in traditional Anglo-Saxon experiences is one way of interrogating masculine-dominated texts. Excavating women's experiences from the extant record enhances our understanding of the power wielded by Anglo-Saxon women who contribute significantly to nation-building.

The mother as first teacher represents an Anglo-Saxon authority who matches, or even surpasses, conventional Latin cultural authorities. Alfred's text is internally authorized, within the narrative, by a mother figure who speaks Latin sources through the English mother tongue. But Wisdom is no mere synthesis of culturally disparate sources of power. In fact, Wisdom challenges Latin privilege by asserting Anglo-Saxon maternal authority over Boethius, the Roman prisoner. In the Latin *Consolation*, just as the prisoner character is inferior to Philosophia, in the Old English *Boethius*, the Boethius character is comparatively inferior to Wisdom. But in *Consolation* there is no cultural distinction that marks this power disparity: the characters maintain a homogenous cultural background that is grounded in the Latin language of the text. Comparatively, in the Old English *Boethius*, the prisoner is Roman while Wisdom

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[84] Helen T. Bennett, "Exile and the Semiosis of Gender in Old English Elegies," in *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections,* ed. Britton J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 43.

[85] Marie A. Kelleher, "What Do We Mean by 'Women and Power'?" *Medieval Feminist Forum* 51.2 (2015): 110. See also Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, "Signifying Gender and Empire," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34.1 (2004), 1-16.

performs an Anglo-Saxon cultural identity. Alfred's translation shifts power from Latin literary sources to the Anglo-Saxon subject position. In the Latin *Consolation*, Boethius laments his imprisonment as evidence that the righteous seem to be powerless against corrupt rulers, and it is generally accepted that Boethius was justly combatting Theoderic's corruption (1.4.10-36). Boethius explicitly denies plotting against Theoderic in his own text (1.4.26-27) Chapter One of the Old English *Boethius*, on the other hand, provides an overview of Boethius's historical context in which he is introduced as undermining the tyrannical Theoderic, and so Boethius is lawfully convicted of treason. Charles Radding claims that Alfred's translation is radically different because the prisoner is explicitly guilty of the charges against him.[86] Boethius's circumstances in the Old English translation are not as stark as Radding interprets. In fact, Wisdom tells the prisoner that he is righteous and morally upstanding (3.18). Still, the omissions of Boethius's just resistance, and his refusal to accept punishment, alter responses to his character, which may account for the Wisdom's scant sympathy for him in the beginning of the text.[87] Discenza explains that Wisdom "implies that the narrator has been privileged for a long time and will have to adjust to living like other people, an accusation that hardly elicits sympathy, especially from Anglo-Saxons reading about a late-antique, privileged Roman."[88] Boethius's Roman heritage is inherently linked to his literary identity; Roman cultural privilege renders him less than sympathetic to an Anglo-Saxon audience. The prisoner is also referred to as *Mod*, or Mind, and *ic*, the first person pronoun, which opens a space in the text for the contemplative audience to assume the role of the prisoner. Discenza notes that "*Mod* offers more possibility for reader identification: where *Boethius* names a specific, now-dead historical figure,

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[86] Charles M. Radding, *A World Made by Men: Cognition and Society, 400-1200* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 133-4.
[87] Discenza, *The King's English*, 72.
[88] Discenza, *The King's English*, 73.

we each have our own mind."[89] Distinguishing between these signifiers, in the opening pages of Alfred's text, the historical specificity given to the signifier *Boetius* specifies a particularly Roman cultural identity. The historical Boethius and the source text referenced by the preface to the Old English translation bear an ineradicable Latin identity, limiting Boethius's literary persona to a strict time and space. Boethius is just a man.

Wisdom, on the other hand, is abstract and everlasting. He signifies across conventional identity categories, representing multiple authoritative identities. Yet he is distinctly Anglo-Saxon. In addition to Wisdom's maternal role as a representation of the cultural authority wielded by Anglo-Saxon mothers as teachers, Wisdom speaks the Anglo-Saxon mother tongue. This is no trivial detail. The Roman prisoner is also speaking Old English, but he does so with the disclaimer that he is the original author writing in Latin, whose words are explicitly marked by translation. The Roman Boethius is conveyed by means of a *wealhstod* (translator), but Wisdom *cwæð* (spoke) the mother tongue of the *Angelcynn* (Preface 1 and 3.3). Moreover, Wisdom relies on their culturally significant metaphors to illustrate his points. For example, investing in the material realm is compared to spreading one's sails to the mercy of the winds (7.42-7), intellectual security is like an anchor that maintains one's position (10.50-61), and God governs Creation like a helmsman (35.93-101). These metaphors are original to the Old English translation. Miranda Wilcox explains that Alfred's modifications to the Latin *Consolation* indicate his own developing theories of epistemology, conveyed by a ship of the mind in the *Boethius*, which reaches its culmination in Alfred's interrelated ocular and nautical metaphors in his translation of Augustine's *Soliloquies*.[90] These metaphors resonate with the Anglo-Saxon experience, because Anglo-Saxons were familiar with nautical travel, and conscious of Alfred's

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[89] Discenza, "The Old English *Boethius*," 208.
[90] Miranda Wilcox, "Alfred's epistemological metaphors: *eagan modes* and *scip modes*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 35 (2006): 197-201.

naval reform. Additionally, Wisdom resonates with Anglo-Saxons because he is exclusively

Christian. Boethius's Philosophia directs her followers to the divine, but her discourse is not

explicitly Christian; she refers to the highest good, or the one true good, and she avoids overt

Christian references. Alfred's Wisdom, on the other hand, is explicitly Christian: In its entirety,

chapter four is an invocation of *drihten*, the Lord. Wisdom directs Boethius to look to the holy

martyrs for courage (11.89-92). The text is sprinkled with biblical references and allusions

including Hell and the flood (15.18-21 and 16.13-16). Even the name Wisdom recalls the Old

Testament allegorical figure included in most of the Wisdom Books.[91] Alfred alters the literary

figures of his text significantly to appeal to a general, contemporary Anglo-Saxon audience.

Fostering his connection to the Old Testament renders Wisdom more Christian, and thus,

according to Discenza, more Anglo-Saxon.[92] Additionally, Wisdom tells the prisoner that he has

departed from his fatherland, and that his cure requires his return:

> Sona swa ic þe ærest on þisse unrotnesse geseah þus murciende ic ongeat þæt þu wære ut
>
> afaren of þines fæder eðele, þæt is [of] minum larum. . . . þær þu gemunan woldest
>
> hwylcra gebyrda þu wære and hwylcra burgwara for worulde, oððe eft gastlice hwilces
>
> geferscipes þu wære on þinum mode and on ðinre gesceadwisnesse; þæt is þæt þu eart an
>
> þara rihtwisena and þara ryhtwillendra. Þa beoð þære heofencundan Ierusalem burgware.
>
> (5.4-5 and 14-19)
>
> As soon as I first saw you in this sorrow, grieving like this, I knew that you had departed
>
> from your father's country—that is, from my teachings. . . . Recall, if you would, which
>
> origin and which citizenship in the world you are, or again, [recall] of which spiritual
>
> fellowship you were [*or* had] in your mind and in your reason—that is to say: you are one

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[91] Discenza also notes that in Latin Wisdom would be *Sapientia*, *The King's English*, 88.
[92] Discenza, *The King's English*, 89.

of the righteous and moral. Those (the righteous and moral) are the citizens of heavenly

Jerusalem.

Boethius is more ambiguous in the original Latin; Philosophia redirects the prisoner towards an

unnamed intellectual *patria*, where she harbors all intellectual refugees from the slings and

arrows of oppressive earthly forces (I.3.12-14). Wisdom explicitly cites Jerusalem as the

prisoner's *patria*, another instance of Christian specificity imposed by Alfred onto the otherwise

ambiguous theology of the *Consolation*. Wisdom cites the *heavenly* Jerusalem as the spiritual

patria, which is familiar to Anglo-Saxons—far more familiar than the tomes and tradition of

Latin learning. Wisdom guides the audience to their *patria*, identifying Anglo-Saxon subjects as

citizens of an intellectual and spiritual heritage that extends far beyond the material boundaries

of cultural centers of power. Once more, Anglo-Saxons on an island at the geographic edge of

the known Western world participate in a noble heritage by means of their intellectual and

spiritual pursuits. Their participation is facilitated by an Anglo-Saxon mother employing

culturally familiar terminology. Nautical metaphors, biblical history, and Christian allusions

expressed by the central allegorical figure, who speaks in the English vernacular, characterizes

Wisdom as inhabiting an Anglo-Saxon subject position.

Boethius's character carries his past with him, maintaining the conventional model of

translatio studii et imperii adopted by Alfred elsewhere. But Wisdom is more ethereal, his

origins are not exact, inviting personal associations with the contemplative audience, and rooting

his persona in the immediacy of his characterization. Wisdom lacks a narrative that precedes the

present translation, and so Wisdom is only encountered in the Old English *Boethius* as an Anglo-

Saxon allegorical figure.

The cultural identities of the characters—Boethius as Roman and Wisdom as Anglo-Saxon— contributes to a disruption, or queering of traditional power dynamics that privilege Latin. Wisdom represents an Anglo-Saxon whose subject position ought to be contingent upon the prior Latin source text, because traditional models of *translatio studii et imperii* locate cultural capital and power in Rome disseminating outwards to geographical ends that are far removed from cultural centers. Disrupting linear models of history, Wisdom manifests "nonnormative logics and organizations of community . . . in time and space."[93] He queers temporality—which Elizabeth Freeman defines as "non-sequential forms of time [that] fold subjects into structures of belonging and duration that may be invisible to the historicist's eye"—intertwining Anglo-Saxon culture with Latin intellectual developments, and complicating linear patterns of *translatio studii*.[94] Wisdom queers traditional orientations to cultural authority, privileging the Anglo-Saxon subject position. Kathleen Davis explains,

> Translation is always double, always both metaphoric and metonymic. Metaphoric, translation substitutes the new text for its source; metonymic, it claims an identity between translation and source. Thus translation can, as the medieval translation theory invoked by Alfred suggests, produce a new identity that is at the same time ancient and powerful. [95]

In addition to the "hierarchies of consoler and consoled" observed by Léglu and Milner, the vertical power dynamic of the mother-child, teacher-pupil relationship places Wisdom hierarchically above Boethius.[96] Additionally, Wisdom, by virtue of his maternal orientation to the prisoner, is situated temporally prior to the Latin literary figure, Boethius. Wisdom is an

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[93] Jack Halberstam originally published this piece as Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.
[94] Elizabeth Freeman, *Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xi.
[95] Kathleen Davis, "The Performance of Translation Theory," 162-3.
[96] Léglu and Milner, "Introduction: Encountering Consolation," 1.

Anglo-Saxon who, by the nature of his maternal role, must precede the Roman literary figure.

This orientation suggests that Anglo-Saxons share a deeply rooted source of intellectual power

that authorizes the present text, the present translator, and the Anglo-Saxon audience.

Wisdom synthesizes patrilineal Latin learning with matrilineal Anglo-Saxon learning, but

his metaphorical embodiment and relationship to the prisoner disrupts normative hierarchies of

power. Wisdom queers dominant models of *translatio studii et imperii* that tend to marginalize

Anglo-Saxons as a people far removed from, and receptive to, cultural centers like Rome. He

represents an emerging intellectual Anglo-Saxon cultural identity that is personally familiar,

beginning with the mother as teacher, and ranging to the head of their political body, King

Alfred. In the *Boethius*, Alfred's Wisdom personifies processes of *translatio studii et imperii*: He

is authorized by the Latin literary tradition from which he originates, and yet he performs a

distinctly Anglo-Saxon cultural identity by which he exerts authority over a Roman subject.

Wisdom's queerness not only privileges Anglo-Saxons within networks of *translatio studii et*

imperii, his queerness also emends Boethius's problematic philosophical assertions.

Queer Wisdom as Alfred's Innovation

Alfred's Old English translation achieves what the Latin source text could not: harmony.

Wisdom's queerness represents the harmony between binaries that separate the mind from the

body—binaries that must be synthesized in order for Boethian philosophy to attain the

consolation to which the text aspires. Alfred treats this complexity by locating the material and

the intelligible realms harmoniously under the rule of Wisdom. Western dualism, as noted above,

separates the mind from the body and attributes gendered categories to this dichotomy: men are

associated with the stability of the intelligible realm and women are associated with the flux of

the material realm. Wisdom's queerness synthesizes the Boethian dualism that unnecessarily divorces mind from body, and thus hinders consolation. Moreover, Wisdom's queerness facilitates the philosophical program by inciting participation in the Boethian dialectic. Alfred deviates from his source text to represent Wisdom as an allegorical figure who is aligned with Anglo-Saxon values and who thus facilitates, rather than complicates, consolation. Alfred's representation of Wisdom operates within the parameters of Boethian discourse, but with a difference that exhibits Anglo-Saxon agency.[97] Queerness in the Old English *Boethius* is Alfred's innovation.

The *Consolation* is problematic because Boethian dualism rejects the material realm; this stoicism is impractical for humans living in bodies, particular those, like Alfred's people, who do not have the luxury of personal libraries like those enjoyed by Boethius. Boethian dualism hinders consolation by treating corporal experience as useful only to the extent that it can be used to elevate reason above the material realm, privileging the mind over the body, and further disparaging earthly goods. Even in Boethius's Latin text the narrator refuses the preparation for death that is advanced by Philosophia. Joel Relihan explains that preparation for death, and thus rejection of the material realm, is one possible source of consolation, but if this is true, "then preparation consists of a pattern of absences, omissions, and frustrations of expectation that must be viewed as central to the interpretation of the dialogue which, on its face, ends up far from where it began and concludes with arguments that it misunderstands."[98] Boethius's *Consolation* relies on mind-body dualism to privilege the mind, but the content of Boethius's text ultimately shirks grappling with the mind's separation from the body.

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[97] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 13.
[98] Joel Relihan, *The Prisoner's Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 5.

Alfred's characterization of Wisdom emends the problematic stoicism of his Latin source

text by suggesting a mind-body continuum embodied by Wisdom. Comparatively, in the

Consolation, a mind-body dichotomy is characterized by Philosophia, who directs followers to

the intelligible realm, and Fortuna, who governs the material realm. But in the *Boethius*, Wisdom

assumes responsibility for both. Conflating the roles of Philosophia and Fortuna, he explains to

the prisoner,

> Ægþer ge þira welona [ge] þines weorþscipes, ægþer þara þe come ær from me. . . .
>
> Dysine and ungelæredne ic þe underfeng þu ærest to monnum become, and þa þe getydde
>
> and gelærde and þe þa snyttro on gebrohte þe þu þa woruldare mid begeate þe þu nu
>
> sorgiende anforlete. . . . Ælc soþ wela and soð weorðscipe sindan mine agne þeowas, and
>
> swa hwar swa ic beo beoð mid me. (7.67-8, 71-4, 77-79)[99]
>
> Both your wealth and your honor come from me. . . . I accepted you when you first came
>
> to humankind, foolish and unlearned, and then I trained and taught you, and brought you
>
> to the wisdom with which you obtained the worldly goods, the loss of which you now
>
> grieve. . . . All true wealth and true honor are my own servants, and where I am they are
>
> with me.

Exhibiting control over earthly goods, Wisdom's association imposes value onto material

resources that the Latin text disparages.[100] Discenza argues that it was easier for Alfred to

reconcile contemporary values of treasure with the spiritual bent of his source text, explaining

that "Alfred translated the texts themselves according to an implicit but fundamental assumption

of the connection of monetary wealth and wisdom."[101] Katherine Proppe criticizes Alfred's

translation, faulting his inability to a grasp Neoplatonism, and so, "[w]here Boethius saw the

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[99] Brackets indicate the editors' emendations in this text.
[100] Discenza, "The Old English *Boethius*," 213.
[101] Discenza, "Wealth and Wisdom," 449-450.

universe Platonically as a projection from the mind of God, Alfred struggled with the dualism of idea and matter."[102] Alfred is far from unsuccessful: he supplants Boethian dualism with a model that reconciles the material and the intelligible realms harmoniously.

Wisdom represents the synthesis of embodied immersion in the material realm while desiring mastery of the intelligible realm. Again, the Old English *Boethius* does not exhibit the same sharp distinction between practical philosophy and theoretical philosophy, and the material realm is not rejected entirely, as it is in *Consolation*, due to the Alfredian ideology that wealth and wisdom are inherently connected.[103] Mind and body are implicitly commingled in the Old English *Boethius*, recalling the intimate intense, (homo)erotic interactions with Wisdom in Alfred's *Soliloquies*. Lees and Overing observe that Alfred does away with the dualism presented by Fortuna and Philosophia, and in representing Wisdom's masculine grammatical gender, Alfred "radically alters Boethius's philosophy."[104] As noted above, Bourdieu observes a man-woman dichotomy used to organize other binaries like mind-body dualism across Western cultures, and Bynum has cited this model as an organizing principle for later medieval thought.[105] Alfred conflates Philosophia and Fortuna, and represents this conflation as both masculine and maternal, synthesizing mind-body and male-female dichotomies. Wisdom challenges conventional categories of binary oppositions that are rooted in oversimplified hierarchies. He metaphorically suggests a broad spectrum of unification that cross identity categories, time, and space. Queerness indicates Alfred's emendation to Boethius's text, and a

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[102] Katherine Proppe, "King Alfred's *Consolation of Philosophy,*" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 (1973): 635.
[103] Discenza, "Wealth and Wisdom," 449-450.
[104] Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 161.
[105] Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 104-5; and Carolyn Walker Bynum, "'…And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols,* eds. Carolyn Walker Bynum, Steven Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon, 1986), 257.

distinctly Alfredian innovation: Wisdom suggests that the mind-body dichotomy is in fact a continuum. The queer embodiment of Wisdom reflects the divine simplicity of being, in that the corporeal and the intelligible—a dichotomy that Western traditions have associated with the feminine and the masculine, respectively—are united. Alfred's metaphor embodies Philosophia's conviction that all is one.

Wisdom's queerness enhances Boethius's text in more ways than one: his queer embodiment facilitates the dialectical model of Boethius's philosophical program. Alfred's allegorical figure incites both contemplation beyond the text and continuous return to Wisdom/wisdom. Contemplation beyond one's initial reading of the text furthers one's participation in the Boethian dialectic. Unity with the One True Good, God, is achieved along a continuum that is comprised of multiple, simplified, yet similar cycles. For example, Philosophia remembers that Boethius was once a child who required nurturing before the young person was capable of intellectual activities. This cycle is repeated in his prison: Boethius is once again blinded by tears and he describes his own speaking as *deletravi*, barking (I.m1.2 and I.5.1). The prisoner's admission of having acquired knowledge, then having lost it along with his material wealth and social status, suggests that the prisoner has been at the mercy of Fortuna's wheel multiple times, and that this flux has corporeal effects. It is only after Philosophia tends to his corporeal needs that she can begin applying poultices to the mind (II.1.7-8 and II.3.3-4). Boethius acknowledges that he is performing a meditative ascent, from the instability of the material realm to the stable perfection of the intelligible realm—inward and upward. The curative program of the *Consolation* begins with experience and dominant ideological beliefs to build complex arguments—much like Aristotelian philosophy relies on first principles to compose sophisticated syllogisms.

But *Consolation* is not a linear text. It is circular. John Marenbon explains that "neither the literary structure of the *Consolation*, nor the structure of argument, is linear: both might be better described as circular."[106] Audiences are encouraged to read, contemplate, and return to the text, as modeled by the prisoner, Boethius, who conversed with Philosophia and recollects her lessons in the present text. The circular process of learning and recollecting occurs multiple times as exemplified by Boethius who, Philosophia reminds, had already learned many of the lessons in *Consolation* before his fall from fortune, and so much of her early curative program consists of facilitating his recollection (I.5.4). More generally, Philosophia's dress is mute testimony to the hazards of failing to return to founts of wisdom, such as *Consolation*, as tears in the fabric indicate where fools had torn scraps from her clothing and left her assuming they possessed all of her (I.1.5). It is prudent for one to encounter sources of Philosophia, contemplate her meanings, enact her principles, and return to the sources further develop their understanding.

This recursive process of reading, contemplation, and return is the *Boethian dialectic*. It is a circular model of contemplation that operates at the level of content as well as broader organizing principles of the discourse, so that with each cycle Philosophia's recuperative model elevates her ward closer to divine knowledge. Conceptual cycles lead the prisoner inward and upward, like a spiral, advancing the philosophical program along a dialectical model. Dialectic is a form of logical argumentation that proceeds from definitions. It categorizes and explores the relationships between concepts.[107] Building on definitions, observations, and systems of knowledge, dialectic seeks higher truths, often transitioning from practical matters to theoretical matters. Nicholas Rescher describes dialectical practices as a movement from

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[106] John Marenbon, *Boethius*, 96-7.
[107] Aristotle develops a dialectical model in *Topics*, particularly Book 1.

A level of relative accessibility (elementary, fundamentality) to one of increasing

technicality (elaborateness, sophistication). . . . The system becomes rearticulated and

reformulated in a way that is ever more rarified and complex. Philosophizing is, as it

were, a dialectical game that gets played at different levels of difficulty over the course of

time.[108]

Indeed, Boethius's depiction of Philosophia demonstrates these levels of increasing

sophistication that Rescher observes broadly across dialectical models: The stitch-work staircase

that decorates the dress Philosophia wove for herself implies that these lower levels of cognition

are the conditions that make higher cognitive and theoretical engagements possible. The content

of *Consolation* follows this circular structure so that the same subjects are treated across the five

books, but with increasing levels of nuance and sophistication. Focusing on Boethius's use of

circles, for example, Robert McMahon observes:

circle image[ry] unites the wheel of Fortune in Book II, and the 'orb of divine simplicity

in Book III . . . emphasiz[ing] the self-containment, the internal consistency, of God as

like a perfect sphere, while Book IV presents this divine simplicity as Providence

comprehending everything that happens in the universe. In this way, the circle image in

Book IV implicitly reconfigures our understanding of those in Books II and III.[109]

This repetition with a difference across *Consolation* facilitates the process of recollection and

return that constructs the Boethian dialectic at the level of content. More broadly, the division of

the text into five books bears the imprint of a circular, dialectical model, since every odd

multiple of five ends with five, the numerological significance of the number five suggests return

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[108] Nicholas Rescher, *Philosophical Dialectics: An Essay on Metaphilosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 83.
[109] McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, 232.

and circularity.[110] In Neoplatonic terms, the number five symbolizes the love that rules the universe, observes Edmund Reiss, because it is the sum of the first feminine number (2) and the first masculine number (3) (I.m5, II.m8, III.m9, IV.m6, and V.m3).[111] In accordance with this, Macrobius identifies the number five as the sum total of the universe, including the material realm, the intelligible realm, the world soul, the divine, and the divine mind.[112] Marenbon suggests that the numerological significance of five informs the structure of Boethius's five books to symbolize harmony and circularity that binds the *Consolation* as a reflection of a Neoplatonic macrocosm.[113] *Consolation*'s circular structure encourages the audience not only to read, but also to reread the text, extending the Boethian dialectic beyond the parameters of the text.

Alfred's translation maintains the conviction of his source text that developing one's intellect is a dialectical process that requires perpetual return to Wisdom. Enlightenment is not a singular achievement. It is a process that is cultivated by receiving guidance, meditating on the lesson, and returning to sources of wisdom to enhance one's practices. Wisdom's appearance reflects that of Philosophia, described above. In the Old English *Boethius*, the prisoner notices that Wisdom's "lare swiðe totorenne and swiðe tobrecene mid dysigra hondum" ("his teaching was torn and terribly broken by the hands of fools," 3.14-16). Wisdom's garments, like Philosophia's, signify that no one can truly claim all of Wisdom, and those who try merely carry away scraps. Like Philosophia's dress, Wisdom's clothing also encourages audiences through

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[110] McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, 249-250; Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 102; Russell A. Peck, "Number as Cosmic Language," in *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature*, ed. Caroline D. Eckhardt (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press,1980), 60-1.
[111] Edmund Reiss, *Boethius* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 152-3.
[112] Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, translated by William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), I.6.19-20.
[113] McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, 249.

imagery to return, again and again, to Wisdom, and to participate in the Boethian dialectic.

The contemplative audience is encouraged to participate in a dialectical process that synthesizes experience with introspection, leading one inward and upward, merging embodiment with mindfulness. Wisdom explains to Mind that he is welcome to ascend to the heights of divine understanding on condition that he is willing to descend with humility to the material realm to engage with good people (7.103-105). Here, Wisdom describes a cognitive process by which Mind, and indeed the audience, are expected to engage with the text, other sources of wisdom, and experience in the material realm. This is a dialectical process, the very same described by Philosophia and reiterated by Wisdom when they mourn the common occurrence of humans who fail to return to their intellectual practices. Humans, ideally, will receive instruction imparted by Wisdom, apply it to their own lives in the material realm, then return to the source of intellectual capital for contemplation and reflection. Participation in this cycle inspires nuanced understandings and higher levels of contemplation with each dialectical revolution performed by Wisdom's pupils. But the *Consolation* models enlightenment as an individual experience, exercised in solitude—one mind confronts the text, just as Boethius conferred with Philosophia, alone.

Alfred's audience may not have had access to this luxury. In fact, many scholars agree that reading would have been a communal practice among Anglo-Saxons. Textual communities, describes Brian Stock, did not require literacy as we understand it today. Texts were read aloud, recalled, or performed for the benefit of those who lacked the material or the skill.[114] The cultural conditions that inform textual communities impact reception and interaction with texts.

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[114] Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 37.

Alfred's translation not only facilitates the Boethian dialectical process, but he also expands the potential range of the dialectic beyond the circle of elite *literati* to whom Boethius addressed most of his texts. Appealing to an Anglo-Saxon audience in their vernacular, Alfred renders the text accessible to a wider audience. Comparing the Latin with the Old English versions of Boethius's texts, Discenza identifies distinctions of discourse that signify in-groups and out-groups:

> The *De consolatione* relies on an "internal reading" by those already initiated into philosophical language; the text excluded everyone who has not learned this language. . . . The *Boethius* cannot require a purely internal reading but seeks to initiate its audience into Christian learning; its Wisdom is thus more responsive to those who have little or no learning. [115]

Alfred's translation aims to render complex philosophical discourse accessible to people with limited experience. His text does not incite passive reception; rather, in accordance with the Boethian dialectic, Alfred's translation inspires active intellectual participation. What better way to encourage contemplation than to provide audiences with a complex metaphor like Wisdom whom they can carry with them beyond their exposure to the text?

In his prefaces to *Pastoral Care*, Alfred explicitly acknowledges that the goal of his translation program is to cultivate an intellectual community, a unified people, a culture. Boethius's text is concerned with enlightening the individual; his dialectic is to be practiced in solitude, raising the intellect of a worthy few to divine heights. Alfred expands this dialectical process beyond the text—beyond even a quiet dialogue alone with Wisdom—to compose communal bonds between minds. The dialectical process of engaging with Wisdom, for Alfred, is a process that solidifies *Angelcynn*. This is accomplished by applying an abstract name to the

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[115] Discenza, *The King's English*, 94.

prisoner, similar to Wisdom. Alfred supplies *Mod* to refer to the immediate participant in the meditative ascent mapped by Wisdom's discourse, and this participant could be understood as the historical Boethius or the contemplative audience. Discenza observes that Boethius's name fades over the course of the Old English translation, and disappears completely after Chapter 27. She explains that *Mod* maintains a place in the text for individual participation because "where *Boetius* names a specific, now-dead historical figure, we each have our own *mod*."[116]

Alfred translates this dialectical model to enlighten his people. His Old English translation emphasizes the role of the mother tongue, a common language, to create bonds between men. The Anglo-Saxon vernacular facilitates the distribution of intellectual treasures, and, with the establishment of the Alfredian corpus, it composes a cultural community. Wisdom explains to the prisoner,

> [Þ]æt [god][117] word gefylð eallra þara earan þe hit geherð and ne bið þeah no ðy læsse mid þam þe hit spricð. His heortan [diegelnesse] hit openað and þæs oþres heortan belocene hit þurhfærð, and on þam færelde þærbetwyx ne bið hit no gewanod. Ne mæg hit mon mid sweorde ofslean ne mid rape gebindan ne hit næfre ne acwilð. (13.27-31)[118]
>
> The [good] word fills the ears of all who hear it and it is not in any way diminished with he who speaks it. It opens [the recesses of] his heart and the secret places of the other's locked heart, and in the journey between them it is in no way diminished. No man can slay it with sword, nor bind it with rope, nor ever kill it.

Alfred expands upon a brief statement in *Consolation* Book II, prose 5, to emphasize the utility of the word as useful for disseminating wisdom and uniting people. The dialectic described by

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[116] Discenza, "The Old English *Boethius*," 207-8.

[117] "God" appears not in this sentence but in the previous mention of "word," 13.25, and so I interpret this to be the same good word.

[118] The brackets appear in Godden and Irvine's edition.

Alfred—this *færelde þærbetwyx*, or journey between two people—does not simply enhance one's intellect, it fortifies the bonds between humans who share a common language and who aspire to cultivate wisdom together. Alfred's text constructs an intellectual cultural identity through Old English good words that launch listeners into the Boethian dialectic.

The Boethian dialectic is enhanced and facilitated by the queer metaphorical representation of Wisdom. Referred to as a mother with masculine pronouns in the *Boethius*, Wisdom seems to vacillate between contrary identity categories. His characterization is reminiscent of the ways in which Philosophia varies in height. She is described as dramatically wavering between average human stature and a height that lifts her crown above the clouds so that no human can look upon her face (I.1.1-2). At one moment she is eye level and attainable, in another instance she is above our intellects. The metaphor aptly suggests the limits of the human intellect, but Philosophia's vacillating height is spatiotemporally limited by her embodiment. Alfred does not describe Wisdom varying in height, but he invites multiple interpretations that require audiences to meditate on his representation. As mother and man, Wisdom can vacillate from one identity to another, he can maintain whichever gender identity appeals best to the individual contemplative reader, and his contrary gender identities can also be synthesized because gender does not rely entirely on embodiment. Wisdom's complexity is not limited by dimensions like Philosophia's, who is sometimes eyelevel and at others beyond human purview. Wisdom is always simultaneously maternal and masculine. Wisdom's embodiment of seemingly contrary gender identities more elegantly replicates Philosophia's corporeal defiance of bodily limitations. His physical form does not shift. He challenges conceptual boundaries. Gender is open to variation and interpretation. Irreducible to observable biological features, gender is an affect; it is "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a

stylized repetition of acts."[119] It is performed and signified through various codes that extend

beyond the body and require some abstract reasoning. Alfred's allegorical figure is a simplified

interpretation of Boethius's Philosophia.[120] The very embodiment of Wisdom shifts audiences'

focus from practical to intelligible matters, challenging them to hold a gendered dichotomy

harmoniously in their contemplation of him. In this way, the *Boethius* delivers the "internal

reading" that Discenza notes above.[121] Manipulating imagery, Alfred incites individual

contemplation and participation in the Boethian dialectic that raises thought from practical to

theoretical matters. The solitary contemplative experience that is created through singular

reading practices of his source text is made available to his immediate Anglo-Saxon audience,

many of whom may be struggling with literacy. Wisdom's queer embodiment encourages

contemplation beyond the text without requiring audiences' direct access to the word.

His complex gender identifications incite careful reading and meditation beyond the text

to reconcile the apparent contradictions of his character. He queers categories that are

conceptually problematic for the audience: representing masculine and feminine, intelligible and

corporeal, and thus complicating the categorical function of reason and requiring perplexed

audiences to perform a dialectical inquiry that cycles between their experience of the text and its

abstract implications. As both a character and a concept, Wisdom obfuscates the boundary

between the prisoner's external experience and internal dialogue.[122] He destabilizes

(hetero)normative systems that compose the binary oppositions upon which the Latin

Consolation—and much of Western thought—relies. Alfred's literary innovation incites

audience participation in the Boethian philosophical program by prompting them to search

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[119] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 140.
[120] Elan Justice Pavlinich, "Into the embodied *inneweard mod*," 659-60.
[121] Discenza, *The King's English*, 94.
[122] Anne Payne, *King Alfred and Boethius: An Analysis of the Old English Version of the Consolation of Philosophy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 123.

within the text and within their own experience—read, reflect, repeat. In the Alfredian corpus, queerness cultivates wisdom.

Conclusion

Alfred manipulates conventional models of *translatio studii et imperii* to cull cultural authority from Latin sources and divert power to Anglo-Saxons far removed from sovereign centers like Rome. His translation program identifies Anglo-Saxons as inheritors of a noble tradition. But Alfred is not altogether faithful to his Latin sources. His allegorical representations of Wisdom carry queer connotations in the *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*, and in the *Boethius* Wisdom is carefully constructed as a masculine mother who wields power over the material realm and the intelligible realm, thus synthesizing pervasive ideologies of gendered mind-body dualism. Wisdom further disrupts the content of Boethius's text as he performs an Anglo-Saxon cultural identity. He queers gender conventions, mind-body dualism, and normative models of *translatio studii et imperii* that typically privilege man over woman, mind over body, and Latin subjects over Anglo-Saxon subjects.

Alfred's translation disrupts traditional networks of power that privilege Latin learning and language within geographic models that concentrate cultural authority at Rome, far from Anglo-Saxon England. The following chapter elaborates on queer spaciotemporalities, such as the disorientation that privileges an Anglo-Saxon mother over a Latin protégé in Alfred's *Boethius*. Disrupting linear, chronological models of time that privilege the past, and spatial orientations that locate power at cultural centers, puts Anglo-Saxons on a geographic edge in touch with cultural authorizes associated with Rome and Jerusalem. In *Dream of the Rood* the True Cross, upon whom Christ is crucified, is personified as an Anglo-Saxon, locating the

Anglo-Saxon subject at the center of the crucifixion, and reorienting the island of Anglo-Saxons as a Christian center with soteriological and eschatological significance. Characterizing Wisdom and the Rood as authorities who perform Anglo-Saxon cultural identities privileges Anglo-Saxons within broader cultural ideologies that include *translatio studii et imperii* and Christian salvation.

CHAPTER TWO:

ROOD DISRUPTION: QUEER ORIENTATIONS IN *DREAM OF THE ROOD*

Introduction

In the middle of a desolate night, a lone man on an island near the edge of the known

world experiences a vision of the Rood, the True Cross upon which Christ was crucified,

stretching out across the heavens.[1] The Rood appears as a singular object with multiple façades,

inviting myriad associations, like Wisdom in Alfred's *Boethius* addressed in the previous

chapter. The Rood speaks to the Dreamer in the Anglo-Saxon tongue, recollecting having been

ordered by his Lord to stand firm in his embrace as the Lord died upon his crossbeam. Parallel to

Christ's crucifixion and burial, the Rood suffers martyrdom and he is concealed in a deep pit by

fiends. Later, he is discovered and revered for his abilities to heal those who are in awe of him;

he promises to usher their souls to heaven. The Rood experiences a conversion in his cultural

reception, from a loathsome torture device to a symbol of Christian salvation. The Dreamer,

returned to his solitude, devotes himself to the Rood in anticipation of the Final Judgment.

Dream of the Rood is extant only in the Vercelli Manuscript (Vercelli, Biblioteca

Capitolare C. xvii), folios 104 verso to 106 recto. The Vercelli Manuscript contains twenty-three

prose texts and six poems, copied by a single scribe. Although the scribe compiled this collection

from diverse exemplars, scholars have noted a general interest, or thematic unity, that combines

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I presented an earlier version of this paper, titled "Central Cross/Anglo-Saxon Edge: Queer Orientations
in *Dream of the Rood*," at the 55th Southeastern Medieval Association (Knoxville, 2016). I thank the
conference organizers, my fellow panelists, and other SEMA participants for their thoughtful feedback.
[1] All citations of *Dream of the Rood* and *Elene* refer to George Philip Krapp, ed. *Dream of the Rood* and
Elene, in *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records,* vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

asceticism, penitence, and eschatology.[2] It is unclear how the Old English Vercelli Manuscript

came to be in northern Italy.[3] The book was probably carried by pilgrims who left the manuscript

at Vercelli, a common stop along the way to Rome, as late as the twelfth century. It was

neglected until its rediscovery in the nineteenth century. The content of *Dream* also shares a

complicated and mysterious history. Parts of the poem appear carved in runes on the Ruthwell

Cross of Northumbria, which is now on display in Dumfrieshire, Scotland.[4] The Ruthwell

Cross's futhorc (runes used to write Old English before assimilation to the Roman alphabet)

inscriptions echo lines 39-49 and 56-64 of *Dream*. The relationship between these texts is

unsettled, but it is probable that *Dream* and Ruthwell share a common source.[5]

    Dream refers to dominant centers of Christian power, Jerusalem and Rome, in

accordance with traditional narratives about the True Cross, but the Rood is represented as an

Anglo-Saxon at the time of Christ's crucifixion. Moreover, the Rood's direct address to Anglo-

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[2] Samantha Zacher and Andy Orchard, "Introduction," in *New Readings in the Vercelli Book*, ed. Zacher and Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 4.

[3] *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. D. G. Scragg, EETS 300 (London, 1992), xxiv.

[4] Raymond Ian Page acknowledges that most scholars locate the carving of Ruthwell around 700, but he situates the main text around 750, *Runes and Runic Inscriptions: Collected Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Viking Runes*, ed. David Parsons (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell, 1998), 38. Other scholars, such as Albert S. Cook, Rosemary Cramp, and Paul Meyvaert, argue that inscriptions were added later, the latest possible date being 900. Albert S. Cook, "Notes on the Ruthwell Cross," *PMLA* 17.3 (1902): 380; Paul Meyvaert, " Necessity Mother of Invention: A Fresh Look at the Rune Verses on the Ruthwell Cross," *Anglo-Saxon England* 41 (2012): 408 and 412-6.

[5] Rosemary Cramp argues that an earlier poem must have been circulating and that it was decidedly integrated into the design of the Ruthwell Cross. The aesthetic of Ruthwell would be inexplicably sparse without the runic verse *tituli*, and so they must have been included in the original design, Rosemary Cramp, "The Anglian Sculptured Crosses of Dumfriesshire," *Transactions of the Dumfries and Galloway Antiquarian Society* 38 (1959-60): 12. Raymond Ian Page argues that the runes were a later addition because they are not inscribed with the same precision as the Latin text on the broad sides of Ruthwell: some runic words are split, resulting in a clumsy appearance that frustrates reading, *An Introduction to English Runes* (London: Methuen, 1973), 150. Patrick W. Conner argues, compellingly, that the Ruthwell Monument ought to be read in the context of its multitemporal carvings, and he identifies the runic inscriptions as a tenth century addition, "The Ruthwell Monument Runic Poem in a Tenth-Century Context," *Review of English Studies* 59. 238 (2008): 26 and 28. Focusing on *Dream*, Leonard Neidorf identifies problems in scansion and lexical anomalies that indicate *Dream*, as it appears in Vercelli, is constructed by two scribes, perhaps writing years apart, Leonard Neidorf, "The Composite Authorship of *The Dream of the Rood*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 45 (2016): 51-70.

Saxons within an eschatological context that anticipates a quickly approaching Judgment Day identifies Anglo-Saxon England as a key soteriological site. Within the poem Anglo-Saxons are situated both at the center and periphery of salvation history. *Dream* queers normative orientations to Christian centers of power to privilege the role of Anglo-Saxons in a soteriological context. I am using "queer" beyond its immediate sex-gender connotations, focusing instead on ruptures in time and space that privilege the Anglo-Saxon cultural identity in *Dream*. Heterosexuality reproduces itself and thus maintains a status quo through genealogical lines, but queerness disrupts this "compulsory orientation."[6] Although it is important to recognize the specificity of queerness that is performed through deviant genders and sexualities, queer lives are made possible through broader social deviations that resist these "compulsory orientations.[7] Queer space disrupts normative conventions to connect marginalized subjects with figures and events; queer space can also center a specific site or community that is typically marginalized by hegemonic models of spatiality. *Dream* facilitates Anglo-Saxon connections to Christ by queering conventional orientations to time and space. The Rood is characterized as an Anglo-Saxon Rood whose anachronistic cultural identity destabilizes traditional True Cross narratives that center Jerusalem and Rome and marginalize borderlands like Anglo-Saxon England. According to Sara Ahmed, queer orientations "don't line up. . . . challenging ordinary perception."[8] Queer spatial orientations "put within reach some bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy."[9] Queer temporal orientations often consist of "nonsequential forms of time [that] fold subjects into structures of belonging and duration that

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[6] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 161.
[7] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 161.
[8] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 107.
[9] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 107.

may be invisible to the historicist's eye."[10] My approach to queer spatiotemporalities is informed by postmodern queer theorists Jack Halberstam and Elizabeth Freeman in addition to Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*. Although Halberstam and Freeman are concerned with contemporary LGBTQIA communities, I employ their observations concerning the dynamics and effects of power on contemporary Western queer subjects and their communities to interpret marginalized Anglo-Saxons among Western peoples hierarchically subordinated to Jerusalem and Rome's cultural authority. Halberstam explains, "'queer' refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time." [11] *Dream* disrupts normative organizations of community that look to Jerusalem and Rome as the nuclei of Christianity and culture by reconstructing orientations.

Representing a confluence of Latin and Anglo-Saxon influences, the Rood is a hybrid of generic convention and culturally unique innovation, similar to Alfred's construction of Wisdom detailed in the previous chapter. But the True Cross deviates from traditional representations by means of a distinctly Anglo-Saxon characterization. *Dream* reorganizes space and time to privilege Anglo-Saxons within broader narratives of Christian salvation history, transferring power from dominant cultural authorities to Anglo-Saxon interventions in the literary tradition. *Dream* features an Anglo-Saxon Dreamer near the edge of the known Western world encountering another Anglo-Saxon, the Rood, who experienced Christ's crucifixion intimately and who forebodes the looming Apocalypse. *Dream* situates Anglo-Saxons as authorized subjects at the center and conclusion to human salvation.

