Verba Vana: Empty Words in Ricardian London

Volume I

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the material presented in this thesis is my own.

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Abstract

Verba Vana, or 'empty words', are named as among the defining features of London by a late fourteenth-century Anglo-Latin poem which itemises the properties of seven English cities. This thesis examines the implications of this description; it explores, in essence, what it meant to live, work, and especially write, in an urban space notorious for the vacuity of its words. The thesis demonstrates that anxieties concerning the notoriety of empty words can be detected in a wide variety of surviving urban writings produced in the 1380s and 1390s. These include anxieties not only about idle talk – such as *janglynge*, slander, and other sins of the tongue – but also about the deficiencies of official discourses which are partisan, fragmentary and susceptible to contradiction and revision. This thesis explores these anxieties over the course of four discrete chapters. Chapter one, focusing on *Letter-Book H*, Richard Maidstone's *Concordia* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Cook's Tale*, considers how writers engaged with the urban power struggles that were played out on Cheapside. Chapter two, examining the 1388 Guild Petitions, considers how the London guilds legitimised their textual endeavours and argues that the famous *Mercers' Petition* is a translation of the hitherto-ignored *Embroiderers' Petition*. Chapter three, looking at several works by Chaucer, John Gower, the Monk of Westminster and various urban officials, explores the discursive space that emerges following justified and unjustified executions. Chapter four, focusing on Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and John Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide*, contends that the crises of speech and authority that these poems dramatise can be productively read within the context of the Merciless Parliament of 1388. Through close textual analysis, this thesis analyses specific responses to the prevalence of empty words in the city, while also reflecting more

broadly on the remarkable cultural, linguistic, social, and political developments

witnessed in this period.

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List of Abbreviations

AND   *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*

CLBH   *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: Letter-Book H*

CPMR   *Calendar of Select Pleas and Memoranda, A.D. 1381-1412*

EETS   Early English Text Society

Gazetteer   *Historical Gazetteer of London before the Great Fire – Cheapside: Parishes of All Hallows Honey Lane, St Martin Pomary, St Mary le Bow, St Mary Colechurch and St Pancras Soper Lane*

JEGP   *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*

LBH   *Letter-Book H*

LMA   London Metropolitan Archives

MED   *Middle English Dictionary*

Memorials   *Memorials of London and London Life*

ODNB   *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

OED   *Oxford English Dictionary*

OS   Original Series

PMLA   *Publications of the Modern Language Association*

PROME   *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*

RMLW   *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List*

TNA   The National Archives (Public Record Office)

Acknowledgments

project and for me have proved invaluable in guiding me towards completion. Mary has also read a substantial proportion of this thesis and her insightful and lucid comments have enhanced this project immeasurably.

Finally, I owe a debt beyond words to this project's primary supervisor, Julia Boffey. Along the sometimes tortuous path this project has taken from conception to completion, Julia has been a constant source of wisdom, inspiration, enthusiasm, distractions, and reassurance. Her comments on drafts of this thesis have been unfailingly probing, sound, and analytical, and it is only with her guidance that I have been able to transform my very own *verba vana* into this finished project.

Notes on Quotations and Appendices

This project includes extensive appendices transcribing and translating many hitherto-unpublished manuscript sources. The pertinent sections of these transcriptions are quoted in the body of the thesis and so the appendices are not crucial to my arguments. However, they provide a useful way of presenting the complete texts and contexts from which my quotations are sourced.

Where I quote from published material in French, Anglo-Norman, or Latin I include a full translation (which is either taken from a published edition or, where specified, my own). Where I quote from the Latin material included in my appendices, I include a full translation alongside the quotation. However, where I quote from the Anglo-Norman material included in my appendices I do not provide an accompanying translation (but a full translation can be found in the relevant appendix).

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A Prelude: The Variable Fortunes of Nicholas Exton

On the 10th of August 1382, London's common pleader petitioned the mayor,
aldermen and other good commoners of the city to have the fishmonger Nicholas
Exton removed as alderman of Queenhithe ward for having uttered 'diu*er*sis and
pl*u*rib*us* verbis indec<e>ntib*us*' [*many and various unbecoming words*] to the
mayor.[1] The exact nature of these words goes unrecorded. However, given that
Exton was a prominent spokesperson for the fishmongers,[2] the quarrel probably
arose from the on-going attempts by the mayor, John Northampton, to end the
fishmongers' monopoly.[3] Following deliberation, Exton was discharged from his
position.[4] On the 29th of September 1382, Exton's unrestrained tongue again caused
him problems. He complained in parliament of the 'grant rumour' [*great tumult*] in
the city, and feared that the tumult would result in 'corporel dampnage' [*bodily
harm*] being done to him. He also openly accused Northampton's party of acting
with 'haine, rancour, et envye' [*hatred, rancour, and envy*].[5] Exton was subsequently
summoned to the Guildhall on the 20th of November 1382, where he was accused

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[1] London, London Metropolitan Archives, x109/23 (*Letter-Book H*), f. cliv. Transcribed in Appendix 2a, paragraph 4, p. 321. Future references to the appendices of this thesis will appear parenthetically within the text.

[2] In the parliament of September 1382, Exton is described as the one 'q'avoit les paroles pur les fisshemongers' [*who was to speak on behalf of the fishmongers*]. See *PROME: The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, 1275-1504*, ed. by Chris Given-Wilson et al, on-line edn (Leicester: Scholarly Digital Editions and The National Archives, 2005), III, 143. *Letter-Book H* records how Nicholas Exton did 'good deeds and words on' the fishmongers' behalf. See *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: Letter-Book H, circa A.D.1377-1399*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1907), p. 203.

[3] For the tensions in London during this period see Ruth Bird, *The Turbulent London of Richard II* (London: Longmans, Green, 1949), pp. 63-85; Pamela Nightingale, 'Capitalists, Crafts and Constitutional Change in Late Fourteenth-Century London', *Past and Present*, 124 (1989), 3-35; Pamela Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community: The Grocers' Company and the Politics and Trade of London, 1000-1485* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), esp. pp. 271-91.

[4] Exton was not discharged against his will: he asked to be discharged and had earlier offered to pay a 'grosse so*m*me' of money to the same purpose (2a.5). Being an alderman was expensive and time-consuming, and this may explain why Exton sought his removal. Attempts to avoid becoming alderman were, however, frowned upon (in 1415 John Gedney was imprisoned for refusing to serve as alderman) so it is not surprising Exton's money was refused. See Caroline M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People, 1200-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 138-39.

[5] *PROME*, III, 143.

that he 'menciebat*ur* in pleno p*ar*liamento' [*lied in full parliament*] (2b.3). As

punishment, Exton was sentenced to a year's imprisonment (which was immediately

remitted), and was also deprived of the franchise of the city forever.

This was not, however, to be the end of Exton's career. Four years later,

Exton found himself at the pinnacle of civic politics, serving his first of two terms as

mayor. This reversal of fortune was the consequence of the election to the mayoralty

in 1383 of Sir Nicholas Brembre, a grocer who was sympathetic to the fishmongers'

cause. The civic records inscribe the shift in power concomitant with Brembre's

election. Following a petition from Exton, the accusations made against him – that

he uttered 'verbis inde<c>entib*us*' and that he slandered the mayor – are both

expunged from *Letter-Book H*. Brembre judges that the 'ditz juggementz' were

'errenousement' made, and so Exton is restored to the city and the 'les ditz records &

reconissance [...] sont tretz & adnullis' (2c.4). The records are 'tretz' by being

crossed through with a series of lines,[6] and the addition of a marginal note directing

the reader's attention to 'fol. clxxv' to find the 'causa q*ue* tr*a*hit*ur*' [*cause that it was*

erased] (2a.2).

The case of Nicholas Exton is instructive. In part, it serves to further

reinforce the notion that Richard II's London was politically and socially turbulent:

power was transitory and capricious, and an individual's fortunes were subject to

frequent buffeting. Exton, a perhaps extreme example of this, moves from being an

outcast in 1382, to being at the apex of urban political life in 1386. However,

Exton's fate is also revealing about the role of words in the city. On the one hand, it

reveals the power that words wielded. Exton's slander and his unbecoming words

were dangerous and socially divisive. Exton's fate speaks to the existence of a wider

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[6] See Figs 9 and 10.

climate of fear in late fourteenth-century London concerning careless talk, rabble-rousing, and slander, a climate which has been productively explored in recent by Marion Turner.[7] On the other hand, and paradoxically, Exton's fate reveals that the power of words was limited, for the authoritative language of the original judgement against Exton is nullified and rendered meaningless. Brembre's counter-judgement frames Northampton's original judgement, thereby revealing that such judgements are fluid and always subject to reassessment and revision. This is symptomatic of what Sheila Lindenbaum has termed the 'discursive "turbulence"' prevalent in the city, where 'official pronouncements' were increasingly viewed 'as provisional rather than fixed and transparently authoritative'.[8] Just as power was in flux, so too was language.

Introduction

This is a project about words, about their potency and their impotency. It takes its inspiration from an enigmatic stanza describing London found in the *Stores of the Cities*, a late fourteenth-century Anglo-Latin poem,[9] the sole witness to which is Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O.9.38, a commonplace book assembled in

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[7] See particularly Marion Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict: Languages of Antagonism in Late Fourteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 8-30.
[8] Sheila Lindenbaum, 'London Texts and Literate Practice', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 284-309 (p. 286, 288).
[9] The dating of the poem is difficult to ascertain. Rigg gives a *terminus ad quem* of 1401 as that was when the London's Tun prison closed. See A. G. Rigg, 'The Stores of the Cities', *Anglia*, 85 (1967), 127-37 (pp. 127-28). Rexroth has challenged this, arguing that while the prison closed, the term 'Tun' was still in use (although he provides no evidence of this). Frank Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London*, trans. by Pamela E. Selwyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 187, fn. 288. Both writers agree on 1375 as a plausible *terminus a quo* (on the grounds that 'noua stipula' (1a.14) is the steeple of Coventry's St Michael's Church begun in 1375). If my argument that 'pedula' (1a.14) refers to the font at St Michael's Church, the *terminus a quo* becomes 1394. A date around the mid 1390s may get added support as this was the time Lincoln's Stonebow (possibly referenced in l. 7) was a site of political controversy. See the material in Appendix 1 for an expanded discussion on dating.

Glastonbury in the middle of the fifteenth century.[10] The opening stanza records the properties of London:

> Hec su*nt* londonis, pira pomaq*ue* regia thron*us*
> Chepp, stupha, coklana, doliu*m*, leo verbaq*ue* vana
> Lancea cu*m* scutis hec sunt staura ciuitutis. (1a.1-3)

> [*These are London's: pears and apples, palace and throne,*
> *Cheapside, the Stews, Cock Lane, the Tun, the Lion and empty words,*
> *Lance and shields. These are the stores of the city*].[11]

Despite (or, perhaps, because of) its brevity, this is a rich and nuanced account of the city which captures in a profound way the fragmentary nature of urban life. Unlike other surviving descriptions of London, this stanza lacks an obvious controlling perspective.[12] It is neither laudatory – as in the case of William FitzStephen's 'Description', or 'In Honour of the City of London' by an anonymous poet[13] – nor is it protractedly cynical – as in the case of *London Lickpenny*.[14] Rather, the *Stores* depicts both the high and the low, the good and the bad, the licit and the illicit, but

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[10] For a detailed account of the manuscript's origin, provenance and contents, see A. G. Rigg, *A Glastonbury Miscellany of the Fifteenth Century: A Descriptive Index of Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. O.9.38* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). For an edition of the *Stores*, see Rigg, 'Stores'. For his doctoral thesis Rigg edited the manuscript in its entirety. See A. G. Rigg, 'An Edition of a Fifteenth-Century Commonplace Book (Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O.9.38)', 2 vols (unpublished DPhil dissertation, Oxford, 1965).

[11] This translation fails to capture the stanza's nuances. More detailed commentary is found in Appendix 1b, and in the introductions to each chapter of this project.

[12] For a useful overview see C. David Benson, 'Some Poets' Tours of Medieval London: Varieties of Literary Urban Experience', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 24 (2007), 1-20.

[13] For FitzStephen, see John Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. by C. L. Kingsford, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), II, 218-29. For FitzStephen's text as a 'city laudation', see John Scattergood, 'Misrepresenting the City: Genre, Intertextuality and William FitzStephen's *Description of London* (c. 1173)', in *London and Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by Julia Boffey and Pamela King (London: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1995), pp. 1-34. 'In Honour of the City of London' has been frequently ascribed to William Dunbar, though this has been refuted by Priscilla Bawcutt. See her *Dunbar the Makar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 44, 82. However, on Bawcutt's refutation, see Sally Mapstone, 'Dunbar's Disappearance', *London Review of Books*, 23, 10 (24 May 2001). For a brief account of the manuscripts of the poem – some of which foreground its 'ceremonial context' and others of which bear a distinct London focus – see Julia Boffey, 'London Books and London Readers', in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. by Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 420-37. For the poem, see Curt F. Bühler, '*London Thow Art the Flowre of Cytes All*', *Review of English Studies*, 13 (1937), 1-9.

[14] For 'London Lickpenny' see *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose*, ed. by Douglas Gray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 16-19. For a somewhat optimistic reading of 'London Lickpenny', emphasising its 'good humour', see Lianna Farber, *An Anatomy of Trade in Medieval Writing: Value, Consent, and Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 174-79.

treats every feature of the city in the same elliptical and disinterested manner. The poem offers to the reader a series of fragments of fourteenth-century London, without glossing those fragments.[15]

One particularly intriguing aspect of the poem is its description of the language of London as *verba vana*.[16] In the last few years, there has been renewed interest in the language of the city.[17] Essays by Ardis Butterfield, Marion Turner, and Christopher Cannon in the recent *Chaucer and the City* collection all address the idea that there was a distinctive urban language.[18] Additionally, Turner's monograph probes further the notion of 'languages of antagonism'; Ralph Hanna explores how 'polyvocal and individuated voices' are formed in separate regional spaces and detects a 'London language' of peace and desire in *Piers Plowman*; and Sheila Lindenbaum charts the shift from experimental to normative civic discourses over the course of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.[19] My thesis develops out of these studies to analyse further the language of the city through the prism of the *Stores'* description of it as *verba vana*. The *Stores* suggests that empty words were as notorious and tangible a feature of London life as the city's distinctive

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[15] A similar point is made by Catherine A. M. Clarke, who notes that the *Stores* captures 'the discontinuities, confusions and internal contestations of the late medieval city'. See her *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England, 700-1400* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), p. 127.

[16] While the direct quotation from the poem is 'verbaq*ue* vana', I omit here the –que.

[17] 'Language' here is used non-technically and does not refer to the dialect. I am concerned with a common discourse and set of familiar lexical items which mark out a text as of London. For a linguistic account of the language of London, see the opening sections of Laura Wright, *Sources of London English: Medieval Thames Vocabulary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

[18] In her introduction, Butterfield, developing from work by Walter Benjamin and Michael de Certeau, sees the language of the city (not London specifically) as containing 'debris from the past' that gives to language a pronounced 'strangeness'. Turner speaks of 'urban discourses' – such as curial prose and the legal complaint – which are refracted and situated antagonistically in Chaucer's works. Finally, Cannon sees London's language as intertwined with craft identities as the London crafts used 'speech acts' to define the boundaries of their communities. See Ardis Butterfield, 'Chaucer and the Detritus of the City', in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. by Ardis Butterfield (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 3-22 (pp. 9-10); Marion Turner, 'Greater London', in *Chaucer and the City*, pp. 25-40 (p. 25); Christopher Cannon, 'Chaucer and the Language of London', in *Chaucer and the City*, pp. 79-94 (p. 83, 85).

[19] Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*; Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 3, 274; Lindenbaum, 'London Texts', pp. 284-309.

buildings (the palace of Westminster and the barrel-shaped Tun prison), the city's major thoroughfare (Cheap, the broadest street in the city), the city's produce (apples and pears), and the city's military might (lances and shields). The aim of this thesis is not to catalogue examples of *verba vana*, but rather to consider the consequences of the notorious and tangible nature of these words, seeking, in essence, to explore the implications of living, working, and especially writing, in an urban space renowned for the vacuity of its words.