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[10] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xi.

[11] Jack [published under the name Judith] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

Conventional Anglo-Saxon Orientations

Anglo-Saxon worldviews are informed by their geographic orientations on an island near the edge of the world.[12] Anglo-Saxons are not exactly on the edge of the *known* world, but they are very close to it. Ireland is farther west. Anglo-Saxons were keenly aware of the invading Danes, who traveled from northern regions, such as present day Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. And further still, in the Atlantic Ocean, was the land of Thule, as noted in Alfred's *Old English Boethius* (29.82-5). There were, indeed, borderlands more peripheral to cultural centers than Anglo-Saxon England. Nevertheless, Anglo-Saxons were aware of the distance that separated them from Jerusalem and Rome. In fact, Anglo-Saxon Christianity is informed by the geography of England as an island.[13] In Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, a text first composed in Latin around 731 that precedes Alfred's literary composition of the *Angelcynn* as a coherent identity, Bede describes his native land as "Brittania oceani insula" [Britain, an island of the ocean].[14] Asa Mittman explains that Britain "is doubly separated from [Jerusalem], set apart by the Mediterranean and then the English Channel."[15] Acknowledging that geographic orientations are culturally constructed, Mittman observes, "The edge of the world was the space of the 'outcasts of society,' the uncivilized and barbarous, but time and again, this is where the medieval English placed themselves and their land."[16] England is not exactly on the edge of the known medieval world, and yet some identify Anglo-Saxon England and its inhabitants with geographic and cultural marginalization.

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[12] Daniel Anlezark, "The Anglo-Saxon World View" in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* 2nd ed., ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 66.

[13] Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 34.

[14] Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* eds. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 14. Here, the Late Modern English translation is my own.

[15] Asa Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 43.

[16] Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, 41.

This was not merely a matter of self-conscious identification and humility; subordination of the Anglo-Saxons was also imposed from cultural centers. Roman writers identified Britain as savage due to its location beyond the continent—a notion that Fabienne Michelet traces to Caesar, who explains that the further north one goes, the more wild the inhabitants.[17] Having been influenced by Roman geography, Bede observes a network of power that moves outward, beginning with cultural centers such as Rome, and extending to the periphery, where geographers conventionally located Anglo-Saxon England, in accordance with the model of *translatio studii et imperii* observed in the last chapter.[18] *Translatio studii*, the translation of learning, and *translatio imperii*, the transfer of rule, describe the movement of culture and education, and the movement of power, across time and space. These movements of cultural capital inform networks of power, and thus cultural orientations. There are multiple overlapping and interconnected networks of power, and as we shall see, the normative structure is open to interpretation and manipulation, and thus Rome does not represent the only cultural center. Still, Anglo-Saxon culture revered Rome, and thus maintained one dominant network of power that informs cultural authority in the Western Middle Ages. For example, Bede cites Rome as the foundation for an Anglo-Saxon historical tradition:

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[17] Fabienne L. Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128. Contrary to this perspective, some scholars, such as Kathy Lavezzo, have noted that Anglo-Saxons view their marginality as a privileged position, Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 31. Howe identifies Anglo-Saxons as converts on an island at the edge of the known world as essential participants in the Church's missionary work, Howe, "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* 34 (2004): 152. Nicole Guenther Discenza argues that Anglo-Saxon literature forges connections with distant lands and directs Anglo-Saxon audiences to situate England within cosmological orientations, thus interpreting their lived-experiences as on par with Rome within this broader, cosmic scope, *Inhabited Spaces: Anglo-Saxon Constructions of Place* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 62 and 138.
[18] See Introduction, "Cultural Identity, Power, and *Translatio*," as well as the section titled, "Alfred's Authority and Anglo-Saxon Orientations to Power" in the previous chapter.

[U]idelicet Nothelmus . . . Romam ueniens, nonnullas ibi beati Gregorii papae simul et

aliorum pontificum epistulas, perscrutato eiusdem sanctae ecclesiae Romanae scrinio,

permissu eius, qui nunc ipsi ecclesiae praeest Gregorii pontificis, inuenit, reuersusque

nobis nostrae historiae inserendas cum consilio praefati Albini reuerentissimi patris

adtulit. (4)

Nothhelm [archbishop of Canterbury in 735] went to Rome and got permission from the

present Pope Gregory to search the book chest of the said holy Church of Rome, where

he found certain epistles of the blessed pope Gregory as well as of other bishops.

[Nothhelm] brought them to me [Bede], under the advisement of Father Albinus, to be

included in our history.[19]

In Bede's time, Rome continues to influence English ecclesiastics such as Nothhelm, who is

granted access to the records contained in his own church by Pope Gregory. Citing this exchange

and the found letters, Bede claims a Roman literary heritage as the source for intellectual

institutions and developments in his native land, so that, as Anlezark explains, "the genesis of an

English nation and the literate culture they inherited as converts to Christianity placed Rome at

the centre of history and the map."[20] Roman authorities, whom Bede cites as responsible for

Anglo-Saxons' conversion to Christianity, refined England's inhabitants, maintaining

conventional networks of power that identify Rome as the source of cultural authority for

peripheral peoples.

But Rome did not only exert authority from afar. Romans occupied parts of the British

Isles up until the fifth century, and some Anglo-Saxons, including Bede, traced the conversion of

England to the moment Gregory saw two boys for sale in a Roman market. Hearing them called

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[19] The Late Modern English translation is by Bertram and Colgrave in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.
[20] Anlezark, "The Anglo-Saxon World View," 70.

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Angles, he was inspired to ensure that these pagan youths, with the faces of *angels*, should reach heaven.[21] According to his anonymous English biographer, Pope Benedict permitted Gregory to visit the Angles for the purpose of converting them to Christianity. Although he was recalled to Rome before ever departing for England, Gregory persisted.[22] When he was elected pope himself, Gregory sent monks to complete the mission, including Augustine (dispatched in 596), who settled with a group of Italian monks at Canterbury and founded the monastery of Saints Peter and Paul (later renamed Saint Augustine's). Gregory sent monks to interact directly with the pagan inhabitants of England—monks, who traditionally withdraw from the world, were affecting history firsthand, against their customs and their personal better judgment.[23] Not only had Gregory himself met with Angles, but he also dispatched missionaries from Rome to convert pagans near the edge of the known world.[24]

The narrative about Gregory the Great's encounter with English slave boys at the Forum was promoted by Christian intellectuals who had been influenced by Bede. Ælfric, in particular, uses the story to construct social cohesion and to privilege Anglo-Saxons within conversion narratives.[25] According to Kathy Lavezzo, Ælfric emphasizes the boys' wildness, because this is a socially constructed identity imposed on denizens of the borderlands. His details remark on the whiteness of their skin, opposing the "black devil" whom Gregory assumes these pagans serve. Ælfric's retelling is infused with the cultural memory of Anglo-Saxon conversion as he turns the

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[21] Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* 132-134.
[22] Bertram Colgrave, ed. and trans., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 91-3. Bede reproduces this anecdote in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and his translators reproduce this in Old English.
[23] The forty monks Gregory sent in 596 were so afraid of what they might encounter among the Anglo-Saxons that they tried to turn back, Joseph H. Lynch, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (Harlow: Longman, 1992), 50-51.
[24] Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, 50-51.
[25] *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. by W. W. Skeat, EETS 94 and 114 (London, 1881-90; reprinted Oxford University Press, 1966), 32.116-118 (col. 2, page 322).

"boyish signs of barbaric strangeness into emblems of Christian election" so that the Anglo-Saxons are privileged as a people chosen for conversion.[26] Cultural memory is the sense of history that is derived from dominant historical narratives and ideologies maintained by a group of people.[27] This narrative gains cultural capital and authority via the *translatio studii* by which it disseminates from Gregory the Great, to Bede, to Ælfric, and thus enters into the cultural memory.[28] In fact, Bede describes Pope Gregory as England's *apostolus* (apostle), who traced his ancestry from noble, devout Romans.[29] Bede cites Gregory's heritage of ancient Romans and papal authority, connecting Anglo-Saxon Christianity to this same ancestry via Gregory's intervention.

But Gregory was not the only influence on Anglo-Saxon conversion. Constructing a connection to Roman Christianity benefited Anglo-Saxons by establishing a noble heritage of cultural capital; also this cultural connection proffered socio-economic advantages. Bede's popular narrative valorizes Gregory for having perpetrated the conversion of *nostrae gens*, "our race" of the English.[30] Nicholas Brooks observes that Bede is careful to identify Roman cultural forces as the impetus for English conversion, as opposed to the Britons who inhabited Britain along with the Romans as early as the first century.[31] Bede was influenced by *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, by the Welsh monk Gildas, who believed that British influences were sinful, and therefore Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* records Romans exclusively as the

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[26] Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, 31.
[27] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 92; Anlezark, "Anglo-Saxon World View," 66.
[28] Cultural capital, as observed in the first chapter, is comprised of the ideas and education that operate economically within a stratified society to facilitate an advantaged social status, Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. E. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 243-4.
[29] ". . . genus a proauis non solum nobile sed et religiosum ducens," Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 122.
[30] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 132.
[31] Christopher A. Snyder, *The Britons* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 4-7.

missionaries who converted the English.[32] Bede identifies Roman Christianity as a source of cultural power that is received directly from a dominant Western center: Rome. Sharon M. Rowley explains that Gregory's letters to bishops reveal that this episode may be a fabrication, not entirely Bede's doing, but rather the blame lies with delayed letters and misrepresentation. She argues that the English probably sought conversion mediated by Romans, rather than the nearby Franks, for trade purposes.[33] Robin Fleming identifies political turmoil in the sixth and seventh centuries as one factor in English conversion narratives: as young pagan English princes sought refuge with Pictish and Frankish kings, or others who had been born Christians, they adopted Christianity during their exile.[34] Diverse cultures influenced the English conversion to Christianity, but Roman influences commanded cultural authority, and that authority could be transferred to others. Narratives that identify a direct link between Rome and England, like Pope Gregory's mission to convert the Angles, conforms to dominant networks of power while situating Anglo-Saxons as immediate beneficiaries of Roman cultural capital, via *translatio studii*, minus the geographical obstacles and non-Roman intercessors.

Given the geographic distance from Rome that hinders direct influence and Bede's account of Gregory's intervention, Anglo-Saxon England appears to have been selected for conversion to Christianity by the Pope. Some Anglo-Saxons interpreted their cultural conversion narrative as an emblem of their Christian election.[35] Because they were selected for conversion, some Anglo-Saxons shared a privileged connection to Rome. Nicholas Howe explains that

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[32] Nicholas Brooks, "From British to English Christianity: Deconstructing Bede's Interpretation of the Conversion," in *Conversion and Colonization in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov and Nicholas Howe (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 5; Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum,* 1.22; Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom (London: Phillimore, 1978).
[33] Sharon M. Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), 100-102.
[34] Robin Fleming, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400-1070.* New York: Penguin, 2010), 167.
[35] Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, 31.

sources such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* indicate that

Anglo-Saxons favored the core-periphery orientation because it inverts the power that is usually

associated with core cultural powers. For Anglo-Saxons, "[b]eing a missionary in heathen lands,

on the political and religious periphery, means becoming central to the dynamic of the Christian

faith by emulating the most honored of human exampla in Christian history, the original apostles

who ventured across the world to spread the faith."[36] The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records Irish

exiles coming to Alfred's court in 891, which Fabienne Michelet considers evidence that

England is "the place to which God directs his followers who trust in his judgment and who let

providence guide their journey, thus implying that Anglo-Saxon England is a significant site in

Christendom."[37] Although England is a borderland on the edge of the medieval European West,

the Roman Catholic mission identified it as a place of place elected for conversion and medieval

travelers and merchants from the Continent and North Africa considered the island a place of

interest.[38] Lavezzo argues that while medieval English writers were self-conscious and

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[36] Nicholas Howe, "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004): 152.
[37] Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest*, 158.
[38] Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, 7. As evidence of England's attraction to diverse inhabitants from afar, Caitlin Green relies on oxygen isotope data collected from excavated human enamel to trace individuals to areas beyond the British Isles, confirming Anglo-Saxon England as a diverse contact zone for people who grew up in Scandinavia, far eastern Europe, North Africa, and Southern Iberia. Sources of drinking water impose specific values of the phosphate oxygen isotope ($\delta^{18}O_p$), that vary according to climate and elevation, but some of the evidence collected from remains in Britain diverge from the normal levels of inhabitants who have lived in that area for the majority of their lives, indicating that these individuals must have originated, or at least grown up, in different climate zones, Caitlin R. Green, "Some oxygen isotope evidence for long-distance migration to Britain from North Africa and Southern Iberia, c. 1100 BC-AD 800" *Dr Caitlin R. Green.* http://www.caitlingreen.org/2015/10/oxygen-isotope-evidence.html (accessed 31 July 2017); Green, "Out of the cold far north east? Some oxygen isotope evidence for Scandinavian and central/eastern European migrants in Britain, c. 2300 BC-AD 1050." *Dr Caitlin R. Green.* http://www.caitlingreen.org/2016/01/oxygen-isotope-scandinavia.html (accessed 31 July 2017). Additionally, the contents excavated from Sutton Hoo, a site of at least eighteen burial mounds, reveals Anglo-Saxon England to be a "colonial contact zone," Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 78. Mound One in particular culls artifacts from much of medieval Europe, Rupert Leo Scott Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial:*

participatory in constructing England as a global borderland, this very marginality, paradoxically, comprises social authority.[39] For Anglo-Saxons, their location at the edge of the known Western world and their reception of Christianity from cultural authorities identified with Rome were sources of pride and power.[40]

Anglo-Saxon representations of Christianity maintain the immediacy of Roman influences on Anglo-Saxon England. Some Old English narratives about the cross, such as *Dream*, combine Roman figures and imagery with Anglo-Saxon literary conventions, following Latin literature more closely than biblical record. Howe explains that Rome is a cultural center to which Anglo-Saxons looked for their spiritual *patria*:

> The Anglo-Saxon gaze looked, typically, toward the south and especially toward Rome and the Holy Land. Like other forms of the gaze, the Anglo-Saxon one had a certain element of desire to it: it looked for a purpose, to accommodate a need, to satisfy an absence, to close a distance.[41]

Similar to the ways in which Alfred's Old English translation program constructed a cultural connection to Rome via networks of *translatio studii*, *Dream* also exhibits a strong Latin influence that constructs similar connections. *Dream* constructs parallels between core cultural authorities, Rome and Jerusalem, and Anglo-Saxons on the geographic edge, in accordance with the core periphery model identified by Howe above, to authorize *Dream* among generic

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Late Roman Byzantine Silver, Hanging Bowls, Drinking Vessels, Cauldrons and Other Containers, Textiles, the Lyre, Pottery Bottles and Other Items, Volume 3 (London: British Museum, 1983), 69-146.
[39] Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, 7.
[40] Heide Estes, "Colonization and Conversion in Cynewulf's *Elene*," in *Conversion and Colonization in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov and Nicholas Howe (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 150; Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest*, 158; Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, 23; Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, 208-9.
[41] Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England*, 79.

conventions, and to authorize Anglo-Saxon England as a core site within Christian salvation history.[42]

Cult of the Cross Conventions

The True Cross upon which Jesus Christ sacrificed himself had a popular following known as the Cult of the Cross. The cross was adopted as a sign for Christ because it represents the manner of his execution while alluding to the promise of Christian triumph over bodily death: Christ sacrificed himself to save the souls of every Christian who accepts the one God, and so through him Christians gain immortal life. As early as the third century, Tertullian had used the sign of the cross in devotional practices.[43] Popular reverence for the True Cross emerged in the fourth century along with holy sites and the Cult of the Saints.[44] In 380, Egeria, a nun or abbess from Spain who recorded her pilgrimages, observed a feast in Jerusalem that was held to commemorate Constantine's Holy Sepulcher (completed in 335); the feast coincided with the day of the discovery of the True Cross, but Egeria does not record a specific date.[45] By the early fifth century, in Jerusalem, the Exaltation of the Cross, or Holy Cross Day, was celebrated on September 14, with banquets and displays of relics of the True Cross.[46] Liturgies and pilgrims' itineraries indicate multiple sites and devotional practices for venerating the holy wood through the fifth and sixth centuries. A feast day for the cross was established in Rome by the

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[42] Howe, "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England," 152.

[43] Sandra McEntire, "The Devotional Context of the Cross before A.D. 1000," in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986), 346.

[44] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 44.

[45] Egeria, *Itinerarium Peregrinatio*, Pars Secunda XLVIII.1, in *The Latin Library*, http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/egeria2.html (accessed 18 December 2017).

[46] Louis van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross: Toward the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in Early Medieval Liturgy* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2000), 81.

seventh century.[47] Relics and shrines of devotion to the True Cross were fairly common in the

early medieval period, inspiring many of the stone crosses of seventh and eighth-century Britain,

such as the Ruthwell Cross.[48] Moreover, in 883 and 885, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records

King Alfred receiving pieces of the True Cross from Pope Marinus.

In addition to material culture, the cross inspired literature as well. Cult of the Cross

narratives employ conventions that traditionally privilege Jerusalem and Rome. As observed in

the previous chapter, normative networks of power begin at the center and disseminate outwards:

translatio studii et imperii begins with Jerusalem and Rome, disseminating towards geographical

ends such as Britain. Like the relics sent from the Pope in Rome to Alfred in England, Cult-of-

the-Cross narratives follow a similar trajectory, emanating from Christian centers to the

periphery via oral transmission and translation.

Jerusalem, the site of the crucifixion and thus the origin for Cult of the Cross narratives,

is a Christian center, which *Dream* identifies by means of spatial orientations. Some medieval

concepts of the universe identify it as a cosmological center. Medieval cartography commonly

held Jerusalem to be the center of Creation because in Ezekiel 5:5 the Lord describes Jerusalem

as "the center of nations, with countries all around her." Adomnán's seventh-century *De locis*

sanctis also identifies Jerusalem's centrality, observing the disappearance of shadows at noon on

the summer solstice. Similarly, the account of Sæwulf, an Anglo-Saxon pilgrim, locates

Jerusalem as the center of the earth.[49] Annemarie Mahler argues that the Rood must be visualized

in its full dimensions as it is rooted in the sphere of the earth, specifically at Jerusalem. It

resembles the *globus cruciger*, a cross-bearing orb signifying Christian dominion and authority

as it reaches from the cosmological center, Jerusalem, into the sky and extends to the edges of

[47] van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross*, 10.
[48] McEntire, "The Devotional Context of the Cross before A.D. 1000," 346.
[49] Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, 32-5.

the cosmos.[50] Julia Bolton Holloway suggests pilgrimage to Jerusalem is a model for *Dream* and other Anglo-Saxon artifacts that participate in the Cult of the Cross because the central action of *Dream*, the crucifixion of Christ, is historically located at Golgotha, just outside of Jerusalem.[51]

The setting of the crucifixion is implicit and incidental to the Old English retelling in *Dream*, and a key feature of one of the centers inhabited by the Rood; however, *Dream* bears stronger connections to Rome as a cultural center, than to Jerusalem. The location of the crucifixion near Jerusalem is an essential feature of the event, but Jerusalem is never explicitly cited. According to the Gospels, the Cross was constructed in Jerusalem and taken to Golgotha for the crucifixion where it was carried to the crest by Christ. Cult of the Cross narratives generally agree with these details. In *Dream*, however, the Rood describes:

Bæron me ðær beornas on eaxlum,   oððæt hie me on beorg asetton,

gefæstnodon me þær feondas genoge.   Geseah ic ða frean mancynnes

efstan elne mycle   þæt he me wolde on gestigan. (32a-34b)

Men bore me there on their shoulders,   until they set me on a hill,

Enemies enough fastened me there. I saw the lord of mankind

Hasten with great zeal   as he wanted to mount me.

The Rood is harvested from the edge of the forest and planted at Golgotha where Christ approaches him. *Dream* shares more similarities with Sedulius's *Carmen Paschale* than the Gospels. *Carmen Paschale* is a fifth-century Latin Christian epic that was read in Anglo-Saxon England. Sedulius omits Gospel details such as the intervention of Simon of Cyrene (Matt 27:32 and John 19:17); nor is it clear, during what Sedulius portrays as a royal procession to Calvary,

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[50] Annemarie E. Mahler, "*Lignum Domini* and the Opening Vision of *The Dream of the Rood*: A Viable Hypothesis," *Speculum* 53 (1978): 446-9.

[51] Julia Bolton Holloway, "*The Dream of the Rood* and Liturgical Drama," *Comparative Drama* 18 (1984): 19-37.

that Christ carried the cross.[52] Although Jerusalem is a crucial setting for the Rood's experience, *Dream* exhibits stronger adherence to Roman Cult of the Cross narratives than biblical or historical details. *Dream*, much like Bede's historical account of the English, is informed by Roman sources.

Moreover, the appearance and spatial orientations of the Rood in *Dream* are homologous to popular representations of a celestial Christian symbol appearing to Constantine (Roman emperor from 306 until 337). Constantine's conversion was effected by a dream the night before his battle at Milvian Bridge in 312 during which a symbol appeared to him with the words *In hoc signo vinces* (you will conquer by this sign).[53] After Constantine defeated his co-emperor Licinius in 324, Christianity became the official Roman religion.[54] By the end of the fourth century it was widely accepted that Helen, Constantine's mother, had discovered the True Cross hidden underground in 326; this relic was confirmed by miracles in the same year it was discovered. The legend of Helen's *inventio crucis*, or the discovery of the True Cross, was widely disseminated; it was recorded in Greek, Latin, and Syriac in the same century.[55] Cult of the Cross legends about Constantine and Helen were also translated into the Old English poem *Elene*, which appears along with *Dream* in the Vercelli Manuscript. In fact, the descriptions of Constantine and Helen's encounters with the cross in *Elene* overlap with the descriptions of the Dreamer's interactions with the Rood in *Dream*. *Elene* details Constantine's vision of the cross, his subsequent conversion, and his mother's journey to Jerusalem to recover the True Cross,

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[52] Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the* Dream of the Rood *Tradition*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 4.

[53] Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, eds. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), book I, paragraph 28. 80-1. It is not clear from Michael Lapidge's *Anglo-Saxon Library* that Anglo-Saxons would have been familiar with Eusebius's *Vita Constantini* specifically, but considering the content of *Elene* Anglo-Saxons must have known Eusebius's text or a similar account.

[54] Hans A. Pohlsander, *Emperor Constantine* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 59-62.

[55] Jan Willem Drijvers, "Helena Augusta, the Cross and the Myth: Some New Reflections," *Millennium Yearbook* 8 (2011): 126-7.

connecting Anglo-Saxon audiences to Latin culture by drawing from Latin sources and featuring Roman figures.[56] *Dream* exhibits a similar rhetorical strategy. Although *Elene* is preceded by *Dream* in order of appearance in the Vercelli Manuscript, this does not reflect the chronological order of events recorded in the poems (which is logically reversed), nor does this preclude *Elene* from having been an analogue that informs the content of *Dream*.

In *Dream*, the appearance of the Rood to the Anglo-Saxon Dreamer is strikingly similar in orientation and appearance to the vision of Constantine that is described in Cynewulf's *Elene*:

[He] up locade	swa him se ar abead,
fæle friðowebba.	Geseah he frætwum beorht
wliti wuldres treo	ofer wolcna hrof,
golde geglenged,	gimmas lixtan;
wæs se blaca beam	bocstafum awriten,
beorhte ond leohte:	"Mid þys beacne ðu

[56] *Elene* is one of four surviving poems signed by Cynewulf, identified by his runic signature encoded at the end. Cynewulf's poems include *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Juliana*, *Elene*, and *Christ II*. Cynewulf probably composed his poems in Northumbria or Mercia. The dates assigned to his poems range from 750 to 1000, but most scholars, myself included, assign his work to the late eighth to early ninth century. R. D. Fulk argues that linguistic evidence suggests that Cynewulf writing in early ninth-century Mercia, "Cynewulf: Canon, Dialect, and Date," in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. Robert E. Bjork (New York: Routledge, 2001), 15-18. Robert E. Bjork is not compelled by linguistic evidence alone for dating Cynewulf's works; he suggests possible sources for Cynewulf's works are a better indication. For example, Cynewulf's *Fates of the Apostles* is more consistent with texts after the early ninth century, indicating a later date, Robert E. Bjork, "Introduction," in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. Robert E. Bjork (New York: Routledge, 2001), xvi. For a much later date, Patrick Conner argues that Cynewulf must have been writing in the tenth century, based on later influences and the near-rhymes of *Elene* that are more commonly used among tenth-century Anglo-Saxon poets, "On Dating Cynewulf," in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. Robert E. Bjork (New York: Routledge, 2001), 35. I locate Cynewulf's *Elene* in the late eighth century as a possible influence on *Dream*. John Gardner identifies the network of power that influences the Old English connection to Latin sources, Cynewulf's *Elene* has three Latin analogues: the "Vita Quiriaci" of the *Acta Sanctorum*, the *Inventio Sanctae Crucis*, and the legend of the *Vitae Sanctorum*, "Vita Quiriaci," in *Acta Sanctorum* 14, ed. J. Bollandus, rev. J. Carnandet, et al. (Paris, 1863-75), 4 May; *Inventio Sanctae Crucis*, ed. A. Holder (Lipsiae, 1889); *Sanctuarium seu Vitae Sanctorum* 1, ed., B. Mombritius (Paris, 1910); John Gardner, "Cynewulf's *Elene*: Sources and Structure," *Neophilologus* 54.1 (1970): 65.

on þam frecnan fære   feond oferswiðesð,

geletest lað werod."   (lines 87–92a)

Constantine looked up as the messenger,

the faithful peaceweaver, ordered. He saw, bright with ornament,

The beautiful tree of glory, across the roof of the heavens

Adorned with gold, glittering with gems.

The radiant tree was inscribed with book-letters,

Bright and shining: "With this beacon

On this fearful expedition, you will overpower the fiend;

You will stop the loathsome legion."

Similarly, the Dreamer describes:

Þuhte me þæt ic gesawe   syllicre treow

on lyft lædan,   leohte bewunden,

beama beorhtost.   Eall þæt beacen wæs

begoten mid golde.   Gimmas stodon

fægere æt foldan sceatum,   swylce þær fife wæron

uppe on þam eaxlegespanne.   Beheoldon þær engel dryhtnes ealle,

fægere þurh forðgesceaft. . . .

. . . .

Syllic wæs se sigebeam . . . (4a-10a and 13a)

It seemed to me that I saw   a most wonderful tree

led into the air,   wrapped with light

the brightest of trees.   That beacon was entirely

covered with gold.   Gems stood

fair at the corners of the earth,   likewise there were five

up on the crossbeam.   They all beheld the angel of the lord,

the fair ones throughout creation. . . .

The victory tree was wonderful . . .

Both Constantine and the Dreamer encounter a cross manifesting multiple appearances: a tree, a

text, a luminous beacon, and an adorned cross. "Treo(w)," or tree, in both poems acknowledges

the natural origin of the cross; an artifact shaped by humans for a destructive purpose, made

glorious by Christ's intercession (*Elene* 87a, *Dream* 4b).[57] Representing the cross as a layered

subject, from a tree of the forest to a symbol of Christianity, succinctly encodes the narrative of

the True Cross. It represents salvation, a developmental process that the angel proffers to

Constantine by way of the cross: the wood that is now glorious can deliver Constantine to glory

(90b-92a).

Each poem also acknowledges markings inscribed upon the cross. In *Elene* the cross is

"bocstafum awriten," ("inscribed with book-letters," 89a). *Elene* does not identify the language

or content of these words, rather it is a detail indicating the cross is a text available for reading

and interpretation. Anglo-Saxons, as noted in the introduction and the previous chapter,

identified written texts with antiquity, and thus writing and literacy connects Anglo-Saxons to

cultural authorities—specifically Latin, and thus Rome, although the cross in *Elene* may just as

easily be inscribed with Hebrew words given the context and ambiguity of the description.[58]

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[57] "treow," *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph*
Bosworth, ed. T. Northcote Toller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1898) comp. Sean Christ and Ondřej
Tichý. Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/030998.
[58] Mechthild Gretsch, "Literacy and the Uses of the Vernacular," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old
English Literature* 2 ed., eds. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2013), 290; and Rebecca Stephenson and Emily V. Thornbury, "Introduction," in *Latinity and*

Bocstafum, therefore, implies a connection to the ancient, revered past. It also suggests extension into the future by means of textuality. Christine Fell's analysis of "boc," meaning book, in comparison to "læne," meaning loan, within Anglo-Saxon charters indicates the written record achieves permanence. For example, Old English poetry associates the earth with "lænland," loaned land, but heaven is "bocland," land guaranteed by the charter of the Gospels. Fell argues that "boc" transcends the transience of the material realm.[59] The cross of *Elene* is a text signifying biblical and historical records that connect Constantine to literary networks spanning time and place.

Comparatively, the Rood also bears words: "Ongan þa word sprecan   wudu selesta," (It began to speak words, the best of wood," 27). The Rood's words are mediated by the Dreamer's text, and are thus available for interpretation and dissemination beyond the Dreamer's experience. The Rood is represented as a text. The Anglo-Saxon Dreamer discerns scars through the Rood's gold covering, and he interprets this inscription as the site where "hit ærest ongan / swætan on þa swiðran healft.   Eall ic wæs mid sorgum gedrefed," ("it first began / to bleed on the right side. I was all disturbed with sorrows," 19b-20b). The violence enacted upon the Rood has left an inscription, like the words imprinted onto the cross in *Elene*. Reading the text, the Dreamer interprets the Rood's inscription as "earmra ærgewin," ("the ancient agony of the wretched," 19a). He locates agony in the ancient past, but are "earmra," the wretched who endure(d) this agony, those who experienced the crucifixion—Christ and the Rood—or all who suffer, including the Dreamer? The ancient past connects with the present as the Dreamer reads the inscription and feels the disturbance of sorrows, empathy for the Rood who bears the

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Identity in Anglo-Saxon Literature, eds. Rebecca Stephenson and Emily V. Thornbury (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 3-4.

[59] Christine Fell, "Perceptions of Transience," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* 2 ed., eds. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 181-2.

markings of a wound on the right side of his trunk, and also empathy with Christ whose trunk was speared on the right side during the crucifixion (John 19:31-7). The cross in *Elene* and the Rood in *Dream* employ textuality and hermeneutics that transcend time and place to implicate witnesses, Constantine and the Dreamer, within narratives beginning with ancient cultural authorities, the Gospels, and Christ.

Additionally, these Old English representations of the cross register aesthetics associated with Jerusalem and Rome that developed after Constantine's conversion. Both *Elene* and *Dream* describe the Rood as a "beacen" dazzling with "leohte" (beacon of light, 90 and 5b-6b respectively), perhaps informed by the cross of light observed in the sky over Golgotha in 351 C.E, following Constantine's architectural developments in the Holy Land.[60] Moreover, *Elene* and *Dream* describe the cross covered with gold and gems, resembling the *crux gemmata* (a cross adorned with gold, silver, and jewels, typically located at the four points) that originates with Constantine and Helen (*Elene* 88, *Dream* 7).[61] Due to the reverence for the True Cross and the proliferation of the legend of Helen, a commemorative cross between Constantine's basilica and rotunda was erected between 325 and 335, and this cross was later adorned with gold and gems by emperor Theodosius in 417.[62] Some *cruces gemmatae* were reliquaries containing relics that were declared to be fragments of the True Cross. In *Dream*, the Rood recalls that he was "freondas gefrunon, / gyredon me golde ond seolfre" ("found by friends who adorned me with silver and gold," 76-77), alluding to Helen's *inventio crucis* and the gilding of the cross as described in Cynewulf's *Elene* (1017-1032a). The *crux gemmata*, argues Ian Wood, **"had become an appropriate way of representing the crosses set up in the Holy Land [and thus] the

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[60] Edward J. Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem* (London: Routledge, 2000), 4 and 22.
[61] Ian Wood, "Constantinian Crosses in Northumbria," in *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England,* eds. Catherine E. Karkov, Sarah Larratt Keefer, and Karen Louise Jolly (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 10.
[62] Michael Swanton, *The Dream of the Rood* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 42-5.

image entered written discourse, and remained there, appearing as it does in [Anglo-Saxon literature]."[63] Early Christian imagery of the *cruces gemmatae*, along with the Constantinian vision, informed the Anglo-Saxon Cult of the Cross and became a symbol by which Anglo-Saxons could relate to Christian spiritual centers from which the aesthetic disseminates, particularly Rome.

The Rood's appearance in *Dream*, however, which alludes to Constantine's vision and Roman cultural capital, also registers Anglo-Saxon cultural currency. Some Anglo-Saxon writers believed that because Constantine's father, Constantius, ruled Britain in the third century, Constantine may have been born there.[64] This legend ties Constantine to the island of the Anglo-Saxons, rendering them inheritors of a noble Christian tradition. Heide Estes argues that identifying Constantine as British-born in *Elene* reinforces the theme of conversion with contemporary events in Anglo-Saxon England, namely the English people's continued mission to convert the Danes chronically invading their lands.[65] Some English understood their own conversion, influenced by Roman forces, as authorization to extend Christianity to the Danes. In *Elene*, Estes distinguishes two conversion exempla: the ideal is performed by Constantine himself who is elected as a noble convert to Christianity, and the other is violently forced upon Judas, a Jew who attempts to conceal the location of the True Cross.[66] Constantine is a noble

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[63] Wood, "Constantinian Crosses in Northumbria," 11.

[64] Constantine is identified as British by birthplace in Aldhelm's prose *De Virginitate* and the Old English version of *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*: Aldhelm, *De laudibus virginitatis sive de virginitate sanctorum*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by J. P. Migne 89.148B; and *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 36-37. Heide Estes notes that Aldhelm's work was popular and widespread, and that the legend of Constantine's British birth was common enough to be recorded later in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the King's of Britain*, Heide Estes, "Colonization and Conversion in Cynewulf's *Elene*," in *Conversion and Colonization in Anglo-Saxon* England, ed. Catherine E. Karkov and Nicholas Howe (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 138; and Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York, 1966), 132.

[65] Estes, "Colonization and Conversion in Cynewulf's *Elene*," 141.

[66] Estes, "Colonization and Conversion in Cynewulf's *Elene*," 138 and 149.

British leader who is elected for Christian conversion, just as Anglo-Saxons were generally depicted as elected for conversion by Pope Gregory.[67] The Germanic characterization of Constantine in *Elene* presents a transtemporal association for Anglo-Saxons. In the broader context of the Vercelli Manuscript, Constantine is an historical British convert to Christianity who connects the Anglo-Saxon cultural identity to authorized Roman historical narratives via processes of conversion. *Dream* also manipulates the legendary connection between Constantine and England by alluding to his vision in the context of an Anglo-Saxon Dreamer's vision. Hailed by the Rood, the Anglo-Saxon Dreamer is thus called into an experience that resembles that of a Roman and Anglo-Saxon authority figure. The Dreamer performs a subject position that is similar to Constantine's orientation to the celestial sign. *Dream* connects Anglo-Saxons on the periphery to a core cultural figure.

The Anglo-Saxon Dreamer's vision is thus authorized by Roman figures and popular Roman representation of the cross. These allusions connect the Old English text to Latin literatures and culture more than the Gospels. *Dream* encodes a bond between the geographically marginalized England and the socially, politically, and spiritually powerful Rome. Citations of Roman culture and Latin literatures authorize the Old English text—for the purpose of authorizing Anglo-Saxon England within the narrative of Christian salvation history.

Speaking of Power: *Translatio Studii* and Anglo-Saxon Confessions of Faith

Dream's innovation, the personified Rood speaking the mother tongue of the Anglo-Saxons, constructs a model of *translatio studii* that traces authority from Christ, to the Rood, to the Anglo-Saxon Dreamer and his audience. The Rood describes the means by which power and

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[67] Colgrave, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby*, 91-3; Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, 31; and see the opening of the section "Conventional Anglo-Saxon Orientations" earlier in this chapter.

authority are transferred to him. During the crucifixion, the Rood's will to vanquish Christ's

enemies is replaced by the word of his lord: "Þær ic þa ne dorste ofer dryhtnes word /

bugan oððe berstan" (there I dared not against the word of the Lord bow or break," 35-6). Then,

the Rood explains how his experience with Christ authorizes him: "On me bearn godes /

þrowode hwile.   Forþan ic þrymfæst nu," ("On me the Son of God / suffered for a while.   Due

to this I am glorious now," 83b-84b). Because of his former intimacy with Christ, the Rood is

authorized to save others, specifically *voicebearers*, who he inspires to speak and to share the

faith with others: "ærþan ic him lifes weg / rihtne gerymde,   reordberendum," ("I opened for

them [created beings] the way of life / the right way,   for voicebearers," 88b-89b). The Rood

has received *dryhtnes word*: he passes this onto the Dreamer and other voicebearers, creating a

chain of reception and transmission via professions of faith. Authority is shared through words

and thus authorizes others. In *Dream*, power is disseminated through language.

Connecting outliers to Christ, the Rood facilitates *translatio studii* by inciting others,

specifically *reordberendas* (voicebearers), to confess their faith. Joseph L. Baird focuses on the

occurrence of *reordberend*, meaning voicebearer or eloquent person, and its alliteration with

rihtne (weg), the proper way to salvation (88b-89b). Baird argues that the Rood urges the

Dreamer to do what is right and to share his vision with others.[68] In the vision that frames the

Rood's narrative, we witness the Rood similarly transferring power from Christ, through himself,

to the Anglo-Saxon Dreamer. Power is disseminated via language, promoting community

through cohesive beliefs that connect participants to the origin of Christian power: Christ.

Miranda Wilcox argues that confessing the Christian faith was an important practice for

ensuring personal salvation and for community-building among Anglo-Saxons. Social

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[68] Joseph L. Baird, "*Natura Plangens*, the Ruthwell Cross, and *The Dream of the Rood*," *Studies in Iconography* 10 (1984): 37.

conventions compelled Anglo-Saxons to confess proper terms of faith during rituals of baptism, communion, or receiving last rites. Confessions were thought to prepare souls for entering heaven, and these confessions were circulated through medieval Europe, resulting in formulations meant to transmit a ritual discourse of Christian orthodoxy.[69] Personal confessions of faith in Anglo-Saxon England consist of public commitments that affirm one's beliefs, identify or challenge doctrinal interpretations, or respond to charges of heterodoxy. Despite the fixity required for confessions of proper faith, Wilcox notes that some texts, particularly personal confessions as opposed to liturgical creeds, allowed for more experimentation. In fact, she implies Anglo-Saxons generally associated personal confessions with poetic compositions.[70] They exhibit far more variation than other forms of confession in Wilcox's taxonomy, creating a more fluid dynamic with conventions. Wilcox notes that personal confessions generally focus on relationships between past and present traditions and the author's relationship with contemporary social conditions and ideologies: the author commits to ideology while communicating it to others, and thus transferring personal insights for communal benefit.[71]

Dream is a series of partial confessions that are not entirely in chronological order, by which the Rood confesses to the Dreamer, who confesses to his audience. The Rood reveals himself to the Dreamer and "Ongan þa word sprecan," (began to speak words, 27), sharing his experience, confessing his loyalty to his Lord. Now, the Rood explains, "ond ic hælan mæg / æghwylcne anra, þara þe him bið egesa to me," (I am able to heal / each one of those who wonders upon me, 85-6). The Rood's confession connects the present audience to Christ's crucifixion at the center of the poem:

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[69] Miranda Wilcox, "Confessing the Faith in Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 113.3 (2014): 308-341 at 308.
[70] Wilcox, "Confessing the Faith in Anglo-Saxon England," 335-6.
[71] Wilcox, "Confessing the Faith in Anglo-Saxon England," 337.

Nu ic þe hate,   hæleð min se leofa,

þæt ðu þas gesyhðe   secge mannum,

onwreoh wordum   þæt hit is wuldres beam,

se ðe ælmihtig god   on þrowode […] (95-98, italics added)

Now I urge you,   my beloved man,

that you speak this   sight to others,

Uncover with words   that it is the tree of glory

On which almighty God   suffered…

The verb *onwreoh*, from *onwrigan*, meaning to uncover, urges the Dreamer to *uncover* this

vision in his vernacular. Britt Mize explains that *onwrigan* has to do with physical exposure of

privileged understanding, reserved for "the mystery of Mary's miraculous impregnation, or of

her perpetual virginity; a saint's prophetic knowledge of his approaching death; God's wisdom

laid open to human minds, . . . the secret history of the True Cross"[72] The Rood employs

onwreoh to encourage the Dreamer to *uncover* his vision for others, just as the location of the

True Cross was uncovered in language for Helen (*Elene* 588b-90 and 673b-76a). The poem itself

facilitates participation in a ritualized *inventio crucis*, discovery of the True Cross. The cross is

continuously rediscovered, received, and transmitted, along this chain of confession that

connects participants to the site of the crucifixion in Jerusalem and the Roman sources informing

representations of the True Cross.