To explore the implications of the phrase, it is first necessary to understand what is meant by *verba vana*. As with many of the terms used in the *Stores*, *verba vana* resists straightforward definition. The phrase, along with equivalent phrases such as *verba ociosa* and the English *ydel wordes*, has a long history in pastoral and spiritual works. Anxieties about 'vain' speech go back as far as biblical injunctions that 'profane and vain babblings' should be shunned (2 Timothy 2:16), that 'every idle word' spoken must be accounted for on the day of judgement (Matthew 12:36), and that the 'wicked' speak 'vain things' to their neighbours (Psalm 11).[20] The difficulties of defining the concept of vain speech in these quotations is apparent in Thomas Aquinas's commentary on Psalm 11.[21] Aquinas is unable to give a single definition of 'vana', which is variously: the 'signum defectus sanctitatis' [*the sign of the failing of sanctity*]; that 'quod non habent subsistentiam' [*which has no substance*]; that 'quod intellectu non tenetur' [*which is not kept by the intellect*] such as 'superflua verba' [*superfluous words*]; and that 'quod non est stabile' [*which is not stable*], specifically 'verba de temporalibus' [*words concerning the temporal*

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[20] *The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version*, rev. by Richard Challoner (London: Baronius Press, 2005).
[21] In Aquinas's numbering, this is psalm 12.

world].[22] In Aquinas's commentary, *verba vana* becomes a fluid concept, with multiple significances. It can signify any worldly speech, or it can be a more nuanced term encompassing specific varieties of earthly speech, such as loquacity (a superfluity of words), or gossip (words without substance). It should be stressed that not all religious texts express such anxiety about the term's meaning. In the influential *Rule of Saint Benedict*, the phrase's meaning is somewhat clearer: the instruction '[v]erba vana aut risui apta non loqui' [*to not say empty words or those appropriate to laughter*], along with the praise of '[t]aciturnitate', forbids disciples from engaging in any form of worldly speech.[23]

In the tradition of pastoral writings on the sins of the tongue, such casting of idle talk as any worldly speech is less appropriate, given the secularity of the audience. As Susan E. Phillips notes, in attempts to communicate the dangers of idle talk to the laity, the concept of 'idle talk proves difficult to explain in practical terms'.[24] Attempts were made to create taxonomies of verbal sins: the influential *Summa de vitiis* by Guillelmus Peraldus, for example, lists twenty-four sins of the tongue which include 'mendacium' [*lying*], 'convicium' [*insult*], 'contentio' [*quarrelling*], 'ociosa verba' [*idle words*], 'multiloquium' [*loquacity*], 'bonorum derisio' [*mocking good people*], and 'seminatio discordiarum' [*sowing discord*].[25] But these categories are hardly scientific and some overlap can be detected: how, for example, do we distinguish an insult from quarrelling, or playful mockery from

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[22] Quotations from *Sancti Thomae Aqvinatis: Ex Ordine Praedicatorvm Qvinti Ecclesiae Doctoris Angelici Expositiones Praeclarissime in Genesim, in Iob, in Davidis Primam* (Paris: Societatem Bibliopolarvm, 1660), p. 293. The translations are my own.
[23] *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, ed. and trans. by Bruce L. Venarde (London: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 34, 42.
[24] Phillips's quotation here is explicitly referencing Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, although it applies to the other texts her article explores. See Susan E. Phillips, '"Janglynge in churche": Gossip and the Exemplum', in *The Hands of the Tongue: Essays on Deviant Speech*, ed. by Edwin D. Craun (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp. 61-96 (p. 64).
[25] All twenty-four sins are listed in Edwin D. Craun, *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 15-16. Guillelmus Peraldus is also referred to as Guillaume or William Peyraut.

attempts to sow discord? The fluidity of these categories is perhaps best indicated by returning to Exton's 'verbis inde<c>entibus' and slander which began this introduction: Exton is guilty of at least five sins of the tongue ('mendacium', 'convicium', 'contentio', 'bonorum derisio', and 'seminatio discordiarum') and this indicates the extent of overlaps. Phillips has suggested that as a result of this fluidity, 'idle talk' came to be a generic term to encompass 'all verbal transgressions'.[26] This shift in the use of idle talk can be detected in the *Book of Vices and Virtues*, a late fourteenth-century translation of Lorens d'Orléans' *Somme le roi*.[27] This text condemns those who 'speke ydele wordes', and cites five types of such speaker: those who speak 'now of o þing, now of a-noþer' (a form of loquacity); those who utter 'newe tyþynges' that make 'men yuele at ese'; those who tell 'faire taales and queynte wordes wher-yn is moche vayn glorie'; those who say 'iapes and knakkes ful of filþe and of lesynges'; and finally those who make 'bourdes and scornes and lyʒenges [...] vpon goode men'.[28] Here 'ydele wordes' becomes an umbrella term, incorporating a range of verbal sins, from loquacity to lying, and from slander to vainglory.

The above has only been the briefest of overviews of several complex medieval traditions, but it gives an indication both of the history of *verba vana* and of its semantic flexibility. As both Sandy Bardsley and Craun note, by the end of the fourteenth century, the sins of the tongue tradition had become firmly 'woven [...] into the fabric of everyday life', permeating not only sermon literature, but also

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[26] Phillips, '"Janglynge in cherche"', p. 69.
[27] For details of these two works, see Craun, *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity*, pp. 17-18.
[28] *The Book of Vices and Virtues: A Fourteenth Century English Translation of the 'Somme le Roi' of Lorens d'Orléans*, ed. by W. Nelson Francis, EETS, OS 217 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), pp. 55-56.

works on good counsel, courtesy books, literature of *fin' amor*, and civic records.[29] It

is within this tradition that the *Stores*-poet's use of the phrase is most commonly

read. It is defined variously as 'pub chatter', 'gossip', 'leeres Geschwätz' (or 'empty

chatter'), and 'story-telling'.[30] While these definitions capture a facet of *verba vana*,

I would suggest that they are all somewhat reductive. To locate *verba vana* solely

within the locale of a pub, or to define it primarily as social chatter and gossip, limits

the term's power. For, following the lead of the *Book of Virtues and Vices*, the

phrase can also reference rumour-spreading, loquacity, and slandering. These are the

types of verbal sin which were prevalent in London, and which the authorities

attempted to control.[31] They are also, of course, the sins of Nicholas Exton: he

spreads rumours and slanders the mayor. Exton is thus a frequent utterer of *verba*

vana. That he was expelled from the city's freedom and threatened with

imprisonment as a consequence of his idle speech raises an important point about

these 'empty' words, a point made explicitly in the *Book of Vices and Virtues*: words

which are called 'idele [...] beþ not ydel, for þei beþ wel dere and ful of harm and

wel perilous'.[32] *Verba vana* thus describes deeply threatening speech.

The paradox of ostensibly trivial speech being 'so consequential' has been

noted by Phillips, who argues that it is in part this paradox which makes gossip

transformative.[33] But this project is not concerned just with gossip and other verbal

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[29] The quotation is from Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 26; the genres are itemized in Edwin D. Craun, 'Introduction: Marking Out Deviant Speech', in *The Hands of the Tongue: Essays on Deviant Speech*, ed. by Edwin D. Craun (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp. ix-xviii (pp. xiii-xiv).
[30] Rigg, 'Stores', p. 133; Turner, 'Greater London', p. 29; Frank Rexroth, *Das Milieu der Nacht: Obrigkeit und Randgruppen im Spätmittelalterlichen London* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1999), p. 209; Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 187; A. G. Rigg, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature, 1066-1422* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 306.
[31] On this see Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 9-30; Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 129.
[32] *Book of Vices and Virtues*, p. 55.
[33] Susan E. Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), p. 7.

sins. There is another facet of *verba vana* to explore which was presaged earlier in this discussion: the susceptibility of language to contradiction and overwriting, which meant that even authoritative judgements could be stripped of their power. This is exemplified in Northampton's judgements on Exton, which are reduced to empty words through Brembre's counter-judgements. Again, language is transformational, but here the transformation is in the opposite direction: words that were consequential are reduced to mere trivia. Concern over the fracturing of language – the 'proliferation of the one into the many, the collapse of authority into contingency' – was a topic of interest dating back to the Greek philosophers.[34] However, this topic assumes a particular pertinence in the fourteenth-century both in an academic sphere – with Ockham's emphasis on the 'ambiguity and autonomy' of language ensuring that writers lose 'the assurance that language coheres with truth'[35] – and in a practical sphere – with the increasing reliance on documentary writing, particularly within London.[36] That the *Stores*-poet is embracing written as well as

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[34] For a useful account of the origin and fall of language, see John M. Fyler, *Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-59 (p. 55). Fyler's book can be usefully supplemented by Rita Copeland, 'Rhetoric and the Politics of the Literal Sense in Medieval Literary Theory: Aquinas, Wyclif, and the Lollards', in *Interpretation Medieval and Modern*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), pp. 1-23.

[35] Holly Wallace Boucher, 'Nominalism: The Difference for Chaucer and Boccaccio', *Chaucer Review*, 20, 3 (1986), 213-220 (p. 215, 217). Stephen Penn suggests Boucher overstates Ockham's discussion of language; see his 'Literary Nominalism and Medieval Sign Theory: Problems and Perspectives', in *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*, ed. by Hugo Kieper, Christoph Bode, Richard J. Utz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 157-89. On Ockham and nominalism, see also Burt Kimmelman, 'Ockham, Chaucer, and the Emergence of Modern Poetics', in *The Rhetorical Poetics of the Middle Ages – Reconstructive Polyphony: Essays in Honor of Robert O. Payne*, ed. by John M. Hill and Deborah M. Sinnreich-Levi (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), pp. 177-205. A useful book-length study exploring some of these issues is Jesse M. Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century: Oral Contexts of Writing in Philosophy, Poetics, and Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), esp. pp. 39-78 and pp. 151-91.

[36] Malcolm Richardson argues that by the end of the fourteenth century a 'culture of pervasive literate practices' was apparent amongst the 'middle-class' of London. See his *Middle-Class Writing in Late Medieval London* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), p. 4. Caroline M. Barron similarly cites London's 'developing vernacular written culture of books, documents and bills' as one of its distinctive features. See her 'London, 1300-1450', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume I, 600-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 395-440 (p. 395). See also Lindenbaum, 'London Texts', pp. 284-309 (Lindenbaum begins her study in 1375) and Emily Steiner,

spoken words in his poem seems entirely plausible. The *Stores*-poet demonstrates a

particular concern with the visual tableaux found in cities,[37] and texts could certainly

be part of those tableaux. Malcolm Richardson suggests that 'London was the city in

which the act of writing could be witnessed quite easily', but it was also the city in

which the result of writing – including bills, complaints, and broadsides – could be

seen decorating the streets.[38]

Of the various meanings which coinhere in the phrase *verba vana*, this

project will focus on two specific facets: sinful utterances and fractured and

problematised authoritative discourses. These are the twin aspects of London's

language which can be detected so clearly in the account of Nicholas Exton with

which this project began. Exton is guilty of verbal sins, while the judgements and

counter-judgements enacted upon him reveal the fractures in documentary

discourses. And it is these twin aspects that provide the backdrop against which late

fourteenth-century London writers were working, a backdrop in which words are

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Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 47-48. Steiner's work usefully reminds us of the centrality of documentary writing prior to this period, but stresses its flourishing in imaginary contexts in the mid- to late-fourteenth centuries. For earlier documentary production, see the foundational M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).

[37] Of the five senses, the *Stores* never appeals to touch, and contains only one reference to smell (the 'bubulus flatus' (1a.9)). There are several references to food ('pira pomaq*ue*' (1a.1), 'mele, salt, salamones' (1a.5), 'panis ordeus, halpenypykys' (1a.10), 'sulsaq*ue* plumba' (1a.20)), which could appeal to either sight or taste, and three references to bells ('bellia bolne' (1a.7), 'clocheriaq*ue*' (1a.17), 'bel' (1a.20)) which could be to sight or sound. If we take 'bolne' to mean 'swollen', it would suggest the poet is more interested in the appearance rather than the sound of bells.

[38] Richardson, *Middle-Class Writing*, p. 45. On broadsides and bills, see Clementine Oliver, *Parliament and Political Pamphleteering in Fourteenth-Century England* (York: York Medieval Press, 2010), pp. 14-20; Wendy Scase, '"Strange and Wonderful Bills": Bill-Casting and Political Discourse in Late Medieval England', *New Medieval Literatures*, 2 (1998), 225-47; Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 29; Marion Turner, 'Conflict', in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 258-73 (esp. pp. 259-67). For the broadside attacking John of Gaunt which was pinned to Westminster Hall and St. Paul's, see: *The Anonimalle Chronicle, 1333-1381*, ed. by V. H. Galbraith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1927), pp. 104-5. For a recent discussion on the material aspects of documentary production in the city, see Linne R. Mooney, 'Locating Scribal Activity in Late Medieval London', in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, ed. by Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney (York: York Medieval Press, 2008), pp. 183-204.

both hugely potent – in their capacity to foment division – and hugely impotent – in their being ultimately subject to the vicissitudes of power. And it is this which, in part, marks out late fourteenth-century London as distinct.[39] Of course, urban writings are not unique to Richard's reign, while anxieties about dangerous speech and the sins of the tongue are certainly not confined to Ricardian London.[40] But these anxieties, coinciding with an emerging concern amongst the urban professional classes with the importance of literary and documentary culture, establishes in Ricardian London paradoxical discourses about the transformative power of words. It is the conflicting place of words in the city that is refracted in a range of surviving writings from the period, many of which demonstrate an awareness of, and anxieties about, the prevalence of *verba vana* in London.

There are other reasons for thinking of Richard II's London as a distinct point in history. The literary achievements of this period have long been recognised, and the three prominent authors – Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower and William Langland – have all been read within a London context.[41] This period has also been of significance to historians of the English language, as it witnessed not only English poetry, but also the first parliamentary text in English (produced by the Londoner

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[39] On London's distinctness, see Barron, 'London, 1300-1450', esp. p. 440.

[40] See, for example, David Cressy's recent work on slanderous speech and idle talk which focuses particularly on the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. David Cressy, *Dangerous Talk: Scandalous, Seditious, and Treasonable Speech in Pre-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). For London writing before Richard II see: Ralph Hanna, *London Literature*. For a useful overview of London books during the emergence of print, see Boffey, 'London Books'. For London in the early modern period, see Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[41] For an overview of studies of Chaucer's London roots, see David Raybin, 'Chaucer as a London Poet: A Review Essay', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 24 (2007), 21-29. For Gower as a London (and urban) poet, see Robert Epstein, 'London, Southwark, Westminster: Gower's Urban Contexts', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 43-60. For Langland as a London poet, see Caroline M. Barron, 'William Langland: A London Poet', in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. by Barbara Hanawalt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 91-109, and C. David Benson, *Public 'Piers Plowman': Modern Scholarship and Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

Thomas Usk), and the first entry in the civic letter-books in English.[42] Finally, urban historians have been drawn to this period as it featured substantial factional divisions within the city, two iconoclastic mayors, urban violence, quarrels between the king and the city, substantial pageantry, and the public burning of civic records. These events and developments mark out Ricardian London as distinctive. While the broad focus on this project is on Ricardian London, my particular interest is in the middle years of his reign, from around 1383 – when Nicholas Brembre was elected as mayor – to 1397 – just before Richard began mobilising against his opponents.[43] This project will thus engage with one important national crisis – the Merciless Parliament of 1388 – but it will also be concerned with more parochial events – the execution of John Constantyn, the 1383 election, and the trial of Northampton and his allies. It is, this project will show, in the highly-factional and emotionally-charged texts which surround these events that Londoners' awareness of, and anxieties about, the prevalence of *verba vana* become most visible.

In exploring different responses to the prevalence of *verba vana*, this project will adopt a resolutely text-centric approach. In selecting texts for this study I have not sought to be representative or comprehensive, as I am not arguing that concerns about *verba vana* manifest themselves in all urban writings.[44] Rather, I have

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[42] The earliest English text in the letter-books is a proclamation by Brembre printed in Appendix 6b. For the most powerful case for English's emergence in this period, see Basil Cottle, *The Triumph of the English, 1350-1400* (London: Blandford Press, 1969). The extent to which English *triumphed* in this period will be explored elsewhere in this project.

[43] I thus omit discussions of the 1381 rising and the deposition, which have been productively explored elsewhere. See Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*; Paul Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422* (London: Yale University Press, 1998); Jenni Nuttall, *The Creation of Lancastrian Kingship: Literature, Language and Politics in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[44] Two particular writers are notable by their absence from this project: William Langland and Thomas Usk. Langland's London autobiography is a fascinating passage, and there is much to say about the dynamics of speech in Langland's work. However, C. David Benson's magisterial study of the poem, *Public 'Piers Plowman'*, explores the poem's London context in a compelling and thorough way. Usk is an important figure in urban textual culture and he experiences both forms of *verba vana*: he is subject to Londoners' 'janglynge' and his documentary discourses are subject to

selected a diffuse range of texts which all produce interesting responses to *verba vana's* omnipresence. In discussing these texts, I will be exploring not only what they say, but also how they say it: the language, imagery and rhetorical tropes that the texts deploy. In approaching these texts, I have been particularly influenced by Natalie Zemon Davis's study of sixteenth-century pardon tales. Davis's work examines 'the "fictional" aspect of these documents', by which she does 'not mean their feigned elements, but rather, using the other and broader sense of the root word *fingere*, their forming, shaping and molding elements: the crafting of a narrative'.[45] I thus follow Davis in exploring how 'people told stories', whether those people are canonical poets or unnamed urban officials.[46] It is because of my interest in the text – its material presence, its narrative structures, and its linguistic and stylistic features – that I have made infrequent use of the published calendars and translations of urban writings, and have turned instead to the source archives themselves from which I have produced new transcriptions of many hitherto-undiscussed texts.[47]

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revision. However, these issues have been productively explored by Turner and Strohm. See Marion Turner, 'Usk and the Goldsmiths', *New Medieval Literatures*, 9 (2007), 139-77; Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 93-129; Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 145-60; Paul Strohm, 'Politics and Poetics: Usk and Chaucer in the 1380s', in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, ed. by Lee Patterson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 83-112.

[45] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 3. For recent post-medieval work following in the footsteps of Davis, see Malcolm Gaskill, 'Reporting Murder: Fiction in the Archives in Early Modern England', *Social History*, 23, 1 (1998), 1-30; M. Jackson, 'Fiction in the Archives?: Sources for the Social History of Infanticide', *Archives*, 27 (2002), 173-85. Davis is cited as an influence by Mary Flowers Braswell in her *Chaucer's "Legal Fiction": Reading the Records* (London: Associated University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 15-16. Richard Firth Green mentions Davis in passing, but feels that medieval legal texts lack the complexity necessary for her approach; see his 'Medieval Literature and Law', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 407-31 (esp. pp. 408-10).

[46] Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, p. 4. I have also been particularly influenced by C. David Benson, who has focused on how the urban records are 'constantly relating entertaining stories'. Benson goes so far as to describe the *Letter-Books* as like a 'tale-telling contest'. Benson does not name Davis, but their approaches share a great deal. See his 'Literary Contests and London Records in the *Canterbury Tales*', in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. by Ardis Butterfield (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 129-44 (pp. 137-38).

[47] These transcriptions (together with translations) appear as a series of appendices to this project.