Encouraging the Dreamer to share his vision, and others to do likewise, the Rood also

authorizes Anglo-Saxon vernacular intercessions into the Latin dominated Cult of the Cross (95-

6). Wilcox explains that "the entire community was invested in the construction and maintenance

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[72] Britt Mize, "The Mental Container and the Cross of Christ: Revelation and Community in *The Dream of the Rood*," *Studies in Philology* 107.2 (2010): 146.

of their social identity through shared belief structures."[73] Still, confessions of faith did not

standardize devotion, subsuming individuals into a broadly unified Christian identity; rather,

confessions of faith encouraged cultural cohesion. Personal confessions of faith in particular,

observes Wilcox, invited Old English poetic contributions.[74] The Rood's encourages the

Dreamer to share his vision, and thus authorizes him to transmit the Rood as an Anglo-Saxon

personification. The Rood himself is the means by which souls will dwell in heaven with their

Lord (119-121a). There is nothing to fear as long as one "in breostum bereð   beacna selest"

("bear in their breast the best of trees" 118). The spatial reference is ambiguous due to the

instability of the in/on prepositions in Old English.[75] Bearing the Rood in or on the breast could

refer to a pectoral cross, a devotional symbol worn about the neck and dangling at the chest, or a

reminder to carry the story of the Rood close to one's heart. The ambiguity of this line allows for

all three. Focusing on the abstract sense: the Dreamer and his audience accept the word of the

Rood, and thus they carry the cross metaphorically in their hearts, parallel to the earlier account

of the Rood's acceptance of his *dryhtnes word* (35). Eric Jager observes that Old English

literature frequently describes "speech and other verbal functions in pectoral terms . . .

specify[ing] the chest as the source of utterance and as the center of verbal activity."[76] The chest

is also described as a hoard, which Anglo-Saxon contexts traditionally associate with treasure,

but the chest is specifically a word hoard, which is opened to share intellectual and spiritual

treasures with the community. Mize argues that the spiritual revelation of the Dreamer, material

treasures, "should not be hoarded but distributed for public benefit," according to Anglo-Saxon

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[73] Wilcox, "Confessing the Faith in Anglo-Saxon England," 340.
[74] Wilcox, "Confessing the Faith in Anglo-Saxon England," 317 and 335-6.
[75] See my "Into the Embodied *Inneweard Mod* of the Old English *Boethius*," *Neophilologus* 100 (2016): 649-662.
[76] Eric Jager, "Speech and the Chest in Old English Poetry: Orality or Pectorality?" *Speculum* 65 (1990): 845.

social custom.[77] The Rood advises the Dreamer and his audience to carry him in their breasts, at the corporeal site of language and social exchange.

The Rood does not simply passively receive power from Christ and transmit this power to his fellow Anglo-Saxons on the geographic periphery; the Rood actively locates Anglo-Saxons at the center of salvation history because the Rood himself is characterized as an Anglo-Saxon. Cult of the Cross conventions as well as Old English literary genres and eschatology combine to reveal "the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a . . . starting point for an opposing strategy.[78] *Dream* exhibits Anglo-Saxon agency, in accordance with Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe's observations concerning agency and disruption cited in the introduction, because the poem operates within the normative discourse of Cult of the Cross narratives, and yet the Rood is characterized as an Anglo-Saxon, opening within the discourse numerous "narrative moments of contradiction and surprise that point us to the orchestration of agency."[79] An Anglo-Saxon subject acts as the altar upon which Christ's purpose is fulfilled. *Dream* simultaneously cites and disrupts normative models of spatiotemporality, upon which networks *translatio studii* rely, to privilege Anglo-Saxon subjects at the inception and conclusion of salvation history.

The Anglo-Saxon Rood

Despite his geographic origins at the outskirts of Jerusalem, the Rood implicitly identifies as an Anglo-Saxon. He shares Anglo-Saxon perspectives and cultural values, and he employs Old English language and literary tropes. Locating an Anglo-Saxon at the crucifixion queers

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[77] Mize, "The Mental Container and the Cross," 147.
[78] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 100-1.
[79] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 13.

normative "forms of time [that] fold subjects into structures of belonging."[80] The poem disrupts temporality to put Anglo-Saxons "within reach [of] some bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy"—specifically, the body of Christ.[81] Performing an Anglo-Saxon cultural identity reorients *Dream*'s immediate Anglo-Saxon audience from their geographic location near the edge to the cultural center at the inception of salvation history.

Spatial orientations in *Dream* are significant: as described above, the Dreamer's orientation to the Rood is analogous to Constantine's orientation in *Elene*; similarly, the Rood's personal origin is analogous to the geographic orientations of Anglo-Saxons. The Rood reveals his origin to the Dreamer, beginning at the forest's edge, on the outskirts of a community: "ic wæs aheawen   holtes on ende" ("I was cut down   on the forest's edge," 29). Thomas Hill observes that, as a tree harvested from the edge of the forest, the Rood "imagines its beginning in terms of conventional Anglo-Saxon (and pre-modern American) logging practices."[82] But the spatial orientations of the Rood manipulate Cult of the Cross conventions that maintain Jerusalem as the narrative center that is then culturally connected to Romans by means of Constantine and Elene's interventions. According to the Gospels, as previously mentioned, the Cross was constructed in Jerusalem and taken to Golgotha for the crucifixion; Cult of the Cross narratives generally agree with these details. In *Dream*, the Rood first identifies as an inhabitant of the forest's edge he claims spatial orientations that resemble the geographical and cultural orientations of Anglo-Saxons to the cultural center.

Additionally, the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, which occurred between the late sixth and late seventh centuries, informs their cultural memory of their pagan past in Northern

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[80] Freeman, *Time Binds*, xi.
[81] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 107.
[82] Hill, "The *Passio Andreae* and *The Dream of the Rood*," 5.

Europe.[83] Conversion is not a social process that belongs to Anglo-Saxons alone, but I suggest

that the details of the Rood's conversion, particularly as his conversion is spatially oriented,

resonates with Anglo-Saxons' conversion near the edge of the known world. The Rood

experiences conversion as he is reformed from a tree to a cross, taken from the edge of the forest

and joined with Christ at the center of salvation history. From an unrefined border-dweller to a

central figure in the Christian symbolic order, the Rood shares the Anglo-Saxon worldview of a

people on the periphery who construct cultural connections to Christian centers.[84] He identifies

himself as *bana*, or murderer (66), "Iu ic wæs geworden   wita heardost, / leodum laðost,"

("Before I had been made the hardest of punishments, most hated by humans, 87-88). He

explains that "Rod wæs ic aræred.   Ahof ic ricne Cyning" ("I was raised a rood.   I raised a

mighty king," 44). In spite of his humble origins, he was able to perform an act of spiritual

nobility. John Flood argues that when the Rood recalls that it was "aræred," or *raised* as a tree

who later *raised* a king, the verb connotes both the material sense of being brought up and the

abstract sense of being exalted (44a).[85] Similarly, the Anglo-Saxon conversion narrative effected

by Pope Gregory encodes a process of Roman authority electing Anglo-Saxons for Christianity.

Just as the Rood is conscious of his converted public reception from damnable torture device to a

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[83] The pagan-Christian divide, like all historical borders, is not an abrupt delineation; rather, it is one that is marked by processes of transition. Robin Fleming notes that pagan and Christian beliefs coexisted and blended for quite some time, *Britain after Rome*, xxi. Traces of the old religion permeated devotional practices. Charms, for example, marry pagan and Christian practices, as found in Oswald Cockayne, ed. *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft*, EETS 35 (London: 1864), I. x-xii. Gale R. Owen explains that during this period that witnessed the erection of stone crosses, like the Ruthwell and Bewcastles monuments, "paganism was evidently rife [and p]eople must have still enjoyed the old legends [as evinced by] the Northumbrian carver who made the whalebone box now known as the Franks Casket. . . . Yet by the eighth century Christianity must have imbued almost all aspects of life." Gale Owen, *Rites and Rituals of the Anglo-Saxons* (Totowa, NJ: David & Charles, 1981), 158.

[84] Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, trans. Lee Preedy (Boston: Brill, 2004)*,* 47; Brandon Hawk, "'Id est, crux Christi': Tracing the Old English Motif of the Celestial Rood," *Anglo-Saxon England* 40 (2011): 43-73.

[85] John Flood, "*Aræred* in The Dream of the Rood and the Gospel of St. John," *English Language Notes* 36.4 (1999): 1.

symbol of salvation, Anglo-Saxons were aware of their historically recent conversion to Christianity.[86]

Moreover, the Rood participates in Anglo-Saxon bonds that typically feature a reciprocal relationship between a lord and his retainers: the lord would provide food and shelter, and he would distribute gifts of rings, weapons, armor, horses, and land in exchange for thanes' loyal service. Christ as a traditional Anglo-Saxon lord promises to his followers, "blis mycel, / dream on heofonum,   þær is dryhtnes folc / geseted to symle," ("much bliss, / joy in heaven,   where the lord's people / sit to feast," 139b-141a). In return, the Rood exemplifies the fidelity of an Anglo-Saxon thane when he vows to stand firm in accordance with the Lord's word (35a-36a). Performing the culturally constructed roles of lord and thane, *Dream* participates in the literary conventions of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry. Loyalty to kin and brothers in arms, along with the necessary risk of death, drive the action of Old English heroic poems, such as *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon*, and *The Battle of Brunanburh*. *The Battle of Maldon* commemorates the defeat of Byrhtnoth and his Anglo-Saxon army under the invasion of wolfish Vikings in 991, Essex. It is a haunting narrative, rife with heroes who maintain the Anglo-Saxon heroic code when confronting certain death. Offa, for example, is one of Byrhtnoth's loyal retainers; Byrhtnoth has been slain, and Offa soon follows:

> . . . he beotode ær   wið his beahgifan
>
> þæt hi sceoldon begen   on burh ridan,
>
> hale to hame,   oððe on here crincgan,
>
> on wælstowe   wundum sweltan;
>
> he læg ðegenlice   ðeodne gehende. (290-294)[87]

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[86] Estes, "Colonization and Conversion in Cynewulf's *Elene*," 150; Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest*, 158; Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, 23.

. . . he had vowed   to his ring-giver

that they would both   ride into the stronghold

safe to their home,   or fall in arms,

on the slaughter-field,   to die from their wounds;

he lay thane-like   near his lord.

Offa's loyalty to his lord requires that he seek vengeance for his death, to die with pride. He dies *ðegenlice*, thane-like, close to his lord; the attention to spatial proximity to his lord suggests both honor and intimacy. These men share a bond that extends beyond their transient lives into the memories maintained by their people, the oral histories and textual transmissions of their deeds, and the afterlife that honors loyalty to one's lord.

In *Dream*, Christ is a Germanic hero who overcomes death and promises salvation to all retainers who bear the cross in their chests (118). The Rood is his loyal thane who honors the will of his Lord. The Rood is familiar with the customs of Anglo-Saxon thanes, and he identifies his personal obligations within the homosocial bonds of warriors. E. Amanda McVitty explains that homosociality "recognizes that medieval masculine identities were discursively constructed and socially performed primarily in relation to other men rather than in opposition to women and the feminine."[88] Historians such as R. W. Connell, James W. Messerschmidt, and Derek G. Neal have identified an ideal model of masculinity performed by an elite group, and they believe that the repeated performance of these ideals over generations developed hegemonic standards of

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[87] Donald Scragg, ed. *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991* (Cambridge, MA.: Blackwell, 1991).
[88] E. Amanda McVitty, "False Knights and True Men: Contesting Chivalric Masculinity in English Treason Trials, 1388-1415," *Journal of Medieval History* 40.4 (2014): 460.

masculinity that continue to influence Western cultures.[89] Homosocial relations resulted in hierarchical social and political structures based on one's ability to conform to these socially constructed masculine ideals; those with the means and ability to perform properly acquired more power, and those who could not were subordinated. Scholars of medieval homosociality have predominantly focused on the later Middle Ages, following the Norman Conquest in England, but these frameworks are applicable to earlier medieval English social organizations. Homosocial relationships in Anglo-Saxon texts appear frequently as a fraternal connection between warriors, enacted by men eating, sleeping, and, if need be, dying together. Hierarchical relationships between lords and their retainers, or thanes, are also homosocial. The thane pledges to serve the lord, and to avenge his death if circumstances take a turn for the worse, and his lord leads the warrior brethren in war and he doles out the spoils among them. Homosocial bonds are thus informed by heroic ideals, which posit that Anglo-Saxon men should fight valiantly alongside their warrior brethren and fulfill their oaths for the good of the group.[90] In *Dream*, the Rood self-identifies as a thane for the lord who approaches him at the crest of Golgotha. Christ appears as a warrior in accordance with Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry as he willingly hastens towards his own crucifixion, which the Rood describes as Christ's "miclan gewinne" (great battle, 65a). As a loyal thane, the Rood is obligated to uphold the will of his lord, but the lord's will requires him to participate in the lord's death. Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry demonstrates the importance of loyalty, particularly in battle; a thane is expected to protect his lord, or to avenge his death, even at the expense of his own life. As Christ climbs upon the Rood, he explains, "Þær ic þa ne dorste   ofer dryhtnes word / bugan oððe berstan," (There I dared not   against the word

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[89] R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19.6 (2005): 832; Derek G. Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 42-4.

[90] David Clark, *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 130 and 134-5.

of the lord / bow or break, 35a-36a). As a thane, he is expected to sacrifice himself to protect his

lord, or to risk his own life to avenge the death of this lord, a feat he is indeed capable of

accomplishing: "Ealle ic mihte / feondas gefyllan," ("I might have / flattened all of those

enemies," 37b-38a). But the word of his lord, as he acknowledges above, requires him to stand

firm. Refusing to save his lord, the Rood refuses to save himself, and in so doing, he facilitates

salvation for every Christian. The crucifixion bonds him to Christ so that they share experiences

intimately: "Bysmeredon hie unc butu ætgædere.   Eall ic wæs mid blode bestemed," ("They

blasphemed us both together.   I was all wet with blood," 48). The Rood fulfills the expectations

of a thane as exemplified by heroic poetic conventions: he dies for and with his lord in the battle

for human salvation. *Dream* conveys the unsettling tension of the crucifixion as a triumphant

sacrifice, combining heroic and elegiac literary conventions.

    In addition to the conventions of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry, *Dream* also employs the

conventions of elegy. Old English elegies are short reflective poems that focus on separation,

absence, and anxiety, thrown into stark contrast with the remembrance of better days. They

traditionally open with ambiguous subjects and temporal settings, inviting myriad associations

and interpretations. Rather than crisp narrative oral histories, elegies often emphasize feelings

expressed through dramatic monologue with an appeal to the audience to listen to and learn from

the speaker's personal experience.[91] Paul Battles focuses on the traditional opening of Anglo-

Saxon poems as a distinguishing feature that separates Old English texts into epics, elegies, and

wisdom poetry.[92] Battles identifies *Dream* as an elegy because it is predominantly a first-person

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[91] Paul Battles, "Toward a Theory of Old English Poetic Genres: Epic, Elegy, Wisdom Poetry, and the 'Traditional Opening,'" *Studies in Philology* 111.1 (2014): 11.

[92] Battles identifies five Old English poems that begin with the traditional elegiac opening detailed above: *The Wife's Lament*, *The Seafarer*, *The Fates of the Apostles*, *The Dream of the Rood*, and *Judgment Day II*, "Toward a Theory of Old English Poetic Genres," 12.

dramatic reflection on loss and consolation grounded in personal experiences.[93] In addition to the

opening features identified by Battles above, the Dreamer's solitude in the middle of the night

and the deep pit in which the Rood is hidden are familiar, desolate landscapes that are common

in Old English elegies. Furthermore, the Dreamer sustains the elegiac mood as he meditates on

experiences of separation from loved ones, and the possibility of consolation after the Final

Judgment. Combining literary tropes from heroic poetry and elegies, *Dream* observes Cult of the

Cross generic conventions from a particularly Anglo-Saxon perspective.

This is powerfully exemplified by the Rood's identification with Saint Edmund, a

prominent Anglo-Saxon martyr. Following Christ's crucifixion, the Rood explains that "forleton

me þa hilderincas / standan steame bedrifenne;   eall ic wæs mid strælum forwundod" (the

warriors left me / standing blood-drenched, and shot all over with arrows, 61-62). Previously, the

Rood had been pierced with "deorcan næglum" (dark nails, 46) in accordance with conventional

narratives of Christ's crucifixion. The Gospels are not specific about how Christ was affixed to

the cross; he was crucified along with two others and his clothes were divided among the soldiers

(Matt 27:38, John 19:18, Mark 15:24 and 27, Luke 23:33). The Rood recounts the crucifixion

with more detail. He describes the *næglum* (nails) left in his body as metaphorical *strælum*

(arrows). The Rood exacerbates his suffering, expanding the number of the few nails to a

veritable quiverful of arrows: "*eall* ic wæs mid strælum forwundod" ("I was shot *all over* with

arrows," 62, emphasis added). The hyperbolic metaphor operates to sanctify the Rood, turning

him from an object to a sentient being who experienced terrible suffering. Switching the

instruments of torture from nails to arrows also expands the Rood's opportunities for allusion to

other martyrs. The Rood shares a common experience with Christ, but he also identifies with

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[93] Battles acknowledges that *Dream* also exhibits elements of a dream vision, a homily, and *prosopopoeia*, which I associate with the Old English *Exeter* riddles, "Toward a Theory of Old English Poetic Genres," 12.

Saint Sebastian and Saint Edmund. Saint Sebastian is a Roman who was martyred around 288

C.E. under Emperor Diocletian's persecution of Christians. Sebastian is commonly depicted with

arrows protruding from his body.[94] Given his hyperbolic description of impalement, the Rood

resembles the Roman martyr Sebastian. But the description of the Rood multivalently matches

the English martyr, Saint Edmund, as well. King of East Anglia from 855 to 869, Edmund

refused to surrender to the Danes Hinguar and Hubba, and for this he lost his life. In *Lives of

Saints*, Ælfric describes Edmund's torture, "[h]e eall wæs besæt mid heora scotungum swilce

igles byrsta, swa swa Sebastianus wæs" ("He was completely covered with their darts like a

porcupine's bristles, just as Sebastian was," 117-8).[95] Having been shot through with

metaphorical arrows, the Rood resonates with descriptions of Saint Edmund, who employed his

faith against pagan threats to *Angelcynn*. He also shares an intimate experience with Christ. The

Rood is a slippery signifier, inviting associations with Christ at Jerusalem, Sebastian at Rome,

and Edmund in England.

The Rood's identity, like his appearance, is polyvalent, inviting numerous associations

that change and blend over the course of the poem to express the dynamics of power, authority,

and identity. For example, previous feminist and queer approaches to *Dream* tend to focus on the

gender and sexuality of the Rood because he complicates the homosocial bonds traditionally

found in Old English poetry.[96] But here, reading *Dream* within networks of power and

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[94] Saint Sebastian was in fact revived after he was shot with arrows and beheaded. There is no evidence to connect him with homoeroticism except the erotic depictions of his body that were popular during the Early Modern period and following. Richard Kaye, "Losing His Religion: Saint Sebastian as Contemporary Gay Martyr," in *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*, ed. Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1996), 89; "Sebastiani Martyrus," in *Acta Sanctorum*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Patrologiae Cursus Completus Accurante, 1845), XVII.1021-1221.

[95] *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. by Walter William Skeat, EETS 94 and 114 (London, 1881-90; reprinted Oxford University Press, 1966), 32.116-118 (vol. 2, page 322).

[96] Mary Dockray-Miller, "The Feminized Cross of *The Dream of the Rood*," *Philological Quarterly* 76.1 (1997): 1-18; Clark, *Between Medieval Men*, 149-50.

conventions of authorization, the Rood's dynamically gendered Anglo-Saxon identities demonstrate the means by which Anglo-Saxons are authorized by culturally constructed connections to Christ: The Rood's complex gender and sexuality are interconnected with his Anglo-Saxon identity in relation to cultural centers of power. He is the receptive partner in his relationship with Christ, an orientation that presumes feminine and homoerotic connotations. He is receptive and informed before he is authorized to inform others.

The Rood explains, "Bifode ic þa me se beorn ymbclypte" ("I trembled when the man embraced me," 42); this embrace has invited a number of interpretations regarding Anglo-Saxon performances of sex and gender. In "The Feminized Cross of *The Dream of the Rood*," Mary Dockray-Miller argues that the diction in these lines suggests that the relationship between Christ and Rood is not homosocial; rather, it is a heterosexual relationship between a masculine Christ and a feminine Rood.[97] Focusing on the sexual connotations of *gestigan* (to mount, ascend), *bifian* (to tremble, shake, be moved), *ymbclypte* (to embrace), and *ongyrede* (to strip), she argues that the Rood's narrative conveys a masculine Christ who strips and embraces a trembling, feminine Cross, upon whom he performs his heroic and seemingly erotic passion. Reviewing entries for these words in the *Dictionary of Old English* and the *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, however, yields no evidence of sexual denotations. Nevertheless, Dockray-Miller argues that based on gendered connotations in *Dream*, Christ's masculinity requires a feminine other over and against whom he asserts his masculinity. The Rood's femininity, she argues, is most evident in his identification with Mother Mary.[98] Situating the Rood within a feminine position of suffering and passivity contrasts with Christ's heroic masculinity.[99] Dockray-Miller

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[97] Dockray-Miller, "The Feminized Cross of *The Dream of the Rood*," 7.
[98] Dockray-Miller, "The Feminized Cross of *The Dream of the Rood*," 13.
[99] Dockray-Miller, "The Feminized Cross of *The Dream of the Rood*," 8. Arthur Brittan observes that masculinism relies on the culturally constructed dichotomy of masculine/feminine to assert and naturalize

explores the literary construction of Christ's masculinity in *Rood* as a heterosexual opposition to the feminine figures whom Christ dominates within and beyond the text. She argues that because the Rood is feminized, and thus affirms Christ's masculinity, the Dreamer is therefore able to conjure a homosocial relationship with Christ via the Rood's feminine mediation. As violence is enacted upon the Rood, the Dreamer derives pleasure in the form of scopophilia.[100] Yet Dockray-Miller's interpretation of a feminized Rood fails to account for his performed masculine gender.

Despite linguistic and metaphoric connotations, the Rood performs masculinity as a thane of Christ. The *Dictionary of Old English* identifies *rood* as both a feminine and neuter noun. In *Dream*, the Rood is referred to with neuter pronouns; however, grammatical gender does not necessarily agree with subjects' gender identities. For example, *ides*, meaning woman or wife, is neuter. Similarly, in *Dream*, despite the grammatical gender of the Old English noun for which he is named, the Rood performs a masculine subject position. The Rood as thane seems to preclude identifications with any other Anglo-Saxon class besides warriors, but his own claimed associations with Mother Mary invites audiences to identify with the Rood across narrowly defined categories of class and gender. Dockray-Miller admits that identifying the cross as *comes* or thane of the Lord-Christ results in a masculine gendering of the Rood, but she is far more intrigued by reading the Rood as a passive victim, whose role is traditionally feminine.[101] Dockray-Miller imposes a feminine gender onto the Rood so that his relationship with Christ conforms to normative sex-gender expectations. Taking the Rood at his word, as a self-identified

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a masculine ideology of domination and aggression. Masculinism depends on hierarchy; it requires subordination of femininity in order to assert superiority, Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 147-8 and 106. Dockray-Miller argues that this very dichotomy is the means by which Christ's masculinity is composed in *Dream of the Rood*, and that the literary construction of Christ's masculinity reifies the fragility of dominant masculinity and patriarchal Christianity.

[100] Dockray-Miller, "The Feminized Cross of *The Dream of the Rood*," 14.

[101] Dockray-Miller, "The Feminized Cross of *The Dream of the Rood*," 6.

thane, situates the Rood and Christ within Anglo-Saxon homosocial bonds, for which the text provides evidence, even if the Rood's interaction with Christ complicates the boundaries of this relationship.[102]

Moreover, the Rood's passive roles and associations with Mary exhibit the potential for subverting gender binaries and for identifications to occur across the arbitrary boundaries enforced by gender. David Clark points out that Dockray-Miller neglects *clyppan*, a verb that describes the homosocial context of an exile who dreams of embracing his lord in *The Wanderer* (lines 41-4). Identified as an Old English elegy, *The Wanderer* expresses a solitary speaker's remembrance of halcyon days; now, the exile laments his loneliness under the burden of harsh weather, finding comfort only in his heavenly Father. Considering the exile's desire for intimacy with his lord in *The Wanderer*, Clark proposes a more complicated gender dynamic in *Dream*, arguing against Dockray-Miller's assumption that because the Rood is made passive and experiences violence, it must therefore be feminine. Clark admits of the possibility of sexual desires encoded in the Rood's interactions with Christ, but he also acknowledges the Rood's masculine gender, suggesting instead the possibility of homoeroticism.[103] Citing the Rood's associations with Mary, Dockray-Miller has argued that the Rood must be feminine, but Clark convincingly argues that this assumes that only women can identify with the subject positions of

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[102] Stephanie Hollis argues that the conversion of Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, along with the paradoxes of embodiment introduced by their faith, resulted in a "new erotic consciousness" that found articulation through religious desire, Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1992), 11. According to Clare A. Lees, Anglo-Saxon Christianity's attempts to replace sexual desire with spiritual desire betrays the problems of embodiment. Lees argues that sublimated erotic desire resurfaces in spiritual literature, "Engendering Religious Desire in Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27:1 (1997): 17 and 39. Lees does not include *Dream* in her analysis, but her arguments extend nicely to the Rood's embodiment because he experiences the central Anglo-Saxon tension between "martial ethos and Christian belief," Lees, "Engendering Religious Desire," 19. Drawing on Lees's arguments, I suggest that the Rood exhibits the same erotic desire that she observes in other Anglo-Saxon spiritual texts, but unlike these other texts, the Rood demonstrates homoerotic desires.

[103] Dockray-Miller, "The Feminized Cross of *The Dream of the Rood*," 8; Clark, *Between Medieval Men*, 149-50.

other women.[104] Drawing on the rejection of the male-female binary in Galatians 3:28, Clark explains that in *Dream*, "a poem constructed upon the paradox of a Christ who is both Man and God, which revels in polysemy and shifting identities, it should perhaps not be surprising that gender is also a fluid and paradoxical characteristic."[105] Clark interprets the Rood as a masculine subject who is placed in a feminized, passive, abject position, which the poem revalues as a positive quality, equating passivity with Christian humility.

The Rood's gendered relationship with Christ reflects the power dynamics of Anglo-Saxon subject positions who receive cultural capital from Christian centers such as Jerusalem and Rome. The poem resonates with receptive Anglo-Saxons engaging in the process of *translatio studii*, receiving knowledge and power disseminating from cultural centers like Rome. Emma B. Hawkins argues that gender codes in *Dream* indicate this transference of power. Hawkins explains:

> Masculine-coded traits which traditionally verified the possession of power were honor, mastery, aggression, victory, bravery, independence, martial prowess, physical strength, assertiveness, verbal acuteness, hardness or firmness, and respect from others. Traits coded feminine (non-masculine) which suggested powerlessness were dishonor, subservience, passivity, defeat, cowardice, dependence, defenselessness, weakness, lack of volition, verbal ineptness, softness or indecisiveness, and lack of respect. . . . Gender-coded language signals when the cross and Christ move from an established position of power (coded masculine), through the loss of power (coded feminine), and to the regaining of power.[106]

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[104] Clark, *Between Medieval Men*, 151.
[105] Clark, *Between Medieval Men*, 151-2.
[106] Emma B. Hawkins, "Gender, Language, and Power in 'The Dream of the Rood,'" *Women and Language* 18.2 (1995): 33-4.

Hawkins' arguments are based on the same hegemonic gender binary, and the disparate access to power available to men and women, described by Bourdieu in the previous chapter. The Rood performs traits associated with each of these discrete categories. As previously mentioned, he is weak and subservient until he received the word of his Lord; he is defenseless until his experience garners strength and honor. The Rood exemplifies the feminine traits in transition to the masculine traits observed by Hawkins as the Rood is infused with power from Christ and transmits power to the Dreamer, and by extension his audience. The Rood receives and transmits cultural capital. The gendered categories into which giver and receiver are organized are culturally constructed. Power is not essentially masculine any more than weakness is essentially feminine. Dockray-Miller and Hawkins are relying on hegemonic notions of gender to describe the translation of power from Christ at the center of the narrative to other subjects who are empowered by him. The same network of power that informs the politics of Alfred's Old English *Boethius* are observable here in *Dream*. Gender categories are one way to think about representations of authority and the changing dynamics of power, but as the Rood demonstrates, gender categories are insufficient and a single subject does not conform neatly to either masculine and powerful or effeminate and weak character traits. Rather, the Rood demonstrates for the Dreamer and his audience how Christian authority is transferred. Performing masculine and feminine traits, the Rood demonstrates the simultaneity of receiving and transmitting cultural authority, modeling for the Dreamer how he can employ his vision to promote cultural cohesion, via his textual confession, thus articulating an authorized Anglo-Saxon voice.

Describing his personal experience to the Anglo-Saxon Dreamer, the Rood facilitates a connection to Christ that transcends time and space. It is anachronistic for the Rood to identify as an Anglo-Saxon at the time of Christ's crucifixion because this event precedes historical

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formation of the Anglo-Saxon political identity. His presence is disorienting, and yet he is the stable presence that unites each of the temporalities nested within *Dream*. The Rood's personal Anglo-Saxon identity connects Anglo-Saxon audiences intimately with Christ by disrupting normative orientations to cultural centers. As noted in the introduction, queerness has both a sex-gender and social register, so that while queerness is specifically performed through deviant sexual acts, there are broader social deviations that resist compulsory orientations to make queer lives possible.[107] The Rood's intimacy with Christ at the crucifixion queers both gender and spatiotemporal orientations, disrupting heteronormative regimes of power that maintain the compulsory orientations marginalizing Anglo-Saxon England and thus historically limiting connections to Jerusalem and Rome.

Anglo-Saxon Culture as Eschatological End and Soteriological Center

Dream personifies the Rood as Anglo-Saxon—an anachronism given the Rood's placement at the Crucifixion, some 850 years before Alfred would refer to his people collectively as *Angelcynn*. According to Catherine Hills, through the seventh and eighth centuries, Anglo-Saxon was not a coherent cultural identity; instead, identity was attached to kinship and varied regionally.[108] Sarah Foot argues that a "self-conscious perception" of an English national identity is observable in the ninth century, particularly in the court of King Alfred, with this literary construction of *Angelcynn* as a political identity.[109] The formation of an Anglo-Saxon cultural

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[107] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 161.

[108] Catherine Hills, "Overview: Anglo-Saxon Identity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, eds. David A. Hinton, Sally Crawford, and Helena Hamerow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-12.

[109] Sarah Foot, "The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity Before the Norman Conquest," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 29-30, especially 25.

identity was a long and complex process that was developing centuries after the crucifixion.[110] The Rood's Anglo-Saxon cultural identity queers normative spatiotemporal orientations. The Anglo-Saxon literary conventions that encode his experience disrupt traditional Cult of the Cross orientations that normally direct audiences to the events at Golgotha, Rome as a Christian cultural center, or the New Jerusalem.

In *Dream*, queer orientations empower Anglo-Saxon England by locating an Anglo-Saxon cultural identity at the very beginning of salvation history as well as the very end. Eschatological concerns inform *Dream*, imparting a sense of urgency pressed by an Anglo-Saxon Rood who originates at the center of soteriology, the fulcrum upon whom Christ performs his noble sacrifice to save human souls. The Rood directs his narrative and his call to action to a fellow Anglo-Saxon, the Dreamer, who lives near the geographic edge of Christian dominion and the temporal end of salvation history. The Dreamer explains that the vision manifests while voicebearers sleep (2-3), an allusion to the Second Coming which Paul describes as an event that occurs in the middle of the night (I Thess. 5:2). The Rood imparts some urgency as he explains to the Dreamer,

> Hider eft fundaþ
>
> on þysne middangeard   mancynn secan
>
> on domdæge   dryhten sylfa,
>
> ælmihtig god,   ond his englas mid,
>
> þæt he þonne wile deman   se ah domes geweald,
>
> anra gehwylcum (103b-108a)
>
> Hither again the Lord himself, God almighty, will hasten
>
> To this middle earth to seek humankind

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[110] Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 40.

On Judgment Day and his angels with him

In order that he will judge   he who wields judgment

each and every one.

The tense of "fundaþ," from the verb "fundian," meaning "to set out, depart; hasten," is

ambiguous because Old English has no separate future tense; present tense is used for future.[111]

Fundaþ could be present or future: "Christ (will) hasten(s)." An adverb could potentially verify

whether Christ is coming now or later, but the text supplies "hider eft" (hither again), specifying

only location and repetition. The action is suspended between present and near future, stressing

the urgency of the quickly approaching Judgment Day. In addition to this brief description of the

Second Coming, the Rood himself signifies approaching Judgment Day in accordance with the

Gospels:

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all tribes of

the earth mourn: and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with

much power and majesty. (Douay-Rheims Bible, Matthew 24:30)

The "sign of the Son of man in heaven is ambiguous," but like the ambiguous sign in the heavens

observed by Constantine, the cross signifies Christ and will also herald doomsday. Brandon

Hawk observes that the Celestial Rood signifying Judgment Day was appropriated by Anglo-

Saxons, and that the trope evolved, becoming a complex matrix of associations. Hawk explains,

"*Dream of the Rood* thus uses the cross itself as a symbol of Christian salvation history,

emphasizing its apocalyptic and eschatological elements to turn the attention of the audience

from Crucifixion to Judgment Day, when the cross will again be the foremost sign of the Second

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[111] "fundian," *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette
diPaolo Healey, et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2016).

Coming."[112] Reading *Dream* as an eschatological poem, with this abrupt turn from Crucifixion to

Judgment Day, locates Anglo-Saxons at the beginning and end of human salvation.

Some early Christians thought the Final Judgment would occur in the year 500 because

they projected that the world would only endure for 6,000 years, and by the time Christ walked

the earth, the world was already 5,500 years old. "The fable of a thousand years" spread,

worrying some that the fetters fastened round Satan would only last for one thousand years after

Christ's crucifixion and his harrowing of hell. Superstitions had some convinced that the world

would end either in the year 500 or 1000.[113] And these anxieties were not easily silenced, despite

the efforts of post-Nicene Church Fathers.[114] Bede is one source of Anglo-Saxon understandings

of the apocalypse. Although he denounced millennialism, the belief that the world would end in

the year 1000, Bede composed a letter to Eusebius in which he interprets the Apocalypse of Saint

John of Patmos as symbolic of benchmarks alluding to the development of the church, and

culminating in the end of days.[115] This letter was copied and shared, particularly in the eighth

and ninth centuries, as a source for commentaries on the apocalypse and further calculations for

the exact year.[116] Even as the year 1000 passed, the sense of doom did not dissipate. For some,

the end of days was a matter of misunderstanding divine temporalities, so when famine struck in

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[112] Hawk, "Tracing the Old English Motif of the Celestial Rood," 71.

[113] Megan Hale Williams, "Lessons from Jerome's Jewish Teachers," in *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context*, eds. Natalie B. Dohrmann and David Stern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 80; Douglas W. Lumsden, *And Then the End Will Come: Early Latin Christian Interpretations of the Opening of the Seven Seals* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3; Richard Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography, Medieval and Modern," *Speculum* 75.1 (2000): 110-2; Charles Evan Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millenial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 3-5.

[114] Richard Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000," 104-110; Robert E. Lerner, "The Medieval Return to the Thousand-Year Sabbath," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 51 – 71. Especially 50-2 and 70-71.

[115] Bede, *Patrologia Latina* ed. by J. P. Migne 93: 129-206 and 191A-192D.

[116] E. Ann Matter, "The Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 47.

1033 it was assumed by some to be the inevitable fulfillment of prophecy. Ælfric, who lived

around 1000, argues that no one knows when the end of days will come, but when it does,

humans will feel so disoriented that the destruction will appear both slow and swift.[117]

The end of the world appears to be a concern for many later Christian Anglo-Saxons.

Anglo-Saxon perceptions of the Final Judgment are a matter of debate. Bernard McGinn argues

that medieval people lived with enough hardships that any date given for a looming apocalypse

did not matter much, but fear of the antichrist's presence was always at hand during their daily

experiences.[118] Michael J. St. Clair argues that the end of days was feared no more than other

natural wonders like comets or eclipses.[119] Considering the moving date of the apocalypse, some

have assumed that Anglo-Saxons did not place much importance on whether the world would

end in the year 500, 801, or 1000.[120] Allusions to the apocalypse in Anglo-Saxon texts exceed

the year 1000 deadline, as, for example, the warning found in Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*

(1014). Some scholars have interpreted eschatology in these contexts as rhetoric merely

employed to incite repentance.[121] But those who believed the end of the world would occur at the

first millennium maintained such fears even after it had passed, as late as 1033, suspecting a

possible miscalculation of dates.[122] Edwin Duncan draws on Ælfric's *Colloquy*, Wulfstan's

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[117] Ælfric, "Dominica II: In Adventum Domini," in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part Containing the Sermones Catholici* vol. 1, ed. Benjamin Thorpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 608-20.
[118] Bernard McGinn, *Anti-Christ: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 99.
[119] Michael J. St. Clair, *Millenarian Movements in Historical Context* (New York: Garland, 1992), 95.
[120] Edwin Duncan, "Fears of the Apocalypse: The Anglo-Saxons and the Coming of the First Millennium," *Religion and Literature* 31.1 (and a correction added to 31.2) (1999): 17.
[121] Leo Carruthers, "Apocalypse Now: Preaching and Prophecy in Anglo-Saxon England," *Études Anglaises* 51.4 (1998): 409.
[122] Duncan, "Fears of the Apocalypse," 16 and 22.

Sermo Lupi, and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to identify social, political, and natural events that

were interpreted by some Anglo-Saxons as indications of the swiftly approaching apocalypse.[123]

In fact, some early English eschatological theories cited biblical passages that indicate

Anglo-Saxon England as a predictor of the Final Judgment. Howe explains that some Anglo-

Saxons assumed a privileged position as a people, signifying the conclusion to the mission of the

Apostles: their mission was to spread Christianity to the farthest corners of the earth, and Anglo-

Saxon Christians inhabited a far corner of the earth.[124] Michelet identifies the theory of the four

world empires that originates in the Book of Daniel as a form of political eschatology that

situates Anglo-Saxon England as a significant eschatological site.[125] Daniel 2, 7, and 8

metaphorically imply that history will be divided into four world empires, ushering in the Final

Judgment that shall leave only the New Jerusalem. Alfred's Old English translation of Gregory's

Pastoral Care alludes to the four world empires, including his own kingdom as part of this

model of *translatio studii et imperii*.

> Ða gemunde ic hu sio æ wæs ærest on Ebreisc geðiode funden, and eft, ða hie Creacas
>
> geliornodon, ða wendon hie hie on hiora agen geðiode ealle, and eac ealle oðre bec and
>
> eft Lædenware swæ same, siððan hie hie geliornodon, hie hie wendon eala ðurh wise
>
> wealhstodas on hiora agen geðiode. (5.25-7.4)[126]
>
> Then I remembered how the law was first rendered in the Hebrew language, and
>
> afterwards, when the Greeks learned it, they translated all of it into their own language,

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[123] Duncan, "Fears of the Apocalypse," 19-21.

[124] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*, 148-151; Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood,* 47.

[125] Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest*, 158-9.

[126] *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. Henry Sweet, EETS 45 (London, 1871). 5.25-7.4.

and also all other books. And later the Romans did just so; after they learned them, they

translated all of them through wise translators into their own language.

Alfred identifies a system of *translatio studii et imperii* that follows a similar course mapped by

the world empires cited in *Orosius*. The *Orosius* identifies Babylon, Greece, Carthage, and Rome

as the World Empires, whereas Alfred references languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.[127] Alfred

cites two languages associated with the World Empires, implicating his own translation program

and thus Anglo-Saxon England as the final World Empire. Michelet explains that Alfred adds a

spatial element to the temporal sequence of world empires, following "an east-west course, [and

so] this teleological outlook situates salvation in the west."[128] History may be read unfurling

from Christian centers towards the ends of the known globe. The geographic end also indicates a

temporal end to the history of human salvation. Anglo-Saxons, on an island near the known

world's western edge, inhabit a geographic end. In the context of the four world empires, Anglo-

Saxon England also signifies a temporal end.

Between lines 78 and 95 of *Dream*, *nu*, or now, appears four times, emphasizing the

contemporary time and space in which the Dreamer experiences the vision, as well as the time in

which his audience encounters the text. Due to the urgency of the Rood's prompting and his

direct address to the Anglo-Saxon Dreamer, the Rood implicates Anglo-Saxon England as a

significant site for the pending Final Judgment. The repetition of "now" privileges the temporal

site of his vision in Anglo-Saxon England, an island at the geographic edge of Christian

dominion. If *Dream* anticipates a quickly approaching Final Judgment, then Anglo-Saxon

England marks a geographic and temporal end for the history of salvation. Anglo-Saxon England

may be a borderland, but within the eschatological context of *Dream* it constitutes a significant

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[127] *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Bately, EETS 6 (London, 1980), 36.12-16 and 132.24-133.28.
[128] Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest*, 158-9.

site for all of Christianity. *Dream* disrupts normative power structures by situating Cult of the Cross episodes within an eschatological frame that identifies Anglo-Saxon England as a cultural center for Christianity.[129]

Spatiotemporal orientations are culturally constructed. Temporality in *Dream*—specifically eschatological time—is mapped onto geography to privilege the place of Anglo-Saxon England. *Dream* employs queer spatiotemporalities to privilege Anglo-Saxons at the narrative's beginning and ending. The poem defies chrononormativity in favor of nested narratives so that audiences are transported from the contemporary context of the Dreamer in Anglo-Saxon England to Jerusalem at the time of Christ's crucifixion; after the focus returns to England the poem resolves to anticipate the Final Judgment and the heavenly reward beyond the limitations of the text. James W. Earl observes that Anglo-Saxon apocalyptic texts often lack chronology in favor of more complex temporalities, while employing repetition across temporalities to compose intricate cycles. Earl muses:

> Perhaps from the point of view of the end of history chronology is really irrelevant. When you are standing at the end of time (and perhaps this also applies to the moment of death), time looks quite different than it did when past, present, and future were at issue. When we are watching a play or reading a novel, the plot seems the most important thing; but when the curtain falls or we close the book, plot is suddenly less important than theme, insight, and deep structure. . . . Likewise, when medieval writers approach history from an apocalyptic viewpoint, *recapitulatio* does not mean plot-summary; it means

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[129] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 176; Howe, "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England," 148-51.

approaching the meaning of history the way the prophets did, by hammering at the deep

patterns that repeat themselves, getting to the heart of the issues.[130]

Earl observes parallels in eschatological contexts that imply a connection between people and

events separated by time and space. *Dream* composes a similar cyclical pattern that identifies

one Anglo-Saxon at the end of God's life on earth, and another Anglo-Saxon at the edge of the

earth anticipating the end of days. If queer orientations "put within reach some bodies that have

been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy," then *Dream* queers

spatiotemporalities to render the body of Christ accessible to Anglo-Saxons.[131] Altering

chrononormativity, queering spatiotemporal orientations, connects Anglo-Saxons to Christian

centers of power by identifying England as a prominent site on par with Jerusalem and Rome in

the history of salvation.