One important objective and principle underlining my approach is to analyse each text on its own merits. Recent criticism has tended to produce an holistic picture of urban writing, linking disparate texts and disparate writers.[48] This tendency has been spurred on by new discoveries revealing the overlap in the personnel responsible for literary and documentary production. We now know, for example, that Thomas Usk was a scribe, a writer of political testimony (his *Appeal*), a reader of Chaucer, and a writer of literature (his *Testament of Love*).[49] Equally, Linne R. Mooney has suggested that it 'seems very likely' that Chaucer's scribe, Adam Pynkhurst, was behind the *Mercers' Petition*.[50] I would, however, hesitate before using Pynkhurst to draw connections between disparate texts and individuals in London. For a start, questions remain over the accuracy of the identification; Mooney herself expresses some doubt when she says it only 'seems very likely' that Pynkhurst was the scribe, and Jane Roberts has recently argued that '[c]onvincing evidence that Adam Pynkhurst was scribe B remains uncertain'.[51] Equally, even if we do accept that Adam Pynkhurst was the scribe behind the *Mercers' Petition* and the early Chaucer manuscripts, it is unclear how significant this discovery is. Turner views Pynkhurst as assuming '[r]esponsibility' for the *Mercers' Petition*, but this is contradicted by my discovery that the *Mercers' Petition* is actually just a translation

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[48] See, for instance, Turner's discussion of the *House of Fame* and the *Mercers' Petition*, which pays little heed to the distinct form and origins of the *Mercers' Petition* (*Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 8-30). Elsewhere, she argues that scribes are the 'crucial lynchpins for the interplay between the livery companies and Ricardian poets' ('Usk and the Goldsmiths', p. 142). Consider also B. W. Lindeboom's suggestion that 'Pynkhurst's involvement in the Mercers' Petition' suggests that 'Chaucer's office was closer to Brembre and Usk than it is often assumed'. See his *Venus' Owne Clerk: Chaucer's Debt to the 'Confessio Amantis* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 53.
[49] For the most recent overview of Usk, see Turner, 'Usk and the Goldsmiths'.
[50] Linne R. Mooney, 'Chaucer's Scribe', *Speculum*, 81 (2006), 97-138.
[51] Jane Roberts, 'On Giving Scribe B a Name and a Clutch of London Manuscripts from *c.*1400', *Medium Aevum*, 80, 2 (2011), 247-70 (p. 263). Prior to Roberts' article, Alan J. Fletcher produced an interesting discussion of 'where to draw the line' as regards scribal identification. See 'What did Adam Pinkhurst (Not) Write: A Reply to Dr Horobin', *Review of English Studies*, 61, 252 (2010), 690-710.

of a contemporary Anglo-Norman petition.[52] Pynkhurst should not necessarily be

viewed as an innovative pseudo-author, when he could be viewed as simply an

efficient scribe who gained employment from a variety of sources and was able to

adapt himself to various contexts. Consequently, this project does not attempt to read

texts alongside each other, but instead firmly contextualises each text within its

unique historical, political, generic, and diplomatic context.[53]

As a result of this approach, this thesis will exhibit a degree of

fragmentariness. For while my discussions will be linked by this thesis's overall

concern with the topic of *verba vana*, I will be adapting my methodologies and

emphases to suit the requirements of each individual text. I offer no apologies for

such fragmentariness; indeed, I would argue it is vital to any sensitive study of such

diffuse writings. This fragmentariness is also in keeping with the *Stores of the Cities*,

the poem that inspired this project and which itself turns fragmentariness into an art

form. As well as taking its inspiration from this poem, this project will also draw on

the *Stores* for its structuring impetus. Each of the four chapters of this dissertation

takes as its starting point one of the poem's four half-line descriptions of London.

This project begins in the very heart of the city of London to explore representations

of Cheapside. Inspired by the half-line 'Chepp, stupha, coklana' (1a.2), this first

chapter analyses how *Letter-Book H*, Richard of Maidstone's *Concordia*, and

Chaucer's *Cook's Tale*, reflect on urban antagonism. The second chapter – inspired

by the half-line 'doliu*m*, leo verbaq*ue* vana' (1a.2) – moves beyond Cheapside to

consider the textual productions of the city's guilds. This chapter explores how in

their 1388 petitions, the guilds of London employ a range of strategies to legitimise

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[52] Turner, 'Conflict', p. 264. For my discussion of the *Mercers' Petition* as a translation, see chapter 2, pp. 127-33.
[53] The exception to this is chapter 4 where I read the *Squire's Tale* alongside the *Boke of Cupide*. But this is done advisedly, and is based on generic parallels between the works.

their own voice and delegitimise Brembre's. Chapter three moves beyond the walls of the city to Southwark (home of John Gower) and to Westminster (home of the Monk of Westminster). Inspired by the half-line '[l]ancea cu*m* scutis' (1a.3), this chapter explores how these authors depict discursive turbulence arising in the wake of an execution. The final chapter takes its inspiration from the *Stores'* opening line – 'pira pomaq*ue*, regia thron*us*' (1a.1) and moves outside the city entirely. This chapter discusses how two literary writers, Clanvowe and Chaucer, depict crises in speech in courtly and natural settings. This project concludes by returning to the *Stores of the Cities* to reflect on how the notoriety of *verba vana* drove textual innovation in this period.

'Chepp, stupha, Coklana': Ricardian Cheapside and Urban Power Struggles

Introduction

In criticism of the *Stores*, a repeated emphasis is placed on the poem's density and ambiguity.[1] The poem's relatively simplistic structure – it is little more than a mostly asyndetic list of concrete nouns with the occasional adjective – belies a semantic complexity. Much of this complexity arises from the *Stores*-poet's choice of words. The poet deploys words which are polysemous (such as 'doliu*m*' (1a.2): a prison and a cask), and he makes frequent use of synecdoche ('bolt' (1a.7), representing the entire gate to Lincoln), and metonymy ('regia thron*us*' (1a.1), referring by association to the king).[2] In these examples, words are deployed for the richness and multiplicity of their associations, rather than for their straightforward denotations. Even when the poet uses proper nouns – the meanings of which are ostensibly more precise – a similar concern for multiplicity can be detected. In the poem, four specific areas get named: London's 'Chepp, stupha, Coklana' (1a.2) are named, and is Norwich's 'dy^r^ʒt [...] vicus' (1a.11). Notably, at least three of these areas share an association with illicit sexual practices. The Stews and Cock Lane were areas

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[1] In his edition, Rigg notes that the poem presents 'many problems', and he acknowledges his translation is doubtful. Clarke stresses the poem's 'incongruous elements' in her analysis, while Turner has also argued the poet treats space as 'indeterminate' and boundless. See Rigg, 'The Stores', p. 127, 129, fn. 6; Clarke, *Literary Landscapes*, p. 127; Marion Elizabeth Turner, 'Urban Chaucer: Fragmented Fellowships and Troubled Teleologies in Some Late Fourteenth Century Texts' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2002), p. 35.

[2] For the 'doilu*m*' punning see Appendix 1b, p. 308-09. For Lincoln's 'bolt', see appendix 1c, pp. 311-12. For the use of metonymy, see pp. 220-21 below. It could be argued that metonymy and synecdoche are the dominant devices of the poem, as each word conjures up the city space either through referring to a part of it or to associated concepts.

outside London's walls and were infamous for prostitution,[3] while 'dy^r^ʒt [...] vicus', or 'Dirt Street' refers to Norwich's 'gropecuntelane', a street which Elizabeth Rutledge suggests was 'presumably a red-light district'.[4] The *Stores*-poet appears here to be concerned with these spaces' suggestiveness, rather than their topography.

The fourth area mentioned, London's Cheapside, sits somewhat uneasily alongside these other spaces. There is limited evidence of prostitutes acting on Cheapside: perhaps the most famous medieval prostitute, John (aka Eleanor) Rykener, was propositioned while (s)he was passing 'per vicum regium de Chepe'.[5] Prostitutes also evidently made a living in the city, and it is reasonable to assume that Cheapside, due to its centrality, was a typical place for them to solicit clients.[6] However, Cheapside was not as notorious a locus for prostitution as Cock Lane, the Stews, or 'gropecuntelane', and it would be reductive to view the *Stores*-poet's mention of the street as solely, or primarily, a reference to illicit sexual behaviour. This is especially so as the word 'Chepp' occupies a strategic point in the poem, bridging the gap between the elevated figures of the poem's first line (referring to nature and regal authority) and the more quotidian – and identifiably urban – figures in the second line (mentioning prostitutes, taverns, and jails). 'Chepp' functions as a marker in the poem, grounding the audience in London for the first time. 'Chepp'

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[3] See the discussion of the parading of convicted prostitutes through the city to Cock Lane, where they were left to continue their trade in Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 187. The Stews were regulated by the Bishop of Winchester, and a set of regulations is published in J. B. Post, 'A Fifteenth-Century Customary of the Southwark Stews', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 5 (1977), 418-28. On Southwark, see Martha Carlin, *Medieval Southwark* (London: Hambledon Press, 1991).

[4] Elizabeth Rutledge, 'Landlords and Tenants: Housing and the Rented Property Market in Early Fourteenth-Century Norwich', *Urban History*, 22, 1 (1995), 7-24 (p. 20, fn. 33).

[5] The case, contained in the plea and memoranda rolls, is edited and translated in David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, 'The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth Century London', *GLQ*, 1 (1995), 459-465 (p. 461).

[6] That a proclamation was issued in 1393 blaming 'common harlots' in places 'within the said city' for causing 'affrays' testifies to the continued presence of prostitutes in the city. *Memorials of London and London Life, in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. and trans. by Henry Thomas Riley (London: Longmans, Green, 1868), pp. 534-55 (p. 534); *CLBH*, p. 402. It is worth noting that by the early seventeenth century, Cheapside's association with prostitution was more notorious, as illustrated in the appropriately-titled *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. See Thomas Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, ed. by R. B. Parker (London: Methuen, 1969).

can thus already be read as functioning metonymically, as it shares with Cock Lane

and the Stews associations with prostitution, but also synecdochically, as it stands

for the city of London itself. This chapter seeks to explore in more depth the

associations of Cheapside to understand further why the *Stores*-poet situates it so

prominently in his poem.

Work by urban theorists has done much to emphasise the fluid and fractured

nature of 'social spaces', spaces produced and defined by individual societies.[7] In

particular, Henri Lefebvre argues that social spaces are sites of 'accumulation': sites

where 'living beings, things, objects, works, signs and symbols' coincide.[8] They are

also sites where particular societies coincide, for each specific social space – lacking

tangible boundaries – cannot but 'conflict' or, at least, 'interpenetrate one another'.[9]

Cheapside – the street which ran from east to west through the heart of London –

was one such site of accumulation, interpenetration, and conflict. Indeed, it was

arguably the foremost site in London for such accumulation.[10] While other spaces in

the city had dominant and restrictive associations – the Guildhall was associated with

the urban records and the civic elite; St Paul's was associated with civic religious

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[7] The two most oft-quoted studies of space (and especially urban space) remain Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991) and Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the City', in his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (London: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 91-110. A useful account of the development of theories of 'social space' is found in Bobby M. Wilson, 'Social Space and Symbolic Interaction', in *The Human Experience of Space and Place*, ed. by Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 135-47. For applications of these theories to medieval literature, see especially Albrecht Classen, 'Urban Space in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age: Historical, Mental, Cultural and Social-Economic Investigations', in *Urban Space in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 1-145; Benson, 'Some Poets' Tours', pp. 1-20; Ruth Evans, 'The Production of Space in Chaucer's London', in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. by Ardis Butterfield (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 41-56.
[8] Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 101. While his thesis is different, de Certeau similarly notes how cities are the site of 'accumulated times'; see *Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 108.
[9] Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp. 86-88. I have removed Lefebvre's emphases.
[10] Notably, Lefebvre pinpoints the origins of accumulation in the market spaces that emerge in Western Europe from the twelfth century onwards. He sees the marketplace as distinct both from its historical forebear, the fora, and from its contemporary spaces, cathedrals and guildhalls. For, the marketplace 'brought commerce inside the town and lodged it at the centre of a transformed urban space' which was marked out as a 'place of exchange and communications, and therefore of networks'. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp. 262-68 (esp. pp. 265-66).

practices (notably the worship of St Erkenwald); and Cornhill was associated with commerce and punishment[11] – Cheapside's associations were more expansive. It was the site of market stalls, churches, a hospital, crosses, guild halls and conduits. And it was the site of kings, shopkeepers, martyrs, artisans, political dissidents, urban officials, and petty criminals. This chapter is about accumulation; it characterises Cheapside as a problematic space, a space where a multiplicity of competing interests collide and a space where urban power struggles were played out. This chapter considers how such collisions and struggles manifest themselves in urban writings.[12] While this chapter's primary focus is on Cheapside, it will also provide a useful overview of late fourteenth-century London, introducing some of the key personages, events, and conflicts which will reappear throughout this project.

This chapter begins by offering a brief account of the historical Cheapside to expand upon the above suggestion that it was a conflicted and fluid space. It then takes three works in turn to explore how they depict and engage with Cheapside's power struggles. The first section explores *Letter-Book H*, in which the civic officials seek to privilege their words and define Cheapside as a space for transparency and order. Section two focuses on Richard Maidstone's *Concordia*, and analyses the

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[11] For a discussion of the Guildhall, see Caroline M. Barron, *The Medieval Guildhall of London* (London: Corporation of London, 1974), pp. 15-24. For its symbolic importance, see Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, pp. 24-28. For St Paul's, see Caroline M. Barron and Marie-Hélène Rousseau, 'Cathedral, City and State, 1300-1540', in *St Paul's: The Cathedral Church of London*, ed. by Derek Keene, Arthur Burns, Andrew Saint (London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 33-44. For a brief recent discussion of St Erkenwald see Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 64-71. For Cornhill (and especially the pillory) see C. David Benson, '*Piers Plowman* as Poetic Pillory: The Pillory and the Cross', in *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall*, ed. by David Aers (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 31-54. This article, in amplified form, appears in *Public 'Piers Plowman'*, pp. 206-35. Out of these three spaces, Cornhill is the most diverse in its associations (a point noted by Benson). However, it does not have the associations with conspicuous consumption and with regal (and, to an extent, mayoral) authority that mark out Cheapside.
[12] Helen Fulton has attempted a similar exercise, focusing on the way different medieval records 'variously constructed' Cheapside as 'a specific kind of social space'. Fulton notes that, particularly in the literary records, Cheapside is 'a social space which is not only intersected by multiple interest groups, but is a space in which relations of power are acted out and problematized'. See her 'Cheapside in the Age of Chaucer', in *Medieval Cultural Studies: Essays in Honour of Stephen Knight*, ed. by Ruth Evans, Helen Fulton and David Matthews (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), pp. 138-51 (p. 148).

fantasy of mediation which Maidstone envisages taking place on Cheapside. The final section turns to Chaucer's fragmentary *Cook's Tale*, a text in which Chaucer traces out the consequences of uncontrolled accumulation. The chapter then concludes by returning briefly to the *Stores*, to see how an exploration of textual manifestations of Cheapside can aid our reading of this dense and ambiguous poem.

Conceptualising Late Fourteenth-Century Cheapside

To analyse textual manifestations of Cheapside it is first necessary to understand Cheapside's various and conflicting roles within civic life. Cheapside, referred to as Chepe or Westchepe (not to be confused with the ward of Chepe or the smaller street of Estchepe), was the most significant public space within the medieval city of London. Measuring some '450 yards long by 20 yards wide',[13] the street ran horizontally through the centre of the city, connecting with Cornhill at the eastern end and with the Shambles and St. Paul's at the western end. By 1400, the street was dominated by four substantial constructions – the Great and Little Conduits at the street's east and west ends respectively, the Great Cross, and the Standard – and it was bookended by the city's two most important churches: St Paul's and the church of St Thomas of Acon.[14] Other notable buildings in the street included the hospital of

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[13] Derek Keene, 'Shops and Shopping in Medieval London', in *Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology in London*, ed. by Lindy Grant (London: British Archaeological Association, 1984), pp. 29-46 (pp. 32-33).

[14] The two saints – Paul and Thomas Becket – also appear on either side of the seal of the city of London. This 'polar relationship' is noted in D. J. Keene and Vanessa Harding, 'St. Mary Colechurch 105/18', in *Historical Gazetteer of London before the Great Fire – Cheapside: Parishes of All Hallows Honey Lane, St Martin Pomary, St Mary le Bow, St Mary Colechurch and St Pancras Soper Lane* (Cambridge: [n. pub.], 1987), pp. 490-517, online edn, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=4620>, [Last accessed: 24 November 2011].

St Thomas of Acon (where the Mercers assembled on guild business),[15] the visually impressive Goldsmiths' Row, and the church of St Michael le Querne.

Cheapside's particular significance throughout the medieval and into the early-modern period was as London's foremost shopping district, the word 'Cheap' itself deriving from the Old English 'ćeap', meaning 'barter, buying and selling, market'.[16] There were two types of trading taking place in Cheapside. Firstly, there were the fixed shops. Derek Keene has estimated that in the earlier part of the fourteenth century there would have been approximately 400 shops along the street, each measuring 'six or seven feet in front, and ten to twelve feet in depth', although following the Black Death this number decreased.[17] These buildings contained a shop on the ground floor with storage in either the cellar or the solar above.[18] These shops were reserved for the more prestigious of the city's traders: the Goldsmiths dominated, along with similarly large areas owned by Mercers and Saddlers. Consequently, Cheapside became an aesthetically pleasing space, where the finest 'textiles, clothing, and personal adornments' were the main produce sold and displayed.[19]

Secondly, there were the less exclusive street markets, which attracted all classes. These markets – including 'both sedentary and ambulatory traders'[20] – dealt mostly in food and drink, although they also sold clothes and other essentials of a

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[15] The Mercers appear to have been using the hospital's hall from as early as 1348. For details, see Anne F. Sutton, *The Mercery of London: Trade, Goods, and People, 1130-1578* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 72-74.

[16] s.v. 'cheap, n.[1]', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), online edn (2011), <http://www.oed.com/>, [Last accessed 1 November 2011].

[17] Keene, 'Shops and Shopping', p. 34.

[18] David Clark, 'The Shop Within?: An Analysis of the Architectural Evidence for Medieval Shops', *Architectural History*, 43 (2000), 53-87 (p. 59).

[19] Keene, 'Shops and Shopping', p. 31. The visually impressive space of Cheapside is emphasised in *London Lickpenny*. As the narrator arrives on Cheapside he is offered 'velvet, sylke, and lawne' and the 'fynest' Paris 'thred' (ll. 66-68).