    Dream culls power to the geographic edge by constructing Anglo-Saxon England as an

eschatological center. The Anglo-Saxon Dreamer and his Old English text are authorized by their

connections to prominent figures like Christ, the Cross, and Constantine at the centers of

Christian cultures. But the Rood is authorized at the center of the poem and he performs an

Anglo-Saxon cultural identity, thus queering temporal orientations that disrupt the

chrononomrativity that organizes subjects within normative networks of power.[132] Inverting the

core-periphery model observed by Howe, the process of relation between a central Anglo-Saxon

Rood and a peripheral Anglo-Saxon Dreamer shifts power from cultural centers to the

geographic edge.[133] *Dream* employs geographic location at the edge of the known world and the

historical present of the poem aligned with eschatological prophecies to identify Anglo-Saxons

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[130] James Whitby Earl, "Prophecy and Parable in Medieval Apocalyptic History," *Religion and Literature* 31.1 (1999): 35.
[131] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 107.
[132] Freeman, *Time Binds*, xi.
[133] Howe, "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England," 152.

as inhabitants of the spatiotemporal end of salvation history. Locating Anglo-Saxons at the center and periphery of salvation privileges Anglo-Saxons and England by means of queer orientations.[134]

Conclusion

Dream constructs connections to cultural centers like Jerusalem and Rome by employing conventions. *Dream* alludes to Latin Cult of the Cross narratives and prominent Roman figures such Constantine and Helen, as well as material history such as the *crux gemmata*. These implicit citations of cultural authorities manifest a traditional model of *translatio studii et imperii* that authorizes Anglo-Saxon culture because *Dream* traces cultural capital to cultural centers like Jerusalem and Rome. Multivalent identities performed by the Rood, however, also allude to prominent Anglo-Saxon identities like Saint Edmund and the role of the thane as an Anglo-Saxon literary conventions. The Rood's representation of an Anglo-Saxon cultural identity at the center of Christ's crucifixion, long before the historical evolution of an Anglo-Saxon cultural identity, disrupts normative chronologies. The Rood privileges Anglo-Saxons by locating their worldview at the center of salvation history, and *Dream* privileges England by identifying Anglo-Saxons on the geographic edge as inhabitants of an eschatological, and thus Christian, center.

Dream, like Alfred's *Boethius*, cites dominant cultural authorities and the networks of transmission by which cultural capital and power are disseminated. And both of these Old English texts maintain a culturally constructed connection that links Anglo-Saxon intellectual culture directly to Roman sources. Additionally, both texts imbue personifications like Wisdom and the Rood with Anglo-Saxon cultural identities, reorienting their role within the dynamics of

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[134] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 107.

power exchange and thus privileging Anglo-Saxon England and Old English literary production within networks that typically marginalize vernacular interventions from the geographic edge.

Just as the Old English texts in these preceding chapters exhibit strong desires for connectedness to cultural centers and authority, so too do the Middle English texts in the following chapters. Next, in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, the narrator invokes literary authorities and implicates himself within their ranks, employing generic conventions to facilitate his desire for connectedness to male authors. Disrupting the straight directions of desires within heteronormative literary conventions, Chaucer's narrator employs familiar tropes with homoerotic connotations.

CHAPTER THREE:

SAME-SEX DESIRES IN CHAUCER'S *LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN*

Introduction

In the last two chapters, I argued that authorial power seeks to build and privilege social

cohesion among Anglo-Saxons by privileging their contributions to cultural networks dominated

by Latin influences. Literary authority served the community. In the following two chapters, I

turn to Middle English texts, in which literary authority facilitates an author's personal desires.

Power structures and cultural identities change rapidly between the Old and Middle phases of the

English language. The English people are still geographically separated and culturally

marginalized, but political changes altered the social structures in England, influencing the

language, the economy, and the English cultural identity.

In 1066 England was invaded and conquered by Normans; much of the Anglo-Saxon

aristocracy died in battle, some were exiled, and others changed their allegiance to support

William the Conqueror's claim to the throne.[1] Anglo-Norman became the language of

administration and institutions in England, and marriages between Norman aristocratic men and

Anglo-Saxon women fostered bilingualism.[2] Following the Norman Conquest, Latin and French

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[1] David Griffiths "The Ending of Anglo-Saxon England: Identity, Allegiance, and Nationality" in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, eds. David A. Hinton, Sally Crawford, and Helena Hamerow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64; James Campbell, Eric John, and Patrick Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982), 233.
[2] Marilyn Corrie, "Middle English: Dialects and Diversity," in *The Oxford History of English*, ed. Lynda Mugglestone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 116.

signify elite linguistic minorities.[3] As noted in the introduction, the inhabitants of England

generally identified French and Latin with written texts, institutional authority (including church,

government, and written records). These intellectual and institutional associations imprint Latin

and French with social connotations of masculine domination. English, on the other hand, was

mostly recognized as an oral language, a subversive discourse that bore feminine connotations.[4]

Some English writers, however, produced written texts that emulated Latin and Anglo-Norman

literary styles to co-opt authority.[5]

In *The Legend of Good Women* Chaucer's narrator employs literary conventions to

validate his participation in male-dominated literary traditions, but his actions and rhetoric

evacuate the conventions of their efficacy, stonewalling intimacy with women and cultivating

stronger textual connections to men. He performs literary conventions associated with

heterosexual intimacy but he avoids intimate experiences with feminine figures. He queers the

poetic norms established by the male poets who influence his works to covertly articulate same-

sex desires within heteronormative literary structures. For example, when praising the good

example set by Pryamus, he argues, "it is deynte to us men to fynde / A man that can in love

been trewe and kynde" (920-1).[6] The narrator notes that his books, the sources for his retellings

of women's legends, provide very few examples of trustworthy, noble men. Beyond translating

his source texts, the narrator provides a personal commentary about his interactions with

literature and literary production. His observation concerning good male models may be

interpreted to mean that men in general can take pleasure, and relief, in knowing that there is at

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[3] Mary Catherine Davidson, "Code-Switching and Authority in Late Medieval England," *Neophilologus* 87 (2003): 475.

[4] Margaret W. Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 86.

[5] Davidson, "Code-Switching and Authority in Late Medieval England," 475-6.

[6] All quotations from *The Legend of Good Women* are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Oxford University Press, 1987).

least one good example for men. But audiences must provide a heteronormative reading to identify Pryamus as a model for men's behavior. Without this socially-conditioned straight hermeneutic, the narrator literally declares that men take pleasure in a man who is true and kind in love. Heteronormative social conventions and the lack of social models for enacting homoerotic intimacies do not preclude the text from indicating same-sex desires. Sexuality is a cultural construct, but desires are so deeply foundational to one's self that they can override conventions, norms, and restrictions.[7]

Chaucer's narrator challenges literary conventions that presume the narrator's heterosexuality. His heteronormativity rests tenuously on indications of masculinity, his author function, and his participation in love poetry, but his repetitive acts of inauthentic intimacy dramatize the mechanisms by which his gender and sexuality are constructed. First, Chaucer's narrator alludes to textual and experiential sources of knowledge, which bear gendered connotations that attribute text-based knowledge to men and carnal knowledge to women. He constructs binary epistemologies; epistemologies are systems of knowledge, standpoints, and means of understanding. He devotes himself to each epistemology separately, but he implicitly favors the masculine domain of text-based sources and he rhetorically distances himself from personally engaging with feminine figures beyond his literary production. Moreover, the narrative exhibits homosocial desires: he prefers the company of men, he refers to male figures as examples of ideal lovers, and his literary production is aimed at winning the favor of other men. Additionally, he identifies with women's frustrated desires for intimacy with men. The narrator manipulates poetic conventions and women's experiences to identify more closely with male characters and literary authorities.

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[7] David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 53.

The narrator opens *The Legend of Good Women* with musings about the conditions of heaven and hell, which leads to a comparison between epistemologies of personal experience and the wisdom gleaned from authoritative literary sources. The narrator privileges the latter, claiming that nothing can distract him from his beloved books. But then the spring season entices him to indulge his other love: his devotion to the daisy. The narrator abandons his books and explains that he intends to spend all day and all night in a meadow populated by freshly sprouted daisies, but when night falls he retreats to his personal garden, where men make up a bed strewn with flowers. He falls asleep, and in his dream vision he encounters a beautiful woman who resembles a living daisy. She is accompanied by the God of Love, and soon they are encompassed by innumerable virtuous ladies. The God of Love, having seen and questioned the narrator, rebukes him for his literary works. The beautiful woman comes to the narrator's defense, during which we learn that she is Alceste, who offered herself to the underworld in place of her husband, only to be rescued by Hercules and later transformed into a daisy. To appease the God of Love, the narrator agrees to compose a hagiography, or book of saints' lives, about women who conducted themselves virtuously, according to Love's conventions. The rest of the text consists of retellings compiled from classical sources like Ovid and Virgil, with some curious alterations. Ultimately, the narrator fails to complete his hagiography.

There are two extant versions of the *The Legend of Good Women*, designated F and G according to the abbreviated names of their head manuscripts, containing different version of the Prologue.[8] Most scholars believe that F came first and that G is Chaucer's revision due to the fact that G refers to the narrator's aging (G 314-6) and G omits reference to the Queen (F 495-7),

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[8] Chaucer wrote *Legend* after *Troilus and Criseyde*; in fact, *Legend* cites *Troilus and Criseyde* as one of the texts for which the narrator must atone. And *Legend* was written before *The Canterbury Tales*; the Man of Law cites *Legend* in the introduction to his tale (II.60-76). The Prologue to *Legend* is Chaucer's last dream vision, M. C. E. Shaner, "The Legend of Good Women," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

which suggests that G was completed after the death of Queen Anne in 1394. I follow the F-version (Fairfax 16, Bodleian Library) unless otherwise noted because it is most prominent, having survived in eight manuscripts, as opposed to the G-version that survives in only one.[9]

The ways in which Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* narrator relates to networks of power is markedly different than those observed thus far, due in part to the differences in social structure after the Norman Conquest in England, which altered networks of power and authorizing conventions. Chaucer's narrator in *The Legend of Good Women* cites dominant cultural authorities writing in Latin and French as exemplars who inform his own poetry. He identifies the networks of power through which the authority for his present text is transmitted. Similar to the textually constructed links to Latin culture within Old English texts observed in the previous two chapters, Chaucer constructs cultural connections to Latin poets through his citations of authority. The *Legend* narrator also looks to French poets Eustache Deschamps, Jean Froissart, and Guillaume de Machaut—citing their influence, rehearsing their literary styles, and translating lines of their verse—to validate his literary contributions by conferring their prestige onto the present text, and thus bolstering the *Legend* narrators' literary authority.[10] Chaucer's *Legend* narrator implicates himself within dominant literary traditions to authorize his English text. He employs Latin and French literary conventions in English to construct intimacy with the textual authorities. The *Legend* narrator authorizes his text by identifying his processes of literary production as masculine labor that connect him to his male literary influences, and the authorizing conventions that connect him to male literary figures supersede his participation in heternormative poetic conventions.

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[9] Kathryn L. Lynch, ed. *Dream Visions and Other Poems by Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York: Norton, 2007), 118-9.

[10] Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 185.

The *Legend* narrator constructs a queer authority. Queerness is a process, an accumulation of meanings. The *Legend* narrator's desires are processes of relations to gendered signifiers that resist stability. *Queer*, summarizes Glenn Burger, resists "nominalization, functioning more often as an adjective, adverb, even verb, stressing *epistemology* rather than ontology."[11] Burger associates queerness with *epistemology*. Chaucer's narrator employs gendered epistemologies of masculine text-based knowledge and feminine experiential knowledge to nonnormative ends: he constructs a hagiography in praise of women—inspiration for which he receives from male-dominated literary sources—that only ever brings the narrator closer to other men. The narrator's contradictory and ambiguous desires incite a process of reading, reflecting, and interpreting, like the ambiguous gender of Wisdom observed in the first chapter. Complexities that arise from the constructedness of authority by means of heteronormative literary conventions in *Legend* suspend resolution. The narrator's expressions of heterosexual desire are contrived and inauthentic, while his actions and rhetoric indicate same-sex desires. A queer reading of *The Legend of Good Women* resolves disjunctions in the text by exposing the narrator's encoded same-sex desires.

The presumed heterosexuality of literary authorities rests tenuously on culturally constructed assumptions regarding the *auctour*'s sexual identity in relation to his literary production. Tison Pugh argues that heteronormative discourse is one of the foundational rules of genre to which readers and writers ascribe in order to participate in the game of encoding and decoding. Defying these rules results in a queerness, if we expand *queer* to include the relations of power that are predicated upon sexuality; thus queering is a disruption of a character or reader's sense of self that undermines heteronormative sexuality, exposing the sexual

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[11] Glenn Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xi. Emphasis added.

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hermeneutics of medieval literature.[12] Chaucer undermines literary conventions at the site of sexuality across texts. For example, Carolyn Dinshaw observes, in the opening lines of *The Canterbury Tales*, that Chaucer defies literary tradition when he describes "Aprille with his shoures soote / the droghte of March hath perced to the roote" (1-2). Typically, the month of April is a feminine persona in literature. Chaucer's narrator creates the potential for a sodomitical relationship between two male figures, who comprise the very foundation—the natural setting—for the pilgrims' experience.[13] Furthermore, Britton J. Harwood has identified unconscious same-sex desire in *The Parliament of Fowls* that include Chaucer's intimate associations with Ganymede.[14] This chapter adds to these conversations by situating the nonnormative desires of one Chaucerian narrator within the power dynamics of cultural authority. Reading against heteronormative expectations and connecting generic disruptions expose same-sex desires as well as those "narrative moments of contradiction and surprise" that Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe identifies as representations of agency operating within discursive powers.[15] The *Legend* narrator employs literary conventions both to construct authority and to encode same-sex desires, consequently challenging heteronormativity and exposing the homoerotic potential inherent to masculine-dominated networks of power.

I am not claiming that Chaucer himself exhibits homoerotic desires; we simply do not have extant evidence to verify Chaucer's personal sexual proclivities. Although Chaucer's narrators usually identify as *the* authentic Chaucer, this is typically a self-deprecating joke: in *The Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer the character is obtuse, and in *The Canterbury Tales*, his

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[12] Tison Pugh, *Queering Medieval Genres* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 2-5.
[13] Carolyn Dinshaw, "Chaucer's Queer Touches/A Queer Touches Chaucer," *Exemplaria* 7 (1995): 82.
[14] Britton J. Harwood, "Same-sex Desire in the Unconscious of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*." *Exemplaria* 13 (2001): 99-135.
[15] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 13.

poetry is so inane that he is interrupted by the Host (*Sir Thopas* 919-23). As he appears in his

own texts, Chaucer is characterized by frustrated relationships with poetics and hermeneutics.

Maintaining this trend, the narrator who appears in *Legend* fails to fulfill the heteronormative

expectations of a traditional author. Chaucer's characterization of the poet responsible for

Legend interrogates the constructedness of literary conventions and sexual categories. He

disrupts dominant networks of power that privilege Latin and French literary traditions to

authorize his own English contribution to established genres, and he queers poetic conventions to

identify male figures as the subjects of his desires.

The following section locates the binary epistemologies textual versus experiential in

accordance with the gendered categories discussed in the previous two chapters. The narrator

metaphorically refers to and characterizes textual epistemologies as masculine and experience as

feminine, in accordance with the gender binary described by Pierre Bourdieu and others.[16] I map

gendered epistemologies onto the *Legend* narrator's poetic discourse, connecting his abrupt pivot

from epistemological debate to his amorous experiences. Situating epistemologies within poetic

expressions of desire, the narrator subverts feminine experience while demonstrating his fidelity

to masculine literary conventions. Then, he devotes himself to his books and his male literary

influences. The narrator employs literary conventions to indicate male figures are the subjects of

his desires. Next, I locate women's pathos within the narrator's retellings as an expression of

frustrated same-sex desires issued through culturally established narratives. The legendary

women's subject positions are familiar and their experiences of heartbreak approximate the

narrator's hindered homoeroticism. Finally, recognizing the narrator's objectification of women

to facilitate his own same-sex desires reveals the misogyny inherent to homosocial literary

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[16] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 168.

networks of power that extend beyond the Middle Ages, as well as the misogyny that continues

to limit contemporary gay men's cultures.

Gendered Epistemologies

The *Legend* narrator inserts himself into the ranks of male authors, particularly those

writing in Latin and French. He re-enforces networks of power that maintain masculine-

domination. As described in the introduction, texts were predominantly written by men during

the Middle Ages; therefore, literary epistemologies are implicitly associated with masculine

social powers. Experience, on the other hand, is implicitly feminine due to prevalent social

dichotomies that identify corporeality as feminine.[17] Western medieval social constructions of

binary epistemologies privilege institutionalized literary traditions over personal experiences.

Beyond the Middle Ages, this power disparity continues to privilege straight white Christian men

as "objective" standpoints and sources of information.[18] Chaucer's *Legend* narrator incorporates

these binary, gendered epistemologies into debates concerning the limits of mortal knowledge

about heaven and hell. Later, seemingly detached from this debate, he metaphorically associates

his books with masculine text-based epistemologies while associating daisies with feminine

experiential epistemologies.

The *Legend* narrator maintains the prevalent gendered connotations of knowledge sources

to interrogate gendered epistemological dualism. Ultimately, his literary conventions lack

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[17] Jacqueline Murray, "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, eds. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 1-3; Carolyn Walker Bynum, "'…And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols,* eds. Carolyn Walker Bynum, Steven Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon, 1986), 257; Nancy M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering Reality,* eds. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Boston: D. Reidel, 1983), 283–310.
[18] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 168.

authenticity because they are not supported by experience. Chaucer's narrator reinforces gender binaries through discrete epistemological categories, but he also employs these gendered epistemologies to queer literary constructions of *auctorite* within heteronormative poetic conventions. Before analyzing the means by which Chaucer queers literary norms, this section maps the heteronormative structure established through *Legend*.

The opening lines of *Legend* complicate epistemological foundations as the narrator describes the conditions of heaven and hell:

A thousand tymes have I herd men telle

That ther is joye in heven, and peyne in helle,

And I acorde wel that it is so;

But natheles, yet wot I wel also

That ther nis noon dwelling in this contree

That either hath in heven or helle y-be,

Ne may of it noon other weyes witen,

But as he hath herd seyd, or founde it writen,

For by assay ther may no man it preve. (F 1-9)

The narrator acknowledges that experience must precede the oral and textual transmission of knowledge, but there are no accessible people who have directly experienced heaven or hell. Common beliefs, textual evidence, and repetitions authorize knowledge about these realms. Notably, he identifies oral transmission of knowledge ("have heard men telle," 1) before he acknowledges that one might *find* information in texts (8). The narrator focuses on the *experience* of encountering information, uttered or written, as part of a cycle by which experience informs and proliferates ideologies. Still, the conditions of heaven and hell lack an

experiential origin, indicating that knowledge of their conditions may be constructed and maintained through cultural memory alone.[19] The narrator agrees that heaven must be a place of joy and hell must be a place of pain because that is what he has heard, presumably through the teachings of the Christian Church, despite the fact that no one can verify this by means of personal experience.

Later, within the narrator's dream vision, he is confronted by Alceste, a woman who has experiential knowledge of the afterlife. Alceste's husband, Admetus, was fated to die, but Apollo convinced the Fates to allow another person to die in his place. Only Alceste volunteered. She returned from Hades a short while later, having been rescued by Hercules.[20] Alceste experienced the realm of the dead and she returned to the realm of the living, but the narrator fails to recognize Alceste in his dream vision. When he does finally learn of her identity, he neglects to inquire about her experience. The narrator does not take advantage of his own opportunities for constructing experiential knowledge.

The narrator's interactions with textual and experiential authorities situates his literary production among gendered epistemologies. He maintains dominant social hierarchies that subordinate epistemologies of experience under masculine-dominated literary traditions. The narrator cites books and literary traditions as the best source for knowledge:

Than mote we to bokes that we fynde,

Thurgh whiche that olde things ben in mynde,

And to the doctrine of these old wyse,

Yeve credence, in every skylful wise,

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[19] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 92.
[20] Fabius Planciades Fulgentius, *Mitologiarum* I, XXII "Fabula Admeti et Alcestae," http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/fulgentius.html (accessed 25 January 2019); see also *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, trans. Leslie George Whitbread (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 62-3.

. . . .

    Wel ought us thane honouren and beleve

    These bokes . . . (F 17-20 and 27-28)

Older texts that maintain a literary tradition rooted in the past are trustworthy sources of

knowledge. The narrator refers to *auctorite,* the masculine dominated networks of power

described in the introduction.[21] Middle English *auctorite* is informed by the Latin *auctoritas,*

which refers to tradition or an authoritative pronouncement or text.[22]An *auctour,* the subject who

wields *auctorite,* is an authority, teacher, or writer, as well as a founder or ancestor.[23]

    Authorizing gestures performed by the *Legend* narrator, such as his turn to books

described above, indicate his membership and rank in a hierarchy of male *auctours*, a

homosocial network of power. Homosocial relationships consist of identities performed or

discursively produced by men in relation to other men.[24] Homosocial networks of power, such as

the medieval hierarchy of *auctorite* that privileges ancient Latin *auctours* over contemporary

vernacular writers, reveal the roles of gender and status in the social construction of

hierarchies.[25] The narrator inserts himself into homosocial networks of *auctorite* by citing his

male *auctours*, replicating their established conventions, and constructing his own literary

production as a masculine form of labor.

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[21] Chaucer merely suggests *auctorite* in the F manuscript; in the G manuscript, however, the narrator advises, "men shulde autoritees believe" (G 83-4); "auctoritē (n.)," *Middle English Dictionary,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013, accessed March 25, 2019.

[22] "auctoritas, -atis, f.," in *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ed. R. E. Latham, D. R. Howlett, and R. K. Ashdowne (London: British Academy, 1975-2013) http://logeion.uchicago.edu/index.html#Auctoritas (accessed January 27, 2018).

[23] "auctour (n.)," *Middle English Dictionary,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013, accessed March 25, 2019.

[24] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 24 and 35.

[25] E. Amanda McVitty, "False Knights and True Men: Contesting Chivalric Masculinity in English Treason Trials, 1388-1415," *Journal of Medieval History* 40.4 (2014): 460.

First, the narrator validates his own literary production by enmeshing himself within dominant networks of *auctoritas* established by his Latin and French *auctores*.[26] Later, in his dream vision, he is directed to write a hagiography of good women, the sources for which are the books that he previously cites as sources for old knowledge (F 17-20). Even the God of Love refers the narrator to a book for his knowledge about good women, specifically Alceste (F 510-11). Generally, within the frame narrative and the legends, the narrator draws on Latin *auctores* explicitly and French *auctores* implicitly to signify his participation in noble literary heritages.[27] Chaucer's *Legend* narrator offhandedly cites his Latin sources a number of times in the F version of the text as he recalls "Naso seyth thus . . ." concerning Pyramus and Thisbe (725). He is referring to Publius Ovidius Naso—Ovid—whom the narrator cites again for his retelling of the legend of Lucrece (1683).[28] In the G version of *Legend*, the narrator cites more *auctores*, including Ovid, Valerius, Livy, Jerome, and Vincent de Beauvais (G 280-85 and 305-7).

In addition to his Latin sources, the *Legend* narrator also constructs authority by emulating the poetic styles of his near contemporaries writing in French: Eustache Deschamps, Jean Froissart, and Guillaume de Machaut. Eustache Deschamps honored Chaucer with his "Ballade to Chaucer," which Murray L. Brown reads as a record of cultural exchange between

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[26] *Auctorite* is Middle English; therefore, when referring to broad networks that extend beyond English traditions I use the Latin *auctoritas*, or the Latin *auctor/auctores* to identify specific (groups of) author(s).

[27] Karma Lochrie observes that medieval authors cite other prominent figures, literary texts, or scripture to lend credence to their texts, explaining, "the validity of the medieval text depends on its inscribed authorizing gesture, even if that gesture is purely rhetorical." *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 97.

[28] Chaucer draws extensively from Ovid's *Heroides* to compose *Legend*. *Heroides* is Ovid's collection of twenty-one literary epistles; the first fifteen are letters written by legendary women to their well-known male love interests, and the final six letters are correspondences between couples: Paris and Helen, Leander and Hero, and Acontius and Cycippe, Ovid, *Heroides*, trans. James M. Hunter (June 22, 2013) http://heroides.org/ (accessed January 30, 2018). Chaucer's *Legend* features adaptations of only those letters by women that remain unanswered in *Heroides*, Peter L. Allen, "Reading Chaucer's Good Women," *The Chaucer Review* 21.4 (1987): 419 and endnote 2.

the two poets and the broader social networks of their respective courts.[29] Froissart, complains

Peter F. Dembowsky, has been studied as one of Chaucer's influences without much

appreciation for his own poetic style.[30] William Calin argues that *Le Jugement du Roy de*

Navarre is the basis for Chaucer's two versions of the Prologue to *Legend*.[31] James I. Wimsatt

and William W. Kibler identify seven correlations between Guillame de Machaut's *Le Jugement*

du roy de Behaigne and *Remede de Fortune* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* based on

diction and translations.[32] Machaut describes the seasons changing from winter to summer as the

earth donning fresh green garments; a similar metaphor appears in *Legend* (F 125-9).[33] Machaut

refers to the beloved as "mon dieu terrien" (my earthly god), and the *Legend* narrator describes

his beloved daisy as "myn erthly god" (F 95).[34] Other pertinent similarities shall be discussed

below, which further indicate Chaucer's narrator is invoking literary conventions traceable to

French *auctores*.

The *Legend* narrator invokes near-contemporaries more explicitly: lovers who participate

in the Flower and the Leaf debates, a literary trend contemporaneous with Chaucer.[35] The courtly

cult of the Flower and the Leaf consisted of knights and ladies who declared their fidelity to

either the flower or the leaf with sophisticated arguments to support the superiority of one over

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[29] Murray L. Brown, "Poets, Peace, the Passion, and the Prince: Eustache Deschamps 'Ballade to Chaucer,'" in *Chaucer's French Contemporaries: The Poetry/Poetics of Self and Tradition*, ed. R. Barton Palmer (New York: AMS, 1999), 192.

[30] Peter F. Dembowsky, "Tradition, Dream Literature, and Poetic Craft in *Le Paradis d'amour* of Jean Froissart," in *Chaucer's French Contemporaries: The Poetry/Poetics of Self and Tradition*, ed. R. Barton Palmer (New York: AMS, 1999), 277-291.

[31] William Calin, "Machaut's Legacy: The Chaucerian Inheritance Reconsidered," in *Chaucer's French Contemporaries: The Poetry/Poetics of Self and Tradition*, ed. R. Barton Palmer (New York: AMS, 1999), 34.

[32] James I. Wimsatt and William W. Kibler, eds., *Le Jugement du roy de Behaigne* and *Remede de Fortune*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 26-32 and 52-4.

[33] Machaut, *Le Jugement du roy de Behaigne*, 2199-2209 and 2253-2260.

[34] Machaut, *Remede de Fortune*, 663.

[35] Derek Pearsall ed., "Introduction," *The Floure and the Leafe* (Kalamazoo, 1990), 1.

the other.[36] The company of the flower is more interested in fleeting pleasures, whereas the company of the leaf favors constancy.[37] One of Chaucer's French influences, Deschamps, employs similar Flower and Leaf debates in four of his extant ballads.[38] The *Legend* narrator, bemoaning the insufficiency of his English, calls upon traditional *auctours* and contemporary lovers who side with the flower or the leaf, alluding to their poetic debates:

> Allas, that I ne had Englyssh, ryme or prose,
>
> Suffisant this flour to preyse aright!
>
> But helpeth, ye that han konnyng and might,
>
> Ye lovers that kan make of sentiment;
>
> In this cas oghte ye be diligent
>
> To forthren me somewhat in my labour,
>
> Whethir ye ben with the leef or with the flour.
>
> For wel I wot that ye han her-biforn
>
> Of makyng ropen, and lad awey the corn,
>
> And I come after, glenying here and there,
>
> And am ful glad yf I may fynde an ere
>
> Of any goodly word that ye han left. (F 66-77)

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[36] Helen Phillips, "Nature, Masculinity, and Suffering Women: The Remaking of the *Flower and the Leaf* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*," in *The Making of the Middle Ages: Liverpool Essays*, eds. Marios Costambeys, Andrew Hamer, and Martin Heale, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 71-3; Pearsall ed., "Introduction," *The Floure and the Leafe*, 1.

[37] Helen Philips, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, eds. Helen Philips and Nick Havely (New York: Longman, 1997), 287; Crane, *The Performance of Self*, 55-6.

[38] Deschamps references the cult of the Flower and the Leaf in ballads 764, 765, 767, and rondeau 766, Eustache Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, 11 vols., eds. Gaston Raynaud and Henri Auguste Edouard (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1966), 4.258, 261-4; Joyce Coleman, "The Flower, the Leaf, and Philippa of Lancaster," in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, ed. Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 33-4.

The *Legend* narrator likens his word choice to the scraps left in a barren field by his preceding *auctours*, and so he calls on the eloquent lovers of the Flower and Leaf cult to guide him because they possess experiences the narrator lacks—and yet the lovers and poets who participate in these debates rely heavily on literary conventions.[39] The narrator's appeal to lovers who participate in the cult of the Flower and the Leaf is circumscribed by generic expectations rather than authentic experience.

Looking to both classical and contemporary *auctores* for guidance, the narrator identifies literary networks of power, and he locates himself within the lowest ranks of the hierarchy of *auctores* (F 73-77). Irina Dumitrescu describes him as a "passive conduit" for his preceding male *auctores* who mostly wrote in Latin.[40] He is the receptive partner who produces literature by means of their influence. In the G text the narrator explains, "myn entent is . . . [t]he naked text in English to declare," acknowledging his English contribution to a discourse dominated by other languages (G 85-86). Although this implies innovation, Rita Copeland argues that Chaucer employs English to maintain conventional networks of male-dominated power such as the homosocial bonds of *auctoritas*. Copeland explains that the *Legend* narrator employs English to bridge the gap and overcome cultural differences that separate him from the academic discourse of his ancient *auctores*. Identifying the narrator's relation to his *auctores*, Copeland articulates another site of unresolved tension in the text:

> . . . how can the *Legend of Good Women* acknowledge that the condition of writing in the vernacular is a measure of historical loss, and at the same time claim to guard the continuity of memory, unless by struggling against its own vernacularity? This is the

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[39] Phillips, "Nature, Masculinity, and Suffering Women: The Remaking of the *Flower and the Leaf* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*," 72-3.

[40] Irina Dumitrescu, "Beautiful Suffering and the Culpable Narrator in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*," *The Chaucer Review* 52.1 (2017): 109.

paradox of the *Legend of Good Women*. To guard against the loss of history and memory

is to guard against the vernacular itself; and to try to conserve a unified tradition of

authoritative interpretation is to identify with the ideology of Latin academic discourse.

Thus even in the vernacular, academic discourse can assume a regulatory function,

replicating the conservative role it performs in Latin culture.[41]

The *Legend* narrator employs the vernacular to construct and maintain homosocial bonds of

auctoritas. These bonds, as Copeland describes, are not sound. Chaucer troubles the validity of

textual epistemologies by indicating the specter of their unverified experiential foundations, and,

as we shall see, he also challenges the authenticity of literary conventions built upon these

textual epistemological foundations. The *Legend* narrator inserts himself among the ranks of his

auctores through citations of authority and replications of literary conventions. He re-enforces a

literary heritage through homosocial networks of power, but his reliance on textual

epistemologies without personal experience exposes the problems of male-dominated systems of

knowledge that conform to convention.

Later, the narrator associates his literary production with masculine labor as he

metaphorically refers to writing as shipping and wrestling. Shipping and wrestling were

traditionally performed by men during the Western Middle Ages, and so the narrator encodes his

literary practices as physical activities enacted by and among men. Literary production

constitutes his performance of masculinity, an identity that situates him among his male

auctores. First, he complains that some details are far too long and tedious to describe, and to do

so would endanger his narrative in the same way that "men may overlade a ship or barge" (621).

His descriptions must be moderate and evenly paced so as to avoid cumbersome rhetoric and

drivel, just as shipmen must take care to evenly distribute cargo and load their ships

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[41] Copeland, *Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, 227.

conservatively. In both cases, ships and narratives ought to convey neither too little nor too much, so the narrator follows the God of Love's charge that he be brief in his retellings (F 576-577).

Later, as he begins "The Legend of Ariadne," the narrator calls to Ariadne's father, King Minos, "comestow on the ring" (1885-1886), suggesting that he will face Minos in a wrestling match. Wrestling is a metaphor for the poet's confrontation with an historical subject. While a number of medieval sporting events could take place in a ring, it is most likely that Chaucer's narrator refers to wrestling because a similar analogy between writing and wrestling appears elsewhere in the Chaucerian corpus. Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* narrator also lacks proper experience regarding matters of love; Scipio Africanus, the narrator's guide through his dream, explains to the narrator,

> But natheles, although that thow be dul,
>
> Yit that thow canst not do, yit mayst thow se.
>
> For many a man that may nat stoned a pul
>
> Yet liketh hym at wrastlyng for to be,
>
> And demen yit wher he do bet or he.
>
> And if thow haddest connyng for t'endite,
>
> I shal the shewe mater of to wryte. (*PF* 162-8)

Scipio compares the narrator to men who have no experience wrestling, and yet enter the ring anyway. He implies that the narrator performs similar hubris thinking that he is capable of literary production without proper experience, but Scipio shall provide him a vision suitable for poetry. Also, in *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer describes the Miller as a wrestler (*General Prologue* 545-8). Because wrestling matches sometimes pitted members of the upper and lower

class against one another, this characterization, according to Gregory M. Colón Semenza, suggests that the Miller is well equipped to "quyt," or best, the Knight in their storytelling competition. Although the Knight is the Miller's social superior, wrestling levels the discursive playing field.[42] Now, in *Legend*, the narrator pits himself against Minos in a wrestling competition, emphasizing the role of Ariadne's father before launching into his retelling of her experience. The *Legend* narrator cites male *auctores* and he performs masculine labor to situate himself within homosocial networks of *auctoritas* in the context of a poem and penitential task that ought to focus on women's experiences.

Chaucer plays with tensions between *auctoritas* and experience across texts. Helen Philips and Nick Havely explain that the "bookish narrator is one of the motifs in [Chaucer's] poems that raises the issue of the relationship of books to experience, and also of the relationship of Chaucer's own narratives to earlier authors' books, especially classical authors like Ovid and Virgil, to which they so often refer—and from which they can so radically depart."[43] In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer's narrator cites Lollius as the ancient *auctor* from whose Latin he translates—but Lollius did not exist; Chaucer made up his *auctoritas* (*TC* 1.394 and 5.1653).[44] In *House of Fame*, Chaucer's narrator is about to meet with "a man of gret auctorite" at the House of Rumor (*HF* 2155-8). Then the poem abruptly ends; the man of great *auctorite* never appears in the text. It is fitting that *auctorite* is promised but never present at the House of Rumor; after all, rumor frustrates *auctorite* as it tends to travel in whispers, obfuscating verifiable sources as each retelling augments the narrative. Finally, Alison, Chaucer's Wife of Bath in *The Canterbury Tales*, cites texts and *auctores*, like Ptolemy (180-3, 323-7), and a host of Scriptural references,

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[42] Gregory M. Colón Semenza, "Historicizing 'Wrastlynge' in *The Miller's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 38.1 (2003): 66-7.
[43] Philips, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, 15.
[44] Bella Millett, "Chaucer, Lollius, and the Medieval Theory of Authorship," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 1 (1984): 97-8.

specifically Jesus (15-9, 139-141), King Solomon (35-6), Saint Paul (49-50, 64-5, 73-4, 160-2),

and Abraham and Jacob (55-6). Peggy Knapp argues that Alison fully comprehends the Church

teachings that she references in the prologue, and that she is capable of performing the "proper"

misogynistic reading, but that her experience reveals the falsehoods of patriarchal doctrine.[45] She

cites Scripture and performs exegesis—an interpretive process not generally condoned for

women in medieval Western society, as explored in greater detail in the following chapter. But

she cites them to validate non-traditional conclusions, such as support for her active sex life. She

references traditional texts and supplies an alternative interpretation to validate her personal

experience and authorize her forthcoming tale. Alison claims, "Experience, though noon

auctorite / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 1-2). She

excludes herself from the role of *auctour*. Nevertheless, she asserts her experience as *auctorite*,

validated by her numerous relationships with diverse lovers. Although Alison's *auctorite* lacks

an institutionalized heritage, experiences were indeed validated by hermeneutics of the later

Middle Ages.[46] Chaucer's texts foreground experience as a vital epistemology for women such

as Alceste and Alison, but his *Legend* narrator privileges *auctorite* over experience. Simulations

of heteronormative literary conventions emphasize male-dominated literary contrivance over

authentic experiences, particularly with feminine figures, opening a space within the text that

indicates the *Legend* narrator's queer construction of *auctorite*.

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[45] Peggy Knapp, "Alisoun of Bathe and the Reappropriation of Tradition," *Chaucer Review* 24 vol. 1 (1989): 49-50.
[46] A.J. Minnis explains that in "the later Middle Ages . . . certain vernacular writers . . . sought to locate and empower their writings and those of distinguished contemporaries in relation to the systems and strategies of textual evaluation which scholasticism had produced," "*De vulgari auctoritate*: Chaucer, Gower and the Men of Great Authority," in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, 1991), 39. Scholasticism had incited an epistemic rift from which emerged experience-based approaches to traditional texts. By the fourteenth century, authors like Chaucer were constructing their own literary authority within conventional hierarchies of *auctorite*, Gwendolyn Morgan "Authority," in *Medievalisms: Key Critical Terms*, eds. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 27.

Chaucer's *Legend* narrator reconstructs women's narratives and his text implicates women's experiences and experiences of women as essential to knowledge-building and poetic authenticity; however, the narrator foregoes personal interactions with feminine figures. He does not disrupt traditional networks of power that privilege masculine textual epistemologies; rather, he asserts his own authority in accordance with the conventions of literary networks of power in such a way that unites him with masculine *auctores*. He employs poetic conventions, but his conventions signify nonnormative desires.

Homosocial Bonds of *Auctorite* and the Promise of *Fin'Amor*

Tensions between literary and experiential epistemologies continue beyond the *Legend* prologue's opening lines about heaven and hell; the narrator reiterates the same dualism through metaphors: books and daisies. Books represent masculine-dominated textual epistemologies and the daisies represent experiential epistemologies that are traditionally associated with feminine knowledges. As we shall see, the poetic conventions outlined below (specifically fourteenth-century *fin'amor* conventions) require interactions with women, emphasizing experience as a means of refinement.[47] The narrator's encounters with the daisy represent the potential for him to build on his experience of love in relation to feminine figures and knowledge sources. But he exhibits a stronger attachment to masculine literary traditions. He employs literary conventions to construct a traditional poetic interaction with the daisy as a feminine figure, and yet his rhetoric undermines the authenticity of this experience. Close reading reveals that the narrator draws on male-dominated textual epistemologies to inform an idealized interaction with the daisy while maintaining distance between himself and pragmatic encounters with feminine

[47] Larry D. Benson, "Courtly Love and Chivalry in the Later Middle Ages," in *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1984), 240.

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figures. The opening debate is not disconnected; it has been resituated within poetic conventions of desire. According to the heteronormative poetic conventions adopted by the narrator, the subject of his desire ought to be a noble woman represented by the daisy, but the narrator distances himself from feminine figures. He maintains his preferences for male authority figures, his books, while practicing the conventions of love poetry. Moreover, the romantic poetic context in which he reinscribes his fidelity to *auctorite* exceeds the bounds of homosocial networks of power as the narrator's participation indicates his same-sex desires.

Within the opening lines, he shifts abruptly from epistemological debate to pledges of fidelity. The narrator reveals his personal desires when he first expresses love and devotion for his books:

On bokes for to rede I me delyte,

And to hem yive I feyth and ful credence,

And in myn herte have hem in reverence

So hertely, that ther is game noon

That fro my bokes maketh me to goon . . . (F 30-34)

Books are a source of delight, to which he commits his faith and heart. Nothing can distract him from his beloved books. But then, in the same sentence, his fidelity cracks. The spring season causes him to turn his attention from books to daisies:

. . . whan that the month of May

Is comen, and that I here the foules synge,

And that the floures gynnan for to sprynge,

Farewel my bok and my devocioun!

. . . .

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> That, of al the floures in the mede,
>
> Thanne love I most thise floures white and rede,
>
> Swiche as men callen daysyes in our toun. (F 36-39 and 41-43)

He pledges fidelity to the daisy, vowing, "I love it, and ever ylike newe, / And evere shal, til that myn herte dye" (F 56-7)—the same heart that holds books with reverence (F 32). He exchanges his investment in masculine *auctorite* for the experience of the fair daisy in the field. And yet even as he alters the object of his devotion he continues to cite male-dominated linguistic structures, noting that the flower is identified as a daisy among the local men F 43). It seems that the narrator's only true constant is his inconsistency, because when his May desire for the flower subsides he intends to return "to olde stories and doon hem reverence" (F 95-8).