[20] Derek Keene, 'Tanners' Widows, 1330-1350', in *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 1-27 (p. 11).

lesser quality than those available from the shops. The more public nature of these markets resulted in a greater concern over guaranteeing the quality of the produce. In the later years of the fourteenth century, attempts were made to regulate these markets more closely: the new post of Common Hunt introduced in 1379 controlled and collected money from the leasing out of stalls,[21] while *Letter-Book H* records attempts to regulate the 'evechepynges' (evening markets), at which were sold under cover of darkness 'wares that have been larcenously pilfered, and some falsely wrought, some that are old, as being new'.[22]

By virtue of its commercial significance, Cheapside also became a socially significant space. Londoners, by necessity, visited the stalls in Cheapside to purchase their victuals, and they would here interact with citizens, apprentices, foreigners, and aliens. It was not only the need to purchase goods that brought Londoners to the street: the principal water supply for Londoners was at the Great Conduit at the eastern end of the street. Social interaction on Cheapside was further encouraged by the street's various inns (such as 'The Lion' and 'le Got'),[23] while the halls of craft guilds and the parish churches would also have been more exclusive meeting places. The inevitable throngs gathered on the street resulted in Cheapside becoming an important space for the authorities of the city to communicate with the commonalty. This communication included stating or restating the ordinances that Londoners should observe. For example, the rules over the holding of the *evechepynges* mentioned above were 'publicly proclaimed in full market in Westchepe and

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[21] On the position, see Barron, *London*, pp. 192-93; Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 241-42. In 1379, stallholders were charged 13 shillings and 4 pence to lease a stall at the Standard (*Memorials*, p. 435).
[22] *Memorials*, pp. 532-34; *CLBH*, p. 391.
[23] For 'the Lion' see Sutton, *Mercery*, p. 142 and Keene and Harding, 'St. Pancras Soper Lane 145/37', *Gazetteer*. For 'Le Got' see Keene and Harding, 'All Hallows Honey Lane 11/10', *Gazetteer*.

Cornhulle'.[24] While other proclamations copied into *Letter-Book H* do not specify a location for their delivery,[25] it must be likely that the majority of these were proclaimed in Cheapside, where the words were guaranteed a substantial audience.

Alongside verbal communications, Cheapside was also the location in which the authorities could assert their power through visibly punishing malefactors. Criminals were paraded through Cheapside as a sign of their transgression: William Hughot, for example, was ordered to carry a lighted candle through Cheapside to the church of St Dunstan after he had physically and verbally assaulted an alderman in 1387.[26] There were also static punishments: in 1384, Nicholas Brembre had John Constantyn, Cordwainer, beheaded on Cheapside to quell growing dissent.[27] Less dramatically, in 1378 ten men of 'Erhethe' were convicted of having used nets that were too small – thereby risking the depletion of the Thames's fish by catching fish that weren't fully grown – and the nets were 'ordered to be burnt in Chepe' as a warning to others.[28] Such a penalty was not entirely effective – there is another case of false nets being burnt in 1396[29] – but it does show how infractions (and particularly infractions against commercial rules) were visibly punished on Cheapside as a warning to others.[30]

Implicit in the above is, of course, the fact that the laws of the city were frequently broken. This provides an example of the problematic and conflicted

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[24] *Memorials*, p. 533.

[25] Appendix 6 of this project transcribes five proclamations dating between 1378 and 1386. None of these provide any details of the proclamation's delivery.

[26] *Memorials*, p. 493. The parading of prisoners is discussed further below, see pp. 53-54.

[27] The case of John Constantyn, Cordwainer, is explored in depth in chapter three of this thesis. See pp. 199-218.

[28] *CLBH*, p. 86.

[29] *CLBH*, pp. 426-27.

[30] For a discussion of the importance of civic punishments being 'legible' and 'transparent', see Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, esp. pp. 118-19. For Cheapside as a 'place of exemplary punishment', see Vanessa Harding, 'Cheapside: Commerce and Commemoration', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 71, 1 (2008), 77-96 (pp. 90-94). Harding's work is on early-modern Cheapside, but much of her discussion is applicable to the fourteenth century.

nature of Cheapside; for, while it was the site for the authorities to assert their power, it was also the site where that authority was resisted, whether by revolutionary Cordwainers or negligent fishermen. Barron casts the late fourteenth century as a period in which Londoners 'were on the march', and Cheapside was one of the arenas in which struggles against the authorities were played out.[31] Sometimes these attempts to resist authority were of a particularly violent nature: as part of the 1381 rising the vintner Richard Lions 'and many others, were beheaded in Cheapside' by the rebels.[32] However, on other occasions these revolts were of a more symbolic kind. Following the election of Nicholas Brembre in 1383, a group of Londoners shut their windows as a sign of insurrection.[33] Cheapside's position as a social hub thus provided the authorities both with an opportunity, allowing them to deliver verbal and visual information to the broad populace of the city, and with a threat, as the gathered populace of London possessed the strength in numbers to resist.

Alongside these everyday social and commercial functions, Cheapside was also an important ceremonial space within the city. Cheapside was the city's widest thoroughfare and consequently became the central route for processions through the city. These included civic occasions, the most notable of which were the mayor's annual riding on the 29th of October when 'the whole city was *en fête*'.[34] The newly-elected mayor would travel south from the Guildhall onto Cheapside and then

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[31] Caroline M. Barron, 'Richard II and London', in *Richard II and the Art of Kingship*, ed. by Anthony Goodman and James L. Gillespie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 129-54 (p. 134). Barron suggests the Londoners' rebelliousness arose, in part, as a consequence of the drastic population decrease following the Black Death.
[32] *Memorials*, p. 450.
[33] This event is discussed in the next section of this chapter; see pp. 56-63.
[34] Barron, *London*, p. 152. For brief contemporary insights into the ridings see *Memorials*, p. 424, pp. 620-21; *Liber Albus: The White Book of the City of London, Compiled AD 1419 by John Carpenter, Common Clerk, and Richard Whitington, Mayor*, trans. by Henry Thomas Riley (London: Richard Griffin, 1861), pp. 22-23. For a fuller overview of its significance, see Anne Lancashire, *London's Civic Theatre: City Drama and Pageantry from Roman Times to 1588* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 52-54. For the development of the mayor's riding into the Lord Mayor's Show, see Sheila Williams, 'The Lord Mayor's Show in Tudor and Stuart Times', *Guildhall Miscellany*, 10 (1959), 3-18.

through to Westminster flanked by the city's guilds. While this riding was not as theatrical as the later Lord Mayor's show, Anne Lancashire notes that it still contained 'elaborate dress, formal processing' and, by at least 1369, music.[35] Other civic processions along Cheapside were more modest: there were, for example, ridings of newly elected sheriffs; processions of prisoners from Newgate to the pillory, tun, or thew; and processions organised by the city's religious guilds to and from St Paul's.[36]

The most sumptuous pageantry, however, coincided with royal entries, usually marking significant occasions such as Richard II's coronation in 1377, the arrival of Anne into London in 1382, and the reconciliation of the city with Richard in 1392.[37] These and similar pageants, which had begun at least as early at the coronation of Eleanor of Provence in 1236,[38] followed a similar route: they began either at London Bridge (in the case of royal entries) or the Tower of London (in the case of coronations), before progressing through the city onto Cheapside, and then moving westwards into St Paul's and out of the city at Ludgate.[39] During these ceremonies, Cheapside would be decorated with elaborate tapestries mounted on the walls, and there would be golden leaves or coins strewn across the floor. The conduits would flow with wine rather than water, and often there would be

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[35] Lancashire, *London's Civic Theatre*, p. 53. As Lancashire notes, the Goldsmiths' records reveal that they employed a minstrel for this riding in 1369 (the earliest recorded use of a minstrel). By the 1390s – where full records for several guilds survive – such payments to a minstrel are standard.

[36] For the sheriffs' processions, see Lancashire, *London's Civic Theatre*, pp. 53-54. For processions of criminals see Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, pp. 172-87. For an overview of guild ceremonies in London and beyond, see Benjamin R. McRee, 'Unity or Division?: The Social Meaning of Guild Ceremony in Urban Communities', in *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 189-207.

[37] For an overview of these see Gordon Kipling, 'Richard II's "Sumptuous Pageants" and the Idea of the Civic Triumph', in *Pageantry in the Shakespearean Theatre*, ed. by David M. Bergeron (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), pp. 83-103.

[38] Barron, *London*, p. 19.

[39] Lancashire, *London's Civic Theatre*, p. 46.

something erected at the Standard – a castle or tower – where a short performance would be given in front of the royal party.[40]

To an extent, Cheapside's commercial and ceremonial roles co-existed happily. The ceremonial occasions would certainly have benefitted from the talented craftsmen and tradesmen working in and around Cheapside who could create and import whatever elaborate devices were needed. Equally, the ceremonial occasions benefitted the traders in the city for, without a tradition of performing plays (as in Chester and York), the guilds would have welcomed the opportunity to display their skills and wares both to their fellow Londoners and to the foreigners and aliens attracted by such ceremonies.[41] These new visitors – mostly from the higher classes – would have expanded the customer base for the richer shops in Cheapside, but as Barron notes they would also have generated business for the taverners and other lesser.[42]

Nevertheless, there were some tensions because of the dual functions of Cheapside as both a ceremonial and a commercial space. Ceremonies were disruptive to trade; they would often necessitate the removal of the market stalls, while they also required Cheapside to be kept clean and presentable, which placed financial and logistical burdens on the street's sellers.[43] Interestingly, over the course of the fourteenth century, two types of ceremonial occasion appear to have been

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[40] These typical elements were all in place by the time of Queen Margaret's coronation in 1299. For a description, see *Chronicles of the Mayors and Sheriffs of London, A.D. 1188 – A.D. 1274*, trans. by Henry Thomas Riley (London: Trübner, 1863), p. 220.

[41] Jonathan Gil Harris notes how the guild play 'was a production not only *by* a mystery or guild, but also *of* a mystery', thereby demonstrating to the spectators the nature and practices of that mystery. See Jonathan Gil Harris, 'Properties of Skill: Product Placement in Early English Artisanal Drama', in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. by Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 35-66 (esp. pp. 43-44).

[42] Barron, *London*, p. 22.

[43] The disruption caused is illustrated by the London butchers; they were required in the 1380s to do their butchering outside the city walls in Knightsbridge and Stratford, but they vocally complained about the inconvenience this caused. See Barron, 'Richard II and London', p. 143.

removed from Cheapside entirely. First, in 1389 the sheriff's ridings were curtailed. Sheriffs were forbidden from engaging in elaborate ridings from the Guildhall to Westminster, and were instead compelled either to go by barge or to travel by land more modestly 'without there being any arraying of men of the trades'.[44] The decision to curtail this riding was primarily because of the costs the commonalty incurred in purchasing new suits and renting horses, rather than any concerns about disrupting trade on Cheapside. However, it is notable that the revised shrieval ceremony would not have necessitated the removal of market stalls from Cheapside, and would have ensured that the majority of the city's traders did not lose a half-day's business.[45]

Second, after 1331, royal tournaments ceased to be held in Cheapside. Such tournaments were grand affairs lasting several days, and were thus particularly disruptive to civic trade. The 1331 tournament, for example, lasted from Monday 23rd of September until Wednesday 25th, and was preceded by a procession through Cheapside on the Sunday.[46] This tournament was not an unqualified success; as the *Annales Paulini* records, on the first day:

> solarium namque quod fuerat in transversum, in quo residebant regina et omnes aliae dominae ad spectaculum intuendum, subito cecidit solotenus; unde multi tam dominae quam milites graviter fuerunt laesi et vix periculum mortis evaserunt.[47]
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> [*the terrace which lay across [the street], in which sat the queen and all the other ladies watching the spectacle, suddenly collapsed so that many*

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[44] *Memorials*, pp. 515-16.

[45] Lancashire argues that the sheriff's processions were never actually reduced in stature; see Lancashire, *London's Civic Theatre*, p. 54. However, even if nothing changed, it is still significant that these complaints about ceremonials were raised.

[46] Caroline M. Barron, 'Chivalry, Pageantry and Merchant Culture in Medieval London', in *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, ed. by Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), pp. 219-41 (p. 221).

[47] *Annales Paulini*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. by William Stubbs, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1882-83), I (1882), 355.

ladies as well as knights were seriously injured and only just escaped the risk of death].[48]

This was the final tournament to be held in the city; subsequent tournaments, such as one in 1343, were held outside the city walls in Smithfield.[49] The reason for this shift from Cheapside to Smithfield is unclear. Certainly, the endangering of the queen's life in 1331 would have been sufficient motive for the royal party to seek to move away from London's cramped spaces. However, Stow records that following this tournament, rather than seeking to relocate, the king caused to be built on Cheapside 'a shed to be strongly made of stone fore himselfe, the Queene, and other states to stand on, & there to beholde the Iustings'.[50] The commissioning of this 'shed' strongly implies that the royal party expected tournaments to continue to be held on Cheapside, and this raises the likelihood that it was Londoners who desired the relocation. This is the view of Barron, who speculates that 'it may be that the citizens had objected to the closure of the city's busiest market thoroughfare for three days while the jousting took place'.[51] This is a compelling thesis: for the Londoners to be happy surrendering their prime shopping street to a royal tournament for three days seems unlikely, particularly when they had no involvement in the tournaments.[52] This could imply that while there was an acknowledgement that Cheapside had both commercial and ceremonial functions, Londoners themselves placed more value on Cheapside as a commercial space and were unprepared for their commercial activities to be significantly disrupted.

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[48] The translation is my own
[49] Juliet Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and its Context, 1270-1350* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1982), p. 58.
[50] Stow, *Survey of London*, I, 268.
[51] Barron, 'Chivalry, Pageantry and Merchant Culture', p. 221. Barron phrases this point more strongly elsewhere, suggesting that '[c]learly' the tournaments would have 'inconvenienced the normal business of the city'. See Barron, 'Richard II and London', p. 151.
[52] Such tournaments were 'organised by the crown for the delectation of the court'. Barron, 'Chivalry, Pageantry and Merchant Culture', p. 220.

Implicit in the preceding paragraph is another tension surrounding

Cheapside: the tension between the monarch's requirements of the street and

Londoners' requirements. London was the central city of the kingdom; it was the

king's 'cameram' [*special home*] as the *Westminster Chronicle* puts it, and he

wanted it to be clean, peaceful, and welcoming.[53] While London was self-governing,

it was not independent of royal interference. Its liberties could – and were –

withdrawn if the city failed to meet the king's exacting standards.[54] It is thus not

surprising that Londoners sought to maintain harmony with their monarch, both

through regular loans to the crown and through the staging of ceremonies. However,

it would be fallacious to argue that the king's dominance was absolute. One notable

feature of Cheapside was the church of St Thomas of Acon, a building

commemorating the birth of Thomas Becket in Cheapside in the twelfth century.

This building marked the eastern entrance to Cheapside, and would have been one of

the first buildings encountered by a monarch processing along the street. As

Lancashire notes, this establishes an interesting dynamic, as the building served as 'a

continuing reminder of London's desired and expressed independence – even at

times, as in royal entries along Cheapside, of deference to royalty'.[55] Becket's

importance to the city cannot be overstated: his image featured on the city's seal; his

parent's tomb in St Paul's churchyard was incorporated into mayoral inaugurations;

the church and hospital built on the site of his supposed home were regular sites for

burial and bequests; the church assumed a central role in civic and parish

ceremonials throughout the year; and St Thomas's bells could be heard throughout

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[53] *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381-94*, ed. and trans. by L. C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 63.
[54] The withdrawal of the city's liberties in 1391 is discussed below, pp. 65-67**.**
[55] Lancashire, *London's Civic Theatre*, p. 47.

the city and were used to mark out important moments in the day – including the time that trading in Cheapside should end.[56]

It is difficult to judge exactly how potent the image of this church was during a royal procession through the city. While many of the objective features of Cheapside can be recreated and analysed, the subjective component of the space is inevitably more elusive. However, given Becket's importance, it can be assumed that the church itself would have had a particular *imageability*: it would, that is, have evoked strong images and associations in spectators.[57] While quantifying this imageability is difficult, the fate of Sir Robert Bealknap, the chief justice of the Common Pleas, offers some evidence that Londoners were aware of the building's symbolic power. At Richard II's coronation in 1377, the Londoners sought to exercise that 'quod sui erat [...] videlicet officium in pincerna' [*which belonged to them [...] specifically the office of butler*].[58] Bealknap refused superciliously and the Londoners – having first threatened that they 'occidissent eum' [*should have killed him*] – instead 'in dedecus personæ effigiaverunt simile sibi caput, et statuerunt super aquæductum in foro venalium, quod, in adventu regis et plebis, evomeret ore vinum' [*made, to the shame of his person, a head in his likeness, and they set it up above the conduit in the market place so that, at the arrival of the king and masses, it vomited out wine from the mouth*].[59] That this effigy was erected at the 'aquæductum in foro

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[56] For a lengthier account of the significance of this site, see Keene and Harding, 'St. Mary Colechurch 105/18', *Gazetteer*.

[57] The term *imageability* was coined by Kevin Lynch to describe 'that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any observer'. By 'image', Lynch is directly referring to material aspects – shapes, colours, arrangements – but I think his work can be usefully broadened to consider symbolic images as well. See Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960), p. 9.

[58] Thomas Walsingham, *Chronicon Angliæ, ab anno domino 1328 usque ad annum 1388*, ed. by Edward Maunde Thompson (London: Longman, 1874), p. 153. All translations from Walsingham are my own.

[59] Walsingham, *Chronicon Angliæ*, p. 153. For this event, see also John L. Leland, 'Bealknap, Sir Robert (*d.*1401)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1809/>, [Last accessed: 7 Jan 2011].

venalium' – a reference to Cheapside's Great Conduit situated directly outside the church of St Thomas of Acon – raises the possibility that Londoners viewed this area as the site of their independence. A complex symbolic vignette emerges in 1377, with Londoners prostrating themselves in front of the new king, while simultaneously emphasising the necessity of their involvement in royal ceremonials and reminding the royal party that it is not impervious to mockery.

Vanessa Harding argues that when a text described 'an event as "in Cheapside"', this did 'more than locate it geographically: this worked to fix it in the public realm and marked it with significance'.[60] However, as this section has sought to show, the 'significance' of Cheapside was not fixed. It had a range of roles in civic life, and was home to a multiplicity of competing discourses and interests: commercial, ceremonial, civic, regal, dissident, and orthodox. Cheapside was thus a site of accumulation, its associations and significances were fluid, and this allowed writers working in Ricardian London to construct Cheapside in an array of different ways to suit their own agendas. The remaining sections of this chapter seek to explore how Cheapside manifests itself in urban writings.

'[T]am tubis & fistulis ducat*ur* p*er* Chepe' (4.3): Order and Transparency in
Letter-Book H

The London letter-books provide an unparalleled insight into the governance of London from 1275 through until 1689.[61] These volumes are compilations; into them

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[60] Harding, 'Cheapside', p. 77.
[61] For brief introductions to the letter-books see *Memorials*, pp. vii-viii; *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: Letter-Book A, c. A.D. 1275-1298*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John

are copied a wide variety of documentary forms – including judicial processes, petitions, statutes, indictments, proclamations, trading regulations, writs, election returns, and royal ratifications – recording the actions of the mayor and of the Courts of Aldermen and the Common Council, along with miscellaneous urban and national business.[62] The letter-books were jointly overseen by London's chamberlain and common clerk who themselves copied some of the texts into the volumes, although many others appear to have been written by either retainered or freelance scribes.[63] Given the breadth of information found within these volumes it is of no surprise that they have proved of crucial use both to medieval compilers of civic custumals – such as John Carpenter, whose 1419 *Liber Albus* is derived from the letter-books – and to modern urban historians – such as Henry Thomas Riley, whose *Memorials* is 'indebted' to the letter-books 'for its existence', and Caroline Barron, whose magisterial study of medieval London 'is based upon' the letter-books, as well as the plea and memoranda rolls and surviving wills.[64] While Carpenter, Riley, and Barron are all involved in very different scholarly endeavours, they approach the letter-books from a similar perspective: viewing them as repositories of factual information about urban customs and about the political and social life of the city. While such an approach is entirely valid, it can as a consequence overlook how London is depicted in the volumes. This section approaches three entries in *Letter-Book H* from a novel perspective, exploring how the entries' language and the narratives they construct

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Edward Francis, 1899), pp. i-xii; *An Introductory Guide to the Corporation of London Records Office*, ed. by Hugo Deadman and Elizabeth Scudder (London: Corporation of London, 1994), p. 14.
[62] By the end of the fifteenth century, the proceedings of the Courts of Aldermen and Common Council were recorded in dedicated volumes – the *Repertories* and *Journals* respectively.
[63] On the officers, see Barron, *London*, pp. 181-82, 186-88. Riley notes the 'scores of varying hands' appearing in the volumes (*Memorials*, p. vii), and these hands appear to include freelance scribes such as the so-called 'HM 114 scribe' whose hand has been detected in *Letter-Book I*. See Mooney, 'Locating Scribal Activity', pp. 201-02; Ralph Hanna III, 'The Scribe of Huntingdon HM 114', *Studies in Bibliography*, 42 (1989), 120-33.
[64] On Carpenter, see William Kellaway, 'John Carpenter's *Liber Albus*', *Guildhall Studies in London History*, 3 (1978), 67-84; Riley, *Memorials*, p. vii; Barron, *London*, p. 3.

function to legitimise the authority of the civic governing elites, while marking out Cheapside as a transparent and orderly space.

The letter-books are resolutely civic volumes. It is the case that individual entries in the letter-books are dated by the conventional regnal years, so entries in *Letter-Book H* begin in the forty-ninth year of the reign of Edward III (i.e. 1375) and end in the second year of the reign of Henry IV (i.e. 1401). However, other features of the letter-books place a greater emphasis on the figure of the mayor, a figure who has been likened to 'a king' within the 'small domain' of the city.[65] This emphasis can be seen in aspects of the *mise-en-page*. The recto of each folio of *Letter-Book H* contains as a header the folio number (in roman numerals) and the surname of the current mayor (see figs 15 and 16 for a typical opening). These headings – which were contemporaneous with the entries[66] – ensure that each entry is read through the prism of mayoral authority. Casual readers of *Letter-Book H* are oriented not by the regnal years buried within the entries, but by these distinctive headers. And notably, it is not the office of mayor being promoted here, but specific, named individuals. Such a cult of individuality is heightened at the changeover of mayor: when Sir Nicholas Brembre is elected in 1383, a large proportion of folio clxviii is taken up with engrossed letters which read 'de tempore d*omi*ni Nich*ol*i brembre mihtis maioris' [*of the time of master Nicholas Brembre, gentle mayor*] (see figs 17 and 18). The ostentatious nature of this inscription is unprecedented in the letter-books,[67]

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[65] Barron, *London*, p. 147.

[66] The folio numbers and the surnames appear on the same ruled line and are seemingly written by the same hand. Given that the folio numbers can be proven to have been written contemporaneously (see Appendix 2c.2 which gives the folio number for another entry in *Letter-Book H*), so too must the mayoral surnames.

[67] In Appendix 14, I print the opening folios of the mayoralties of Northampton (fig. 20) and Exton (fig. 21) for comparison. Both of these openings differ from the customary headings – 'Norhmpton' is written in a bolder script and Exton's name is followed by the regnal year – but neither are as eye-catching as Brembre's introduction.

and provides a potent visual marker of the shifting power dynamics in the city concurrent with the election of Brembre.

The authority of the civic governors is also inscribed within specific entries in *Letter-Book H*. Benson – one of the few critics to explore the literary character of the letter-books – has considered them as a type of 'tale-telling contest' in that they contain 'a series of competing discourses'.[68] While Benson provides some interesting and valid examples of such discursive competitiveness, it is worth stressing that many entries in the letter-books actually resist such a plurality of discourses. A useful example of this is a 1394 judicial case concerning John Godefray, 'Pynner', who is accused by the hurers of selling 'Cappes [...] qui sunt false & deceptorie facte [...] tam in merrato q*ua*m in domo sua' [*caps which are falsely and deceitfully made as well in the market as in his house*].[69] Seventeen jurors – made up of 'hureres' and 'haberdasshers' – find against Godefray, and the judgement is given that the 'dicte cappes comburentur in Chepa' [*said caps should be burnt in Cheapside*] (3.2) and that Godefray should be fined twenty shillings. This case concerns the regulation of commercial activity in the city: at stake is transparency, a theme foregrounded by the entry's language. In a relatively short text, the phrase 'false & deceptorie' appears five times: Godefray is first charged with having sold caps which 'sunt false & deceptorie facte'; Godefray then testifies that the caps 'sunt bone & sufficientes & non false & deceptorie facte'; London's

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[68] Benson, 'Literary Contests', p. 138. The letter-books have also received attention from David Wallace who makes some pertinent – if brief – comments on the entries and the appearance of the manuscript. See David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 159-62.

[69] See Appendix 3, section 2. 'False' here could refer to the materials used; in 1318-19, the hurers petition for a proclamation banning the making of 'false caps of flocks, and of flocks and wool mixed', *flock* being '[a]' material consisting of the coarse tufts and refuse of wool or cotton'. See s.v. 'flock', *OED*; *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: Letter-Book E, c. A.D. 1313-1337*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1903), p. 87. However, the hurers had three years' previously accused Godefray of producing caps falsely as they had been 'fulled under the feet' when the caps should be 'fulled by the hands of men' (*Memorials*, p. 530). Given this precedent, I would suggest 'false' here refers primarily to the manner of production.

common pleader then repeats the accusation that they 'sunt false & deceptorie facte';

a jury is called to certify whether the caps 'sunt false & deceptorie necne'; and

finally the jury rules that the caps 'sunt false & deceptorie facte' (3.2). In contrast to

the 'elaborate narrations' that Benson detects, the narration here is resolutely

monovocal.[70] Each stage of the judicial narrative – the charge, the plea, the

counterplea, the judgement – is couched identically, with no attempt to capture

idiosyncratic voices. While the text may claim that 'Godefray [...] dicit' [*Godefray

said*] (3.2), it is clear that his words are ventriloquised by the civic authorities who

ensure that through the use of restrictive and focused language, their single,

authoritative perspective dominates. This restrictive language resists any legal or

linguistic slippages; through the fivefold repetition of 'deceptorie' – along with the

double echoing of 'decep*cion*em communitatis' [*to the deception of the community*]

– Godefray's crime of deception is rendered in a forceful and transparent manner.

Alongside reducing the judicial process into a single refrain, the text's

transparency is furthered by its shunning of a technical lexis. There are very few

words from the semantic field of hat-making, and notably those that do appear –

'Pynner', 'Cappes', 'haberdasshers', 'hureres' – are given in English.[71] While it was

conventional for guild names to appear in the vernacular (particularly when they are

in the nominative case), the use of 'Cappes' is more distinctive.[72] The language of

the entry is inclusive rather than exclusive, and so the judgement on Godefray is

made comprehensible to the immediate audience of the various guildsmen attending

the mayor's court. We could also imagine a wider context for this language: there is

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[70] Benson, 'Literary Contests', p. 138.

[71] This text can usefully be compared with the 1391 case against Godefray, which contains several specialist terms, including 'fulled', 'fulling', 'grease', and 'oiled'. *Memorials*, p. 530.

[72] The 1391 case against Godefray uses the Latin 'pile' and the vernacular 'cappes'. Another case from 1394 refers to the burning 'falso*rum* pileo*rum*'. See *LBH*, f. cclx and ccxcix. Even as late as 1418, the Latin is still used; see *Memorials*, p. 667.

limited evidence to suggest that the punishments which took place in and around Cheapside included a spoken glossing.[73] In 1364, for example, John de Hakford was placed on the pillory for perjury, and while there, 'the cause of his punishment shall be solemnly proclaimed'.[74] Similarly, in 1375, William Felde was placed on the pillory for deceitfully confiscating alcohol, and while there 'the cause of his punishment' was 'publicly proclaimed by the Sheriffs'.[75] It should be stressed that these examples are exceptional; similar cases in the letter-books do not demand the proclaiming of the causes of punishments. However, given that these punishments served an exemplary purpose,[76] it must be likely that some gloss was provided for the action even if this was not formally decreed by the civic authorities. Notably, the linguistic choices behind the Godefray text make it well-suited to public paraphrasing: a brief skim read of the document emphasises the charge against Godefray – that his caps were falsely and deceitfully made – and it is tempting to imagine this phrase being recited, possibly in the vernacular, while the caps were burnt 'in Chepa'. This point is speculative; however, even without such recitation, Cheapside is still configured in this entry as the space for commercial transparency, as through public punishments the civic authorities visibly counteract deceit and expose falsehoods.[77] Both through language and action, the civic authorities thus emphasise the extent of their own power, while also foregrounding transparency and legibility.

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[73] Rexroth notes that prostitutes would be taken to the thew where 'her case was proclaimed' (*Deviance and Power*, p. 173). Similarly, the names of unchaste clergyman were publicly proclaimed in the city (*Deviance and Power*, pp. 292-95). Rexroth sees these as part of a wider movement against deceit and an attempt to establish interpretative monopolies.

[74] *Memorials*, p. 667.

[75] *CLBH*, pp. 18-19.

[76] Harding, 'Cheapside', pp. 90-94.

[77] For further examples of the urban authorities' 'visible fight' against 'secrecy and falsity' on Cheapside, see Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, pp. 96-187 (p. 129). See also Harding, 'Cheapside', pp. 90-94.

A second entry in *Letter-Book H* similarly exhibits a concern with issues of deceit and transparency. In 1383, John de Stratton is summoned to respond 'de pl*ac*ito decepc*io*nis & falsitatis' [*concerning a plea of deception and of fraud*].[78] Stratton is accused of having intercepted a letter sent from John Croul to Thomas of London which contained 'diu*er*sa intersigna int*er* eos' [*various countersigns between them*] (4.3). Stratton, 'ip*s*e ymaginando ad decipiend' [*scheming within himself to deceive*], then 'fauxit & fabricavit vnam aliam l*itte*ram continentem* ead*em* int*er*signa' [*counterfeited and forged another letter containing the same countersigns*] (4.3). Using this 'deceptorie' made letter, Stratton approaches Croul and extracts from him money which he 'retinuit false & deceptorie' [*falsely and deceitfully retains*] (4.3). This entry shares with the Godefray case a rhetoric of deceit, although the concern here is with social, rather than commercial, transactions. This entry is also notable as it illustrates anxieties concerning documentary cultures: the *vna alia littera* created by Stratton is falsely made and put to duplicitous use. Whereas Godefray challenged the accusation against him, Stratton 'gratis cognouit fals*e* & decepc*io*nem p*re*dic*t*as' [*freely recognised the aforesaid wrong and deception*] (4.3). The 'gratis cognouit' formulae is conventional, and is used in several contemporary texts dating from the mayoralty of John Northampton (1381-83) by plaintiffs charged with making a false accusation of theft, slandering the mayor, and knowingly selling putrid fish.[79] Interestingly, all of these cases concern forms of *verba vana* from the sins of the tongue tradition: false accusations, slander, and lies. Given Northampton's emphasis on purifying civic behaviour as part of what Frank Rexroth sees as a 'morality campaign', it may be significant that the judicial

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[78] See Appendix 4, paragraph 3. For a brief previous discussion of the Stratton case, see Benson, '*Piers Plowman* as Public Pillory', p. 41.

[79] See *Memorials*, p. 460, 462, 471-72 respectively. There are two other examples of its use outside of Northampton's mayoralty: *Memorials*, p. 241 and 486. I have no doubt there are other examples that are not printed by Riley.

records from this period place particular focus on a plaintiff's 'gratis' acknowledging their wrong.[80] For, this free admission of guilt allows the judicial procedure to narrate a movement from duplicity to honesty, from the deceptive words of the *littere* to the honest and freely-spoken words of Stratton's admission.

Despite Stratton's acknowledgement of guilt, there is a need for punishment which again involves Cheapside:

> consider*atum* est quod idem Joh*anne*s Stratton' ducat*ur* ad prisona*m* de Neugate & abinde eod*em* die cum tubis & fistulis ducat*ur* per Chepe vsq*ue* ad collistrigiu*m* sup*er* Cornhull & sup*er* illud ponat*ur* p*er* vnam horam diei & tunc reducat*ur* vsq*ue* p*r*isona*m* p*r*edic*t*am ib*ide*m moratur*us* vsq*ue* crastino diei p*r*edic*t*i quo de it*er*um ducat*ur* ab inde cum tubis & fistulis vsq*ue* collistrigiu*m* p*r*edic*t*a*m* & p*er* vna*m* horam diei sup*er* illud ponat*ur* &c & tunc reducat*ur* vsq*ue* prisonam p*r*edic*t*am.
>
> [*it is decided that the same John Stratton should be taken to the prison of Newgate and from there the same day, with trumpets and pipes, he should be taken through Cheapside all the way to the pillory upon Cornhill, and be placed upon that for one hour of the day, and then be taken back to the aforesaid prison, to remain in that place until the morrow of the said day, when he again should be taken from there, with trumpets and pipes, all the way to the aforesaid pillory and be put upon that for one hour of the day, etc., and then be taken back to the aforesaid prison*]. (4.3)

The parading of a convict from Newgate to the pillory was common, and appears to have been a punishment particularly favoured by Northampton, who used it to punish, *inter alia*, spreading false reports, cheating at chequers and dice, slandering the mayor, practicing sorcery, and impersonating a physician.[81] The majority of these cases share with the Stratton case an emphasis on deceit or impersonation for financial gain and they all result in similar punishments: spending an hour on the pillory for one, two, or three consecutive days. The language of this entry provides a useful indication of how the civic authorities' conceived of these processions. The

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[80] Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 126 and *passim*.
[81] *Memorials*, pp. 454-66.

description of Stratton's punishment foregrounds order and structure. The stages of the route – 'Neugate', 'Chepe, 'Cornhill' – are carefully itemised, while the repeated use of 'ducat*ur*' and 'reducat*ur*' gives a regimental air to the proceedings. This regimental air is reinforced by the text's repetition of 'cum tubis & fistulis', as the linguistic echoing reflects the fixed nature of each day's procession. Rather than signifying Bacchanalian excess, the trumpets and pipes come to signify an unchanging, carefully-choreographed and meaningful procession.[82] In articulating the punishment for Stratton, the civic authorities conceive of Cheapside as a space receptive to ordered and purposeful processions, a space where they can exact exemplary punishments and establish control over the street and, by extension, the city.

'[I]nsurrecc*io*nem co*n*gregac*io*nes & conuenticul*e*' (5.2): Sir Nicholas Brembre's Anti-Associational Rhetoric

The previous paragraphs have spoken of the civic authorities as an anonymous collective who use commonplace phrases – such as 'false & deceptorie' – to legitimise the voice of officialdom. However, I now want to focus on the figure of Sir Nicholas Brembre to explore how his individual voice infiltrates the urban records and how he uses documentary forms to affirm his authority. Previous studies of fourteenth-century urban politics have often side-lined Brembre – who served two terms as mayor between 1377 and 1378, and another three terms between 1383 and

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[82] I am here influenced by Strohm's comments on the 'closed narrative system' which emerges in post-1381 texts in which revelry is constrained 'through an image of revelry bound over'. See Paul Strohm, '"Lad with revel to Newegate": Chaucerian Narrative and Historical Meta-Narrative', in *Art and Context in Late Medieval English Narrative: Essays in Honor of Robert Worth Frank, Jr*, ed. by Robert R. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 163-76 (pp. 170-71).

1386 – to focus instead on the more 'enigmatic' figure of his rival John

Northampton.[83] Such marginalisation of Brembre is unfortunate; while his mayoral

terms were less revolutionary than Northampton's,[84] he certainly made his mark on

civic life.[85] A particular radicalism can be detected in Brembre's approach to

documentary production. Brembre was aware of the power of words and the

importance of controlling documentary discourses. One example of this is the

period's anti-associational rhetoric. The existence of an 'antiassociational rhetoric' at

this point in London's history has not gone without notice.[86] However, while

previous critics have implied that this rhetoric was non-authored – arguing that it

was part of the general 'textual world' of the period or was one of the 'buzzwords

and key symbols' emerging from the 1381 rising[87] – I seek here to demonstrate that

the rhetoric can be directly linked to Brembre.

This rhetoric can be seen at work in the indictment produced by the civic

authorities in September 1384 concerning 'felon*iis* & p*rodit*oribus' [*felonies and

treasons*] made by John Northampton and two of his accomplices, the mercers John

More and Richard Norbury.[88] Treason trials could begin either with an appeal by an

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[83] Two modern historians describe him as 'enigmatic': Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, p. 77; Nightingale, *Medieval Mercantile Community*, p. 227. For a useful overview of medieval and modern responses to Northampton, see Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, pp. 141-44. Rexroth continues this focus on Northampton, who he views as a 'moral crusader' (p. 133).

[84] Northampton implemented substantial changes to London's electoral systems, while he also intervened forcefully in social and commercial life in the city. For details, see Bird, *Turbulent London*, pp. 263-91; Nightingale, 'Capitalists', pp. 3-35; Nightingale, *Medieval Mercantile Community*, pp. 263-91.