Pledging his love to books and daisies, the narrator implicates himself within *fin'amor* literary conventions. *Fin'amor*, true love, is an ideal of proper conduct between lovers, promoted by literary conventions that privilege heteronormative romantic relationships between men and women.[48] *Fin'amor*, fine love, consists of "sensual longing, verbal love games, separations, frustrated sexual expectations, postponed physical union, temporary satisfactions and stolen looks or kisses, [and] fear of competing lovers . . . "[49] *Fin'amor* poetics are traditionally performed in the first person so that the poet-speaker is inspired by his personal longing for the beloved lady. From love sickness to fulfilled desires, the poet's interior states are ineffable; the resulting poem is a meditation on his perceptions of and interactions with a beloved woman and the complexity of his embodied, emotive responses to her.[50] *Fin'amor* was promoted among

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[48] "fin'amor," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Robert E. Bjork (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[49] Moshe Lazar, "*Fin'amor*," in *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, eds. F.R.P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 75.

[50] Christopher Stampone, "Choreographing *Fin'amor*: Dance and the Game of Love in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 50.3-4 (2015) 393-419.

twelfth-century troubadours, performers who composed lyric poetry in Provençal in an early French dialect now identified as Occitan.[51] Twelfth-century *fin'amor* idealized adultery, which obstructed fulfillment and increased longing between the lovers. This traditional *fin'amor* model generally characterizes the woman in the relationship as an other who completes and stabilizes the male subject.[52] By the fourteenth century, however, *fin'amor* had evolved as a model for perfect marriage among aristocrats.[53] Fidelity distinguished the Middle English *fyn lovyng* (F 544) from other common relationships, marking a significant contrast from the earlier Occitan model of *fin'amor* that emphasized adultery and unfulfilled desires.[54] Chaucer's England, according to Larry D. Benson, identified *fin'amor* as a source of chivalric virtue, and this ideology was promoted among courtly romances and handbooks instructing proper conduct.[55] Cyndy Hendershot argues that the fourteenth-century *fin'amor* model for aristocratic marriage feminizes the male lover, problematizing normative gender roles in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*.[56] Douglas Kelly suggests that Chaucer puts pressure on *fin'amor* conventions because the fourteenth century exhibits a more skeptical view of such idealism.[57] The *Legend* narrator exposes some of the problems with *fin'amor* by employing the discourse to disrupt normative sex-gender orientations.

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[51] Sarah Kay, Terence Cave, and Malcolm Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 22.

[52] Cyndy Hendershot, "Male Subjectivity, Fin Amor, and Melancholia in *The Book of the Duchess*," *Mediaevalia* 21 (1996): 3 and 4.

[53] George Kane, "Chaucer, Love Poetry, and Romantic Love," in *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in Its Contexts, 700-1600*, eds. Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1982), 243-4.

[54] Douglas Kelly, *Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Courtly Love* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 197.

[55] Benson, "Courtly Love and Chivalry in the Later Middle Ages," 240.

[56] Hendershot, "Male Subjectivity, Fin Amor, and Melancholia," 1 and 9-10.

[57] Kelly, *Medieval Imagination*, 196.

The *Legend* narrator pledges his faith and admiration to books like a noble lover pledges fidelity to his beloved in accordance with medieval *fin'amor* conventions. But the books to whom the narrator devotes his faith in *Legend* do not signify a beloved woman. They signify homosocial bonds manifested through male-dominated literary culture. Investing his faith and heart in his books equates to investing his faith and his heart in a male-dominated literary culture. Even when he explicitly turns away from books to daisies, the narrator rhetorically privileges masculine literary conventions. Florence Percival argues, "When [he] abandons his study for the daisy-studded fields of spring he is not setting up a significant contrast between authority and experience . . . since daisy worship turns out to be a very much bookish experience than first appears."[58] The narrator replicates *fin'amor* conventions, but he undermines their heterosexual significations through inauthentic representations. He does not participate in *fin'amor* conventions for the sake of *fin'amor*; he participates in *fin'amor* conventions to insert himself among his *auctores*.

Turning his attention to the daisy, the narrator invokes contemporary French and English literary trends that employ the daisy as a symbol for women named Marguerite or Margaret.[59] Marguerite was a popular name among fourteenth-century French nobility. In French the name means daisy, the very same flower that Chaucer's *Legend* narrator adores. Marguerite and its denotation provide a convenient metaphor for poets.[60] For example, Machaut's narrator in *Dit de la Marguerite* describes loving a flower who opens for the sun and follows it across the sky, indicating that she is humble and courteous. This flower has a yellow center and a sweet smell

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[58] Florence Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 25.

[59] Phillips, "Nature, Masculinity, and Suffering Women: The Remaking of the *Flower and the Leaf* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*," 74; Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 57.

[60] Lynch, *Dream Visions and Other Poems*, 121.

that can raise the dead, and in the narrator's personal experience she has restored him from

sorrow. Because she is worthy of all of his heart, body, and thoughts, he acknowledges that he

ought to serve and honor her.[61] Here the speaker uses this opportunity to meditate on the virtues

of fine loving and the superlative qualities of the lady. Traditionally, *marguerite* is a

metaphorical daisy that the *auctor* employs to refer to an actual woman. The marguerite

metaphor constructed by Machaut, Froissart, and Deschamps has diverse meanings, elegantly

employed to refer to an ideal beloved in accordance with *fin'amor*. Machaut probably uses the

daisy metaphor to refer to Marguerite of Flanders, a wealthy woman known about France and

England.[62] In Latin, *margarita* means "pearl," which Machaut employs in his French poetry as a

precious gem that adorns beautiful women and saints in heaven, making full use of the range of

meanings *marguerite* denotes.[63] Chaucer's corpus bears numerous borrowings from Marguerite

poems. In fact, *Book of the Duchess* and *Troilus and Criseyde* include roughly 126 phrases

translated from the French Marguerite poems.[64] *The Legend of Good Women* bears direct

influence of Marguerite poetic conventions, including the narrator's description "thise floures

white and rede, / Swiche as men callen dayses in our toun" (F 42-3), which loosely translates

Froissart's *flours petites / Que nous appellons margherites*.[65] Despite these shared conventions,

the Marguerite poets employ the daisy to refer to a beloved woman, but in the *Legend* narrator's

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[61] Guillaume de Machaut, *Dit de la Marguerite* in *Jean Froissart: Dits et Débats*, ed. Anthime Fourrier (Geneva: Droz, 1979), 147-53, lines 1-8 and 25-35.

[62] James I. Wimsatt, *The Marguerite Poetry of Guillaume de Machaut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Caroline Press, 1970), 47.

[63] "margarīta, -ae, f.," in *A Latin Dictionary*, by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), 1114; Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, 30; Guillaume de Machaut, *Lis et Marguerite* in *The Marguerite Poetry of Guillaume de Machaut*, ed. J. I. Wimsatt (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1970), 263-74.

[64] James I. Wimsatt and William W. Kibler, editors, *Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne and Remede de Fortune*, 26-32.

[65] Jean Froissart, *Paradis d'Amour, L'Orloge Amoreus*, ed. Peter F. Dembowski (Geneva: Droz, 1986), 1611-2.

experience, preceding his dream vision, the daisy is just a flower. Chaucer's narrator reduces a

lush metaphor to a singular literal noun, problematizing his use of the poetic convention because

a daisy cannot participate in *fin'amor* conventions with him.[66]

The narrator asserts his English vernacular while employing French poetic conventions,

but his English frustrates proximity to a beloved beyond the flower as the French Marguerite

metaphor elegantly accomplishes. English "daisy" lacks such rich connotations. Among the

French Marguerite poets, *marguerite* metaphorically refers to a flower, a pearl, and, a specific

beloved woman.[67] English cannot replicate this chain of significations. The narrator's clumsy

handling of the metaphor in English reveals incongruities that hinder him from achieving the

same idealized referent—try as he might. Chaucer's narrator explains that "The 'dayesye,' or

ellese the 'ye of day,'" is "The emperice and flour of floures alle" (F 184-5). He refers to the

etymological root of the noun that correctly describes the flower as the "eye of day" because the

petals open under sunlight to expose a small yellow center, like a miniature sun.[68] The *Legend*

narrator praises the daisy as the "flower of all flowers," but this superlative is typically reserved

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[66] Additionally, Larry D. Benson notes that Chaucer was "influenced by *Le Roman de la Rose* [more] than by any other French or English work," "The Romaunt of the Rose," in *The Riverside Chaucer* 3rd ed. (Boston: Oxford University Press, 1987), 686. Indeed, Chaucer's *Legend* shares many similarities with *Rose*, which includes a dream vision in which the speaker falls in love with a flower, specifically a rosebud, he encounters the God of Love, pledges devotion to Love, and receives instructions to perform his duties in Love's service. *Rose* was translated by Chaucer; the God of Love confirms this in *Legend* when he criticizes the narrator for transmitting a text that disparages women (F 329-330). The extent to which *The Romaunt of the Rose* is Chaucer's authentic translation, however, is a matter of debate among scholars. The version printed in *The Riverside Chaucer* consists of three fragments: "Fragment A is Chaucerian in style and language and has been accepted by most scholars as an early work of Chaucer's; B, written in a Northern dialect, is definitely not Chaucer's; C is Chaucerian in language and manner but has been rejected by most scholars," Larry D. Benson, ed. "The Romaunt of the Rose," 686. The original French *Rose* was begun and left unfinished by Guillume de Lorris around 1225, and it was completed by Jean de Meun between 1269 and 1278. *Rose* is a dream vision in which the narrator encounters Love and Reason, contrasting binary positions that aim to enslave the narrator to carnal, fleeting desires, or to liberate him by means of intellectual insights, Guillaume Lorris. *Le Roman de la Rose*. Ed. Ernest Langlois (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1920).
[67] Wimsatt, *The Marguerite Poetry of Guillaume de Machaut*, 47.
[68] Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, 40.

for a rose, a lily, or a highly honored woman (F 185). Percival argues the *fin'amor* superlative

applied to "the humble daisy of the meadow" in *Legend* exceeds the norms of *fin'amor*.[69] In the

context of *Legend*, the conventional *fin'amor* superlative applied for the daisy is excessive. This

excess draws attention to the constructedness of poetic conventions and the narrator's affected

participation in Marguerite poetry. The French poetic convention is too unwieldy in English for

Chaucer's narrator; nevertheless, he replicates the convention to signify that he is informed by

the Marguerite poets, and thus he constructs his *auctorite* by means of *fin'amor* contrivance.

His participation in *fin'amor* is inauthentic because his experience is limited to a plant

that lacks a human or idealized referent. Percival interprets the daisy as a reference to an actual

woman, but there is not sufficient evidence to confirm that Chaucer is referring to a specific

Margaret.[70] Even when the daisy assumes autonomy, as Alceste, who is dressed as a daisy (F

214-224), nothing is resolved, because he fails to recognize her. Based on the lack of evidence

indicating a beloved woman, and the descriptive emphasis on the daisy as a plant situated in the

field, the flower in *Legend* appears to be nothing more than a flower that presents the narrator

with an opportunity to play with Marguerite conventions. The daisy is a conventional symbol

that the *Legend* narrator deploys literally as opposed to metaphorically. The reality of the

situation ironically undermines the authenticity of the literary convention, echoing the problem

with textual epistemologies that lack experiential foundations that the narrator introduces at the

beginning of the poem.

In the prologue, the narrator avoids experience—specifically experiences that intersect

with feminine figures—in favor of male-dominated literary conventions. L. O. Aranye

Fradenburg argues, "the ethical poetics of *The Legend of Good Women* both assert and put into

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[69] Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, 40.
[70] Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, 27.

question the humanization, feminization, and heterosexualization of the indeterminate inhuman partner."[71] The inhuman daisy, reduced to vegetation without coherent metaphorical associations, negates the possibility of the narrator's authentic participation in *fin'amor*, which he confirms by constructing rhetorical distance between his love and the daisy. Literary conventions, audience expectations, and a cursory reading indicate that the daisy is the subject of his desire. A close reading of the pronouns, however, indicates that the narrator is not interested in the feminized daisy. His rhetoric points to the poetic context as the subject of his desire, rather than the traditional feminine subject. Convoluted pronouns confuse the subject of his desires as he describes:

> *That blissful sighte* softneth al my sorwe,
>
> So glad am I, when that *I have presence*
>
> Of *it*, to doon *it* alle reverence,
>
> As *she* that is of all floures *flour*,
>
> . . . .
>
> And I love *it* . . . (F 50-56, emphasis added)

Susan Crane suggests that Chaucer alternates between "it" and "she" to imitate the ambiguity of "la marguerite" modeled by his French *auctores*.[72] But a close reading of the lines indicates that the narrator is more interested in participating in *fin'amor* conventions than intimacy with the grammatically identified feminine subject. The daisy is attributed feminine grammatical gender, and so *she* is contextualized as the *fin'amor* beloved, but the narrator expresses love of *it*. The noun phrase "That blissful sighte," refers to the moment when the daisies unfold their petals in response to the rising sun; this noun phrase is the referent of the neuter pronoun "it" in line 52

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[71] L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 187.

[72] Crane, *The Performance of Self*, 67.

above. The proximity of the feminine and neuter pronouns within the sentence confuses the object of the narrator's desires and sustains audiences' generic expectations of a male poet pledging fidelity to the feminine subject. But the narrator loves *it*, rather than *her*. His participation in the traditional *fin'amor* spectacle—the *it* of the sentence—is the object of his desire, not the daisy, thus undermining the daisy as the object of his affection and the authenticity of his performance as a *fin'amor* lover. Given the dissolution of gendered common nouns over the course of the late Old English and early Middle English phases, it is significant that the narrator attributes feminine grammatical gender to the daisy. He is mimicking the conventions of the French *Marguerite* poems of Chaucer's contemporaries. And yet, Chaucer's narrator also undermines the authenticity of poetic conventions because he does not indicate a signified beloved to which the flower as signifier refers. The *Legend* narrator's rhetoric disrupts heteronormative conventions by distancing himself from the possibilities of authentic experience.

Just as the daisy in the prologue is acted upon by the narrator, women in the legends are acted upon by masculine influences. The narrator's conventions and expressed penitential task continue to tout praise for women, and yet his style implicitly privileges men's autonomy over and above women. The narrator's focus shifts frequently between the legendary women and the men who betray them, but when he turns the narrative away from men, they continue to act, whereas women are left in whatever state men have shaped for them. For example, Aeneas "hath laft Dido in wo and pyne, / And wedded ther a lady hyghte Lavyne;" the narrator hints that Aeneas's story continues beyond the parameters of the present text (1330-1331). Jason, who is the "rote of false lovers," provides unity to the single legend of both Hypsipyle and Medea, and the narrator indicates that his story also continues beyond the vignettes he provides:

> For as a traytour he is from [Medea] go,
>
> And with hire lafte his younge children two,
>
> And falsly hath betraysed hire, allas,
>
> As ever in love a chef traytour he was;
>
> And wedded yit the thridde wif anon,
>
> That was the doughter of the kyng Creon. (1656-1661)

Counting a third wife, the narrator alludes to the continuation of Jason's story beyond the parameters of his text. Similarly, the narrator describes father and son, Theseus and Demophon, as "wikid fruit [that] cometh of a wikid tre" (2395). Disappointing men progress beyond the women's narratives in which they appear, connecting across texts despite the narrator's desire to suppress their literary presence, which he expresses towards Theseus: "Me list no more to speke of hym, parde" (2179). The narrator employs *praeteritio*, a rhetorical device by which one draws attention to a subject by explicitly refusing to give it more attention, and thus the narrator implicitly acknowledges men's agency beyond the limits of his *auctorite*. The men of *Legend* exceed the narrator's focus; they go on to explore other nations, to seek out adventures, to build new lives with new wives. His rhetoric implies that the untrue male lovers abandon the women, and their narratives continue regardless of the narrator's approval, but he does not admit the possibility of women's narratives extending beyond his text. Laura Mulvey argues that "[a]n active/passive heterosexual division of labour has similarly controlled narrative structure. . . . [T]he split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of the advancing story, making things happen."[73] The male characters continue to act regardless of the narrator's intentions, whereas female characters constructed by the narrator rely not only upon

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[73] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminism and Film*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 63.

the men who abandon them, but also the narrator himself. His *auctorite* controls the progression of their *pathos*.

The narrator's treatment of the legendary women, as the subjects of his literary production, further associates him with other men, as his style of narration rhetorically replicates men's silencing of women in the legends. For example, according to the narrator's retelling of the legend of Philomela, Philomela wants to visit her sister, Procne, but her father is sad to see her go. Procne's husband, Tereus, agrees to escort Philomela from Athens to Thrace so the sisters can be together. Instead, Tereus rapes Philomela, cuts out her tongue, and imprisons her. Chaucer's narrator shifts focus between Philomela and Procne, explaining that "in teres lete I Progne dwelle, / And of hir suster forth I wol yow telle" (2348-2349). He does not merely turn the narrative from one sister to the other, he leaves one in stasis while his words advance the action of the other. To save herself, Philomela weaves the events into a tapestry and pays a servant to deliver it to Procne. Once the sisters are reunited, the *Legend* narrator concludes that there is no more to tell (2379-2383). This ending maintains the humble patience that the narrator associates with legendary good women—but this is not Procne and Philomela's end elsewhere. Audiences familiar with Ovid's tale know that Procne murders her son and serves his flesh to his unsuspecting father, Tereus. Having finished dinner, Procne and Philomela present Tereus with the head of his dead son. The sisters flee his rage and, praying to the gods for help, Procne is transformed into a swallow, Philomela into a nightingale, and Tereus into a hoopoe. Instead of presenting the graphic conclusion of Ovid's legend that details women exacting bloody vengeance, Chaucer's narrator maintains a false image of "good" women's humble acceptance of unjust men. Like Tereus, who took what he desired from Philomela then removed her tongue, the *Legend* narrator abruptly drops the thread of the narrative, exerting masculine power of *auctorite*

to silence women's agency. He abandons Procne and Philomela completely by concluding the legend with "thus I *lete* hem in hir sorwe dwelle" (2382). He repeats the verb "lete," meaning to allow, leave, or desert, echoing his previous act of abandonment when he "in teres *lete* I Progne dwelle" (2379), further associating him in word and deed with other untrue lovers like Aeneas who "on a night sleping he *let* [Dido] lye" (1326) and abandons her.[74] The narrator's retelling suppresses Procne and Philomela's agency, forcing them to conform to *Legend*'s overarching model of good women. He foregrounds their pain and drops their agency from his retelling, representing women who accept their fates. Women's humility contrasts significantly with the violent representations of masculine-domination present in the narratives, and the masculine *auctorite* to which the narrator connects his literary production and the further objectification of women. He alters the narratives of women who do not meekly suffer injustice and disloyalty, representing them as passive figures at the mercy of masculine forces. The narrator constructs a stark contrast between women's experiences and masculine domination at the levels of both plot and literary production.

Ultimately, the narrator confirms his identification with men who violate *fin'amor* by abandoning his literary praise of women altogether. In the final extant legend, Lino, Hypermnestra's husband, outruns his wife and leaves her to be imprisoned by her murderous father (2716-2723). Lino continues on; Hypermnestra is static. The narrator abandons her in the middle of her tale—even in the middle of a sentence: "This tale is seyd for this conclusion. . . ." (2723), leaving Hypermnestra suspended on the word "conclusion," without conclusion. The narrator abandons his literary and penitential task. Dinshaw reads this conclusion to *Legend* within the context of masculine *auctorite*, arguing:

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[74] "lēten (v.)," *Middle English Dictionary,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013, accessed 29, July 2018.

The techniques of reading like a man—imposing a single pattern, insisting on reducing complexity to produce a whole, monolithic structure, thus constraining the feminine—are reductive of *all* human experience . . . [I]n the *Legend of Good Women* reductiveness is, finally, shown to be profoundly narrow and unsatisfying. The narrator, defending himself against the mobile feminine, becomes himself bored, idle, torpid, *silent*. It's clear from the abandoned series of legends that reading like a man leads to no literary activity at all. . . . You can't found a tradition on the constraining of the feminine, Chaucer suggests here, because it will eventually silence men, too.[75]

Chaucer's narrator, like the infamous untrue lovers of *Legend*, continues beyond the scope of his unfinished penance. He continues to write. He revisits *fin'amor*. In fact, Chaucer's Man of Law cites this unfinished piece as Cupid's Legend, alluding to the narrator's continued literary production (61). He is like Theseus or Jason, using his rhetoric to advance his momentary interests, but ultimately he fails the women he was prompted to praise. His rhetorical gestures suggest that his fidelity lies with male literary figures.

The *Legend* narrator conforms to masculine-dominated epistemologies of *auctorite* by citing male authors and alluding to their works, he situates himself within the company of men through metaphorical imagery and labor production, and he participates in the objectification and abandonment of women modeled by the men who appear as his literary subjects. Asserting himself within these homosocial literary bonds, he identifies himself as an *auctour* within patriarchal networks of power. The narrator performs masculinity by means of his authorial control of the text, but this is no mere indication of his gender identity. His turn towards masculine literary powers combined with his turn away from feminine experience, indicate the direction of the narrator's desires for men conveyed within *fin'amor* poetic contexts.

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[75] Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 87.

The Deviant Desires of Chaucer's *Fin'Amor Auctor*

Same-sex desires are indicated in Chaucer's texts through reversals of the normative directions of *fin'amor* desires and where he fails to maintain heteronormative expectations. The *Legend* narrator devotes himself to books and he practices the literary conventions that have been established by other male *auctores,* but upon close reading, *fin'amor* conventions fail to fructify under his *auctorite*. He employs *fin'amor* conventions that indicate male figures as the subjects of his desires. Moreover, he indicates the potential for poetic conventions and homosocial networks to facilitate homoeroticism.

First, he leaves the daisy for a simulation constructed by men, effectively abandoning feminine experience for masculine contrivance. Acting on his devotion to the daisy, the narrator seeks out the meadow to "day by day, / Dwellen alwey, the joly month of May, / Withouten slepe" (F 175-177). But he does not remain in the meadow day by day. And he does, indeed, go to sleep. Similar to his fair-weather devotion to books, his devotion to the daisy is upset when night comes and he hastens home to go to bed. The narrator, on whose words the poem relies, fails to live up to his word. He promises a heteronormative, *fin'amor* experience, but then he evacuates experience of authenticity. Instead, he simulates the meadow. In his arboretum he "bad men sholde me my couche make . . . / I bad hem strawen floures on my bed" (F 205 and 207). He ordered men to make his "couche" and cover his bed with flowers—"couche" typically refers to a couch or bed, but it figuratively implies sexual activities.[76] The narrator undermines the experience upon which his fidelity to the feminine daisy is based by substituting a simulation for the authentic act of devotion. His devotional practice for the daisy is replaced by the homoerotic imagery of men preparing his bower.

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[76] "couche (n.)," *Middle English Dictionary,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013, accessed January 27, 2019.

This change in setting reflects the narrator's substitution of any actual experience of *fin'amor* with *fin'amor* literary conventions. Fourteenth-century English adaptations of the twelfth-century Occitan *fin'amor* implicate experience as a necessary component of *fin'amor* as indicated by the courtly romances and chivalric handbooks; a man develops virtue by interacting with a beloved woman properly.[77] The *Legend* narrator, however, abandons his experience of the feminine daisy, which in itself was just a simulation of *fin'amor* conventions, for a bed of turf in his personal garden constructed by male attendants. The men who make up his flowery bed recall *fin'amor* literary constructions maintained by male *auctores*. For example, Machaut's *Livre dou Voir Dit* brings the narrator, identified as Machaut the poet, closer to other men: He first learns of his beloved from a dear male companion, "mien especial amy" (my special friend) who brings him great joy and relief after a long sickness just by his mere presence.[78] Manuscript A includes a miniature of a man holding a love letter addressed "a guillaume" as he stands over the poet who reclines in his bed.[79] Machaut depicts Guillaume, a characterization of himself, supine in bed, receiving consolation from a male messenger. While Machaut's narrator directs his affection toward a woman, his beloved is idealized and for much of the narrative she is distant. His affections are continuously inspired by words that are delivered to him by men. The veneer of heterosexual desires rests on homosocial interactions. The *Legend* narrator assumes similar orientations reclining in a bed constructed by men as he is informed, via his books, by men, and he is inspired to generate poetry that fails to resolve the nonnormative gendered performances of

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[77] Benson, "Courtly Love and Chivalry in the Later Middle Ages," 240.

[78] Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Livre dou Voir Dit*, ed. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, trans. R. Barton Palmer (New York: Garland, 1998), lines 74-89.

[79] MS A (BnF, ms. Fr. 1584) contains the complete works of Guillaume de Machaut, and it was completed during his lifetime. Containing 154 miniatures by Jean de Sy, MS A is revered for its iconography as an example of fourteenth century French manuscript illumination, Domenic Leo, "Machaut Manuscript A (BnF, ms. Fr. 1584): An Art Historical Overview," *University of Exeter* http://machaut.exeter.ac.uk/#_edn1 (accessed 28 March 2019).
Machaut, *Le Livre dou Voir Dit*, 50.

amorous suffering. But Machaut's character takes to his bed because he is deprived of his

beloved, which results in lovesickness.[80] The *Legend* narrator simply wants to sleep. While he

employs the appropriate conventions observed by similar love poets, the *Legend* narrator fails to

connect to women because his *fin'amor* façade lacks substance. The *Legend* narrator complicates

the homosocial networks that undergird *fin'amor*, as observed in Machaut's text, by implicating

male conventions and contrivance, the company of men, and male *auctores* as the subjects of his

desires.

Falling asleep in the bed made for him by men, he finds himself back in the meadow, but

in the context of a dream—another simulated experience. In his dream vision, the God of Love

approaches with his queen, Alceste, and they are followed by a massive company of women who

are virtuous because of their *fin'amor* practices. The narrator fails to recognize Alceste, but he

gathers from her appearance that she ranks high in Love's court, and so he performs his duty as a

self-proclaimed *fin'amor* poet: he recites a ballad to honor her, but he fails to identify her as

Alceste. Instead, he references other exemplars of *fin'amor* by their outstanding features,

including their complexions, their mannerisms, and their notable actions. He attempts to win

Alceste's favor by comparing her to exemplary women and a couple of men. The narrator

estimates that each of these *fin'amor* exemplars is deficient in comparison to Alceste's

perfection. He advises them to hide away their noteworthy attributes, because his beloved

approaches (F 249-269). Her approach causes them "disteyne," which in Middle English means

that they are dimmed or obscured by Alceste (F 255, 262, and 269).[81] Percival lauds this ballad

because it demonstrates the sophistication of English for the expression of French "courtly love"

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[80] Sylvia Huot, "Guillaume de Machaut and the Consolation of Poetry," *Modern Philology* 100.2 (2002): 180.

[81] "disteinen, (v.)," *Middle English Dictionary,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013, accessed February 9, 2018).

traditions while executing the literary conventions of his examplars.[82] Percival observes that the narrator "favourably compar[es] [Alceste] to the heroines of antiquity" within a "straightforward [ballad] of graceful encomium and technical facility."[83] But Percival overlooks both the narrator's failure to name Alceste and his comparisons between Alceste's virtues and those characterized by men. Although Alceste's perfection exceeds that of every other *fin'amor* exemplar, the exemplars are explicitly identified and described by the narrator. Alceste is not.

The narrator includes male icons to represent some of the qualities that Alceste embodies: "Hyd, Absalon, thy gilte tresses clere . . . Hyd, Jonathas, al thy friendly manere" (F 249 and 251). Absalon, the first exemplar in the first line of his ballad, hints at Alceste's beauty. Jonathan, who protected David from Saul in the Old Testament, represents a fraction of Alceste's friendliness.[84] The narrator's references to these men within a ballad intended to glorify the ideal woman disturbs the gender binary that underpins *fin'amor*. Gila Aloni and Shirley Sharon-Zisser observe that the first three lines in praise of Alceste begin and end with male figures, thus conforming to patriarchal principles of order that privilege men.[85] Moreover, they point out the erotic connotations of Absalom who, in the Old Testament, is "an object of androgynous beauty and polymorphic desire, including the desire of his father, who is described as having 'long[ed] for him' (Samuel II 14:1)."[86] The *Legend* narrator indicates that from his perspective Absalom, with homoerotic associations, sets the standard for aesthetic excellence. Then the narrator praises Jonathan as a figure who represents exceptional demeanor (Samuel II 1:26). Aloni and Sharon-Zisser explain that medieval exegesis tended to emphasize erotic inflections of Jonathan and

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[82] Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, 42.

[83] Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, 48 and 59.

[84] Tison Pugh, "'For to be Sworne Bretheren Til They Deye': Satirizing Queer Brotherhood in the Chaucerian Corpus," *Chaucer Review* 43 (2009): 286.

[85] Gila Aloni and Shirley Sharon-Zisser, "ודישהכיג [shir ve-gila]: Judaism and Jouissance in Two Medieval Texts," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 28 (2001): 176-7.

[86] Aloni and Sharon-Zisser, "ודישהכיג: Judaism and Jouissance in Two Medieval Texts," 182.

David, including etymologies that suggest masculine virility and phallic associations.[87]

According to John Boswell, from late Antiquity through the early Middle Ages, Jonathan and David had become "the biblical counterpart of the pagan Ganymede as a symbol for passionate attachment between persons of the same gender."[88] Boswell traces Peter Abelard's treatment of Jonathan and David to twelfth-century curricula that include the study of Latin same-sex poetry in France, and, by extension, familiar to English students as well. Boswell argues that this suggests that Jonathan and David were associated with same-sex desires across cultures.[89] Their relationship was used metaphorically to describe the scandalous intimacy between Piers Gaveston and King Edward II, who was deposed and died roughly sixteen years before Chaucer's birth.[90] Chaucer's *Legend* narrator reveres a woman by referring to men he admires, suggesting more about the poet's preferences than the unnamed woman's features. He employs *fin'amor* conventions to encode male figures with homoerotic associations as exemplary models, but the narrator's same-sex desires are obfuscated by the ballad, which names these men as deficient in reference to the woman he is praising—a woman he cannot even identify.

The narrator's descriptions of Alceste and the God of Love, as well as those of other men and women who appear in his legends, such as Dido and Aeneas, maintain a hierarchy wherein the narrator implicitly elevates men. First, Alceste is crowned with white leaves, pearls, and a golden hairnet, which "Made hire lyk a daysie for to sene" (F 224). The God of Love "was corowned with a sonne," so that "his face shoon so bryghte / That wel unnethes myghte I him beholde" (F 230 and 232-3). Their appearances replicate heliotropism, the natural phenomenon

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[87] Aloni and Sharon-Zisser, "ודישהכיג: Judiasm and Jouissance in Two Medieval Texts," 179-80.
[88] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 252.
[89] Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 238-9.
[90] *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. Noël Denholm-Young (London: Nelson, 1957), 30.

by which flowers extend towards light sources, as the narrator observes early on when the daisy, also known as the "ye of day," towards "the sonne sprede" (F 184 and 48). But Alceste's appearance is notably a matter of contrivance. Her garments make her look *like* a daisy; her costume is metaphor, creating a process of relation that reveals its own contrivance. The God of Love, however, is literally crowned with a sun and his actual face is so bright that the narrator has difficulty seeing him. Alceste resembles the daisy by means of fabrication much like the *marguerite* metaphor of the French poets, whereas the God of Love is efficacious in and of himself. Moreover, Love's face attracts the narrator's gaze. It is not only Alceste who participates in this feigned heliotropism by means of her attire. The narrator also signals that he too, like the daisy, is naturally attracted to masculine Love as he self-consciously reflects on his apprehension of Love, alerting audiences to his personal gaze (F 232-3). Similarly, in "The Legend of Dido," the narrator describes Dido looking regal in white and gold, adorned with precious stones, "fair as is the bryghte morwe (1202), but Aeneas is "lik Phebus to devyse" (1206). Phebus, the god of light *and poetry*, associates Aeneas with the sun, whereas Dido is like the dawning light of the morning. She is beautiful, but the narrator locates women's beauty as metaphorically beneath that of men.

Additionally, the men within the narrator's retellings employ the sun to indicate their love for other men. In "The Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea," the narrator describes Hercules manipulating Hypsipyle into believing that Jason is a noble lover who would be good for her. In the midst of this exchange Hercules tells Hypsipyle that he hopes Jason will find a wife who is worthy of him, but all of this is contrivance. Later, Jason and Hercules will take her gifts and abandon her. The narrator, however, divulges Hercules's interior thoughts, which include his desire that no man perceive Jason to be a lover (1537), and also,

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This Ercules hath so this Jason preysed

That to the sonne he hath hym up areysed,

That half so trewe a man there nas of love

Under the cope of heven that is above. (1524-1527)

The narrator once again refers to the sun and matters of truth, not to describe the deceitful Jason's interactions with Hypsipyle, but to describe love between men. Associating women's beauty with processes of relation and metaphor, as indicated by the ballad above, Alceste's costume, and the subsequent descriptions of women, the narrator associates women's beauty with contrivance and multiplicity like the multiple meanings of the French *marguerite*. Men, on the other hand, are adorned and associated with the sun, their beauty is light perceived without obstacle by other men, and compared with the narrator's descriptions of women, men are aesthetically elevated. He encodes men's beauty not only in natural terms, but also, as represented by the sun, love between men is cosmic.

Still, the God of Love identifies Alceste as an authority on *fin'amor* conventions who is worthy of love poets' devotions when he explains in *Legend* that "she taught al the craft of *fyn lovynge*," presumably because she sacrificed herself for her husband (F 544, emphasis added). But the narrator's ballad is not his only literary offence to *fin'amor* and Love's court. Alceste lists four of Chaucer's works with which she is familiar, and each of these works neglects or disrupts *fin'amor* conventions. First, she names *House of Fame*, another dream vision. *House of Fame* is concerned with reputations, the dissemination, permanence, and authenticity of information; it is not about *fin'amor*. Next, Alceste catalogs "the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse," the *Book of the Duchess*, a dream vision much like *Legend*, in that the narrator falls asleep while reading a book (F 418). Within the dream realm, the narrator finds a weeping knight

wearing black. The Black Knight is mourning the death of his beloved, White; while the knight's superlative description of White and his expressions of devotion are conventional, his beloved is never present. He reveals to the narrator that she is dead, but even in recollection Lady Whyte, who is the pinnacle of eloquence (925-36) and who is transparent truth par excellence (1003-1022) only ever speaks one word: "Nay" (1243). Then, Alceste lists *Parliament of Fowls*, a dream vision that deals explicitly with matters of *fin'amor*, but only between birds. Finally, Pugh has pointed out that, included within this list of literary works, Alceste cites the "love of Palamon and Arcyte," which signifies Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, but omits Emily from the title. Alceste references only the two men of the love triangle (F 420).[91] Citing the "love of Palamon and Arcite" suggests a same-sex love story that defies *fin'amor* heteronormativity. The God of Love and Alceste cite a corpus that demonstrates the narrator's continuous failures to participate in *fin'amor* conventions.

Confronted for his improprieties, the narrator sustains his pattern of devotion to masculine authority figures over women. Both Alceste and the God of Love rebuke the narrator, both list his corpus as sins against *fin'amor*, and both give him terms to amend his trespass, but the narrator supplicates the God of Love. Although the narrator thanks Alceste (F 456-461) for intervening on his behalf (F 433-441), it is the God of Love, a masculine authority, who dictates the narrator's literary style and authorial technique. He orders him to retell each legend "shortly, or he shal to longe dwelle," and for this "*my love* so shal thou wynne" (F 567 and 575, emphasis added). The narrator's act of penance ought to cultivate reverence for good women, but he performs it to win Love's love, and his labor, as previously described, is informed by Love's directive (621). It would seem that only Love's approval truly matters to the narrator, since he performs penance to win Love's good graces.

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[91] Pugh, "Satirizing Queer Brotherhood," 293.

The *Legend* narrator's desires are implicit and obfuscated by heteronormative literary conventions because they lack an available social structure for coherent communication and because his desires verge on that which ought not to be expressed: sodomy. During the Middle Ages, as Dinshaw explains, sodomy was an ambiguous and unspeakable offense not limited to anal penetrative sex; rather, it connotes numerous sexual practices deemed to be perverse because these acts disrupt heteronormative comportment. Unspeakable acts of sodomy include mutual masturbation between same-sex partners or even nonnormative intercourse between heterosexual partners.[92] Hansen describes the narrator as asexual or perhaps postsexual.[93] Conversely, I argue that the narrator's same-sex desires are indicated by silences and reorientations within *fin'amor* literary conventions. The gaps, overlaps, and implications of his text suggest censored sodomitical desires. The narrator is not lacking in sexual desire; rather, explicit expression of his sexual desires is curtailed by literary convention and cultural coercion.

Fin'amor poetics incite expectations that the speaker will address desire for intimacy with a beloved. Ultimately, the narrator returns his fidelity to books and thus to his male *auctores* despite social conventions that direct him towards daisies in May. Moreover, his *fin'amor* literary conventions construct bonds with male authority figures. As previously noted, the *Legend* narrator is the receptive partner among the male *auctores* who precede him. He describes the field of *fin'amor* poetry now barren after others have "lad awey the corn" (F 74). Now, he approaches a *fin'amor* famine, "glenying here and there . . . any goodly word that ye han left" (F 75 and 77). The *Legend* narrator acknowledges the hierarchy of *auctoritas* that privileges the past over contemporary vernacular writers. He and his craft are receptive to the *auctores* who precede him.

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[92] Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

[93] Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, 15.

He employs the poetic conventions of his *auctores* to construct his participation in their networks of power, but he bends *fin'amor* poetic conventions to avoid authentic intimacy with feminine figures and to maintain masculine figures as the subjects of his desires. Beyond the encoded indications that the narrator desires men, his role as *auctor* affords him the opportunity to assume the subject positions of women as they function within *fin'amor* conventions. Legendary women provide a cultural medium for speaking desires that are frustrated by social conditions.

Simulations of Feminine Experience as Expressions of Same-Sex Desires

The narrator's literary simulations of the good women's complaints permit expression of frustrated love for men that lie within his authorial control. It would be impossible to reject epistemologies of experience entirely—a logical fallacy, as the narrator indicates in his opening debate that cites experience as a necessary foundation for all knowledge. Despite the narrator's preference for textual epistemologies, Chaucer indicates that textual and experiential epistemologies are interconnected. In fact, reading and writing are experiences in and of themselves. Despite his lack of experience, the *Legend* narrator's hagiographies focus on women's experiences. The text of *Legend* combines multiple literary sources, the narrator's self-conscious reflections on his writing practices, and his interactions with women's recorded experiences. His literary production is a synthesis of textual and experiential epistemologies. The *Legend* narrator dramatizes the plight of women, which he refers to as "the fruit of al / Why I have told this story" (1160-1161). His descriptions of women's suffering are described with an intimacy that is markedly different from his descriptions of male characters' interiorities. Reading the narrator's empathy for his suffering female characters as an indication of his

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personal experience of frustrated desires for men is one possible interpretation that resolves this difference. Unfulfilled same-sex desires within a heterosexual context explains the narrator's hypothetical identification with women's pain even while he actively avoids interaction with feminine figures. Sedgwick describes "coming out," revealing oneself as gay, is a process of articulations that often precede a formal confession; "silence is rendered as pointed and performative as speech, in relations around the closet . . ."[94] Foucault, on the other hand, emphasizes reverse discourse, such as homosexuals employing nineteenth-century psychiatric terminology to claim homosexuality as legitimately natural.[95] Informed by Foucault and Sedgwick's combined interpretive strategies regarding silences and reversals, I read the narrator's frustrated same-sex desires through women's suffering in his text. The narrator's silent indications of same-sex desires and his demonstrated empathy with women's longing corresponds to Sedgwick's description of queerness, which includes "gaps . . . and resonances . . . when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically."[96] The women's complaints voice the frustrations of the queer narrator within the parameters of literary conventions. He employs the discourse available to him to express what the dominant culture attempts to silence.

Feminine textual subjectivities have permeable boundaries in *Legend*; the narrator crosses these boundaries with ease, a rhetorical technique evinced by Chaucer's narrator in *House of Fame* as well when he retells Dido's point of view and claims her experience as his own (*HF* 312-314). In *Legend*, when the narrator describes women's experiences, he claims intimate knowledge of their interior states. For example, retelling the tale of Lucrece, the narrator details her anguish before revealing to her family that she had been raped by Tarquinius. Beyond the

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[94] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 4.
[95] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 101.
[96] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.

events of the story, the narrator describes Lucrece's inability to speak: "A word, for shame, forth ne myght she brynge," (1835). He details access to her interior thoughts, particularly regarding matters of shame and sexuality. The narrator exhibits empathy with Lucrece that he does not share with the untrue male lovers of the legends. His identification with Lucrece suggests he has some personal experience harboring a secret that is difficult to speak and sexual in nature. Similarly, in the context of Hypermnestra deliberating between the orders of her father, a patriarchal social structure, and her love for a man, the narrator describes her interior struggle with tender consideration: "For pite by the herte hire streyneth so, / And drede of deth doth hire so moche wo" (2685-6). Andrew Galloway explains that Chaucer uses the feminine perspective to critique masculine, pagan, and clerical social assumptions, and that his function as author is to "think his way into" these perspectives.[97] Kathryn L. Lynch argues that Chaucer uses women's standpoints to explore textual subjectivity and that "through these stories of victimized heroines, Chaucer demonstrates his ability to achieve high pathos in the scope of a short narrative."[98] The stories claim authenticity, not through historical facts, but through the common thread of pity that runs through each legend, as Mann explains: "womanly *ethos* of pity extends to envelop the reader: the reader is feminized, as it were, by the process of reading."[99] I argue that he identifies with women's *pathos* because, while his style conforms to masculine practices of writing, it is the feminine subjectivities who articulate his queer orientation to *fin'amor* and practices of *auctorite*. The narrator expresses his complaints and desires through the textual subjectivities of women who are forced to suffer *fin'amor* deprivation, such as when Dido laments, "Tak now my soule, unbynd me of this unreste! / I have fulfild of fortune al the cours" (1339-1340). Her

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[97] Andrew Galloway, "Chaucer's Legend of Lucrece and the Critique of Ideology in Fourteenth-Century England," *ELH* 60 (1993): 813-832, at 825.
[98] Lynch, *Dream Visions*, 118.
[99] Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 33.

beloved has abandoned her; Dido is frustrated by circumstance. Similarly, the narrator

participates in *fin'amor* conventions, but without fulfillment because the directions of his desires

move against normative *fin'amor* structures as he orients himself towards male figures. Unlike

Dido, the narrator does find rest, at least enough to dream himself into the court of Love; he

takes his rest in the company of men who make up his garden bed (F 205-207).

      The narrator obfuscates boundaries of gender and identity in his poetic retelling of lovers'

complaints, particularly in "The Legend of Thisbe." Bemoaning the wall that separates them,

both Pyramus and Thisbe speak the same words, simultaneously and indistinguishable from one

another:

> . . . woldest thow but ones lat us mete,
>
> Or ones that we myghte kyssen swete,
>
> Thanne were we covered of oure cares colde. (760-762)

Each lover desires just one kiss to alleviate the longing they feel. Masculine and feminine

perspectives are articulated through the singular expression of the narrator. He rhetorically

merges gendered identities to complain about a physical manifestation of social boundaries that

forbids intimacy: a wall. The experience of Pyramus and Thisbe may be mapped onto the

homoerotic desires of a narrator who is walled in by heteronormative social structures that

prevent his intimacy with other men. Very few traditional *auctores* provide models for noble

same-sex love. But literary traditions supply numerous examples of women longing for men

whom circumstance forbids, and these characters provide an approximate subject position for

others who are experiencing sexual desire for men.

      But the narrator is not the only one to cross the boundaries of gendered subject positions;

in fact, he characterizes some of the subjects of his narratives as performing opposing gender

roles. Women in *Legend* are praised for acting more like men, but men who act like women are deviants. For example, Alceste benefits from associations with male exemplars within the narrator's *fin'amor* ballad. Then, within the legends, Dido is drawn to the deceitful Aeneas because she observes he resembles "Venus[,] hadde he swich fairnesse," and once Jason and Hercules have agreed to manipulate Hypsipyle, "Jasoun is as coy as is a mayde" (1072 and 1548). Masculine bodies can assume feminine features and vice versa, revealing the gender binary to be permeable, except that when women, like Alceste, perform masculine qualities they are virtuous, but when men, like Aeneas and Jason, perform feminine qualities they are deceptive.[100] The narrator, similarly, employs women's subject positions deceptively to promote desires for masculine *auctorite* rather than heteronormative *fin'amor*.

The narrator's identification with feminine textual subjectivities resembles the findings of David Halperin's study of contemporary gay men's culture. Although Halperin's work does not include the European Middle Ages, his theoretical framework is relevant to an analysis of marginalized sexual identities within a heteronormative culture such as *fin'amor*. Halperin argues that gay men appropriate and parody women's roles because women's roles are regarded less seriously, and this is based on cultural indications that "all feminine forms of embodiment and self-presentation, necessarily come off in a male-dominated society as performative."[101] In

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[100] In addition to the feminine underhanded characteristics of these untrue lovers, according to Marcia Smith Marzec, *fin'amor* conventions typically feminize men by contrasting the masculine knight, whose "*passio* may increase his testosterone in battle," with the romantic knight, who is rendered impotent and feminized by lovesickness. Love increases a woman's "natural tendencies" of irrationality, passivity, and weakness, but for men this is an inversion of masculinity, "What Makes a Man? Troilus, Hector, and the Masculinities of Courtly Love," *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, eds. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (Rochester, NY, 2008), 58-72, at 66-67. Marzec's argument, however, is based on a hegemonic sex-gender binary that has difficulty treating deviations with nuance. I suggest that the narrator employs *fin'amor* conventions to access the feminine, not to become effeminate himself in hopes of winning a beloved lady; the narrator's feminization consists of using the feminine subject position of the legends to signify a queer subject position that precedes the historical development of the homosexual political identity category.

[101] David Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012), 183-4.

fact, according to Halperin's study, gay men's practices of identification with women's subject positions is an essential component of gay men's culture, so much so that the acrobatic process of identification supersedes identifications to other gay men. He explains,

> Identification, too, expresses desire: a desire to bring oneself into relation with someone or something that is different from oneself. . . . gay men of an earlier era knew how to attune themselves to gay aspects of the Judy Garland persona . . . That may well have been the whole point of identifying with Judy Garland: she wasn't a gay man, but in certain respects she could somehow express gay desires, what gay men want, *better* than a gay man could. That is, she could actually convey *something even gayer than gay identity itself.*[102]

Some gay men identify with women's subject positions because they lack suitable models with whom they can identify and others enjoy the subversive process of deviant relations. Similarly, in the medieval context of Chaucer's *Legend*, the feminine personages provide the narrator a medium for his latent, same-sex desires. Women's roles in a predominantly heteronormative culture create positions for silenced gay men to experience desire for men—in fact, it is the prerogative of the poet to understand the feelings and experiences of women to express their narratives well. As the narrator relates to women using the codes of *fin'amor* poetics, he entangles expression, empathy, and experience.

Fin'amor literary conventions present the narrator with subject positions that resonate with homoerotic longing. The narrator's repeated avoidance of authentic heteronormative intimacy, coupled with his indications of same-sex desires, suggests that his standpoint resonates with the legendary women's standpoints insofar as they desire relationships with men that circumstance forbids. Their textual perspectives provide a literary vehicle for the narrator to

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[102] Halperin, *How to Be Gay*, 122-3. Haplerin's emphasis.

voice his personal attraction to male figures, and the tragedies of the women's narratives also provide catharsis for his unfulfilled desires.

He uses women's experiences recorded in the literary traditions established by classical *auctores* to construct his own *auctorite*, for personal catharsis, and to win Love's favor, and this runs parallel to *Legend*'s chronic objectification of women. Dumitrescu acknowledges that one conundrum of *Legend* includes the narrator's charge to praise women, and yet he cannot do this without idealizing women who ultimately suffer and die in accordance with hagiographic narratives that fetishize women's pain.[103] Dumitrescu argues that the more he performs his penitential task, the more he renders himself "complicit in the aestheticization of female pain."[104] He fails to fulfill his penance, but inserting himself into suffering women's subject positions to vocalize his own frustration, and to bolster his own participation in hierarchies of *auctoritas*, amounts to objectifying women for men's literary production and expression of desire.

Regardless of his sexual orientation and subsequent orientation to *fin'amor*, the narrator is *using* women's experiences like his patriarchal *auctores*. Closing the "Legend of Phyllis" the narrator warns, "trusteth, as in love, no man but me" (2561). Why is he the only man who is worthy of trust? Lynch observes the narrator "paradoxically undermines the masculine narrative authority that the entire poem claims to shore up—and indeed he weakens the authority of books that the poem, from its opening lines, had at least pretended to strengthen."[105] She argues that the narrator exempts himself from the category of "man," eliciting more distrust than affirmation of his honest nature.[106] I suggest a more complex series of relations: the narrator is in fact just like every other man, particularly the untrue lovers who have deceived women to fulfill their own

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[103] Dumitrescu, "Beautiful Suffering," 106-8.
[104] Dumitrescu, "Beautiful Suffering," 109.
[105] Lynch, *Dream Visions and Other Poems*, 185, n. 2.
[106] Lynch, *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions*, 127.

desires. He too is using women. He retells the stories of their pain to facilitate his own advancement into the ranks of *auctores* and to covertly express his own frustrated desires for intimacy with men. He is the only man who women may trust in matters of love only to the extent that he bears no sexual desire for women. As his interactions with the daisy exemplify, his interest in women is theoretical and textual. It is not physical. And if there is an emotional connection between himself and women, it is with those women whose desires for intimacy with men is strained, much like a man whose social circumstances forbid acting on homoerotic desires. He is not valuing feminine epistemologies of experience. He is using literary conventions to voice his own feelings.

The narrator self-consciously employs women's experiences to construct his own *auctorite*. As noted above, the women's narratives are confined to his scope, unlike the men whose actions progress beyond the narrator's words, reducing women to "bearer[s], not maker[s], of meaning."[107] Ultimately, the narrator abandons his task and thus his penance to all good women, like an unfaithful lover. He uses women's narratives to the extent that they occupy his attention and benefit his craft. He does not revere the women and their legends as ends in and of themselves who are worthy of his poetic praise; rather, he treats the women as means that fulfill his personal end—whether that end is to appease the God of Love, to construct a *fin'amor* text, or to use women's subjectivities to think through his own desires and frustrations. He exhibits misogyny in spite of his empathy and perhaps due to his homoerotic valorization of *auctores*. Locating Chaucer's medieval text within broader social politics, like masculine domination and attraction to masculine cultural authorities, exposes patriarchal systems that

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[107] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 59.

objectify women to further male sexual desires, even when those desires are for other men.[108]

Confronting the misogyny implicit in these dynamics of power exposes the culturally constructed

overlay between gender and authority while combatting misogyny that continues to influence

medieval studies.[109]

Conclusion

The Legend of Good Women relies on audience presumptions of heteronormativity

because the text is predicated upon a series of normative structures, namely networks of

auctoritas and *fin'amor* conventions that presume a homosocial literary heritage. But Chaucer's

narrator's repetitive acts of inauthentic intimacy and contrived (mis)identifications dramatize the

mechanisms by which his gender and sexuality are constructed as well as the identity categories

that issue from his own *auctorite*. His actions frustrate fulfillment of his purported devotion to

feminine figures; instead, he exhibits an affinity for the company of men, and yet his same-sex

desires also remain indistinct and unfulfilled. Neither his heteronormative identification nor his

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[108] Drawing correlations across time and cultures, some gay men disparage women and sexual attraction to them. People wrongfully assume that gay men are diametrically opposed to lesbians largely due to the distinctly different and sexualized social spheres they frequent, like bars and dance clubs. This pervasive binary is a sad development considering the communal activism of the 1980s, when groups of lesbians tended to gay men suffering the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Patrick Strudwick, "Yes there is misogyny among gay men—but our sexist world is the problem," *The Guardian*. November 6, 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/06/misogyny-gay-men-sexist-rose-mcgowan-rights-women (accessed March 20, 2016); and Michael Musto, "Gay Men Can't Take Criticism," *Advocate*. March 12, 2015. http://www.advocate.com/michael-musto/2015/03/12/gay-men-can-t-take-criticism (accessed March 20, 2016).

[109] In a blog post now deleted, prominent Anglo-Saxon scholar, Allen J. Frantzen, refers to feminism as a fog, privileging a warped understanding of masculinity that—as I understand it—Halperin attributes to PostStonewall gay men's culture that rejected the perceived effeminacy of the previous generation. According to Frantzen, feminism is a fog that hinders critical inquiry among academics; and the means by which a man becomes his truest, best self is by "grabbing [one's] balls" and becoming more masculine, Allen J. Frantzen, "How to Fight Your Way Out of the Feminist Fog," http://web.archive.org/web/20160313185240/http://www.allenjfrantzen.com:80/Men/femfog.html (accessed February 16, 2018). Frantzen represents a failure to appreciate the evolution of medieval studies, and academia more generally, which ought to promote inclusion and critical inquiry that values diversity and nuance in cultural studies.

same-sex desires are realized. They are hinted at by spaces within the text that invite audiences to impose hegemonic categories of identification onto his persona. The narrator's heteronormativity rests tenuously on a network of culturally constructed associations. Indications of his homoerotic desires complicate the homosocial networks of *auctoritas* and *fin'amor* conventions.

Chaucer's *Legend* narrator indicates homoerotic desires through the particular dynamics of his literary interventions. Dinshaw, Pugh, and Harwood have noticed similar traces of homoeroticism, like constellations, across Chaucer's corpus. Here, I have identified the rhetorical function of same-sex desires as performed by one of Chaucer's narrators to identify inclusiveness already present in our traditional English canons and to add nuance to our LGBTQ+ histories. Reading the homoeroticism indicated in Chaucer's *Legend* suggests a queer subject position that intersects with our "Father of English Poetry."

LGBTQ+ histories are sparse. We are connected not by blood but by desire. We identify our kin by similarities that connect experiences—just as the *Legend* narrator identifies with the women of his hagiography. Crossing time and culture to forge connections with the past, Halperin's *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* and Leslie Feinberg's *Transgender Warriors* suggest possible means by which we might reclaim our forequeers, but these histories rarely include more than a brief mention of the Middle Ages. Hélène Cixous argues, "poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious and . . . the unconscious . . . is the place where the repressed manage to survive: women, or as Hoffman would say, fairies."[110] In addition to women and fairies, we can add any number of latent, suppressed, and marginalized subject positions. If, as Cixous explains, poetry manifests unconscious desire, then it is probable that

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[110] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs* 1.4 (1976): 879-80.

Chaucer's poetry records traces of sexual urges that prefigure sexual identity categories. Identifying Chaucer's narrator's homoeroticism situates queerness at one of the significant origins of the English heritage. In addition to my queer reading of Alfred's *Boethius*, which locates queer characterization in the corpus of the "Father of English Prose," my reading of *Legend* establishes alternative sex-gender identities at the inception of English literary authority.

Chaucer's narrator employs conventional models of *auctorite* and *fin'amor* towards unconventional ends; in the following chapter Margery Kempe also constructs her personal biography in accordance with women's hagiographies and other popular literary tropes. But Margery's citations of authority and performances of sanctity, not to mention her interactions with the Godhead, are so excessive that they undermine, rather than enhance, her authority. Her queer authority suspends authenticity, relegating Margery's sanctity to the queerness of faith's open possibilities.

CHAPTER FOUR:

MARGERY KEMPE'S AUTHORITY AND EXCESS

Introduction

Contemplating her personal narrative, Margery Kempe explains, "þer was so mech

obloquie & slawndyr of þis creatur þat þer wold fewe men beleue þis creatur" (6.Intro.14-16).[1]

The Book of Margery Kempe suspends Margery between legitimate mystic and saint because her

text challenges the limitations of discursive conventions, but Margery herself disrupts and

exceeds traditional identity categories, exposing the contrivance of literary conventions. Kempe

employs authorizing conventions, such as humbly referring to herself as "creature," and she

records common experiences that are traditionally found in women's mystical and hagiographic

texts, such as the social exclusion and denigration she describes above.[2] But Margery Kempe is

not a traditional mystic and saint. Her class, gender, and sexuality threaten normative models of

sanctity.

I presented an early version of this chapter, titled "Queer Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," at
the 53rd International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, 2018).

[1] All Middle English references to Margery Kempe's *Book* are from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, eds.
Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS o.s. 212 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940).
Parenthetical citations indicate (page number. chapter number. line numbers).

[2] Taking a cue from Lynn Staley, I distinguish Margery Kempe's roles by referring to Margery as the
character who is conveyed through the *Book*, I refer to Kempe as the author who constructs Margery
through her literary production, and I use her full name when her narrative self and her literary self are
interconnected. This practice, in part, is a matter of respect. Criticism tends to refer to "Margery,"
conflating the historical person with the literary figure, and the author who utters the text through which
we learn about her. Kempe is rarely treated with the same professional decorum that refers to Chaucer or
Langland by their last names, which signifies respect for their authorial status. Identifying Margery
Kempe the author as "Margery" rhetorically devalues her literary contributions and signifies another
tactic by which her literary contributions continue to be diminished due to her gender, class, and—in
some cases—her sexuality.

Margery Kempe (1373-1439) lived most of her life in Lynn (now called King's Lynn), Norfolk. She was born into a prominent family: her father served as mayor of the town five times and then became alderman of the Trinity Guild. She married a man beneath her social status, John Kempe, a brewer, and together they had fourteen children.[3] Margery's biological family generally appear in *The Book* to the extent that Margery is obliged to tend to the affairs of her household, but mostly her domestic relationships are overshadowed by her devotional practices, her holy life, and prominent spiritual authorities. Early in her text, Margery details failed business ventures, including brewing ale and milling; according to Dinshaw this implies a lack of models for secular women's lives (9-10.2.30-38). Instead, Dinshaw suggests, we ought to situate her within a tradition of English women authors, "extending the line already established from Aphra Behn to Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf . . . work[ing] in the service of social justice and democracy."[4] Dinshaw argues that Margery Kempe "lives in a multitemporal, heterogeneous *now*."[5] Margery Kempe exceeds the limits of her own circumstances, challenging not only the social conventions of her day, but later scholars' perceptions and approaches to the Middle Ages and Christian spirituality.[6] Later, Margery Kempe felt shame for her sins of lust and pride. She describes her guilt and an illness as the combined circumstances that humbled her and inspired her religious fervor. Christ converses with Margery because, he explains, she is most beloved to him. He gives to her the ability to cry tears of great compunction, mixed with her high contemplation of Christ's Passion and the suffering of his mother, Mary. Margery exercises a

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[3] Carolyn Dinshaw, "Margery Kempe," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, eds. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 223.
[4] Dinshaw, "Margery Kempe," 236.
[5] Dinshaw, "Margery Kempe," 237.
[6] Comparatively, Julian of Norwich, who is a saint in the Catholic and Anglican churches, garners more respect as a mystic among scholars, and she also explicitly desired deep understanding of Christ's passion and a sickness close to death that incited her mystical visions, Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings*, eds. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, 2 vols, (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), vol. 1, 201-4.6-39.

freedom not typically experienced by women in her circumstances: she travels at times without a

male companion, and she makes various modes of public statement about Christianity while

refuting accusations of Lollardy and subverting restrictions against women preaching. Margery

Kempe desired sanctity and so she constructed sanctity, which she records as an amalgamation

of traditional women's roles and literary conventions resulting in a series of "gaps, overlaps,

dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses"—Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick's definition of

"queer."[7] Margery Kempe's *Book* constructs a gap that suspends the narrative between fiction

and reality because the text overlaps and resonates with hagiographic literary conventions but

Margery herself is dissonant, and she represents herself as a spiritual model who exceeds her

exempla.

Most of what is known about Margery comes from her personal account of her life,

which she dictates to two priestly amanuenses, who inscribed *The Book of Margery Kempe*. One

manuscript of Margery's book survives: London, British Library, Additional 61823. It was

rediscovered in 1934 by Colonel Butler-Bowdon and announced soon after in the London *Times*

by Hope Emily Allen.[8] This manuscript is a copy made before 1450 by a scribe who signs the

bottom of the last page with the name Salthows.[9] According to the text, Christ directed her to

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[7] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.
[8] Lynn Staley, ed. and trans, "Introduction," in *The Book of Margery Kempe* (New York: Norton, 2001), vii.
[9] Anthony Bale suggests that this is the signature of Richard Salthouse, a Benedictine monk who could have inscribed the *Book* manuscript as a novice monk in Lynn, or perhaps after he entered the priory, locating the mansucript's composition at Norwich during the late 1440s, "Richard Salthouse of Norwich and the Scribe of *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *The Chaucer Review* 52.2 (2017): 177-9. While there is only one surviving manuscript of Kempe's *Book*, distinguishable handwritten glosses suggest that the manuscript was conveyed to various places, including Syon Abbey, where Wynkyn de Worde probably encountered the manuscript and thus published a pamphlet containing extractions from the *Book*, *A shorte treatyse of contemplacyon taught by our lorde Iesu cryste, or taken out of the book of Margerie kempe of lynn*, STC 14924, Cambridge University Library, Sel. 5, 27, 1501. These same extracts were reprinted in 1521 and 1910, Henry Pepwell, *Here begynneth a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon taught by our lorde Iesu cryste, or taken out of the book of Margerie kempe ancresse of lynn*, STC 20972, British Library C. 37, 1521; Edmund G. Gardner, *The Cell of Self-Knowledge: Seven Early English Mystical Treatises*

record her story for the benefit of the Christian community, but it was at least a decade before she felt comfortable doing so, and then another few years before she found her first of two scribes. The narrative is an episodic, nonchronological holy autobiography, or autohagiography, recorded between 1436 and 1438. She is nearly contemporary with other late medieval English authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, and Julian of Norwich. In fact, Margery meets with Julian, whom Margery quotes at length to validate her own experience and thus authorize her text.

Margery Kempe and her *Book* are authorized according to the medieval discursive conventions of saints and mystics; however, she employs so many of these conventions and to such a hyperbolic degree that they simultaneously suggest that she is privileged above other saints and mystics, and that she is participating in literary conventions and thus replicating formulas. According to Foucault, as described in the introduction to this dissertation, discourse both constructs power and reveals the mechanisms by which power is constructed.[10] The overabundance of Margery's analogues to women's roles in hagiographies, and the frequency with which these conventions appear in her *Book*, draw attention to the constructedness of authority in *The Book* and within the broader discursive models in which Margery participates.

She replicates traditional identity categories such as wife and mother within spiritual contexts, and her devotional practices and expressions are connected to literary exempla. It would seem that she is participating in discursive norms or replicating heteronormative identity categories, but Margery Kempe performs contrary identity categories, such as mother and virgin;

Printed by Henry Pepwell in 1521 (London: 1910). Until the Salthows manuscript was re-discovered, these were the only available texts by which general postmedieval audiences could access Margery Kempe, Charity Scott Stokes, "Margery Kempe: Her Life and the Early History of Her Book," *Mystics Quarterly* 25.1 (1999): 48-9.

[10] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 100-1.

she replicates women's roles in excess of the boundaries that delineate identity categories. Moreover, she cites women mystics and saints as her exempla, while implicating herself as comparable or superior to them. Margery privileges herself by means of queer orientations within social and spiritual hierarchies. Judith Butler argues that excess occurs within the repetitive acts and gestures that constitute heteronormative discursive regimes, and this excess exposes the performativity, or constructedness, of identity categories, particularly when repetition fails or when it "is redeployed for a very different performative purpose."[11] Margery Kempe exceeds the normative boundaries of identity categories, performing as virgin and mother, and participating in erotic mystical relationships with the Godhead. The literary conventions that validate Margery Kempe are so excessive that they simultaneously authenticate and destabilize her narrative, indicating the constructedness of sanctity beyond her text, and thus resulting in her queer literary authority.

A wealth of scholarship has been produced in the last three decades on *The Book of Margery Kempe*, much of which concerns the sources and authority of this enigmatic text. Due to her class, the erotic nature of some of her mystical encounters, the corporeality of her devotional practices, and the hyperbolic nature of her experiences, her credibility as a mystic and author has been treated with skepticism. Cheryl Glenn identifies Kempe's constructions of narrator and author-as-character as sophisticated techniques of an author creating fiction.[12] Lynn Staley argues that Kempe's *Book* is a work of fiction, explaining, "its allusions to other books of spiritual counsel, its attention to its own veracity as a written text, and its careful delineation of the chronological relationship between experience and transcription, [Kempe's

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[11] Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (London: Routledge, 1991), 24.

[12] Cheryl Glenn, "Author, Audience, and Autobiography: Rhetorical Technique in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *College English* 54.5 (1992): 546; see also Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

Book] seems to insist upon its own literary authority."[13] Critics focus on the literary conventions

that construct authority within Kempe's *Book* to identify the content as either fiction or

nonfiction, but Margery Kempe and her *Book* resist tidy categories because her *Book* is a

synthesis of her historical, spiritual, and metaphorical truths. I read Margery Kempe's *Book* as

autohagiography. Hagiographies comprise a dominant literary genre during the European Middle

Ages. They were mostly composed in Latin for monastic and clerical audiences; however, the

surge in production of vernacular translations from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries

suggest that they were increasingly produced for lay audiences.[14] Recording the intersections of

her public and private experiences, *The Book* documents a laywoman's intimate interaction with

the divine, employing generic literary conventions to conceptualize her experiences and her

relationship with the Godhead.

In the following sections, I begin by situating Margery Kempe within patriarchal norms

of Christian spiritual discourses and literary production to identify the conventional means by

which she authorizes her nonnormative interventions. Then, locating Margery within literary

traditions of mysticism and hagiographies, I argue that Margery Kempe not only employs the

authorizing conventions of saints, like the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Birgitta of

Sweden, but she exceeds the devotional practices that are based on these exempla. The

authorizing conventions of her *Book* elevate her status despite social hierarchies that would

normally subordinate her. Margery Kempe exceeds discursive norms, challenging the boundaries

of identity categories, resulting in the queer authority that simultaneously validates her mystical

experiences while exposing the constructedness of literary conventions.

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[13] Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, 36.
[14] Sherry L. Reames, "General Introduction," *Middle English Legends of Women Saints* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), 1.

Authorizing Subversion

Margery uses the authorizing conventions employed by her contemporaries, such as relying on male, church authorized amanuenses, identifying herself as an illiterate laywoman, and constructing a maternal relationship with her text, but ultimately highlighting herself as the *auctour* wielding power over her discourse and manipulating patriarchal norms of literary production. She cites male authority figures to validate her experiences and her text and she employs male amanuenses to writer her *Book*. Nevertheless, Margery's experiences indicate problems with masculine-dominated discourse that tends to control and silence women's expressions. Kempe explicitly situates herself among church authorities and male authors to validate her text, but she also challenges the social restrictions that hinder women from participating in written discourse and preaching. Although Kempe exercises patriarchal authorizing conventions, her narrative characterizes Margery as the spiritual authority over her *Book* and audience.

Margery is repeatedly reminded that dominant social structures require her dependence on men to inform, direct, and validate her religious experiences, but the same men who are obliged to hear Margery are also quick to silence her. Early in her *Book*, before she experiences any divine encounters, Margery suffered an illness. Believing that her death was imminent, she called to her confessor because an unnamed sin weighed on her conscience. He rebuked her before she could confess and she was forced to endure her guilt:

> [A]ftyr þat hir chyld was born, sche, not trostyn hir lyfe, sent for hir gostly fadyr . . . &,
> whan sche cam to þe point for to seyn þat þing whech sche had so long conselyd, hir

confessor was a lytyl to hastye & gan scharply to vndyrnemyn[15] hire er þan sche had fully

seyd hir entent, & so sche wold no more seyn for nowt he might do. (7.1.10-19)

The man whose solemn duty was to hear her confession, direct her penance, and help absolve her

of sin, obstructed her expression instead. The immediate result was Margery's plunge further

into sickness, exacerbated by threatening demons:

[D]euelys cryed up-on hir wyth greet thretyngys & bodyn hir sche schuld forsake hir

Crystendam hir feyth, and denyin hir god, hys Modyr, & alle þe seyntys in Heuyn, hyr

good werkys & alle good vertues, hir fadyr, hyr modyr, & alle hire frendys. And so sche

dede. (7.1.28-33)

Silencing Margery's confession led to a further break from reality and her renunciation of faith.

But Margery recuperated. She repented. And she resisted social structures that silence women's

spiritual expressions. Margery does not rely on patriarchal interventions to mediate her

relationship with the Godhead. She has direct access. Elizabeth Petroff argues,

Visions led women to the acquisition of power in the world while affirming their

knowledge of themselves as women. Visions were a socially sanctioned activity that

freed a woman from conventional female roles by identifying her as a genuine religious

figure. But the success of medieval women in communicating their experiences should

not blind us to the fact that the medieval world, especially the institutional church, was

mistrustful of women who claimed spiritual authority. Each individual woman had to

discover for herself how to write, how to express her insights within the framework of the

Church.[16]

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[15] reprove

[16] Elizabeth Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 6.

Mysticism was a means for women to assume power over their personal understanding and experience of the divine.[17] Margery Kempe's mystical public expressions accord well with exemplars and women's devotional practices while exceeding common comportment to resist the silences imposed by patriarchal forces and to communicate her perspective regarding spirituality.

Margery's mystical gifts are prominently characterized by weeping as a demonstration of her mystical contemplations; this amounts to a woman making public statements about spiritual matters. Margery did not merely shed tears. She *sobbed*. Margery experienced uncontrollable outbursts, bodily convulsions, cries of agony, and diluvian tears. Loud wailing was in fact a common form of expression for mystics, particularly those expressing dramatic compassion for the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, as performed by Marie of Oignies and Angela of Foligno, and representations of the inconsolable Virgin Mary in the Towneley *Crucifixion* play.[18] Margery's public displays—the weeping gift bestowed by Christ—conforms to women's affective devotional practices. Affective piety for medieval Christians is an emotionally charged devotional practice that concentrates on the humanity of Jesus Christ, with particular emphasis on his birth and death, and the joys and sorrows experienced by his mother, Mary.[19] Johanna Ziegler and Bynum have demonstrated that women's devotional practices focus on embodiment.

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[17] Luce Irigaray cites mystic in the late Western Middle Ages as the only identity category that affords women a place to speak and act publicly, *Speculum de l'autre Femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974), 238. Jennifer Summit observes that visionary writing provided women with access to divine knowledge that "transcended, and revealed the insufficiency of" theological learning from which they were excluded, Jennifer Summit, "Women and Authorship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, eds. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 96.
[18] Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt*, 129; Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 7; Frank M. Napolitano, "Discursive Competition in the Towneley *Crucifixion*," *Studies in Philology* 106.2 (2009): 170; Dhira B. Mahoney, "Margery Kempe's Tears and the Power over Language," in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1992) 43.
[19] William Abel Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 189-262; Susan Dickman, "Margery Kempe and the English Devotional Tradition," in *The Medieval Tradition in England*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1980), 156-72; Anne Clark Bartlett and Thomas H. Bestul, "Introduction," in *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 2.

Medieval women were generally excluded from institutions and intellectual traditions, and some feminist theorists argue that women are more likely to use personal experience and embodiment to construct and assess knowledge claims due to socialization that develops empathy among women.[20] Consequently, women focused more on Christ's humanity, derived entirely from Mary, his only human parent, and thus representing a corporeal means for women to connect with divinity.[21] For example, Margery describes her own "hy contemplacyon in þe manhood of owr Lord" (145.59.6). His humanity is an essential aspect of Margery's devotional practices that fosters her intimacy with the divine.

Additionally, crying is a devotional practice performed by Mary, Mother of God, and Mary Magdalene. For example, Margery explains, "owr Lady wept wonder sor. And þerfor þe sayd creatur must nedys wepyn & cryin whan sche sey swech gostly syȝtys in hir sowle . . . and hir thowt þat owr Lady & sche wer al-wey to-gedyr to se owr Lordys peynys" (190.79.25-30). Margery's participation in these devotional practices fosters her identification with women who experienced intimate relationships with Christ. Liz Herbert McAvoy explains that Margery's gift of tears "will forever connect her to the weeping Virgin Mother . . . as well as consolidating her identification with that foremost of honorary virgins, Mary Magdalene, whose tears had become

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[20] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2000), 251-2; Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, 10th Anniversary Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 35-8; Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* 2nd Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 133-5, Nancy M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering Reality,* eds. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Boston: D. Reidel, 1983), 283–310.

[21] Johanna Ziegler, *The Word Becomes Flesh* (Worcester, MA: Cantor Art Gallery, 1985), 11-14, 19, and 24-5; Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 176.

a permanent symbol of contrition and penitence within the Church."[22] Laura Kalas Williams interprets Margery's copious tears at Calvary as stigmatic (68.28.12-17): elsewhere her tears are produced with "labowr" indicating spiritual birth that associates her tears with "the waters of the amniotic sac which nourish generatively" (185.78.26-9).[23] Her tears are an expression of her spiritual maternal identity.

Margery's weeping is communicative. Her tears of great compunction are nonverbal expressions that elicit responses by those around her who are either annoyed by her public displays, or who are moved to think more deeply about their personal relationships with God.[24] Dhira B. Mahoney argues:

> [H]er tears and prayers are interchangeable, or rather, interlocked; together they combine to express and channel God's spirit to her and through her. Incident after incident demonstrates that she has power, the power to foretell the future, the power to save souls, the power to cure illness and to cause miracles. Thus, though Kempe's tears are themselves inarticulate, their explicit link with her prayers translates into an equation whereby tears equal prayer which equal power. Paradoxically, even power over language.[25]

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[22] Liz Herbert McAvoy, "Virgin, Mother, Whore: The Sexual Spirituality of Margery Kempe," in *Intersections of Sexuality and the Divine in Medieval Culture: The Word Made Flesh*, ed. Susannah Chewning (New York: Routledge, 2005), 126.

[23] Laura Kalas Williams, "'Slayn for Goddys lofe:' Margery Kempe's Melancholia and the Bleeding of Tears," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 52.1 (2016): 93 and 97.

[24] Emma Gatland observes, "female saints adapt their language . . . traversing boundaries of social position, gender, religion, and consciousness, . . . moments caused by emotion and usually accompanied by tears when an individual is speechless—and spaces or occasions in the lives when they can speak but their words fail to be heard or understood," Emma Gatland, *Women in the Golden Legend: Female Authority in a Medieval Castilian Sanctoral* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), 67-8.

[25] Mahoney, "Margery Kempe's Tears and the Power over Language," 43.

Margery overcomes the problematic restrictions of language that were enforced specifically against women.[26] Her weeping attracts attention, whereby she demonstrates an emotive response combined with religious devotion, challenging others to consider their own expressions of reverence and interactions with the divine. For example, upon entering a church in Leicester, she notices a crucifix. Beholding this image,

> Þe Passyon of owr Lord entryd hir mende, wherthorw sche gan metyn & al-to-relentyn be terys of pyte & compassyown. Þan þe fyer of lofe kyndeldyd so ȝern in hir hert þat sche myth not kepyn it preuy, for whedyr sche wolde er not, it cawsyd hir to brekny owte wyth a lowde voys & cryen meruelylowslyche & wepyn & sobbyn ful hedowslyche þat many a man and woman wondryd on hier þerfor. (111.46.7-15)

Margery's boisterous response is beyond her control. She feels such pain for the crucifixion of her Lord, as every Christian ought, that a spontaneous overflow of emotion exceeds her control, draws attention to her sobbing, and disrupts the solemnity of the church service. Her weeping breaks from decorum, yet it is appropriate. She inspires bystanders to wonder. Why does this woman feel her connection to Christ so deeply? Are the restrained church services and parishioners comportment deficient observations of faith? Margery employs her mystical gifts to subvert the social restrictions imposed upon her. Margery's weeping is preaching.

Although Margery Kempe's public demonstrations disrupt social norms—and the peace—she observes traditional masculine-dominated networks of power when constructing her own literary presence and validating her text. Literary production and *auctoritas* are predominantly reserved for men, so Margery seeks authorization from masculine sources. When seeking a confessor, she requests that an Archbishop "grawnt hir auctoryte" (36.16.20-3) to

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[26] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 162 and 165.

choose one for herself. Additionally, when God moves two clerks to defend Margery against anyone who speaks ill of her generally, Margery observes that when they support her, they strengthen "her skyllys[27] be auctoriteys of Holy Scriptur" (167-8.69.37-1). Margery receives *auctoritas* externally from masculine sources who maintain conventional authorizing practices that observe power disseminating from core institutions such as the Church, or preeminent texts including Scripture.

Religious and social structures invested men with the authority to mediate the devotional practices of laypersons. But some women threatened these patriarchal networks of power. Women speaking publicly on spiritual matters, particularly women rehearsing Scripture in their mother tongue, attracted accusations of Lollardy. "Lollard" is a derogatory term used to refer to Wycliffites, or those informed by John Wycliffe (1330-1384), who promoted Scripture as the only text for Christian salvation and who opposed the Roman Catholic Church.[28] Fears of Lollardy resulted in harsh penalties for something as simple as possession of a single line of English Scripture.[29] Jean Charlier de Gerson, a prominent French theologian and contemporary of Margery, argues:

> The female sex is forbidden on apostolic authority to teach in public, that is either by word or mouth or writing. . . . All women's teaching is to be held suspect unless it has been examined diligently and much more fully than men's. . . . [b]ecause [women] are

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[27] arguments

[28] Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 280; and Chad V. Meister and J. B. Stump, *Christian Thought: A Historical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2010), 312-3.

[29] Staley, *Book of Margery Kempe*, xi.

easily seduced and determined seducers, and because it is not proved that they are witnesses to divine grace.[30]

Writing an autohagiography as a laywoman is dangerous work. Margery was actually accused of being a Lollard by the Archbishop of York, Henry Bowet (123-128.53). But she admits that she is illiterate, she relies on male amanuenses to record her experiences, and she conforms to normative models of literary production.

Margery identifies herself as illiterate, and yet her text exhibits familiarity with biblical and mystical texts (143.58.31). In fact, even her admission of illiteracy resonates with her contemporary, Julian of Norwich. Julian describes herself as unlearned, and yet she is familiar with literature and Scripture, and she even writes her own vision literature. Julian may be referring specifically to her Latin literary abilities because *litteratus* came to refer to one who had better than minimal Latin reading abilities as documentation increased during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[31] Julian of Norwich and her contemporary, Margery Kempe, identify as illiterate, and yet they demonstrate knowledge of literary cultures and conventions. Medieval forms of literacy vary from those we are accustomed to today. For example, reading was not a solitary practice. Texts were often read aloud, performing the bond between sign and utterance. Reading in the Middle Ages was both oral and aural.[32] Margery learned Scripture at church and in conversation with clerks in addition to four texts that were read aloud to her: Saint Birgitta's *Revelations*, *Stimulus Amoris* (falsely ascribed to Saint Bonaventure), Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, and Richard Rolle's *Incendium Amoris* (29.14.31-2 and 39.17.23-5).[33]

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[30] Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, eds. and trans. *A Book of Showings*. 2 vols. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978. Vol. 1, 151.

[31] Dinshaw, "Margery Kempe," 226-7; Margaret W. Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 64-5.

[32] Dinshaw, "Margery Kempe," 228.

[33] Staley, *Book of Margery Kempe*, 30.

Margery's two male scribes authorize her holy biography insofar as they appear in her

text. Men predominantly authorized medieval texts, "exercis[ing] nearly complete control over

the textualisation of women's utterances."[34] Kempe's first amanuensis, an Englishman who had

lived in Germany, moved to England and agreed to write out Kempe's narrative as she dictated

her experiences to him (4.1.4-12). She is probably referring to her son, as suggested by a letter

written by him, now held in Gdańsk, which matches the description of Margery's first

amanuensis in *The Book*.[35] A second amanuensis, a priest for whom Margery felt much affection,

agrees to take up the task (4.1.12-4). At first, he finds it impossible to understand the text copied

by the first scribe because it was "neiþyr good Englysch ne Dewch" (4.1.16). Then, he hears so

many terrible things about Margery that he defers the task for four years (4.1.19-27). Finally, the

priest feels guilty and agrees to help her put her book into writing (4-5.1.40-4). The lives of holy

women were traditionally recorded by men: Jacques de Vitry penned the life of Marie d'Oignies,

Thomas de Cantimpré wrote the life of Christina Mirabilis, Philip de Clairvaux recorded the life

of Elisabeth de Spalbeek, and Osbern Bokenham translated saints' lives of women.[36] There were

some exceptions, of course. Notably, Saint Birgitta of Sweden wrote and dictated her revelations

to male scribes and Julian of Norwich wrote her own book of visions.[37] Jennifer Summit argues

that we need to employ medieval notions of textual production as collaboration to discern the

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[34] Catherine M. Mooney, "Voice, Gender, and the Portrayal of Sanctity," in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 6.

[35] Sebastian Sobecki, "'The Writyng of This Tretys': Margery Kempe's Son and the Authorship of Her Book," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015): 257-83.

[36] Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, 33. Julian of Norwich wrote her own text—one that Margery surely knew—but Julian's books are about her visions, not a chronicle of her life.

[37] William Patterson Cumming, ed. *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, EETS 178 (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), xxvii.

writings of medieval women. Summit suggests that authorship is a range of acts and cultural practices that extend beyond hegemonic, institutionalized ideologies that exclude women.[38]

In Margery's case, a male author with holy orders bound to the Church, such as her final amanuensis, might have been necessary to confer his authority upon her text and to sidestep further accusations of heresy. Staley argues that Margery has strategically written the male amanuensis into her work to authorize her book.[39] She observes that Margery's second amanuensis imbues the work with literary authority because the work self-consciously identifies his presence and the process of transcription, whereby the scribe embodies the skeptical reader or any antagonist to Margery's account. The figure of the scribe excuses Margery from religious or political dissent because she is not speaking directly to the reader, only the scribe, and therefore she is not speaking directly against the devotional sluggishness of her contemporaries.[40] Staley argues that the scribes are characters fabricated by Kempe.[41] But Margery's amanuenses need not be fictitious in order for Kempe to employ them rhetorically for validation and as her safeguards against further accusations of heresy. Although there is very little evidence to confirm how much control Kempe wields over the construction of her text, *The Book* characterizes Margery exercising authorial control, literary knowledge, and directing her amanuenses—at times, miraculously. Based on this characterization, I argue that Kempe's *Book* is an account of her historical and mystical experiences, and I read her amanuenses as real men whom Margery employed to help her record her experiences due to her illiteracy and as figures cited within the narrative to authorize the text and safeguard Kempe.

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[38] Summit, "Women and Authorship," 96.
[39] Lynn Staley, "The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe," *Speculum* 66.4 (1991), 838.
[40] Staley, "The Trope of the Scribe," 837.
[41] Staley, "The Trope of the Scribe," 838.

Despite her reliance on male amanuenses, the opening pages of Margery's book codify her authorial control over and above their labor and influence. Before her second amanuensis could begin his labor, he was hindered by a devil. He could not see; consequently, he could not write. Margery identifies the demonic source of his troubles, and she directs him to struggle against wicked forces to write what he could by the grace of God:

> Whan þe prest began first to wryten on þis booke, hys eyn myssyd[42] so þat he mygth not se to make hys lettyr ne mygth not se to mend hys penne. Alle oþer thing he mygth se wel a-now. . . . He compleyned to þe creatur of hys dysese. Sche seyd hys enmy had envye at hys good dede & wold let[43] hym yf he mygth & bad hym do as wel as God wold ʒive hym grace & not levyn.[44] Whan he cam a-geyn to hys booke, he myth se as wel, hym thowt, as euyr he dede be-for . . . (5.1.20-8)

It is only after Margery performs intervening prayers and she directs him to carry on with his task that her amanuensis is capable of transcribing any words at all. Due to Margery's miraculous interventions in his literary production, he issues the proem, the only direct address made by the church-sanctioned authority behind Kempe's text.