[85] The 1388 guild petitions discussed in chapter two are indicative of how resentful some Londoners were over Brembre's changes. Brembre's notoriety in London lasted long after his death: in 1415 an insolent grocer is threatened 'with Brembre's fate, if he did not conduct himself well and honestly'. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: Letter-Book I, c. A.D. 1400-1422*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1900), p. 132.

[86] The phrase is taken from Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, p. 171. See also Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, esp. pp. 18-19, 127-31; Michael Hanrahan, 'London', in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 266-80 (p. 272); Strohm, '"Lad with revel"', pp. 166-67.

[87] Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 127; Strohm, '"Lad with revel"', p. 165.

[88] See Appendix 5, section 2.

individual or by an indictment produced by local juries.[89] Although the national

authorities did have in their possession an appeal, produced by Thomas Usk and

used against Northampton at his earlier trial at Reading in August 1384, it was this

indictment which began the second trial.[90] While the indictment was produced for a

non-civic context – the trial was presided over by John Montague, Robert Tresilian

and Robert Bealknap – it is copied into *Letter-Book H* as part of a lengthier account

of the delivery from prison of the three men.[91] The indictment addresses the

aftermath of the divisive mayoral election of October 1383 at which Brembre was

elected mayor. Northampton continued agitating for Brembre's removal until he was

arrested on the 7th of February 1384 amidst suspicion that he 'was endeavouring to

create disturbances of various kinds in the city of London'.[92] Following

Northampton's arrest, disturbances continued in the city led by More and Norbury,

and it is these disturbances which are narrated in the indictment.

The indictment describes how More and Norbury:

> fece*r*unt pl*u*res co*n*uenticlas co*n*gregac*i*ones & Couinas [...] P*er* quod
> hostia & fenestre pl*u*rimar*um* domor*um* & shopar*um* in Westchepe
> Bugerowe ffletestrete & alibi in Ciuitate & suburbiis p*redicti*s prius
> mane ap*er*ta postea cito in signu*m* insurrectionis claudebant*ur* & serrata
> fuerunt & p*opulu*m in quantu*m* in eis fuit co*n*gregaue*r*unt ymaginando &
> co*n*spirando felonice & p*r*oditorie morte*m* d*icti* Nich*oli* maioris &
> q*uorumd*am ald*er*mann*orum* & alior*um* p*r*obor*um* hom*inis* & sapientu*m*
> eiusdem Ciuitatis.

[89] J. G. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 138.

[90] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 95-97. A useful study of Usk's *Appeal* and its various judicial contexts is provided in Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, pp. 145-60. While much work has been done on the *Appeal*, this indictment has gone hitherto undiscussed.

[91] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 95-97. While this case was heard in a national court, the proceedings were not isolated from London: twenty-four Londoners were compelled to be present at the trial (*CLBH*, p. 294).

[92] *Westminster Chronicle*, p. 63. Comprehensive accounts of Northampton's actions in this period can be found in the inquisition printed in Bird, *Turbulent London*, pp. 134-40 and in Thomas Usk, 'The Appeal', printed in *A Book of London English, 1384-1425*, ed. by R. W. Chambers and Marjorie Daunt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), pp. 22-31.

> [*made many conventicles, congregations, and covins [...] As a result of
> which, the doors and windows of many houses and shops in Westcheap,
> Bugerow, Fleet Street and elsewhere in the city and aforesaid suburbs
> {which} earlier in the morning were open, were soon afterwards shut
> and they were locked, as a sign of the rising up; and, as much as was in
> them, they assembled the people, feloniously and treasonably scheming
> and conspiring {towards} the death of the said mayor Nicholas, and of
> certain of the aldermen and of other good and wise men of the same
> city*]. (5.2)

The national context for this indictment is made apparent in the selective naming of

'Westchepe', 'Bugerowe' and 'ffletestrete' as the areas where rioting occurred, even

though disorder broke out 'alibi in Ciuitatis'. 'Westchepe' is obviously named due to

its centrality,[93] while Bugerowe – otherwise Bowgerowe, or Budge Row, a 'street so

called of the Budge furre, and of Skinners dwelling there'[94] which ran perpendicular

to the Poultry – is perhaps named to highlight how the protests infiltrated more

minor streets in the city. But the naming of Fleet Street is particularly significant, as

this was a street beyond the walls of the city, and was part of the route from the city

to Westminster. The insurrection is thus not confined to the streets of the city;

disturbances spread beyond the city walls to threaten the king and the wider country.

However, while this is a text produced with a wider national context, it shares with

the previously-discussed texts an awareness that actions on Cheapside function as

signifiers. However, whereas the previous entries depicted the civic officials imbuing

actions with significance to foreground their power, this indictment presents

dissident factions staging performances as a sign ('in signu*m*') of their resistance to

that official power ('insurrectionis').

    The indictment couches the events on Cheapside, Bugerowe and Fleet Street

in the passive voice, narrating how it was 'per' the formation of conventicles that

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[93] The use of 'Westchepe' rather than 'Chepe'/'Chepa' may also indicate the text's national context.
'Westchepe' is a more precise and unambiguous term, whereas 'Chepe' could be misconstrued as the
ward.
[94] Stow, *Survey of London*, I, 250.

windows and doors 'claudebant*ur*'. To an extent this denial of agency is an example of what Turner terms the 'rhetoric of scapegoating', through which writers centred their 'attacks on specific individuals' thereby denying 'the reality of the deeply rooted [...] social antagonism'.[95] The indictment does not name the everyday Londoners who shut their windows, stating only that it is More and Norbury who 'insurrexerunt', along 'cum aliis quor*um* no*min*a ignorant' [*with others whose names they know not*] (5.2). This claim is scarcely plausible; the inquisition taken at the trial of Northampton lists nearly forty co-conspirators, and at the very least the names of William Essex and John Constantyn would have been notorious.[96] The indictment is here being deliberately reticent in order to scapegoat More and Norbury. However, the passive voice does more than just scapegoating More and Norbury; it also implicates the 'co*n*uenticlas co*n*gregac*i*ones & Couinas' in the subsequent rioting.

The phrase 'co*n*uenticlas co*n*gregac*i*ones & Couinas' typifies Brembre's anti-associational rhetoric. Anti-associational discourses were not invented by Brembre. The *Liber de Antiquis Legibus*, a civic compilation produced a century earlier, includes a proclamation forbidding making 'conventiculas per se, seu congregationes', and there are sporadic mayoral proclamations on the same topic.[97] Similarly, following the 1381 rising, the king took a greater interest in preventing

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[95] Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 106.
[96] Essex is named as a chief co-conspirator in Usk's *Appeal* and in the *Westminster Chronicle*. Prior to this trial, however, Essex had 'removed himself to Westminster in search of refuge' (*Westminster Chronicle*, p. 95). The inquisition printed by Bird lists the names of 38 co-conspirators, including Constantyn and Essex; see Bird, *Turbulent London*, pp. 134-35.
[97] *De Antiquis Legibus Liber seu Cronica Maiorum et Vicecomitum Londoniarum*, ed. by Thomas Stapleton, Camden Society, OS 34 (London: Camden Society, 1846), p. 98. On the *Liber*, see *An Introductory Guide*, p. 9. For a translation, see *Chronicles of the Mayors and Sheriffs*, p. 103. There are three other relevant mayoral proclamations. Two recorded in the letter books, one from 1312 and one from 1370, and one recorded in the Close Rolls in 1283. See *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: Letter-Book D, c. A.D. 1309-14*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1902), p. 295; *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: Letter-Book G, c. A.D. 1352-74*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1905), p. 271; *Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Records Office: Edward I, volume III, A.D. 1288-1296*, ed. by H. C. Maxwell-Lyte (London: Mackie, 1904), p. 45.

'conventicula et congregaciones'.[98] However, it is important to distinguish anti-associational discourses – that is, a set of shared verbalised anxieties about associational forms – from an anti-associational rhetoric – that is, a specific way of phrasing those anxieties. Brembre certainly experiments with anti-associational discourses: during his five mayoral terms he issues six proclamations against associations, an unprecedented number. But in the period 1383-84, Brembre can also be seen to deploy a specific rhetoric. Previous discussions of the period's anti-associational rhetoric have focused on a proclamation issued by Brembre in late-1383, early-1384 which commands that 'noman make none congregaciouns conuenticules ne assembles of poeple in priue ne apert' (6b.2).[99] However, this proclamation can be supplemented by two further proclamations, one from the 15th of August 1384 commanding that no-one 'fassent congregacioun couyne ne assemble en priue ne apert' (6c.2), and a second from the 20th September 1384 commanding that no-one 'facent congregacioun couine ne conuenticule quelconque en priue ne apert' (6d.2).

These proclamations can be complemented by judicial procedures which use similar stylistic structures. For instance, the indictment discussed above uses the phrase 'conuenticlas congregaciones & Couinas'. Additionally, Thomas Usk in his 1384 *Appeal* complains against people making 'couyns, & gaderynges, & confederacies' and people acting 'be confederacie, congregacion, & couyne'.[100] There is thus in late-1383 and 1384 a remarkable proliferation of official texts on the subject of associations. And each of these texts shares linguistic and structural

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[98] *PROME*, III, 105. On post-1381 actions against conspiracy (and of the political uses to which they were put), see Alan Harding, 'The Revolt Against the Justices', in *The English Rising of 1381*, ed. by R. H. Hilton and T. H. Ashton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 165-96 (esp. pp. 192-93).
[99] See, for example, Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, p. 171. Wallace wrongly assigns the proclamation to Northampton.
[100] Usk, '*Appeal*', l. 219, 206.

parallels which differentiate them from earlier examples of anti-associational

discourses: they use tricolons which frequently alliterate, and they deploy a familiar

set of synonyms for 'assembly'.[101] Given the unprecedented proliferation of these

texts, and their shared elements, it seems likely that there was a directing presence

behind them. And the only figure that links these texts is Brembre. The

proclamations, for instance, were issued by him and reflect his long-standing

concern about associational forms.[102] Equally, More and Norbury are 'ind*i*cati coram

Nich*a*lo Brembre' (5.2), while Thomas Usk's *Appeal* was produced while he was

sequestered 'in domo majoris' [*in the house of the mayor*].[103] Brembre's role in the

production and dissemination of these texts does suggest that we are justified in

speaking of a distinctly Brembresque anti-associational rhetoric appearing in these

texts.

This rhetoric is notable for its adaptability: it is used in a variety of

documentary forms – proclamations, indictments, appeals, oaths – while it is also

couched in three different languages, including English. And the use of English is

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[101] Such use of tricolons is not uncharacteristic of the period. J. D. Burnley names such 'lexical doublets and triplets' as typical of the fifteenth-century's curial style, which he sees as emerging in fourteenth-century parliamentary texts. However, the use of alliteration, as well as the selection of terms, does mark out Brembre's rhetoric as distinct. See his 'Curial Prose in England', *Speculum*, 61, 3 (1986), 593-614 (p. 293). Brembre does not solely deploy tricolons. In his petition to the king concerning Constantyn's death he uses the lexical pair 'conuenitcles & congregacions' (12a.1). He also deploys some tetracolons in the proceedings of the mayor's court. In January 1384, Northampton swears he would not 'make or cause to be made any covin, conventicle, league or congregation openly or secretly'; in August 1384, John More swears similarly; and in October 1384, several Armourers swear to 'take no part in covins, conventicles, plots or congregations against the peace'. See *Calendar of Select Pleas and Memoranda of the City of London, A.D. 1381-1412*, ed. by A. H. Thomas (Cambridge: University Press, 1932), p. 57, 59, and 63.

[102] It is significant that Brembre's earliest proclamation on this topic was issued in 1378 (see Appendix 6a). This suggests that he was not simply responding to the 1381 rising. The fact that the dates of the six proclamations the appear in this period (1378, 1383-4, 1384, 1384, 1385, 1386) mirror exactly the dates of Brembre's mayoralties (1377-78, 1383-86) also testifies to his responsibility for their production.

[103] *Westminster Chronicle*, p. 90. This does raise the question as to whether Usk was truly responsible for his *Appeal*, or whether it was drafted in whole or in part by Brembre. Previous critics have credited Usk with its composition, and it may be that Usk is independently mimicking the Brembresque voice here for deliberate effect. However, given that Usk was sequestered in Brembre's house, it may be that his *Appeal* is less personal than is often thought.

unprecedented: Usk's *Appeal* is the first such document in English, while Brembre's 1383-84 proclamation is the first civic proclamation in English and the first entry in the letter-books in English.[104] Brembre evidently did not have an absolute commitment to English, and he issued many subsequent proclamations in Anglo-Norman. But he does seem to have been conscious of the need to adapt documentary writings to divergent audiences and the need to ensure his text was memorable. The alliterating patterns of three, the frequent re-iteration, and the use of English, all suggest that Brembre's rhetoric could have permeated civic life.

J. D. Burnley has argued that the use of 'pairs or triplets of mutually defining near synonyms' works 'to clarify their significance' and to create 'exactness in meaning and precision in reference'.[105] However, I would suggest that Brembre had a more cynical purpose in mind. The words Brembre uses are relatively meaningless; it is, for instance, unclear what discrete semantic function *congregatio* performs which *conventiculum* does not. The *RMLW* defines them as a 'body of men' or an 'assembly' respectively, while the *MED* defines their English equivalents as '[t]he gathering of people' and '[a] meeting or gathering' respectively.[106] The terms are

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[104] Paul Strohm has labelled the 1380s as 'the largest-scale and most sustained fourteenth-century entry of English into civic documents'. The documents he cites in support of this are Brembre's anti-associational proclamation, other proclamations by Brembre, Usk's *Appeal*, the *Mercers' Petition* (which was an attack on Brembre), and the 1388 guild returns. It is notable that the majority of these texts have a connection to Brembre. This raises the possibility that this entry of English into civic documents was driven by one man, rather than by any wider socio-cultural movements. This would in turn explain why English remained uncommon in the letter-books for many more years: subsequent mayors did not have Brembre's commitment to English. See Paul Strohm, 'Writing and Reading', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. by Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 454-72 (p. 462). For the best recent study of the emergence of English in documentary writings, see Gwilym Dodd, 'The Spread of English in the Records of Central Government, 1400-1430', in *Vernacularity in England and Wales, c. 1300-1550*, ed. by Elizabeth Salter and Helen Wicker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 225-66. There are sporadic subsequent entries in *Letter-Book H* in English in 1384 (*CLBH*, pp. 481-82) and 1387 (*Memorials*, p. 500), but it is not until the reign of Henry V that such entries appear in any significant numbers (see *Memorials*, pp. 628-29, 633-34, 635, 645, 654, 657, 658-60, 664-65, 668-75).
[105] Burnley, 'Curial Prose', p. 596.
[106] s.v. 'congreg/atio' and s.v. 'conven/ticulum', in *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources with Supplement*, prepared by R. E. Latham (London: Oxford University Press, 1980); s.v. 'congregacioun (n.)' and s.v. 'conventicle (n.)', *The Middle English Dictionary*, ed. by

synonymous and – unlike *covina* – neither term appears to have pejorative denotations in this period.[107] Rather than being exact in meaning, Brembre uses expansive terms as part of an all-encompassing rhetoric which defines as iniquitous in the popular consciousness anything that might resemble an assembly. The pervasive nature of this rhetoric serves to create the perception that Brembre's power is being exercised transparently and consistently: he prohibits an action in a proclamation and then, in identical terminology, he indicts people for performing that action. But, there is a cynicism to his exercising of power: he deploys words which are semantically empty or imprecise, which allows him to be the ultimate arbiter of the boundaries between licit and illicit assemblies. In much the same way that the engrossed text on folio clxviii (see figs 17 and 18) visually affirms Brembre's individuality, his rhetoric stakes a verbal claim to his personal dominance over the city.[108]

Brembre does not, however, affirm his power solely through his rhetoric. The indictment also records the actions he took in response to the rioting in the city:

> Et p*redict*us maior hoc audito assu*m*psit se cu*m* pl*u*res ald*ermann*os & alios sapientes d*ictor*um Ciuitatis & suburbior*um* forti manu armatos ven*er*unt in Westchepe p*redict*am ad pacem & t*ra*nquillitate*m* [...] & ad d*ict*as insurreccionem co*n*gregac*ion*es & conuenticul*e* cessand*um* & pacifica*ndum*.

Hans Kurath, et al (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954-99), on-line edn, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>, [Last accessed: 30 January 2012].

[107] A 'covin/a' is defined as an 'illegal compact or association' in *RMLW*. The *MED* defines 'covine (n.)' as both a general 'group of confederates' but also a 'collusion, conspiracy'. The *MED* does offer negative definitions of 'congregation' and 'conventicle' (as 'a clandestine or illegal meeting' and as 'an illicit or secret meeting', respectively), but the only fourteenth-century examples are Usk's *Appeal* and the 1383-84 proclamation, both of which testify to Brembre's use of the words, rather than any intrinsic pejorative connotation they may have.

[108] I am assuming here that Brembre issued directions for the engrossed text, and it was not just an opportunistic scribe seeking to flatter him. This assumption seems justified: in 1377, at the time of Brembre's first election as mayor, he is given a more modest heading, but which contains verbal overlaps with the later heading (see fig. 19). The two headings are clearly written by different scribes, and this suggests both were being directed by Brembre as to what words to use.

[*And the aforesaid mayor, having heard this, took with him many aldermen and other wise {men} of the said city and suburbs; they came, with strong hand, armed, into the aforesaid Cheapside to preserve the peace and tranquillity and to end and pacify the said insurrection, congregations, and conventicles*]. (5.2)

This brief narrative is not really relevant to the indictment, as it lays no charges against More or Norbury. Rather, it serves to glamorise Brembre, who is depicted as acting swiftly and forcefully to end the insurrection. Notably, *insurrectio* here occupies the same grammatical space as *congregatio* and *conventiculum*, again drawing equivalences between the formation of an assembly and wider social unrest. However, here the congregations are not being formed by More and Norbury, but rather are being dismantled by Brembre, who presents himself as the scourge of confederators. While the indictment began with Cheapside being the site of an insurrection, it ends with order being returned to Cheapside through the strength of Brembre.