The short interjection of the amanuensis's proem reads like a nagging formality. It is abrupt, repetitive, and *contained* by Kempe's words. *The Book* begins with Kempe's introduction to her hagiography and the means by which it came to be recorded, followed by the amanuensis's proem, leading once more into Kempe's narration of events:

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[42] failed
[43] hinder
[44] give up

[W]han he had wretyn a qwayr,[45] he addyd a leef þerto, and þan wrot he þis proym to

expressyn more openly þan doth þe next folwyng, whech was wretyn er þan þis. Anno

domini m^{lo}. cccc. xxxvj.[46]

> A schort tretys of a creature sett in grett pompe & pride of þe world . . . not in
>
> ordyr as it fellyn but as þe creatur cowd han mend of hem whan it wer wretyn, for
>
> it was xx ȝer & mor from tym þis creatur had forsake þe world and besyly clef[47]
>
> on-to ower Lord or þis boke was wretyn . . . And þan ȝet it was wretyn fyrst be a
>
> man whech cowd neiþyr wel wryten Englysch ne Duch . . . And so at þe last a
>
> preste was sor mevyd for to wrytin þis tretys, & he cowd not wel redyn it of a iiij
>
> ȝere to-gedyr. & sythen be þe request of þis creatur & compellyng of hys owyn
>
> consciens . . . he gan to wryten in þe ȝer of owr Lord a m.cccc.xxxvj on þe day
>
> next aftyr Mary Maudelyn aftyr þe informacyon of þis creatur. (5-6.Intro.29-24)

There are some indications that her second amanuensis exerted some influence on her narrative,

at least concerning her diction and syntax. For example, Margery and her amanuensis both refer

to her as a "creature" (6.1.25 and 5-6.Intro.33 and 24). Nevertheless, Margery's experience, her

utterance, directs his *stylus*. Moreover, the holy prayers of this self-confessed illiterate mystic

facilitates *his* literacy. Kempe's amanuensis appears in the text, but only to the extent that she

influences his literary production. And when words appear to have been issued by him, rather

than by her dictation, these words are contained by her narrative, rather than opening her text as

an authorial voice. His literary presence lends credibility, but Kempe authorizes his literary

production.

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[45] quire; eight leaves of a manuscript.
[46] In the year of the Lord 1436.
[47] cleaved

Later, Margery wields greater textual authority over her amanuensis when she describes a scenario wherein a man offers to sell him a portable breviary (chap. 24). Margery warns him not to purchase the book because the man is not to be trusted. Formerly, the priest had gone against Margery's foresight when she warned him about another scoundrel, so this time he takes heed (57-8.24.25-24). Circumstances indicate that Margery was correct; when Margery's amanuensis confronts the man, he quickly disappears without consequence (57-58.24.22-24). This scenario, revolving around a book and interpretation, indicates that Margery possesses stronger evaluative prowess than a priest—the same literate man who now records and thus affirms her expertise. The power dynamic between Kempe and her amanuensis regarding literary texts and their production implies that Kempe is superior to masculine powers of textual production.

Moreover, Kempe signifies herself as the author of her text by constructing a maternal relationship to her utterances, and, by extension, the present text. Representing herself as the mother of her words, Kempe situates her literary production on par with the paternal role adopted by some contemporary male authors such as Chaucer regarding their texts. Margery describes her book as a "*lytyl* tretys" (1.Intro.12, emphasis added), echoing the epilogue of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: Chaucer's narrator urges "Go litel bok, go, *litel* myn tragedye" (5.1786, emphasis added), as he disseminates his text into the world, hoping that it will be received properly, and that, as a result, he may touch the lowest ranks of Classical poets. L. O. Aranye Fradenburg and Jeff Espie identify the paternal associations between Chaucer and his literature, an association that I suggest extends to his description of his Troilus book as "litel," like his child, "Lytle Lowys" (*Astrolabe* 1; *little* Louis).[48] I read Margery's description of her text not as mere humility *topos* but as an expression of her maternal relationship with her personal textual

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[48] Jeff Espie, "Literary Paternity and Narrative Revival: Chaucer's Soul(s) from Spenser to Dryden," *Modern Philology* 114.1 (2016), 41; and L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 236.

production. Similar to Chaucer, Margery employs the diminutive adjective "lytel" elsewhere to describe children (94.39.11). Kempe's text manifests a maternal connection between Margery and her spiritual expressions as offspring. She constructs literary maternal authority.

Kempe employs her role as mother to validate her expressions, constructing her own pastoral authority. As mentioned above, when the Archbishop of York accuses Margery of Lollardy, she responds, "Blyssed be thee wombe that the bar and thee tetys that yaf the sowkyn" (126.52.9-10). Staley argues that Margery justifies her public devotion against accusations that she ought to be condemned as a Lollard by referencing the woman who praises Christ's words in Luke 11:27-28. Margery uses the prominent symbols of motherhood, the womb and lactating breasts, to authorize herself as a fertile mother who births the word of God, and thus she should be free to speak of divine matters according to her own will, rather than the will of the church father presently condemning her.[49] She acts as a spiritual adviser to her own son, who disobeys her, indulges carnal desires, and suffers an illness that makes him look like a leper—commonly associated with lechery. He rejected the words of his mother, and so her words are required to save him: "wyth scharp wordys of correpcyon[50] . . . not forȝetyng þe frute of hir wombe, sche askyd forȝeuenes of his synne & relesyn of þe sekenes" (223.II1.2-6). Following her prayers, her son's health is restored, he begins to dress more humbly, and where before "hys langage al uanyte," now "hys dalyawns[51] was ful of vertu" (223.II2.32-34). On another occasion, Margery is invited to a dinner where her hosts are anxious to hear her speak on spiritual matters because "hir speche for it was fruteful" (120.50.15-6). Then, in the following chapter, a "gret clerke" asks her to explicate *Crescite et multiplicamini* ("Be fruitful and multiply," Genesis 1.22). According to Kempe's text, the clerk presents her with Latin—a language that Margery does not read.

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[49] Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, 130.
[50] correction
[51] intimate conversation of a spiritual (or sexual) nature

Margery responds to this Latin, explaining that the words do not only refer to begetting children, but also to obtaining virtue. Margery distinguishes between the palpable fruit of one's loins and the "ghostly fruit" of God's words, which increase one's multiple virtues: meekness, patience, charity, and chastity (121.51.1-9). Liz Herbert McAvoy writes, "[t]he pure word of God made flesh, inscribed upon her performative body, is ultimately born again as text. . . . Margery's book itself becomes spiritual mother to its reader and an instrument of common use, to be handled and possessed by all."[52] Margery Kempe's literary authority is distinctly maternal because she explicitly connects her utterances, and thus her literary production because she dictates her experiences, to her role as mother. She valorizes the role of the mother in education, similar to Alfred's maternal Wisdom discussed in the first chapter, and Margery emphasizes that the ideal role of the maternal teacher is pastoral.

Kempe employs established literary conventions when she identifies the pastoral potential for her work to benefit broader communities, using rhetorical techniques found in the works of her near-contemporary, Chaucer. Comparatively, Chaucer's narrator sends his "litel" text out into the world for the common profit of audiences who stand to benefit from careful reflection on the fruits of his literary production (*TC* 5.1786). In *The Canterbury Tales*, the Nun's Priest quotes Seint Paul who "seith that al that writen is / To oure doctrine it is ywrite," (VII 4631-2). The Nun's Priest advises audiences to "Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille" (VII 3443). Later, Chaucer's narrator repeats a similar charge complete with the same reference to Saint Paul's hermeneutic in his retraction of *The Canterbury Tales*, which he describes as a "litel tretys" (X 1081 and 1083). Similarly, Margery Kempe introduces the rhetorical purpose of her "lytyl tretys" as, "for ower exampyl and instruccyon, and what grace that [ower Savyowr] werkyth in any creatur is ower profyth, yf lak of charyte be not ower hynderawnce" (1.Intro.7-

[52] McAvoy, "Virgin, Mother, Whore: The Sexual Spirituality of Margery Kempe," 134.

10). If audiences approach her book with charity, contemplating her narrative, then "ghostly fruit" shall be begotten in their minds as is the will of our Lord. Margery Kempe identifies herself as the maternal figure who has nurtured the present narrative, and she elevates her text as beneficial for all. Her text is the product of her labor, an act of love, a *lytyl* child whom she gives to her audience. Her prayer, appended to later editions of her text, further indicates, calls for unity across social classes. Margery directs this prayer to the King, the Pope, and to all common folk, urging, "Lord Crist Ihesu, I crye ȝow mercy for alle þe statys[53] . . ." (250.Prayer.1-2). Kempe's concerns over the reception of her text demonstrates mastery over literary production, and a keen awareness of the effects of interpretation once author is divorced from the word, an anxiety also expressed by Chaucer (*TC* 5.1793-9). She encourages audiences to interpret her text kindly, suggesting that she is familiar with these literary conventions and she has given careful consideration to literary production, consumption, and social consequences. But she employs these conventions to facilitate her distinctly maternal literary authority. Her *Book* is her child, humble and vulnerable, whom she shares with the world for the purpose of enhancing audiences' devotional practices and intimacy with the divine.

Kempe also authorizes her narrative for public benefit by situating her *Book* within didactic genres: hagiographic and mystical literatures. Hagiographies are often constructed from the "cultural milieu and in response to specific, often local, needs and agendas."[54] Katherine J. Lewis identifies hagiographies as sources for understanding medieval ideologies, specifically those foundational to constructions of gender, due to the essential moral components of these

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[53] estates, social orders
[54] Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, *Writing Faith: Text, Sign, and History in the Miracles of Sainte Foy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1.

texts.[55] Hagiographies invite audiences to identify with saints and martyrs and to model their

lives after them.[56] Similarly, literature by mystics traditionally offers unique insights meant to

guide a general audience, like a self-help book. It can lead audiences through thoughtful

meditations, similar to the thoughtful direction in *The Cloud of Unknowing*.[57] Or a mystical text

might suggest daily practices for a more spiritual life, such as Marguerite Porette's *Mirror of*

Simple Souls.[58] The mystics who write these texts refer to personal experiences to inform a

general audience, as exemplified by Julian of Norwich's *Shewings*, which she writes in English

so that her meditations and her visions are accessible to laity, and thus she facilitates spiritual

community building.[59] Kempe begins *The Book* with hermeneutic instructions to audiences,

quoted above, to read her "lytel tretys" as a comforting example of God's wonder expressed

through one creature's experiences. Audiences are encouraged to interpret charitably because her

narrative is "for ower exampyl & instruccyon" (1.Intro.8 and 12). She directly addresses

audiences who are conscious of their own sinfulness, and she urges a kind interpretation of her

text that values every creature as an example for personal instruction. The first sentences

introduce the protagonist as a fallible human hindered by circumstance who was raised into the

spiritual and contemplative life. *The Book* is framed as instruction for audiences. If Margery

Kempe with all of her idiosyncrasies can achieve privileged spiritual experiences, then other

creatures could potentially self-fashion individual encounters with the divine—or at least

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[55] Katherine J. Lewis, "Male Saints and Devotional Masculinity in Late Medieval England," *Gender and History* 24.1 (2012): 112.

[56] Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 154; Katherine French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 194.

[57] The anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* ponders the desire to know God and the limitations of human understanding.

[58] Porette argues that one can become one with the divine by losing oneself, literally dissolving one's identity into the enormity of divinity. I interpret her arguments as a medieval precursor to existential philosophy, remarkably similar to Søren Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death*.

[59] Denise N. Baker, ed. *The Showings of Julian of Norwich* (New York: Norton, 2005), xix.

personal salvation. She indicates the potential for people to practice intimate relationships with

the Godhead regardless of their circumstances. Moreover, Kempe's narrative suggests that

Margery experienced some success in modeling an example for others to practice *imitatio*

Margeriae, or imitation of a particular saint performed by lay audiences in order to ensure proper

Christian living—in this case, imitation of Margery. For example, the mayor of Leicester

complains, "I trowe[60] þow art comyn hedyr to han[61] a-wey owr wyuys fro us & ledyn hem wyth

þe" (116.48.12-14), suggesting that Margery's lifestyle was so compelling that some thought she

would entice other women to follow. Finally, Kempe's text, like Julian's, optimistically

envisions a Christian community. Despite her numerous accounts of the abuse she experiences at

the hands of her compatriots, she concludes her text with a prayer that attempts communal

harmony by naming the component parts of the body of Christ, including archbishops, kings, and

common folks in a plea for grace (248-254.Prayer.16-3).[62] Margery participates in hagiographic

and mystical literary genres, authorizing her pastoral care by discursive means despite social

restrictions that hinder laywomen's preaching. Challenging social models of sanctity and

expression, she opens her individual experiences to benefit lay audiences by modeling a

laywoman's mystical self-fashioning.

Kempe characterizes herself as *auctour* of *The Book*. She employs male amanuenses and

she self-identifies as illiterate, constructing queer interventions that, as Glenn Burger describes,

reveal "different modes of textual production . . . ways of relating dominant authorities and the

author function, author function and reader."[63] Margery Kempe's *Book* is produced via

normative networks of male-dominated literary production and authorization, including her

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[60] believe
[61] take
[62] Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, xix.
[63] Glenn Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xiii.

reliance on male amanuenses and citations of authorized texts and church authorities, but she strategically situates herself outside of these conventions as an illiterate *auctour*, and her public and textual expressions challenge patriarchal silencing techniques imposed upon women. In fact, Margery indicates impatience with patriarchal legitimization twice in her narrative. For example, a man approaches her and demands that she explain her tears and high contemplations. It is not clear from Margery's description if he was annoyed by her weeping for Christ in church, or if he was genuinely interested in her experience. Patristic and theological traditions model the good spiritual and mystical woman as humble and quiet. M. C. Bodden argues that these early misogynistic models that prefer quiet pious women continue to infect even feminist approaches to Margery Kempe's text, frustrating her status as saint and mystic, a status granted other women who record more modest interactions with the Godhead.[64] Fortunately, Margery indicates her response to such restrictive models. She avoids the man's tedium by explaining, "Ser . . . it is not ȝow to telle" (111.46.17-8). Then, when an officer of the Bishop of Lincoln expects her to recognize him, Margery seems to respond to every man who attempted to silence her when she explains, "I take lytil heed of a mannys bewte er of hys face, & þerfor I forȝete hym meche þe sonar" (119.49.1-3). She challenges dominant networks of power and authorization while conforming to contemporary literary conventions. Similarly, Margery exhibits the characteristics of mystics and saints while maintaining her social roles as wife and mother, opening her experience as a model for lay audiences to whom contemplative and mystical lives are generally inaccessible. Margery queers identity categories, disrupting social hierarchies by privileging her status.

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[64] M. C. Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England: Speaking as a Woman* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 132-3.

Playing by the Roles

Margery Kempe challenges the boundaries of identity categories such as mystic, saint, wife, and mother by exaggerating social roles, revealing the constructedness of sanctity and thus its accessibility. Margery Kempe was the wife of a burgess, living within social structures that limited her access to the contemplative life of a holy woman and mystic.[65] Late medieval society is comprised of interdependent networks. Personal relationships, observes Staley, are always situated within larger communal contexts. In England, Margery was John Burnham's daughter, John Kempe's wife, and the mother of fourteen children.[66] Later, she achieves a spiritual class that exceeds her status, but rather than leaving one social sphere for another, she reconfigures her roles as wife and mother within her mystical life: She mothers Mary before Mary mothers Christ (18.6.17-20). She weds the Father (87.35.13-23). And she acknowledges her conjugal responsibilities to the Son (14-6.4.14-26 and 90.36.10-31). She identifies as a spiritual wife, mother, and daughter, employing the social roles most familiar to her, while exceeding the boundaries of these identity categories. Liz Herbert McAvoy acknowledges the social restrictions imposed upon women, and she argues that Margery uses the traditional roles available to her, such as virgin, mother, and whore, to construct her own agency.[67] And yet, Margery Kempe's performance of traditional social roles is still queer. Sara Ahmed explains:

Queer lives do not suspend the attachments that are crucial to the reproduction of heteronormativity, and this does not diminish "queerness," but intensifies the work that it can do. Queer lives remain shaped by that which they fail to reproduce. To turn this

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[65] Giles Constable, "The Orders of Society," in *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha, the Ideal of the Imitation of Christ, the Orders of Society*, ed. by Giles Constable (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 251-3 and 258-9; Cordelia Beattie, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2-6.

[66] Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, 59-60.

[67] McAvoy, "Virgin, Mother, Whore: The Sexual Spirituality of Margery Kempe," 121-138.

around, queer lives shape what gets reproduced: in the very failure to reproduce the norms through how they inhabit them, queer lives produce different effects.[68] Similarly, Stacy Wolf argues that a woman queers traditional social roles when an "excessive, performative display of self refutes the limits of femininity even as her voice and body are insistently female."[69] Margery Kempe replicates the social and spiritual roles performed by women, but she does so in excess of social restrictions and beyond the parameters of traditional identity categories she is assigned by society. She manipulates the field of signifiers that are available to women, altering their meanings to suite her desired identifications.

Following an overview of my theoretical approach, which derives from Sedgwick's identification of queerness as "overlaps, dissonances and resonances, . . . and excesses" as well as Butler's theory of performativity and excess, I locate Margery Kempe within the conventions of mysticism and saints' lives.[70] Then I compare Margery Kempe to prominent figures who inform contemporary women's devotional practices, including the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Saint Birgitta of Sweden, analyzing the means by which *Book* characterizes Margery in excess of popular models for women's devotional practices. By exceeding her exemplars, Margery constructs queer authority.

Margery Kempe's text is authorized in part by the extent to which she conforms to both traditional identity categories, and conventions of literary traditions including Scripture, hagiography, and mystical literatures. Butler argues that identity is performative: there is no

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[68] Sara Ahmed, "Queer Feelings," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, eds. Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose, with Andrea Bebell and Susan Potter (New York, Routledge, 2013), 420-441 (428).
[69] Stacy Wolf, "Wicked Divas, Musical Theater, and Internet Girl Fans," *Camera Obscura* 22.65 (2007): 46.
[70] Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 8.

subject prior to the performance; the performance constitutes subjectivity.[71] Components of

identity, specifically gender and sexuality, are culturally constructed and exhibited through a

series of gestures. Heterosexuality relies on repetition performed by multiple subjects over time

so that it appears to be seamless and essential, but every repetition is vulnerable to failure; the

intervals between repetitions indicate the constructedness of heterosexual regimes. Butler

explains that excess "erupts within the intervals of those repeated gestures and acts that construct

the apparent uniformity of heterosexual positionalities . . ."[72] Despite her social restrictions,

Kempe claims her personal identity—burgess's wife and mother—as an authorized subjectivity

for sanctity. The roles familiar to Margery Kempe from Scripture, hagiography, and mystical

literatures provide imaginative apparatuses in which she can locate her own narrative. She

participates in a textual community, which, as defined by Brian Stock, consists of groups of

people who, having mastered texts (not necessarily via directly encountering the written sign),

understood their identities through the mediation of texts and authoritative figures within literary

networks, following the twelfth century.[73] Margery Kempe's text is authorized in part by the

extent to which she conforms to identity categories reinforced by literary traditions including

Scripture, hagiography, and mystical literatures. Reading Margery Kempe's *Book* through

Butler's theory, I focus on the social and literary conventions employed by Margery Kempe that

signify her identity as a saint and mystic, particularly those instances in which she exceeds the

normative boundaries of identity categories, implying that she is privileged, but also revealing

the constructedness of her literary identities, and thus her authority. Margery exceeds

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[71] Excess, according to Butler, is the unconscious constituted through the signifying process, which facilitates the performance, resulting in the psyche, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 28.
[72] Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 24.
[73] Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 90-2.

conventional identity categories, emphasizing the authorizing conventions that validate her text and suggesting that she is privileged above other saints and mystics.

First, Margery marks her text as an auto-hagiography, situating herself within the ranks of saints.[74] The social performance of sanctity generally requires a life marked by fervent spiritual devotion; protection or special favor from God; demonstrated counsel with saints, angels, and the persons of the Trinity; and completed miracles.[75] These are general characteristics that distinguish the life of a saint. Fulfilling these criteria, first Margery exhibits spiritual devotion when she performs penance to prove herself to God (123.52.18-21). Then, God protects her on multiple occasions, including one instance during which he keeps her from vomiting so she would not offend others around her and so she would appear to be most clean (242.8.16-24). Next, she demonstrates her intimate counsel with Christ by revealing hidden truths a number of times (55-8.24.6-23). Later, she exorcises demons from a woman (178-9.75.6-5). Finally, she extinguishes a fire when she receives a snow miracle from God (163.67.19-35).

Focusing on women's roles in Old French hagiographies, Emma Campbell identifies a refused marriage as a major source of conflict in women saints' narratives, marking holy women's rejection of predominantly pagan authority figures in both religious and sexual terms.[76] Margery does not refuse a pagan, but she does deny her husband any more sexual activity. She agrees to join John Kempe for meals that include the meat from which she had been abstaining in exchange for his promise to relinquish any obligations for her to participate in sexual congress

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[74] Early saints were not canonized; they were commemorated by stories and specific days of the liturgical calendar were dedicated to their honor. After the twelfth century, bishops judged whether a particular person was indeed a saint. Pope Alexander III formalized canonization, and in the thirteenth century Pope Gregory IX insisted that only the pope could confirm canonization, Joseph H. Lynch, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (New York: Longman, 1992), 174.

[75] Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, 174; Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 10, 36-8, and 71-2.

[76] Emma Campbell, "*Homo sacer*: Power, Life, and the Sexual Body in Old French Saints' Lives," *Exemplaria* 18.2 (2006): 269.

with him (23-5.11). Later, John presents a hypothetical situation in which Margery would be required to satisfy him sexually in order to save his life. In response to his query, she would happily witness his beheading to preserve her purity (23.11.9-23 and 25.11.4-11).

Identifying other standard features of legends about women saints, Sherry L. Reames explains that most "tend to dwell on virtues that sound quintessentially feminine—chastity, long suffering (whether from persecution, penitential asceticism, or illness), and compassion for unfortunates—and on such private supernatural experiences as spiritual marriage to Christ and visits from angels."[77] Margery Kempe reports both her marriage to the Godhead and visitations with angels, but the details of her experiences exceed the narratives of other mystics and saints. First, Margery marries God, the Father, but she describes a remarkable intimacy with Christ (87.35.13-20). Christ also identifies her as his wife and he urges her to be comely with him, as a wife is welcome to behave with her husband (90.36.17-21). Later, Margery actually touches the body of God, a privilege few women have enjoyed (208.85.21-24). As we shall see in closer detail, Margery privileges her intimacy with Christ above those recorded by her exemplars. Margery Kempe also experiences angelic visions that exceed her models. For example, while Saint Christina was being tortured by her father, "Ther come aungels fro hevyn so bryght, / And held hir up the water anon," so that Christ could baptize her.[78] Comparatively, Margery is inundated by a veritable swarm of angels (88.35.6-20).

Additionally, hagiographies often include debates with antagonists during which the saint affirms fundamental tenets of Christianity.[79] Margery encounters and debates many antagonists at home and abroad, including the interrogation conducted by Archbishop Bowet. She stands

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[77] Reames, "General Introduction," 6.
[78] William Paris, "Life of St. Christina," in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, ed. Sherry L. Reames (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), lines 262-3.
[79] Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, 5.

accused of heresy. Bowet asks her to explain why she wears white, to which Margery admits that she is not a maiden; she is a wife (124.52.15-17). After she spends a night fettered, Bowet demands that she leave his diocese immediately and swear that she will never attempt to teach his people again. Margery rejects both orders because she felt compelled to converse with certain locals. She tells a fable that simultaneously challenges patriarchal church authorities and demonstrates her orthodox interpretations, and eventually she departs with a letter from Bowet confirming that she is not Lollard (126-7.52.24-34 and 134.54.20-26). Time and again, Margery defends herself with orthodox interpretations of Scripture (126.52.9-10, 55-8.24.6-23, and 178-9.75.6-5). Exegesis and proper Christian comportment in hagiographies affirm the saint's wisdom while promoting orthodox teachings for the benefit of audiences. In Margery's case, this debate also situates her interpretation of Scripture and preaching on par with local church authorities.

Despite Margery's fulfillment of hagiographic conventions, her sanctity—like her *auctoritas*—is met with doubt due to her social status as a married laywoman and the eccentricities of her character. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen observes,

> Kempe's skill in marshaling discursive *auctoritas* can be seen . . . in her textual self presentation. Possessing an excellent memory for how previous mystical experience had been rendered, and aided perhaps by her priestly amanuensis, she often describes her visions in figures drawn from previous writers, thereby making herself legible as an inspired, authoritative source of God's word. Citationality gives a solidity to Kempe's discourse by inscribing it within an established authoritative textual corpus.[80]

Similarly, in accordance with Butler's theory of gender performativity, Laura Varnam argues, the "stylized repetition of acts is the foundation upon which a woman such as Margery Kempe

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[80] Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 160-1.

could build her religious life, staging performances in the church and in the home that combine to produce a desirable narrative of holy identity."[81] Other scholars have suggested that Margery's piety is a literal performance. She may have been familiar with dramatic depictions of holy women such as Mother Mary in the pageant plays. Claire Sponsler argues,

> Margery is an obvious expert in the arts of the theatre, adept at the use of evocative gestures (weeping, falling to the ground, throwing her arms out as if crucified, kissing lepers), symbolic costuming (wearing white garments), strategic impersonation (delivering spontaneous homilies in the style of clerical discourse with pitch-perfect accuracy, imitating holy women), and carefully managed scene-stealing (disrupting church services, one-upping obstructionist authorities).[82]

M. C. Bodden explains that Sponsler's interpretation of Margery's performances implies a contrived nature evident in Kempe's participation in certain character conventions and circumstances that replicate biblical episodes and saintly affect.[83] Margery performs holiness. She replicates the norms of the role—an essential component for the cultural construction and cohesion of identity categories. But she performs these norms with "grett pompe" (5.Intro.33). Margery Kempe exceeds normative identity categories and authorizing conventions, privileging herself above other saints and mystics but also destabilizing the veracity of her text. Excessively employed authorizing conventions reveal the discursive mechanisms by which authority is exercised.[84] Revealing the contrivance of authority and privilege that resides in Christian spiritual contexts opens these identity categories to participation beyond the social restrictions

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[81] Laura Varnam, "The Crucifix, the Pietà, and the Female Mystic: Devotional Objects and Performative Identity in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41.2 (2015): 233.
[82] Claire Sponsler, "Drama and Piety: Margery Kempe," in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 130.
[83] Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 134-5.
[84] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1., 100-1.

that inhibited women such as Margery Kempe from practicing a contemplative life due to their social status.

Margery authorizes herself by performing conventions such as *imitatio Mariae*, imitation of Mary, Mother of God; Margery performs a maternal role beyond her immediate family as modeled by Mary. Although Margery is married with fourteen children, she rarely identifies herself as wife and mother to her immediate family. She acts more like their spiritual adviser. As previously mentioned, describing her interactions with her son, "many tymys sche cownselyd hym to leeuyn þe worlde & folwyn Crist" (221.1.23-4). Typical of young adults who loathe being ordered about by their parents, "he fled hyr company & wolde not gladlych metyn wyth hir" (221.1.24-5). Hwanhee Park argues that Margery counters criticism for having neglected her husband and children by representing herself as an exemplary wife and mother to the broader family of all Christians.[85] Margery performs a maternal role in spiritual contexts, particularly when she is mothering Christ. For example, while in Venice on her way to Rome Margery joins a woman and two Gray Friars. The woman carries an effigy of the baby Jesus which she shares with groups of women. Although the women in this particular context are strangers to Margery, together they care for a small doll that resembles the infant Jesus:

> Þei wold puttyn schirtys þerup-on & kyssyn it as þei it had ben God hym-selfe. &, whan
> þe creatur sey þe worshep & þe reuerens þat þei dedy to þe ymage, sche was taky wyth
> swet deuocyon & swet meditacyons þat sche wept wyth gret sybbyng & lowde crying. . .
> . sche had hy meditacyons in þe byrth & þe childhode of Crist . . . (77-8.31.33-3)

Forging an intimate connection with Christ as child, these women practice a communal motherhood by which they also identify with Mother Mary. Devotional practices such as this

[85] Hwanhee Park, "Domestic Ideals and Devotional Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 40.1 (2014): 4-5.

inspire Margery's high contemplations on the birth and childhood of Christ. She assumes a perspective akin to Mary's: observing and caring for the Christ child.

In time, Margery assumes a maternal role not only in relation to Christ, but also in relation to other men who maintain Church offices. Tara Williams argues, "Margery's transition from physical to spiritual motherhood mirrors Mary's transition from biological mother of Christ to spiritual mother of humanity."[86] For example, after Margery is abandoned by her traveling companions in Rome, a legate receives Margery as if she is his own mother (64.27.20-2), and later she "had receyued as for hir owyn sone" a priest who calls her "Modyr" (100.43.33-5 and 73). Similar to Mary, Margery performs a maternal role that extends beyond the immediacy of her biological children. Williams argues that Margery's *imitatio Mariae* transfers authority from Mary to herself, compensating for her lack of virginity and humility and bolstering her own literary authority.[87] She performs the role of spiritual mother beyond her biological family and, as cited above, she also claims a maternal relationship with her text, thus extending her pastoral duty beyond those who come into immediate contact with her. Her *auctoritas* extends her maternal authority to her audience by means of the text.

Margery's *imitatio Mariae*—in addition to her maternal performances—also includes her performance of virginity. Margery arrays herself in white fabrics signifying virginity, contrary to the communal knowledge of her sexual experiences, confirmed by her fourteen offspring. White clothing signifies a subject's virginity, a praiseworthy status representing prelapsarian purity, from which Margery as mother is barred. Margery is hesitant to wear white at first, but Christ is adamant:

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[86] Tara Williams, *Inventing Womanhood: Gender and Language in Later Middle English Writing* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011), 145.
[87] Williams, *Inventing Womanhood*, 129-130.

Ower Lord seyd a-ȝen to hir, ". . . I wyl þat þu were clothys of whyte & non oþer colowr, for þu xal ben arayd aftry my wyl." "A, der Lord, yf I go arayd on oþer maner þan oþer chast women don, I drede þat þe pepyl wyl slawndyr me. Þei wyle sey I am an ypocryt & wondryn vp-on me." "Ȝa, dowtyr, þe mor wondryng þat þow hast for my lofe, þe more þu plesyst me." (32.15.11-23)

Middle English "wundren" means to be surprised, to be puzzled by or curious about something, and to be struck with awe or amazement.[88] Christ tells Margery to wear white to inspire wonder, so that people will concentrate on her, criticize her, challenge her—or perhaps contemplate her more deeply, just as the dual gender signifiers that Alfred employs to characterize Wisdom in the *Old English Boethius* incite audiences to meditate deeply on wisdom. She employs costume to construct a deviant subject position that incites criticism and contemplation.

Margery disrupts the Hieronymic hierarchy. In 383 Jerome constructed a spiritual hierarchy that ranks virgins more pure than widows, and widows over married people. This social stratification is based on Christ's assumed preferences, derived from Jerome's teachings, resulting in the Hieroymic hierarchy.[89] Jerome extrapolates his arguments, based on Scripture and Tertullian, to criticize the social lives of contemporary women. Jerome's arguments, however, are preceded by Paul, who teaches that it is better to marry than to suffer damnation as a consequence of one's lust (I Cor. 7:9), and marriage was named one of the sacraments of Holy

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[88] "wundren, (v.)," *Middle English Dictionary,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013, accessed January 11, 2018.

[89] Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4-5. Virginia Blanton acknowledges a tendency for critics to associate virginity with women, and yet roodscreen iconography of the early Middle Ages regularly features John the Baptist among virgin martyrs, such as Æthelthryth, Agnes, and Barbara, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 277-8.

Church before Margery Kempe's time.[90] Jerome acknowledges that there are indeed holy women among the widowed and the married, but there is a strong distinction between these women and a virgin, who, for denying her sexuality is "no longer called a woman."[91] Ruth Evans explains, "Although some famous men were virgins—Christ, St John the Evangelist, St Alexis—virginity and chastity are overwhelmingly viewed in the Middle Ages as female concerns." Nevertheless, explains Evans, "Women of all estates and ages, lay and in orders, virgins or otherwise, appropriated . . . representations [of virginity] in bold and sometimes radical ways."[92] Margery is one of these women. The later medieval period witnessed a shift from the older Hieronymian notion of physical virginity to a spiritual virginity.[93] A contemporary of Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine of Hippo argues that "purity is a virtue of the mind . . . ."[94] Augustine contrasts with Jerome's flagrant rejection of women's bodies and their well-being because Augustine's primary concern is pastoral, particularly in *The City of God*, in which he addresses women who had been raped during the sack of Rome.[95] In fact, Augustine argues that even when one is overpowered the purity of the body is not sacrificed to the violence of oppressors because "the will to use the

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[90] Early medieval theological writers defended marriage. Those who decried married life as unchristian were denounced as heretics by church councils such as the First Council of Braga (561). Still, the process by which marriage was identified as a sacrament is drawn out and the efforts inconsistent. James A. Brundage notes that the sacramental characteristic of marriage is still a matter of debate in the twelfth century, but from then on the teachings were mostly codified, James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 140 and 254.

[91] Saint Jerome, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, translated by W. H. Freemantle, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) vol. 8, 344-5:22-23.

[92] Ruth Evans, "Virginities," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, eds. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22-3.

[93] Juliette Vuille, "'I wolde I wer as worthy to ben sekyr of thy lofe as Mary Mawdelyn was': The Magdelene as an Authorizing Tool in the *Book of Margery Kempe*," in *Mary Magdalene in Medieval Culture: Conflicting Roles*, eds. Peter V. Loewen and Robin Waugh (New York: Routledge, 2014), 208.

[94] Saint Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. William Babcock (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 20.

[95] Clarissa W. Atkinson, "'Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass': The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Family History* 8.2 (1983): 134-5; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c. 1150-1300: Virginity and Its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 132-4.

body in a holy manner remains."[96] Augustine addresses a specific social context in which he reassures his audience that virginity is maintained by the will, but as Juliette Vuille observes, Augustine's theology informed later medieval women who sought to "become honorary virgin[s] and . . . Bride[s] of Christ, despite [their] sexual past[s]."[97] Margery wills her own virginity in spite of her sexual experiences. Virginity becomes a matter of interpretation.

Margery challenges hegemonic notions of virginity by constructing herself as a virgin: she performs virginity as an identity rooted in the will, as opposed to genital experience, in accordance with Augustine, as opposed to Jerome. Moreover, she queers orientations to the social stratification imposed upon women by Jerome. In the second chapter, I identify Anglo-Saxons located at the center and periphery of salvation history, so that *Dream* authorizes Anglo-Saxon cultures through nonnormative orientations. Similarly, Margery Kempe claims seemingly contrary status positions within the Hieronymic hierarchy. This hierarchy implies spatial orientations that rank virginity above women who bear children, and certainly above women such as Margery who indulge their lust. Claiming her virginity and her maternal identity not only replicates the virgin mother role associated with Mary, Mother of God, but also situates Margery at contrary positions within the Hieronymic hierarchy, resulting in queer orientations. Her *Book* records erotic experiences, she gave birth to multiple children, and she claims the embodied perfection that was associated with virginity, granting her access to multiple contrary identity categories.[98] Similarly, Carolyn Dinshaw reads Margery's white clothing as a critical challenge to identity categories:

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[96] Augustine, *City of God*, 20.
[97] Vuille, "Magdelene as an Authorizing Tool," 208.
[98] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 107.

When we look *at*, not *through*, the mother wearing the clothes of a virgin, and when we

listen to her own word about her experience as well, we perceive a creature that itself is

not clearly categorizable in her community's bourgeois heteronormative terms. Terms

that would ease the contradictions of Christian dogma by leaving perfection to others and

adjusting desires accordingly. We perceive a creature whose body does not fit her desires.

We perceive, that is, a queer. And the queer allows us to recognize . . . the perversion

within the normative: Margery's white clothes point to the disjunction in an orthodox

Christianity which establishes marriage as a sacrament yet always maintains its taint,

maintains that it is a perversion from the ultimately perfect perfection.[99]

According to Dinshaw, cultural signifiers, such as Margery's white garments, fail to properly

replicate and codify conventional identity categories, such as virginity, highlighting the

instability of identity categories.[100] White clothing suggests something about gender and

sexuality that Butler describes as "nothing other than the effects of drag," not only for Margery

but for all who make use of fabrics to signify an identity category.[101]

Margery's performance queers the role of the "virgin," inspiring wonder in others. For

the most part, she is met with resistance, as by the Archbishop of York, who interprets her

virginal clothing as an indication of her heresy. Margery soon convinces him to let her go by

demonstrating her orthodox interpretation of Scripture (124.52.15-17). But Margery reclaims

virginity, and the wonder she inspires in others could incite some to do the same. As previously

mentioned, the mayor of Leicester criticizes her for wearing white and he fears that she will lead

local wives to leave their husbands and to follow her (116.48.12-14, quoted above). Margery

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[99] Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 149.

[100] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 149.

[101] Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 29.

encodes her sexual identity through costume, and thus she constructs herself as text. Margery's

representation exceeds mere *imitatio Mariae*, inciting interpretation of Margery herself.

Margery is also authorized by her *imitatio Magdalenae*, imitation of Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene is an accessible model for some because she represents one's ability to rise

above sin to reach holy status. Medieval exegetes read prostitution into the narrative of Mary

Magdalene, but her sins are never specified in the Gospels.[102] She has been conflated with the

woman who anointed Jesus's feet at the home of Simon the Leper (Luke 7:36-50), it is briefly

mentioned that Christ cast seven devils out of her body (Luke 8:2), and some have identified her

as the same Mary whom Jesus commends for having chosen contemplation with him over

household chores (Luke 10:42).[103] Saint Mary Magdalene traveled with Jesus, she witnessed his

crucifixion, she discovered his empty tomb, and in one account of the resurrection she was the

first person to encounter the resurrected Christ (John 20:11-18). A repentant sinner, the

Magdalene represents reform and the power of God's forgiveness. She also pioneered women's

preaching, according to a Middle English account of her life, after fleeing persecution in a

rudderless boat that "to Marcile the wynd heom drof."[104] Participating in the apostolic mission,

she converted people to Christianity in Provence.[105] The cult of the Magdalene was popular

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[102] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 146.

[103] Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and the penitent who anointed Jesus's feet are sometimes conflated and difficult to discern. Alexander Moody Stuart, *The Three Marys: Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany, Mary of Nazareth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984); Stephen J. Shoemaker, "A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary," in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition*, ed. Stanley Jones (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 24-30; Blair G. Van Dyke and Ray L. Huntington, "Sorting Out the Seven Marys in the New Testament," *Religious Educator* 5.2 (2004): 53-84; James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), 77-80.

[104] Sherry L. Reames, ed. "Early South English Legendary Life of Mary Magdalene," in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), 181.

[105] Barry Windeatt, ed. *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 133, n. 1588-9. Moreover, Wideatt cites an anti-Lollard excerpt from the trial of Walter Brut (BL MS Harley 31), a Welsh writer who was tried in 1391 for slandering the Pope. Records of the trial include a brief acknowledgment of Mary Magdalene preaching publicly in Marcilia and the surrounding areas, Alcuin

across social strata in England. By the end of the Middle Ages, 200 churches had been dedicated

to her honor, she was prominently depicted in churches and manuscripts, and she is the first

woman saint for whom Oxford has dedicated a college, in 1458.[106]

Influenced by popular culture, Margery's narrative bears many similarities to that of the

Magdalene. For reference, I compare Margery's *Book* to "The Legend of Mary Magdalene,"

inserted into the *South English Legendary*.[107] Mary Magdalene is described as proud, vain, and

amorous (49-54). Similarly, Margery confesses that "sche wold not leeuyn hir pride ne hir

pompows aray . . . [to] mennys sygth and hir-self þe mor ben worshepd" (2.10 and 17-8). Just as

Jesus "out of [Marie Maudeleyn] seve develene He drof" (138), Margery also describes demonic

possession early in her narrative (7.1.28-37), which McAvoy interprets as "thus establishing a

link between herself and the sexually transgressive Mary Magdalene."[108] Additionally,

Margery's penitence consists, in part, of wearing a hair shirt, which popular women's devotional

practices associate with Mary Magdalene. According to the *South English Legendary*, Mary

Magdalene lived in the desert for thirty years (539-596), and by some accounts, upon wearing

through her garments, her hair would grow to provide cover, such as the hair shirt worn by

Margery.[109]

Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 251-2.

[106] Reames, *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, 52.

[107] There are multiple copies of the *South English Legendary*, which was composed between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, featuring lives of saints, a life of Christ, and even accounts of Judas and Pilate, written in verse. "The Legend of Mary Magdalene" is not actually considered to be a part of the *South English Legendary*. It appears in Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 108 and two later copies of this manuscript. Because the *SEL* lacks an account of the Magdalene, the legend inserted into Bodleian 108 appears to have been adapted from a different source by a scribe who felt compelled to improve his deficient exemplar, Manfred Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary* (Leeds: University of Leeds Press, 1974), 181-2; Reames, *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, 54.

[108] McAvoy, "Virgin, Mother, Whore: The Sexual Spirituality of Margery Kempe," 123. The Late Modern English translation of the *South English Legendary* is my own.