Michel de Certeau has argued that urban spaces resist 'the reach of panoptic power'.[109] These spaces are sites of accumulation and competition amongst equals, and as such resist any totalising control. However, *Letter-Book H* presents the civic officials as dominating the space of Cheapside. *Letter-Book H* denies the existence of competition and accumulation, and contains closed narratives which chart a course from duplicitousness to openness, and from disorder to order. Through these narrations, Cheapside is presented not as a multifaceted space, but as a space associated with commerce, transparency and order, where the power of the civic governors is visibly demonstrated. Perhaps more than any other figure, the 'panoptic power' of Brembre is privileged in *Letter-Book H*: he was one of the first civic figures to recognise the power of words, and constructed a totalising rhetoric that

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[109] de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 95.

would allow him to consolidate his control over the city and, quite literally, allowed

him to deny accumulation. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the letter-

books are civic volumes compiled and overseen by civic officials, and as such it is

not surprising that they enforce transparency and order. Several of the issues this

chapter has raised – most noticeably Brembre's rhetorical dexterity and his role in

documentary production – will be returned to elsewhere in this project to consider

how the civic governors ultimately failed to control the city through the assertion of

their 'panoptic power'.

'Mediam dum rex venit usque plateam' (275): Mediation in Richard Maidstone's *Concordia*

Having explored a resolutely civic volume, I want to now turn to explore a text

connected with the court. Richard Maidstone's *Concordia facta inter regem et cives*

Londonie (henceforth the *Concordia*) is a celebratory poem describing the

reconciliation forged between the king and London in 1392. Maidstone was an

associate of the royal party: he was a Carmelite and a confessor to John of Gaunt,

and he regularly preached in court circles.[110] However, Maidstone was undoubtedly

also familiar with London – during the 1370s he studied in the Carmelite's London

house[111] – and it would be reductive to argue, as several critics do, that Maidstone's

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[110] For details of Maidstone, see: Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 343, fn. 61; Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. 189; Richard Copsey, 'Maidstone, Richard (*d.* 1396)', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17803>, [Last accessed: 13 May 2010].
[111] Copsey, 'Maidstone', *ODNB*. Presumably this is the White Friars, located outside the city walls off of Fleet Street.

poem privileges the royalist perspective.[112] For, Maidstone is interested in the relationship between the city and the king, and he incorporates both regal and civic perspectives into his poem. This section seeks to explore how, in his account of opulent street pageantry on Cheapside, Maidstone creates a fantasy of mediation, envisaging an urban landscape where the interests of the king and his citizens can harmoniously co-exist.

Maidstone's poem, which survives in a single manuscript,[113] is the lengthiest surviving account of the pageantry that Londoners staged on the 21st of August 1392 following their quarrel with the king.[114] The origins of this quarrel are uncertain.[115] Barron acknowledges that the reasons can only be 'tentatively suggested', but notes that Richard was frustrated by Londoners' refusal to give him money – the last corporate loan had been in March 1388 – while he also had concerns over rubbish on the streets and social disorder.[116] Interestingly, for Maidstone, *verba vana* is the cause of the quarrel: it was '[p]erfida [l]ingua' [*false speech*] and 'mordax detractans lingua' [*disparaging, biting speech*] that sowed division.[117] The poem denies the

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[112] Sylvia Federico, for example, argues that Maidstone's 'perspective is that of a loyalist to the king', while David R. Carlson suggests Maidstone focuses on 'civic submission and royal acquiescence'. Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 19; David R. Carlson, 'Introduction', in Richard Maidstone, *Concordia: The Reconciliation of Richard II with London*, ed. by David R. Carlson, trans. by A. G. Rigg (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), p. 25.

[113] The manuscript is Oxford, Bodleian Library MS e Musaeo 94. For the contents of the manuscript and a description, see Carlson, 'Introduction', pp. 31-35.

[114] There are also contemporary chronicle accounts of the spectacle in the *Westminster Chronicle*, and in the chronicles of Walsingham and Henry Knighton. Additionally, there is a surviving Anglo-Latin epistolary account. Pertinent extracts from these are printed by Carlson in appendices to his addition of the *Concordia*, pp. 91-100.

[115] For lengthier comments on the quarrel, see: Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 258-60, 343-65; Barron, 'Richard II and London', pp. 129-54; Caroline M. Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II with London, 1392-7', in *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*, ed. by F. R. H. Du Boulay and Caroline M. Barron (London: Athlone Press, 1971), pp. 173-201.

[116] Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II', p. 173.

[117] Maidstone, *Concordia*, l. 22, 41. Subsequent references to the *Concordia* will appear parenthetically within the text. The translations are my own (although they are guided by Rigg's useful translation). The poem was previously edited in *Alliterative Poem on the Deposition of King Richard II, and Ricardi Maydiston De Concordia Inter Ric. II et Civitatem London*, ed. by Thomas Wright (London: Camden Society, 1838). I use Carlson's edition as he usefully supplies line numbers.

existence of any substantive policy disagreements between the king and the city, and blames instead divisive speech. Regardless of the actual provocation, the king's actions were dramatic: in May 1392 he relocated the exchequer, the chancery and the court of common pleas from Westminster to York, a symbolic and commercial blow to the city. In June, Richard dismissed and imprisoned London's mayor and sheriffs, before finally consolidating his control over the city on the 22nd of July by depriving the citizens of their customary liberties and appointing Sir Baldwyn Radyngton as mayor. The spectacles of August 1392 were London's attempt to pacify Richard, to apologise for their defaults, and to persuade him to return their liberties.

It is likely that Londoners had help from the royal party, represented by Edward Dallingridge, in structuring the day, while it has also been suggested that the pageantry was influenced by Queen Isabella's entry into Paris.[118] However, perhaps the biggest influence was the memory of Richard's 1377 coronation procession. Both processions passed through Cheapside, which was decorated in a similar style: in 1377 maidens 'aurea folia [...] efflaverunt' [*blew out golden leaves*] while in 1392 a maiden scatters gold 'velud folia [...] sic volat aurum' [*so that gold flies around just like leaves*] (273); in 1377 Londoners erect a 'castrum' [*castle*] in Cheapside while they similarly erect a 'castrum' in 1392 (276); in 1377 'vinum defluxit abundanter' [*the wine flowed profusely*] from the Conduit, while in 1392 '[s]tillat aqueductus Bachum' [*the conduit drips Bacchus*] (269); and finally in 1377 an angel wears an 'auream coronam' [*gold crown*], while in 1392 two angels wear 'coronas' made from 'auro' (289-91).[119] While this pageantry did not immediately resolve the quarrel, by the beginning of 1393 the machinery of the state had returned to London,

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[118] Barron, 'Richard II and London', p. 152; Saul, *Richard II*, p. 352.
[119] The descriptions of the 1377 procession are taken from Walsingham, *Chronicon Angliæ*, p. 155. The relevant passages can also be found in an appendix to Carlson's edition of the *Concordia*, pp. 101-04.

Londoners had freely elected their own mayor and sheriff, and the city's liberties had been returned.

Recent critical work has done much to transform our understanding of the *Concordia*, with engaging new explorations of the poem's use of the New Troy meme, its commentary on contemporary social tensions, its sexual poetics, and its function as an instructional manual for the king.[120] While these critical studies differ in their focus, they all approach the poem in a similar manner. They read it, in Staley's words, as 'both an account of the pageant and a reading of it'; the poem is not a 'script' of the day, but an 'interpretation of what had been staged'.[121] My approach is no different; my presumption is that Maidstone sought not to reproduce the events of the day, but to bring a narrative and symbolic order to them in order to clarify the grounds upon which the concord between the king and the city was made, and to comment pessimistically on its chances of success.

The opening sections of the poem contain several troublesome passages. The '[p]erfida [l]ingua' (22) and 'mordax detractans lingua' (41) serve as reminders of malevolent discourses circulating in the city. Additionally, the description of an overturned phaeton – which 'nudat' [*laid bare*] the 'feminea' [*thighs*] (251) of several ladies, much to the crowd's pleasure – reveals the dangers faced when navigating the city, as well as the lasciviousness of Londoners. Furthermore, the descriptions of the city in the opening sections emphasise its claustrophobic nature. For example, the procession's progress is hindered because of '[c]oncursu populi

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[120] For a discussion of New Troy and the presentation of the 'city-as-woman', see Federico, *New Troy*, pp. 3-6, 18-28 (p. 6). For the use of New Troy to comment on social progression and regression, see Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 61-64. For a brief analysis of the city as a bridal chamber, see Michael Hanrahan, '"A straunge succesour sholde take youre heritage": The *Clerk's Tale* and the Crisis of Ricardian Rule', *Chaucer Review*, 35, 4 (2001), 335-50 (pp. 345-46). Finally, for the argument that the poem seeks 'to instruct as well as to praise' the king, emphasising the importance of wisdom, prudence and compassion, see Staley, *Languages of Power*, pp. 169-92 (p. 170).
[121] Staley, *Languages of Power*, p. 169, 189.

prepediente viam' [*a crowd of people obstructing the way*] (263). Equally, the text describes how in the city '[t]urba premit turbam; iacet hic, ruit hic, cadit ille' [*mob presses mob; this one lies, this one falls, this one topples*] (170) and '[t]urba premit turbam, sic iter artat eam' [*mob presses mob; thus the path limits them*] (246). 'Turba' can be read as a neutral term here, referring simply to a 'crowd'.[122] However, it can also be read as a more troubling term: it can mean a 'tumult, commotion, disturbance', and it shares the same root as the nouns *turbatio* meaning 'confusion, disorder, disturbance' and *turbo* meaning a 'whirlwind', and the verb *turbare* meaning 'to disturb, confuse, disorder'.[123] *Turbatio* is a common pejorative term in civic texts,[124] while Maidstone himself uses forms of *turbo* and *turbare* when he suggests Londoners 'turbari metuens turbine tam valido' [*feared lest they be disturbed by a powerful whirlwind*] (180). That Maidstone uses '[t]urba', 'turbam', 'turbari', and 'turbine' in close succession, suggests that he was not insensitive to their shared root, and recognised the troubling associations of a '[t]urba'. Maidstone thus echoes the period's anti-associational discourses in depicting the spectators not as a harmless crowd, but as a disruptive mob. Maidstone's anxieties about this mob are reinforced through the grammatical structures he deploys. In the repeated phrase '[t]urba premit turbam' – as well as in the phrase 'ars artem sequitur' [*guild follows guild*] (161) – Maidstone employs the same noun as both subject and object. The duplicating nouns depict Londoners as turning in on themselves: each mob in the city presses against other mobs. Such inwardness raises the spectre of a return to the internecine fighting amongst the guilds that marked out the 1370s and 1380s.

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[122] This is how Rigg translates it. While '[t]urba' is not defined in the *RMLW*, it is defined as '[a] crowd, throng, multitude' in *A Copious and Critical Latin-English Lexicon, Founded on the Larger German-Latin Lexicon of Dr William Freund*, ed. by E. A. Andrews (London: Sampson Low, 1851).
[123] s.v. 'turbatio, -onis', 'turbo, -inis', 'turbo, -avi, -atum' in *Copious and Critical Latin-English Lexicon*.
[124] See, for example, the indictment discussed above which lists: 'co*ngrega*c*io*nes et conuentic*u*le turbacio rumor tumultus & insurrectio' (5.2).

The existence of these problematic descriptions of urban claustrophobia and unruliness has not gone unnoticed.[125] However, it is worth stressing that these descriptions are limited to the opening sections of the poem, and are counterbalanced by the appearance of more optimistic descriptions. For example, the pernicious *verba vana* is replaced by a positive form of gossipy speech: a 'rumor amenus' [*sweet rumour*] (20) spreads throughout the city announcing the king's mercy. Equally, when the king finally enters Cheapside, the images of claustrophobia and jostling mobs are replaced with images of openness and civic unity. On Cheapside, the people watching are no longer a '[t]urba': they are instead 'plebs' (313) and 'viris' (270) – that is, they are not in associational or other groupings, but stand alone as individuals. When Maidstone suggests that Cheapside's aqueduct provides drink to 'mille viris' [*a thousand men*] (270), he hyperbolically captures the limitless expanse of the space of Cheapside which stands in contrast to the narrow streets elsewhere in the city.

Cheapside thus assumes a significant role in the poem: it is the space where initial signs of urban tension are dispelled. To reinforce its significance, Maidstone gives the account of the pageantry on Cheapside particular prominence. The account takes up fifty-three lines (263-316), a much larger proportion than equivalent passages in other accounts of the reconciliation.[126] Cheapside's prominence is further established through the imagery and stylistic devices deployed by Maidstone. He uses the inexpressibility topos – asking 'scribere quis poterit' [*who is able to describe*] (266) the tapestries on the street – thereby stressing its superlative beauty.

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[125] For a discussion of 'images of division', see Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 61-64.
[126] The description of Cheapside takes up 10% of the *Concordia*. By contrast, in the Anglo-Norman letter recounting the event, only 41 words out of 809 (that's less than 5%) focus on Cheapside. The other surviving accounts of the procession contain even less about Cheapside. For the Anglo-Norman letter, see Helen Suggett, 'A Letter Describing Richard II's Reconciliation with the City of London, 1392', *English Historical Review*, 62 (1947), 212-23.

Equally, he repeats key terms: 'angelici' (268), 'angelicos' (272), 'angelus' (280, 315), 'celicus' (271), 'celo' (282), 'celestia' (300), 'aurum' (273), 'auro' (291, 311). These terms emphasise the material splendour of the street, while also presenting it as a divinised space. Finally, he dignifies the street by using classical imagery, referring to the space as the '[f]orum' (264) and describing the Conduit as the 'aqueductus' (269).[127]

It is not just the length and style of the description that ensures its prominence: Maidstone also strategically positions this description at the centre of the poem. It is difficult to pinpoint where the poem's exact centre is; at least two pentameter lines are missing (after 93 and 170) and Carlson argues that the first fourteen lines are a later addition (although still written by Maidstone).[128] If this opening is removed and the two missing pentameters are added, then line 267 – just two lines after Richard's entry into Cheapside – marks the poem's centre. Maidstone's awareness of Cheapside's medial position in his poem is hinted at by the language he uses in the description. Richard comes to Cheapside, the 'medium [...] urbis' [*middle of the city*] (263), from where he travels along Cheapside to the 'mediam [...] plateam' [*middle area*] (275), from where he watches the suspended castle which is in the 'medium [...] locum' [*middle space*] (278).[129] Given that Maidstone so emphatically presents the castle as being situated in the middle of the air, in the middle area of a street, in the middle of the city, it seems plausible to argue that he was conscious that he was narrating this tableau in the middle of his poem.

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[127] Such classicizing may have been conventional: compare, for example, Walsingham's description of the effigy of Bealknapp being erected 'super aquæductum in foro' (*Chronicon Angliæ*, p. 153).
[128] Carlson, 'Introduction', pp. 22-23.
[129] The emphasis on medial spaces is furthered in a Latin interlinear heading which appears in the manuscript before line 275 and reads: 'De turri mirabili in medio Chepe' [*of the remarkable tower in the middle of Cheapside*]. Carlson argues that these headings did not appear in the first draft of the poem, and were either added later by Maidstone or a subsequent copyist; see his 'Introduction', pp. 33-34.

Cheapside thus occupies a medial position within Maidstone's account of the reconciliation. However, Maidstone expands this mediality to consider Cheapside as a mediating space: a middle ground between the conflicting concerns of the king and the city.

It may initially seem misguided to see any traces of mediation in the poem. On Cheapside, the Londoners perform a symbolically-powerful re-coronation, giving the king and queen 'geminas [...] coronas' [*twin crowns*] (289). Their subjugated position is underlined in the warden's words to the king: he states that Londoners strive '[p]endere nunc vobis intime quod placeat' [*to pay to you whatever might please [you] deeply*] (304). Here, the king is configured as a passive monarch while the onus is placed on the city to be active in ensuring the king gets what 'placeat' him. If, as Barron posits, Londoners' failure to give the king money was a contributing factor in the quarrel, then the use of '[p]endere' here is significant as it suggests that Londoners recognised their obligation to provide future funds for the king.[130] However, while there is deference shown to the king, it would be wrong to assume that the poem constructs the relationship between the monarch and the city entirely in terms of domination. For, it is significant that during this scene of ostensible capitulation by the city, Cheapside's civic identity is foregrounded. The pageantry and the decoration serve not to obscure or re-imagine Cheapside, but to inscribe its importance within civic life. For instance, the line '[s]tillat aqueductus Bachum – nec adest ibi Tetis!' [*the conduit drips Bacchus – Tethys was not present!*] (269) ostensibly dislocates Cheapside back to a classical past. However, it actually serves to reinforce Cheapside's position within civic life: the 'aqueductus' was, after all, where Londoners came to drink on a daily basis. The entrance of Richard serves

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[130] Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II', p. 173.

to enhance, rather than transform, civic life by changing water into wine.[131] The

inexpressibility topos with which this scene begins works to a similar effect:

> Quales texture picturarumque figure,
> Qualis et ornatus scribere quis poterit? (265-66)

> [*Who is able to describe the woven pictures and images, and the rich
> adornments?*].

Again, tapestries and ornaments were commonplace in Cheapside, as the street's

main shops dealt in 'textiles, clothing, and personal adornments'.[132] However, the

presence of the king makes these products so sumptuous they become ineffable.

Maidstone further foregrounds civic identities by emphasising the

constructed nature of the pageantry. In his description of the two crowns – the

crucial symbol of London's ceding of power – Maidstone states that '[m]ateriam

superavit opus: patet hoc et in artis/Et simul artificis subtilitate nova' [*The

workmanship surpassed the material: and this is well seen in the craftsmanship and

likewise in the fresh subtlety of the artfulness*] (293-94). The crowns still function on

the symbolic plane; but now they are signs of the delicacy and proficiency of civic

artists. This focus on artifice is furthered through Maidstone's evocation at this point

of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ovid says of the Sun's palace – on which Mulciber

engraved 'aequora [...] terrarumque orbem caelumque' [*the seas, and the world, and

heaven*] – that 'materiam superabat opus'.[133] As Robert Brown argues, Ovid here

praises the 'supreme artistry' of Mulciber not just because of his aesthetic prowess,

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[131] The parallels between Richard and Jesus were probably deliberate; Saul notes that Richard's 'surviving iconography shows he was given to seeing himself in Christ-like terms' (*Richard II*, p. 343). See also Kipling, 'Richard II's "Sumptuous Pageants"', pp. 89-90.

[132] Keene, 'Shops and Shopping', p. 31.