[109] Sherry L. Reames observes that episodes about Magdalene's solitude in the desert were conflated in the early Middle Ages with the legend of Mary of Egypt, and so some late medieval cultural memories

Margery's *imitatio Magdalenae* is a convention that serves, in part, to legitimate her

practices and her text, but at times Margery's *imitatio* exceeds the Magdalene. Vuille describes

two instances during which Margery replaces or upstages Mary Magdalene. In the first case,

Kempe places herself with the Virgin Mary, encountering Christ after his resurrection, before he

visits Mary Magdalene (194-7.81.25-3). This episode, which became popular during the later

Middle Ages, is partially a result of the conflation of the biblical Marys cited above and

disagreements between four accounts of the Christ's resurrection: Matthew describes Mother

Mary and Mary Magdalene visiting the tomb together (Matt 28:1); Mark and Luke record groups

of women (Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:10); and John identifies Mary Magdalene, alone, as the first to

encounter the risen Christ (John 20:14).[110] But according to the retelling in her *Book*, observes

Vuille, Margery assumes what is traditionally the Magdalene's subject position so that Margery

replaces, or at least inhabits the role of, Mary Magdalene. In the second instance, Margery

witnesses Jesus's interaction with Mary Magdalene when he tells her to refrain from touching his

resurrected body. Margery describes, "Mary went forth wyth gret joye, & þat was gret merueyl

to hir þat Mary enioyid,[111] for ȝyf owr Lord had seyd to hir as he ded to Mary, hir thowt sche

cowed neuyr a ben mery" (197.81.29-32). Margery disapproves of Mary Magdalene's joyful

reaction to his "*noli me tangere*" ("do not touch me," John 20:17).[112] Margery is disturbed by the

words "Towche me not" any time she hears them because she cherishes physical intimacy with

Christ (197.81.33). Theresa Coletti and Dinshaw interpret Margery's reaction as a failure to

appreciate the deeper spiritual implications of *noli me tangere*, but Vuille situates Margery's

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associate some features with Mary Magdalene that are not traceable to her specific narrative, Reames,
Middle English Legends of Women Saints, 86.
[110] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary," 24-30.
[111] rejoiced
[112] Vuille, "The Magdelene as an Authorizing Tool in the *Book of Margery Kempe*," 214.

interpretation within the tactile-focused affective piety of later medieval culture.[113] Vuille argues that Margery becomes more Magdalene than the Magdalene "[b]y presenting herself as affectively closer to Christ than the repentant saint, who was already conceived in the later medieval period as the epitome of emotional, participatory, and tactile devotion to the Son."[114] Margery is not content with imitation. She desires an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Adding to Vuille's observations, I note another significant instance in which Margery exceeds the Magdalene. According to the *South English Legendary*'s "Legend of Mary Magdalene":

Aungles comen evereche day right abouten ondern,

And nomen swathe softeliche the Marie Maudelein

And beren hire op into the lofte, and broughten hire eft agein.

Men nusten hou heo leovede, for no man ne saigh hire ete;

Ake some huy onderstoden that heo livede bi aungelene mete. (546-550)[115]

Angels feed the Magdalene. But Margery feeds angels. First, Jesus tells Margery, "Dowtyr, þu xalt be ryte welcome to my Fadyr & to my Modyr & to alle my seyntys in Hevyn, for þu hast ȝouyn hem drynkyn ful many tymes wyth teerys of thy eyne" (52.22.2-5). Then again, he confirms, "þi terys arn awngelys drynk" (161.65.1). Margery exceeds the Magdalene, and many

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[113] Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Dream of the Saints* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 84; Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 162-3.
[114] Vuille, "The Magdelene as an Authorizing Tool in the *Book of Margery Kempe*," 215.
[115] Reames, ed. "Early South English Legendary Life of Mary Magdalene," 59-79.
      Angels came every day right around mid-morning
      And very gently grasped Mary Magdalene
      And they transported her up into the air, and they brought her back down again.
      People did not understand how she lived, because no one saw her eat;
      But some of them figured she was sustained by angels' food.
The Late Modern English translation is my own.

other saints, by doling out nourishment rather than receiving it. *The Book* reverses prevalent

ontological hierarchies: Heavenly creatures receive from the earthly creature.

Repeated claims that Margery Kempe nourishes heavenly beings disrupts prevalent

ontological hierarchies, similar to the ways in which her virginal clothing queers the Hieronymic

hierarchy. Ontological stratification, sometimes referred to as "the chain of being" or the

hierarchy of being as it is identified here, is observable in the works of Plato, Aristotle, and

Plotinus. This archeological concept hierarchically orders every known being, locating God

(pure intellect) at the top, minerals (pure matter) at the bottom, and every creature between is

ranked according to their proximity to perfection (*scala naturae*).[116] In *Consolation of*

Philosophy, Boethius refers to a hierarchy of being that identifies embodiment, locomotion, and

levels of cognition as the criteria for one's status within the hierarchy; humans are ranked higher

than vegetables and are therefore capable of reason, but humans are also hindered by their bodies

and can only glimpse divine understanding (5.5.2-4).[117] Medieval scholasticism constructs a

similar hierarchy, illustrating every creature's existence hanging from God, and thus knowledge

of the natural order would elevate one's powers of reason closer to divine understanding.[118] A

human could devolve with carnal distractions or move closer to God with intellectual cultivation.

For example, the imprisoned Boethius is described barking lamentations about his fall from

fortune early in *Consolation*; his animalistic barking implies a devolved status in the cognitive

hierarchy (I.5.1). There is very little evidence to connect medieval concepts of the hierarchy of

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[116] Martin Wieser, "Buried Layers: On the Origins, Rise, and Fall of Stratification Theories," *History of Psychology* 21.1 (2018): 2-3.

[117] *Boethius De consolatione philosophiae* and *Opuscula theologica,* ed. Claudio Moreschini (Munich: K.G. Saur Verlag GmbH, 2005).

[118] Wieser, "Buried Layer," 3-5; Similar concepts are found in the medieval works of Augustine, Albertus Magnus, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Aquinas and Meister Eckhart.

being to the ancient chain of being.[119] Nevertheless, considering the prevalence of this hierarchy, which persists even to this day, Margery Kempe would have been familiar with even a basic hierarchical concept that ranks humans above nonverbal animals, angels above humans, and God above angels. Also, she would have encountered a devotional version of this hierarchy that ranks the intellect above the body in Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, one of the texts with which she claims familiarity.[120]

Nourishing and consumption are in and of themselves gestures of power disparity. The one who nourishes, who possesses goods or capital, exercises power over the receptive one. Such power dynamics are observable in Eucharistic devotional practices, during which supplicants receive holy food *on their knees* with adoration for the *elevated* host.[121] Similarly, some medieval feasts demonstrated political power; seating at tables reinforced social hierarchies.[122] These dynamics also correlate to the hierarchy of being, as creatures lower in status must seek goods from outside of themselves for sustenance and well-being, such as plants and animals, while those higher in status are closer to perfection, more complete, such as angels and God. Margery feeds creatures who exceed her status in the ontological hierarchy, and feeding is a gesture of power. Margery *expresses* holiness—"expression" referring to a gesture or the secretion of bodily fluids, is employed in both senses—to situate herself above some saints and angels.

Nourishing heavenly creatures with her bodily fluids, Margery performs a higher position within this ontological stratification, but she does not elevate herself above her natural state. Her

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[119] Wieser, "Buried Layer," 3.
[120] Staley, *Book of Margery Kempe*, 51.
[121] Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 155-6.
[122] Madeline Pelner Cosman, *Fabulous Feast: Medieval Cookery and Ceremony* 6th edition (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1995), 37.

sanctity is achieved by means of, not despite, her body. The hierarchy of being in both

Neoplatonic and Scholastic contexts indicates suppression of or liberation from the body at

higher levels, as exemplified by asceticism, angels, or God, who is pure understanding of all that

was and all that shall be. Carolyn Dinshaw describes Margery as "*too* bodily, *too* loud," with her

"ostentatious orthodoxy," and her "copious manner of bodily living."[123] Margery maintains her

embodied humility rhetorically throughout *The Book* by referring to herself as "creatur," and thus

acknowledging her mortality and her situatedness within the material realm as a being fashioned

by God. The *Middle English Dictionary* defines "creatur" as a created or invented thing, part of

the created universe.[124] Nancy Lenz Harvey notes that, with the exception of Julian of Norwich,

the MED does not identify another narrator referred to as "creatur," and she argues that in *The*

Book:

> The "creature" of the narrative becomes a literal part of the created universe, that world
>
> of Genesis where the spirit of God is revealed in the image of humankind. It marks the
>
> dwelling where the body and soul inhabit together, where the physical and spiritual selves
>
> meet. Moreover the "creature" is both narrator and participant in the narrative, she is the
>
> vehicle though which the spiritual experiences are made manifest.[125]

Margery Kempe's humble status as a created being, paired with her social circumstances as

common wife and mother, as well as her exemplary mystical life, incites audiences to appreciate

the mysteries of the faith that would elevate such a woman. Christopher Michael Roman

explains, "Kempe identifies the central protagonist of her narrative as "creatur," emphasizing her

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[123] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 146 and 151, Dinshaw's italics.
[124] "crēātūre (n.)," *Middle English Dictionary,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013, accessed September 21, 2018.
[125] Nancy Lenz Harvey, "Margery Kempe: Writer as Creature," *Phililogical Quarterly* 71 (1992): 181.

human reliance on God."[126] Margery Kempe, this problematic "creatur," uses her body, and her bodily fluids, to nourish subjects who exceed her ontological status.

Margery queers the conceptual organization of space within dominant ontological hierarchies because she maintains connections to her embodiment. As mentioned above, Williams identifies Margery's tears as liquid produced by her body for the nourishment of others, implicating Margery's spiritual maternal role over others.[127] She is a nursemaid to both Mary and Jesus, she is a maternal figure to priests, and her bodily fluids nourish the heavenly host (18-19.5.15-23, 64.27.20-2, and 100.43.33-5). Margery's embodiment, particularly as a woman, is an essential component to her pastoral practices. Margery queers normative orientations to the ontological hierarchy because, as Sara Ahmed explains, queer orientations "put within reach some bodies that have been made unreachable" or "disturb the order of things."[128] Margery positions herself higher in ontological status and closer to God. She disturbs the order of things, implying her privilege and authority.

Finally, *The Book* bears many similarities to *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*. In the early 1300s, seven-year-old Birgitta of Sweden experienced visions of angels, the Virgin Mary, and Christ. At the age of eighteen, against her wishes, Birgitta was married and later bore eight children. She and her husband eventually agreed to a chaste marriage. Shortly after her husband died in 1344, Christ appeared to Birgitta and claimed her as his bride. She relinquished her properties and devoted herself to her religious devotion. She was inspired to make pilgrimage to Rome, during which she learned Latin, and later she was called to Jerusalem. Birgitta records over 650 revelations which she either wrote herself in Swedish, or she dictated to a scribe, who

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[126] Christopher Michael Roman, *Domestic Mysticism in Margery Kempe and Dame Julian of Norwich: The Transformation of Christian Spirituality in the Late Middle Ages* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 152.

[127] Williams, "'Slayn for Goddys lofe:' Margery Kempe's Melancholia and the Bleeding of Tears," 97.

[128] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 107 and 161.

would then read back to her so that she could authorize every word before it was finally translated into Latin.[129] There are seven extant manuscripts of *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, or Saint Bride, in Middle English. The version quoted and cited here was translated by two scribes into Middle English in the fifteenth century. Eric XIII of Sweden had married Philippa, daughter of Henry IV, in 1406, which quickly led to the founding of the Brigittine Order at Syon Monastery in 1415.[130] Subsequently, Saint Birgitta was popular in England during Margery Kempe's excursions and mystical experiences, just before her narrative was recorded.

According to her own text, Saint Birgitta doubts if her mystical interactions are actually a gift from the Godhead; she needs assurance that it is not a demon who is deceiving her (3.13-19), and so God explains to her, "I haue chose & take the to me to be my spowse for to shewe the my privey concelles . . . [T]how arte myne be all maner of right, when in the deth of thyne hossebond thowe yeuyste[131] þi wylle jne to myn hondes . . ." (1.19-23).[132] Saint Birgitta's authority is verified by God through her text. Finally, God acknowledges the restrictions to her sanctity imposed up her by the social norms that typically exclude wedded women from sainthood; nevertheless, Birgitta is rightfully claimed by God. Moreover, her text is authorized by God, who orders her:

> [S]hew in thyn werkes how mych þu loveste me; and make my wordes that I haue spoke
>
> with myn own movth to come in open, and bere hem thy-self vn-to þe hede of the church.

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[129] Cumming, ed. *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, xxvii.

[130] Cumming, ed. *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, xxix. In addition to her revelations, Birgitta was inspired by the Mother of God to found an order, the rules for which had been dictated directly from Virgin Mary to Birgitta. The Order of Saint Saviour, or the Birgittine Order, consisted of sixty nuns and twenty-five monks who were separated so that monks and nuns could communicate through the church but never see the other group. The order was approved by Pope Urban V in 1370.

[131] gave

[132] All Middle English references are parenthetically cited as (page number.line number), from *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, ed. William Patterson Cumming, EETS 178 (London: Oxford University Press, 1929). Late Modern English translations are cited by page number from *Saint Bride and Her Book: Birgitta of Sweden's Revelations*, trans. Julia Bolton Holloway (Newburyport, MA: Focus Texts, 1992).

For I shall ȝeve the my sprite þat wher-euer is eny debate by-twixt tewyn,[133] thus shalt

now make hem acorded in my name by þe verteu þat is ȝeve the,[134] yf they ȝiffe faith

and credence to my wordes. (59.12-18)

In this context, Christ orders Birgitta to send her revelations to archbishops and even the Pope.

At this time, the papal seat had previously been relocated from the turbulence of Rome to the

tranquility of Avignon. Pope Urban the V had recently returned the papal seat to Rome and he

was threatening to leave again. Birgitta sent warning that it would be hazardous for the Pope to

leave Rome because this would displease God. Urban V returned to Avignon anyway, and died

within a month.[135] God cites himself as the source of her knowledge and therefore the authority

investing her words with power. To neglect or discredit the words of Birgitta is to deny the word

of God.

Saint Birgitta informs some of the content of Margery's travels and experiences. Julia

Bolton Holloway argues that Saint Birgitta provided a model for accessing power, and that her

example benefited late medieval English women in particular, such as Julian of Norwich and

Margery Kempe.[136] Holloway suggests:

What especially drew women to Bride was that she was a mother. Thus she appealed not

only to celibate clergy but also to lay and especially married women. They stressed her

linking of the body and the book, defying the requirement that for access to Latin one had

to be a virgin and/or celibate, giving up the body for the book.[137]

Kempe refers to *Revelations* and the life of Saint Birgitta to inform and authorize her own

experiences and text. During her travels, Margery visited Syon Abbey, where King Henry V

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[133] between you two
[134] you will make them accord in my name by the virtue that is given to you
[135] Cumming, ed. *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, xxv-xxvi.
[136] Holloway, *Saint Bride and Her Book*, 134.
[137] Holloway, *Saint Bride and Her Book*, 136-7.

established a Brigittine Order (245.10.31-4). Saint Birgitta's *Revelations* are among the texts with which Margery is familiar (39.17.23-5). Later, Christ refers to *Revelations* to reassure Margery, explaining that "rygth as I spak to Seynt Bryde ryte so I speke to þe, dowtyr, & I telle þe trewly it is trewe euery word þat is wretyn in Brides boke" (47.20.32-3). Christ compares Margery's experience to that of Saint Birgitta, and he takes this opportunity to validate *Revelations*. Constructing this parallel between Saint Birgitta and Margery also establishes a connection between *Revelations* and *The Book*, identifying both women as authors who record true, mystical encounters with the Godhead. Margery's record now confirms the veracity of *Revelations*, just as her and Christ's citations of *Revelations* confirm the veracity of *The Book*.

But Margery's relationship with Christ exceeds the intimacy described by her examplar. Saint Birgitta records Christ explaining their marriage bond: "I take the to my spowse and to myn owne propur delyte, sych as semyth goode to haue with a chaste sowle" (1-2.27-2). Christ then lists her obligations to her husband, emphasizing the labor that must be taken to earn his mercy. The text admits of some potentially erotic intimacy as Christ explains, "it is semely[138] that the spowse labor wuth hyr spovse tyll she be wrye, that she may afterward the more sourely and trystely[139] take hyr reste wyth hym" (3.7-9). Christ outlines the proper behaviors of his bride, emphasizing the importance of her "chaste sowle" in their union (2.2). Margery Kempe recalls a similar conversation with Christ in which he directs her to contemplate him in her own bed, minus any mention of chastity. In fact, Christ is determined when he explains,

> I nedys be homly wyth þe & lyn in þi bed wyth þe. . . . [W]han þu art in þi bed, take me
>
> to þe as for þi weddyd husband . . . as a good wife owyth to loue hir husbonde. & þerfor

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[138] proper
[139] surely and trustingly

þu mayst boldly take me in þe armys of þi sowle & kyssen my mowth, myn hed, & my

fete as sweetly as thow wylt. (90.36.17-26)

Kempe's text is remarkably similar to the interaction recorded by Saint Birgitta, but Margery

Kempe's experience bears an increased erotic connotation given the prominence of the bed and

emphasis on physical contact. Directing Margery to think on his body while she is in her bed is

sexually suggestive. Christ encourages Margery to fantasize about kissing him and caressing his

body. This intimacy enhances Margery's relationship with Christ, privileging her above literary

models such as that presented by Saint Birgitta because Margery is granted access to the body of

Christ for her pleasure.

In fact, Christ explicitly tells Margery that she experiences his body in ways that Saint

Birgitta never has. Upon viewing the sacrament during Mass the bread-turned-body appeared to

Margery to flicker like the wings of a dove (47.20.15-18). Christ spoke privately to Margery,

explaining that "My dowtyr, Bryde, say[140] me neuyr in þis wyse[141]" (47.20.26-7). Christ reveals

to Margery a vision by means of his transubstantiated flesh, then he explains to her the meaning

of the vision, performing exegesis for her: my wavering body signifies an imminent earthquake

(47.20.27-31). *The Book* does not record an earthquake actually occurring; rather, Christ explains

that he will send such tribulations to move people to him despite their willful ignorance. Margery

experiences the body of Christ in a way that exceeds the experiences of Saint Birgitta. *Corpus*

Christi trembles for Margery, encouraging her to read its physicality for her own benefit. It is a

text she is privileged to read.

Margery's encounters with the body of Christ exceed her exemplars, and thus her

authority as mystic and saint is partially constructed by means of erotic spiritual implications.

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[140] saw
[141] way

For example, she describes her ecstatic weeping in terms of intimacy and bodily writhing with and for Christ:

> Þan was hir sowle so delectabely fed wyth þe swet *dalyawns* of owr Lorde & so fulfilled of hys lofe þat as a drunkyn man sche turnyd hir first on þe o syde & sithyn on þe o þer with gret wepyng & gret sobbyng, vn-mythy[142] to kepyn hir-selfe in stabilnes for þe vnqwenchabyl fyer of lofe whech brent ful sor in hir sowle. (98.41.27-33, emphasis added)

Christ's dalliance with her soul elicits an uncontrollable, ecstatic response from Margery. Dalliance, according to the *Middle English Dictionary*, primarily refers to (1) "intimate conversation," but it also refers to (2) communion of a spiritual or sexual nature, as well as (3) "amorous talk" or "sexual union."[143] She does not conform neatly to models of virgin saints found in hagiographies, but her reclaimed virginity and erotic spirituality mark her devotion in both religious and sexual terms.

In addition to this rare embodied intimacy with the Lord, Margery is implicitly favored above other saints because the structure of the dialogue between Margery and Christ suggests that she is an intercessor on behalf of all humanity. She employs her role as mystical bride by explaining to her lover, Christ, what he can do to delight her, but she exceeds the conventions of her status by directing the Messiah, *the* savior, implying that salvation is available to every soul due to Margery's request. Christ says,

> "[D]owtyr, aske what þow wylt, & I xal grawnt þe thyn asking." Þis creatur seyd, "Lord, I aske mercy & preseruyng fro euyr-lestyng dampnacyon for me & for all þe world,

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[142] unable

[143] "daliaunce (n.)," *Middle English Dictionary,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013, accessed January 5, 2018.

chastyse us her how þow wylt & in purgatory, & kepe us from dampnacyon for þin hy

mercy." (20.7.13-17)

The conversation ends abruptly with no response from Christ. In the following chapter, after an

exchange with Mother Mary and further directions from Jesus, he shifts the focus of his speech

and concludes as if he is responding to the desires expressed by Margery in the immediate

context, as well as her wish from the previous chapter:

"Dowtyr," [Crist seyd,] "I xal be a trew executor to þe and fulfyllyn all þi wylle, & for þi

gret charyte þat þow hast to comfortyn þin euen-cristen þu schalt have dubbyl reward in

hevyn." (21.8.4-7)

These exchanges are separated by the editorial division of chapters seven and eight made by the

scribe indicating that one narrative or one session has ended and another begins, but the content

of their conversations spans chapters. Kempe warns audiences not to adhere too strictly to

chronological norms, because "[t]hys boke is not wretyn in ordyr . . . but lych as þe mater cam to

þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn" (5.Intro.12-15). This conversation is continued a

long while later. Again, Christ asks Margery, "Dowtyr, aske what þu wylt, and þu schalt have it"

(140.57.6-7). And Margery replies, "Lorde, I wolde I had a welle of teerys to constreyn þe wyth,

that þu schuldist not takyn vttyr veniawns of mannys sowle" (140.57.20-2). Considering the

content of their conversations on this matter, it may be inferred that Margery means to save all

humans from damnation. Once again, Christ makes no immediate response. The chapter simply

ends. But again, later in the book he assures her, "I xal be a trewe styward & a trewe executor

vn-to þe fulfillyng of al þi wil & al thy desyr" (157.63.17-8). Whether Christ fulfills his promise

is left unconfirmed, once again, in the silence between chapter divisions, and the potential that

Margery may have saved every human soul. The hiatuses in their conversations—signified by a

literal break between chapters seven and eight—leaves the status of Margery's request

unconfirmed. Constructing herself as intercessor for every human soul, Margery returns to this

matter multiple times without offering explicit resolution. If Christ promises Margery that he will

fulfill whatever she asks of him, then surely his promise cannot be broken. Of course, Christ

already sacrificed himself to ransom humans from the wrath of his Father, but that does not grant

every soul access to heaven. One is expected to love Christ, accept him, and model one's earthly

life after his example. Margery, on the other hand, does not have to commit herself to any bodily

harm such as he did. Instead, she uses the opportunity presented her to intercede on behalf of

every soul.[144] According to divine mercy, every person could be pardoned. Divine mercy

pardons souls despite their sins, as the early fifteenth century morality play *The Castle of

Perseverance* exemplifies when Mankind, who justly deserves damnation, is saved by the Mercy

of God.[145] Margery appeals to divine mercy on behalf of all humans. If Christ promised to fulfill

any of Margery's desires, then her request ought to be granted. One might assume that the Word

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[144] Robert Glück's postmodern novel, *Margery Kempe*, brings tensions between Christ and Margery to the surface, particularly those tensions that deal with salvation: Who is worthy of it? How willing is Christ to dispense with it? The narrator, Bob, empathetically resonates with Margery, noting "Margery owned little of the world but felt responsible for that portion and more. How strange that the owner of everything felt no responsibility." Robert Glück, *Margery Kempe* (New York: High Risk, 1994), 131.

[145] Concluding *The Castle of Perseverance*, God describes divine mercy, as opposed to justice:
> My mercy, Mankind, geve I thee.
> Cum, sit at my ryth honde!
> Ful wel have I lovyd thee
> Unkind thowgh I thee fonde.
> As a sparke of fire in the se,
> My mercy is sinne-quenchand.

> My mercy, Mankind, I give to you.
> Come, sit at my right hand!
> I have loved you very much,
> Although you have been discourteous.
> Like a spark of fire in the sea,
> my mercy quenches sin.

The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind, ed. Mark Eccles, EETS o.s. 262 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), lines 3598-3603. The Late Modern English translation is my own.

would not break his word (John 1:1). But Christ does not explicitly consent and there is no way for an audience to verify this—not in this life. The structure of the dialogue maintains the ambiguous potential that Margery may have successfully saved every human soul. We do not know whether Christ accepts her request. We know only that he promised to perform whatever she wills. Once again, the force of Margery's authority lies in the realm of possibility, exceeding the bounds of worldly verification. Nevertheless, in response to Archbishop Bowet, Margery demonstrates that she does not require a patriarchal mediator between herself and God. Quite the opposite: Margery herself intercedes for the sake of all men.

Margery's experiences propel her beyond her exemplars, locating herself within a spiritual hierarchy just below Christ (206-7.85.31-3). Maintaining the social roles available to her, but performing them within sacred contexts, Margery reveals the constructedness of identity categories, including sanctity. Moreover, Kempe's text presents Margery as an eccentric exemplum who rose from humble beginnings to an idiosyncratic and intimate relationship with Christ. She expands the mystical possibilities for other laypersons, challenging the social structure, while inviting others to do likewise. Wives and mothers, laywomen and sinners, have the potential to speak directly to God.

Conclusion

Kempe's excessive authorizations rupture normativity and expose the performativity of identity categories. She manipulates the field of signifiers that are available to women, altering their meanings to suite her desired identifications. She exceeds the social strictures of the identity categories to which she subscribes. Margery was no longer a virgin, but she reclaimed that identity. She confesses that lust was a problem early in her *Book*, then she experiences an

erotically charged relationship with Christ. The literary constructedness of her holy biography does not necessarily undermine the veracity of Margery Kempe's mystical life. Her participation in hagiographic conventions indicates the constructedness of sanctity as a culturally contingent identity category. Margery opens the mystical life to participation by demonstrating the means by which she evolved from humble origins. She surpassed the social constrictions of her contemporary culture, and she continues to frustrate identity categories within the postmodern cultures into which her text has emerged.

In fact, Christ promises, "þe mor besy þat þe pepil is to hydryn [your grace], þe mor schal I spredyn it a-brood & makyn it knownyn to alle þe worlde" (138-9.56.37-2). True to his word, Margery was hindered. Her story was neglected for centuries: as previously noted, her manuscript was rediscovered in 1934. Now, her story is known among most professional medievalists and most students of early British Literature, and she informs contemporary contributions to the queer English canon such as Robert Gluck's 1994 novel, *Margery Kempe*. Christ's promises to Margery exceed the parameters of Margery Kempe's life. The legacy of Margery Kempe and her book constructs authority beyond her text.

Margery Kempe exercises normative discursive conventions to authorize her text, and yet her social orientations and experiences queer the identity categories that she claims for herself. The excessive authorizing conventions of her text privilege her above laity and other saints and mystics, while also exposing the constructedness of her privileged social status. Margery Kempe's queer authority empowers a nonnormative English subject position that functions within mystical and hagiographic discourses that tend to marginalize laywomen such as Margery, challenging dominant models of sanctity, and constructing a contemplative life open to participation beyond the strictures of defined social structures.

CONCLUSION

Although the texts and literary figures analyzed in this study now feature prominently within the medieval English literary corpus and traditional curriculums, this dissertation focuses on the marginalized orientations of English subjects to networks of power in their medieval contexts. Reading queerness as a characterization that encodes this marginalized status, dangling modifier provides a unique critical perspective for interrogating dominant cultural authorities and networks of power while validating deviant contributions to the discourse.

My reading of Alfred's Old English *Boethius* identifies gender as a rhetorical device that encodes cultural orientations, shifts power, and enhances philosophical paradigms. Characterizing the allegorical figure Wisdom as a masculine mother, Alfred resolves the gendered mind-body dualism that informs much of Western philosophy. The unresolved tensions of Wisdom's seemingly contrary genders encourage audiences who may not have had immediate access to the text to reflect on the characterization of Wisdom. In this way, the metaphorical Wisdom incites the Boethian dialectic, which requires audiences' careful reflection and continuous return to sources of wisdom. Moreover, Wisdom is also characterized as an Anglo-Saxon wielding intellectual authority over his Roman protégé, Boethius, the author and narrator of Alfred's Latin source text. This queer characterization of Wisdom disrupts not only dominant ideologies grounded in dualism but also networks of power that privilege Romans and Latin literatures and cultures. Wisdom's characterization authorizes the Old English text, King Alfred,

and the Anglo-Saxon audience as participants in a noble intellectual tradition by means of their mother tongue.

Dream of the Rood demonstrates the cultural constructedness of spatiotemporality, and thus orientation is a component of power that can be redirected from cultural centers to geographic and cultural margins. The poem employs Cult-of-the-Cross conventions to construct soteriological privilege for Anglo-Saxons far removed from cultural and religious centers such as Jerusalem and Rome. The Rood represents an Anglo-Saxon at the very center of salvation history. Then, he addresses the Anglo-Saxon Dreamer at the edge of the known world with eschatological portent. The Rood queers spatiotemporality to situate Anglo-Saxons at the beginning and end of salvation history. Dream implicates Anglo-Saxon England as an important eschatological site, and thus, within soteriological contexts, a cultural center at the edge of the known world.

Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* manipulates the constructedness of authorizing conventions and the sex-gender systems on which literary traditions are founded; these conventions are reversible for the purpose of encoding and authorizing same-sex desires. The gendered mind-body dichotomy perpetuated through Latin philosophical traditions is foundational to *Legend*'s central debate, which pits masculine textual epistemologies against feminine experiential epistemologies. The *Legend* narrator performs heteronormativity in accordance with his author function; however, his poetic conventions are unconventionally directed towards objects that feature as metaphors in the works of his *auctors*. He promises himself to a flower with stronger connections to male-dominated literary conventions than to any real woman or feminine literary figure. He names beautiful men to praise the unknown virtues of an unidentified woman, Alceste. He manipulates traditional poetic representations of women—

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predominantly constructed by male poets—to encode frustrated same-sex desires. Chaucer's narrator employs *fin'amor* literary conventions to construct his personal English *auctorite*, revealing the constructedness of networks of power that privilege Latin and Old French, while facilitating his same-sex desires to gain intimacy with his *auctors* through literary production.

Margery Kempe performs hagiographic conventions and women's social roles, such as wife and mother, within spiritual contexts in excess of social and literary norms. Her authorizing conventions accord with hagiographic and mystical discourses, but they are employed with a frequency that exceeds her exemplars. Her experiences are hyperbolic. She records an intimacy with Christ that supersedes the narratives of Mary Magdalene and Saint Birgitta of Sweden, and Christ validates her elevated status on multiple occasions, confirming that she is not deceived by some devils. Margery queers identity categories and literary conventions by exceeding her exemplars. The excessive authorizing conventions in Margery Kempe's *Book* simultaneously privilege her above other saints and mystics while revealing the constructedness of sanctity as an identity category that is open to lay audiences. Margery Kempe's excess destabilizes her narrative, suspending her text and the genres in which she participates, between fiction and reality.

Across these chapters, queer orientations signify and challenge the marginalization experienced by medieval English subjects within dominant networks of power, but the networks of power shift over time. Alfred's England is quite different from Margery Kempe's. During the early medieval period, Old English is the mother tongue of Anglo-Saxons who looked towards Rome as a cultural center on the continent. The Old English *Boethius* and *The Dream of the Rood* disrupt orientations to cultural centers, Jerusalem and Rome, to authorize the Old English vernacular and the immediate Anglo-Saxon audience. During the later Middle Ages, Middle

English exhibits the influences of Norman conquest and culture. Middle English literatures developed, in part, to validate English as a literary vernacular against French and Latin cultural dominance. Among the Middle English texts analyzed here, authorizing conventions are employed to empower a specific subject, namely Chaucer's *Legend* narrator and Margery Kempe. Despite changes in culture and networks of power, some of the authorizing conventions remain the same across these early English literary phases. Each of these Old English and Middle English texts appeals to tradition, encoding ideological links to the past via Roman figures and Latin literary culture to construct contemporary English authorities. Each of these texts also employs queerness to disrupt dominant networks of power. Revealing the constructedness of authority, these texts manipulate authorizing conventions to validate nonnormative perspectives and thus render privileged positions accessible to English subjects within dominant discourses from which they were traditionally excluded. Queerness is both a disruptive and productive force: it exposes the contrivance that maintains networks of power, and it facilitates the authorization of disenfranchised people.

The previous chapters have been organized according to the chronological production of the primary texts, moving from Old English to Middle English texts. Alternatively, these texts could be analyzed in pairs based on their rhetorical strategies to observe similar constructions of literary authority that work across Old and Middle English. For example, Alfred's Old English *Boethius* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* both employ nonnormative genders and sexualities to construct English literary forms within exclusive literary traditions. Both authors were posthumously named patriarchal figures of the English literary heritage. Alfred is considered by some to be the father of English prose.[1] He was not exceptionally revered beyond

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[1] Although some critics might identify other English writers such as William Tyndale as the "Father of English Prose," Alfred was "the only English king to write a book before James I in the early seventeenth

his own time during the Middle Ages, but later, during the Reformation, he was touted as a prominent icon of the English heritage to promote the English Church and Elizabethan Protestantism.[2] Similarly, Chaucer is revered by some as the father of English poetry. Edmund Spenser, for example, constructs a literary genealogy in *The Faerie Queene* that alludes to Chaucer as a paternal figure; Spenser draws authority from his earlier *auctor*, similar to the authorizing conventions employed by Chaucer.[3] Then, in 1700 John Dryden explicitly called Chaucer the father of English poetry.[4] Identifying Alfred and Chaucer as patriarchal figures homologizes them and their literary contributions to the heteronormative regime of reproduction. It is easy to read these figures retrospectively, as the origin of a monolithic English literary heritage, in accordance with Foucault's understanding of the author as an organizational category.[5] The patriarchal figure limits and controls additions to the English literary heritage, subsequently blunting the general perception, or cultural memory, of these now abstracted ghostly "fathers." Institutionalized canons and curricula have generally constructed them as historical figures who represent a standard for literature. In fact, praise for Alfred as a precursor to the Reformation was sanitized of his connections to Rome, and Dryden reveres Chaucer as the father of English literature because "From Chaucer the Purity of the English Tongue began."[6] Rather than facilitating radical innovations as Alfred and Chaucer performed within their social

century," Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1998), 8-9; Catherine E. Karkov, "The Mother's Tongue and the Father's Prose," *Parallax* 18.3 (2012): 31.

[2] Barbara Yorke, "Alfredism: The Use and Abuse of King Alfred's Reputation in Later Centuries," in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Century Conference*, ed. by Timothy Reuter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 363.

[3] Jeff Espie, "Literary Paternity and Narrative Revival: Chaucer's Soul(s) from Spenser to Dryden," *Modern Philology* 114.1 (2016): 39.

[4] John Dryden, *Fables Ancient and Modern* (London, 1700) *Early English Books Online* (accessed March 14, 2019).

[5] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), 115.

[6] Dryden, *Fables Ancient and Modern*.

contexts, the patriarchal status is imposed to limit and construct a coherent, restricted social construction divorced from the vitality that initially inspired these authors. Glenn Burger, focusing on Chaucer, encourages "reading a moment of new beginning in the Canterbury project, not retrospectively through the lens of 'Father Chaucer' and the modernity he originates, but *pro*spectively through the lens of contemporary queer desire unleashed in pornography."[7] Similarly, I have read Alfred and Chaucer's texts with an appreciation for the courage and innovation that they, living within political turmoil, produced against dominant discourses that subjugated their English languages and cultures. The designated fathers of the English literary heritage ought not signify singular models of an exclusive, stable tradition. Alfred and Chaucer constructed radical beginnings: authors who broke convention and dramatically altered English literary culture. They each employed gender and sexuality to rhetorically construct nuanced subject positions that disrupt conventions. If Alfred and Chaucer signify two possible origins of the literary tradition, then the canon has been queer from conception.

Considering another alternative organization, *Dream of the Rood* and *The Book of Margery Kempe* both reorient English subjects to positions of power. *Dream* locates an Anglo-Saxon at the center of Christ's crucifixion, and another Anglo-Saxon at the edge of the known world within an eschatological context that subsequently privileges Anglo-Saxons at the beginning and the end of salvation history. Likewise, *The Book* reorients Margery's social status from a wife and mother to the most beloved bedfellow of Christ. Each of these texts also employs popular hermeneutics and conventions to construct authority. *Dream* cites eschatological concerns that were historically populated by Bede's letter to Eusebius, and which some, including Alfred, interpreted as implicating Anglo-Saxon England as a geographic

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[7] Glenn Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2003), 5.

borderland that signifies the end to the Apostolic mission.[8] Similarly manipulating cultural

conventions and narratives, in *The Book* Margery performs women's social roles and popular

devotional practices, but she does so excessively, privileging her experience. *Dream* and *The*

Book adjust conventions and familiar ideologies to construct power for English subjects within

traditions that generally diminish their roles.

My observations are limited to Old and Middle English texts, but queer authority works

across the artificial boundary that separates the medieval period from the early modern period,

despite the radical shifts in power and culture that occurred during the Protestant Reformation.

The narrator of Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, for example, wields queer authority

that combines author function and same-sex desires similar to Chaucer's *Legend* narrator. He

describes the lover of his poem, Leander, lingering over his body with personal details that

commingle his naked form with the narrator's literary production. Having praised the beauty of

Leander's face and chest, the narrator describes the indentations of his spine, where:

> . . . immortal fingers did imprint
>
> That heavenly path, with many a curious dint,
>
> That runs along his back; but my rude pen
>
> Can hardly blazon forth the loves of men . . . (67-70)[9]

The narrator employs the anatomical blazon: a poetic convention whereby one praises the body

parts of a beloved.[10] The narrator's blazon of Leander's body is a homoerotic event that collapses

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[8] Bede, *Patrologia Latina* ed. by J. P. Migne 93: 129-206 and 191A-192D; Nicholas Howe, "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* 34 (2004): 152; Fabienne L. Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 158.
[9] Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (London: N. Okes for William Leake, 1637) *Early English Books Online* (accessed November 28, 2018).

Leander's physique, the narrator's act of writing, and audiences' participation in the creation of

meaning. Notice that the narrator focuses not on the protrusions of Leander's spinal column, but

the indentations. His gaze is not passively apprehending the male form; his gaze penetrates the

male body he beholds—if only in his mind's eye. Cognitive tests and observations verify that

when reading descriptions of directional movements readers often produce nonconscious

reactions, including eye movements that replicate the direction of motion indicated by the text.[11]

The narrator encourages inward motion—penetration. The "heavenly path" of Leander's back,

like a real path, suggests spatial extension. Therefore, the metaphor encourages audiences to

travel forward beyond the limits of the blazon, carrying the narrator's "rude pen" down to

Leander's terminus. Later, Neptune is aroused by Leander's naked body and he sings a

homoerotic pastoral to win Leander's affection. Neptune uses poetic conventions to convince

Leander to satisfy his same-sex desires (676-685). The narrator employs poetic conventions to

implicate himself and audiences in nonnormative sexual desires, then he describes a god

similarly employing poetic conventions to seduce a man. Same-sex desires are authorized by the

Latin god Neptune. The narrator constructs a cycle of erotic implications that connect author,

subject, and audience. Marlowe is not alone; Richard Barnfield's *Affectionate Shepherd* is

another example of early modern intersections between poetic authority and homoeroticism.[12]

Observing these rhetorical strategies across phases of the English literary traditions

confirms that some marginalized people have historically employed normative discursive modes

to achieve nonnormative desires. Subversive tactics of cultural construction and authorization did

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[10] Grant Williams, "Disarticulating Fantasies: Figures of Speech, Vices, and the Blazon in Renaissance English Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29.3 (1999): 46; Annette Tomarken and Edward Tomarken, "The Rise and Fall of the Sixteenth-Century French Blason," *Symposium* 29.1 (1975): 139-40.
[11] Benjamin K. Bergen, *Louder Than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 185-7 and 216-7.
[12] Richard Barnfield, *The Affectionate Shepherd: Containing the Complaint of Daphnis for the Love of Ganymede* (London: Iohn Danter, 1594) *Early English Books Online* (accessed March 14, 2019).

not emerge with the sociopolitical category of the homosexual around the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries.[13] Tison Pugh explains, "homosexuality, queerness, and heteronormativity

historically shift in relation to one another, but dynamic interactions in reference to ideological

power and marginalization nonetheless characterize their relationship in medieval literature, as

they do today."[14] Queerness is not a modern phenomenon. Our queer ancestors are merely

obscured by the straight lines of historical narratives.

As Anglo-Saxons sought to bridge the gap between their culture and cultural centers, I

seek to bridge the gap between postmodern queer cultures and medieval English literary

canons.[15] Queer individuals are often denied the luxury of a unified lineage because our

relationships are rarely maintained through blood. Persecution, epidemics, and in-fighting have

fragmented our connections across time; dominant discursive models have frayed the threads of

our narratives.[16] Identifying queer innovations early in the English literary heritage adds nuance

to women's and LGBTQ+ histories that have overwhelmingly neglected examples from the

Middle Ages.[17] Just as Alfred, the Dreamer, the *Legend* narrator, and Margery Kempe looked to

the past to validate their interventions into literary traditions, I suggest that normative

conventions of historicization are one potential source of authorization for queer individuals. In

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[13] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 101; Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 27.

[14] Tison Pugh, *Queering Medieval Genres* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 4.

[15] Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 79.

[16] Sara Ahmed, "Queer Feelings," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose, with Andrea Bebell and Susan Potter (New York, Routledge, 2013), 428; Paul Monette, *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988) 22; Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 12.

[17] For example, Leslie Feinberg seems to lack sufficient evidence to cover the Middle Ages in their transgender history, and David Halperin offers one short example of medieval homoeroticism found in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (the tale of Pietro di Vinciolo; Tenth Story of the Fifth Day), while both include multiple examples from antiquity and modernity. Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 38-9.

fact, this is one of the goals of queer theoretical approaches: to establish a history of queer individuals by revealing cultural constructions of gender and sexuality. Queerness inhabits and propels traditional English literary canons. The textual analysis and examples supplied here posit queerness as a disruptive force with the potential to construct innovative critical perspectives. Queerness is a source of power.

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