[133] *Ovidius: Metamorphoses*, ed. by W. S. Anderson (Leipzig: Teubner, 1977), bk 2, ll. 5-7. The translation here is my own. For a full translation, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), p. 50.

but because he tackles 'the supreme theme' – the order of the heavens.[134] Through

the echoed Ovidian phrase '[m]ateriam superavit opus', Maidstone likens the

Londoners who fashion the crown to Mulciber, whose workmanship constructs an

ordered image of the universe. The Londoners who construct the crown are not

powerless submissives capitulating in front of the king. They are powerful craftsman

who, in fashioning the crowns, are engaged in their own project of creating order by

reappointing their king.

In this description of the pageantry on Cheapside, neither the civic or regal

parties dominate. Instead, Maidstone establishes parity between the two, a parity

which is exemplified in the shifts in perspective that Maidstone's narrative

undergoes in these lines. The verb *cernere* [*to see*] is repeated three times in this

section, and each time has a different mood and referent. The first time it is used, the

subject is Richard: he reaches the centre of Cheapside and 'rex [...] Cernit ibi

castrum' [*the king sees there a castle*] (275-76). Here Maidstone writes from the

perspective of the king (as is typical throughout the poem), and the civic display is

the spectacle. The verb is used again five lines later when the narrator, describing the

appearance of two angelic figures, says '[c]erneret has facies quisquis, puto, non

dubitaret/Nil fore sub celo quod sibi plus placeat' [*Whoever would see their faces

would not, I suppose, doubt that nothing under the sky might please him more*] (281-

82). The subject of 'cerneret' has broadened out to refer to an imaginary 'quisquis'

who are watching the spectacle. While the object is again the pageantry – the 'facies'

of the angels – another object of perception also emerges in these lines: for both the

'quisquis' and the narrator (whose voice enters the narrative through the intrusive

[134] Robert Brown, 'The Palace of the Sun in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble*, ed. by Michael Whitby, Philip R. Hardie, J. C. Bramble, and Mary Whitby (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1987), pp. 211-20 (p. 219).

'puto'), are also assessing the king's reaction. The subjunctive mood emphasises that the king's pleasures – that which 'placeat' him – are unknown, and the spectacle is thus perceived through the audience's speculations about the king's response.

The final use of the verb *cernere* occurs when the warden directly addresses the king and says '[r]ex [...] Cernite iam plebem vestram' [*O king, now see your people*] (301). Another shift has taken place here: the king is now the putative subject of '[c]ernite',[135] and the spectacle is the people on Cheapside watching the procession. The focus of the ceremony is redefined here: the erected castle is marginalised in favour of the true spectacle, the 'plebem' who are gathered to welcome Richard to the city. These three usages of the verb *cernere* draw attention to the equivalence established between the king and his people as they all occupy the same roles in the ceremony on Cheapside. The king is both spectator (who '[c]ernit' the castle) and spectacle (whose responses are imagined by the narrator and the 'quisquis'), while the people gathered are similarly both spectators (the 'quisquis') and spectacle (the 'plebem'). The distinctions that the ceremony is ostensibly establishing between the king and his people are thus dissolved.

Criticism of the *Concordia* has often argued that London in the poem is either dislocated – becoming a 'Nova Troia' [*New Troy*] (18) or a New Jerusalem – or dismantled – becoming the king's 'cameram' [*chamber*] (143) and 'thalamum' [*bedroom*] (24).[136] This argument certainly has merit; the poem begins not with London but with 'Trenovantum' (11) and 'Nova Troia' (18), and for much of the poem the city is anonymous. However, as the last few paragraphs have shown,

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[135] I say 'putative' subject as the verb here is in the imperative mood, and so 'rex' should be read in the vocative, rather than the nominative, case.

[136] For example, Federico argues that Maidstone constructs a 'fantasy place', removed from the real London. See Federico, *New Troy*, p. 3. On the role of the poem's sexual imagery, see Federico, *New Troy*, pp. 3-28; Hanrahan, '"A straunge successour"', esp. p. 345. On the image of New Jerusalem, see Kipling, 'Richard II's "Sumptuous Pageants"', pp. 88-91.

Cheapside is not dismantled or dislocated. Maidstone is aware of the street's material presence – its width and medial position – and his classical references and stylistic flourishes serve to foreground the street as an important social and commercial civic space. Maidstone does depict Cheapside as a site of accumulation – of 'mille viris', of kings and citizens, of commerce and ceremony, of spectators and spectacles. However, Maidstone suggests that accumulation does not by necessity lead to conflict. For example, the instruments of ceremony, such as the tapestries and crowns, are not detached from their commercial origins. Equally, while the king's identity is foregrounded – he wears his crown, and Londoners pledge to give him anything he desires –the identities and daily life of Londoners are not disrupted – the conduit and tapestries remain, while Londoners' material skills are praised. Finally, whereas the earlier sections of the poem contain divisive and claustrophobic imagery, on Cheapside the socially disruptive tendencies are contained through its openness. For Maidstone, then, the reconciliation that takes place on Cheapside is not founded on grovelling submission and aloof lordship. Rather, he depicts Cheapside as an idealised space of mutual co-operation.

The poem does not, however, end with the pageantry on Cheapside, and subsequent lines express pessimism about the sustainability of this fantasy of mediation. Maidstone's pessimism is apparent in the final lines of his description of the ceremony on Cheapside which record: '[i]nvisis gradibus, simul angelus ipsaque virgo,/Nubibus inclusi, mox loca prima petunt' [*the angel and the maiden, enveloped in clouds, up invisible steps seek their former places*] (315-16). These representatives of the city return to their original place having taken part in the symbolic re-crowning of the king, a performance that re-enacts the events of 1377 in which an

angel 'regi coronam porrigeret' [*stretched out the crown to the king*].[137] The ascent

of the angel and the maiden echoes Maidstone's earlier description of their descent:

> Descendunt ab ea iuvenis, simul ipsaque virgo;
> Nulla fuit scala, nec patuere gradus.
> Nubibus inclusi veniunt, et in ethere pendent. (285-87)

> [*The young boy and the maiden as well descend to him; there was no
> ladder, and no steps were visible. They come enveloped in clouds, and
> they hang in the air*].

The repetition of 'simul ipsaque virgo' (285, 315) and '[n]ubibus inclusi' (287, 316)

brings a cyclicality to the pageantry on Cheapside. In part, this provides narrative

closure to the performance. But this repetition is also troubling, for it raises the

possibility that the performance will re-occur: the scene was performed in 1377, it

was re-performed in 1392, and now the angel and the maiden lurk in their 'loca

prima' primed for another performance. A cloud quite literally continues to hang

over the city. Given that Maidstone elsewhere in his poem uses the metaphor of

inclement weather to comment on urban unrest, this cloud threatens both the king

and the peaceable men of the city by suggesting the inevitability of future conflict.[138]

Maidstone's interest in the cyclical patterns of history is evidenced again in

the final speech of the poem. In forgiving the city, Richard issues them with a series

of commands:

> Pauperis in causam fraus mala ne veniat;
> Sit et in urbe mea bona pax – contencio nulla,
> Nec conventiculum federis insoliti.
> Si nostras etenim rumor penetraverit aures
> Obvius hiis monitis, urbs luet. (526-30)

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[137] Walsingham, *Chronicon Angliæ*, p. 155.

[138] See ll. 177-82 for the weather imagery. Maidstone states that 'tunc sexus uterque/Turbari metuens turbine' [*then man and woman feared lest they be disturbed by a powerful whirlwind*] (179-80), lines which are typically glossed as being Londoners fearing the king's wrath (see e.g. Carlson, 'Introduction', p. 28). However, given the connections between 'turbine', '[t]urbari' and '[t]urba', these lines could also be read as referring to the socially-divisive factions who threaten the city from within.

[*No evil deceit should afflict the poor; and in my city should be good
peace – not tension nor conventicles of unaccustomed leagues. And
indeed, if any rumour contrary to these warnings should enter our ears,
the city will pay*].

What is significant here is that the city will be punished not if its people disobey

Richard, but if a 'rumor' (whether true or false) reaches Richard that they have

disobeyed him. While this may reflect a wider suspicion of gossip by the Ricardian

faction – which emerged particularly after the events of the Merciless Parliament[139] –

it also returns us to the beginning of the poem, and the references to '[p]erfida

[l]ingua' (22) and 'mordax detractans lingua' (41). The poem begins and ends with

references to the power of rumour. Maidstone personifies the 'rumor' and the

'lingua': the terms always appear in the nominative case, and gossip is thus

presented as an active character in the poem, functioning independently of human

agency. Gossip 'regem [...] vertit in iram' [*turned the king to anger*] (23) before, and

the poem's ending suggests that future tensions between the city and the king are

inevitable.

It is possible to read this passage as Maidstone remonstrating with the king,

and encouraging him not to give credence to rumours.[140] However, I am not

convinced by this argument; Maidstone does not assume a didactic tone in his poem,

and his presentation of rumour as circulating independently suggests he is not

interested in the ability of men to disseminate or judge it. Rather, the poem can be

read as a dramatic meditation on the fragility of the relationship between the king

and the city. Maidstone, who was educated near Fleet Street, a corridor that was

itself a medial space between the city and Westminster, encodes within his poem an

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[139] For Ricardian responses to gossip see Oliver, *Parliament and Political Pamphleteering*, pp. 127-29.
[140] Federico argues a similar point, seeing the poem as 'warning a deviant king to look to the future of the city' (*New Troy*, p. 27).

idealised vision of social harmony founded on the linking of the king and the city.

For Maidstone, this vision is achieved through artifice: through constructed crowns, through choreographed performances, and through deliberative speeches. Maidstone, however, recognises the unsustainability of this vision, not because of human malevolence, but because *verba vana* can disrupt the carefully-constructed social and symbolic patterns achieved through the ceremony. A strain of pessimism thus permeates Maidstone's poem: maintaining social harmony requires substantial effort and organisation, while social disharmony can be established through a single word.

'For whan ther any ridyng was in Chepe/Out of the shoppe thider wolde he lepe' (I.4377-78): Conflict Irresolution in Chaucer's *Cook's Tale*

For Henri Lefebvre, the accumulations that occur in social spaces do not by necessity result in conflict. The accumulated people, objects, perspectives, discourses, and signs certainly can conflict, but they can also interpenetrate or just encounter.[141] It is, for example, interpenetration that is the dominant mode of accumulation in Maidstone's representation of Cheapside, for he presents commerce and ceremony, king and citizens, interacting harmoniously on Cheapside. Stressing this point that accumulation is not necessarily conflictual is important, for recent work on Chaucer's London has foregrounded conflict. For David Wallace, London is an absence which can only be imagined as 'fragments', for in the fourteenth century '[t]here is no idea of a city [...] there are only *conflicts* of associational, hierarchical,

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[141] Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, esp. pp. 87-88.

and antiassociational discourses'.[142] Turner similarly argues that London is represented as a 'place of cultural *conflict*, jostling rivalries, and incompatible interests', although she contends that as London itself was a site of 'incoherence and diversity', Chaucer's faithful incorporation of this incoherency into his works is a forceful sign of London's presence, rather than its absence.[143] I do not dispute the argument that Chaucer represents London as a site of conflict; indeed, this chapter seeks to argue that in representing London (and specifically Cheapside) in the *Cook's Tale*, Chaucer presents accumulation solely in terms of conflict. However, I do want to depart from the arguments of Wallace and Turner by contending that Chaucer's focus on conflict was not a necessary corollary of his writing about London. Rather, foregrounding conflict was an authorial choice, and through this choice Chaucer is deviating from the urban writings that may have inspired the *Cook's Tale*.

The *Cook's Tale* is a fragmentary work; not only is it seemingly incomplete but, as John Scattergood suggests, it is 'the least finished of all Chaucer's fragmentary pieces'.[144] Over the course of a mere fifty-seven lines, the tale provides little more than a description of the riotous behaviour of an apprentice, Perkyn Revelour. Much of the critical commentary on the *Cook's Tale* has focused on this character, who is described variously as resembling the contemporary 'urban wastrels', a 'dapper, restless, birdlike youth', and a 'foot-loose and fancy-free' man.[145] Such a focus is natural given his overwhelming dominance of the poem.

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[142] David Wallace, 'Chaucer and the Absent City', in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 59-90 (pp. 84-85). My emphasis.

[143] Turner, 'Greater London', p. 28, 25. My emphasis.

[144] John Scattergood, 'Perkyn Revelour and the *Cook's Tale*', in *Reading the Past: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), pp. 183-91 (p. 183).

[145] The descriptions come from Scattergood, 'Perkyn Revelour', p. 185; William F. Woods, *Chaucerian Spaces: Spatial Poetics in Chaucer's Opening Tales* (Albany: State University of New

Indeed, so overwhelming is this dominance that the opening lines of the *Cook's Tale* (I.4367-98) read less like a discrete narrative and more like the extended character studies that appear in the *General Prologue*. The tale's opening is distinctive for it, unlike the surrounding Fragment I narratives, does not begin with a narratorial 'I' intruding to comment on the narrative or the narrative process. The Knight, for example, deploys elaborate *occupatio* at the start of his tale, declaring 'I wolde have toold yow fully' of Theseus's conquests if time permitted.[146] Similarly, the Miller abbreviates his narrative, saying of Nicholas's astrological predictions that 'I may nat rekene hem alle' (I.3198). Finally, the Reeve attests to the truth of his narrative, stating that 'this is a verray sooth that I yow telle' (I.3924). In each of these examples, the first-person voice intrudes to comment on the telling or the recounting of the tale. By contrast, there is no such commentary in the *Cook's Tale*; the only narratorial intrusion in the entire poem occurs in the first line's reference to 'oure citee', a phrase which does not reflect on the process of tale-telling or foreground a narratorial 'I'. The *Cook's Tale* has the distinction of being the only one of the poetic *Canterbury Tales* to never include the narratorial 'I'.[147] This tale is thus marked out as particularly distinctive for it lacks a dominant narrative voice steering the story's progression.

York Press, 2008), pp. 79-89 (p. 81); Daniel F. Pigg, 'Imagining Urban Life and its Discontents: Chaucer's *Cook's Tale* and Masculine Identity', in *Urban Space in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 395-407 (p. 396). Each of these studies revolves around the character of Perkyn.

[146] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), fragment I, l. 876. Subsequent references to Chaucer's works will appear parenthetically within the text.

[147] It appears at least once within the first fifty lines of the tales of the Man of Law (II.154), Wife of Bath (II.862), Friar (III.1328), Summoner (III.1709), Clerk (IV.78), Merchant (IV.1254), Squire (V.36), Franklin (V.761), Physician (VI.49), Pardoner (VI.483), Shipman (VII.434), Prioress (VII.513), Pilgrim-Chaucer (VII.713), Nun's Priest (VII.2824), Second Nun (VII.124), and Manciple (IX.159). The 'I' of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* (VIII.720) should perhaps be considered separately. Several of these examples are simply phatic line fillers, although many others offer comments on the narrative.

In this respect, these lines resemble Chaucer's *General Prologue* for, as David Lawton notes, there are 'very few uses' of the 'narratorial "I" in the pilgrim portraits'.[148] However, there are further aspects of the *descriptio* of Perkyn that similarly resonate with the pilgrim portraits. For example, Perkyn is defined in the first line by his position – '[a] prentys' (I.4365) – in the poem's first line, while the narrator's statement that 'sikerly a prentys revelour/That haunteth dys [...] His maister shal it [...] abye' (I.4391-93) explicitly defines Perkyn as the type of a reveller apprentice.[149] Moreover, the concentration of similes in the poem's opening – '[b]roun as a berye' (I.4368), '[g]alliard [...] as goldfynch' (I.4367), 'as ful of love and paramour/As is the hyve ful of hony swete' (I.4372-73) – echoes the *General Prologue's* style, although such concentration of similes is by no means exclusive to it.[150] Notably, the first of these similes also appears in the *General Prologue*, where the Monk's horse is described 'as broun as is a berye' (I.207), its only other appearance in the Chaucer canon. Another uniquely shared element is the description of Perkyn's 'lokkes blake' (I.4369), which mirrors the descriptions of the Squire's 'lokkes crulle' (I.81) and the Pardoner's 'lokkes' (I.677), the only examples in Chaucer's corpus where characters are described by their 'lokkes'.[151] Alongside their 'lokkes', there are further parallels between the Squire and Perkyn, both of whom are satirised for their youthful frivolity: the Squire is a 'lovyere' who 'koude songes make [...] Juste and eek daunce' (I.80, 95-96), while Perkyn is 'ful of love' and

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[148] David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), p. 100.

[149] Jill Mann notes that one way Chaucer typifies estates is to 'evoke the malpractices and frauds that usually go with it'. Such typifying can be seen in the portrait of Perkyn. See Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the 'General Prologue' to the 'Canterbury Tales'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 14.

[150] See, for example, lines 552 and 559 of the Miller's portrait, or lines 675-76 of the Pardoner's portrait. Similar concentrations of similes can be seen at the beginning of the *Miller's Tale* (I.3234, I.3236) and the *Reeve's Tale* (I.3926, I.3935).

[151] The *Miller's Tale* mentions the 'lokkes brode' of Absolon (I.3374); however, this is not simply a character description, but is used as part of the narration of Absolon's wooing of Alison.

'[d]aunce he koude so wel and jolily' (I.4372, 4370).[152] In its satiric thrust, its

narrative perspective, and its linguistic and stylistic choices, the *Cook's Tale's*

opening thus echoes Chaucer's pilgrim portraits.

This is not to argue that the opening lines of the *Cook's Tale* were extracted

from the *General Prologue*. Rather, it argues that Chaucer begins the *Cook's Tale*

writing in a mode that disrupts reading expectations.[153] The initial 'whilom' (I.4365)

promises the emergence of a story, but the promised story is deferred in the

subsequent lines in favour of an elongated *descriptio*. The *descriptio* itself serves not

just to describe Perkyn's appearance, but also to recount the various infractions he

commits in and around Cheapside. Perkyn's commercial infractions are given most

prominence, particularly his attitude to the shop: Perkyn 'loved bet the taverne than

the shoppe./For whan ther any ridyng was in Chepe,/Out of the shoppe thider wolde

he lepe' (I.4376-78). Perkyn's abandonment of the shop here was probably against

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[152] The similarities have been noted by Wallace in 'Absent City', pp. 71-72. Wallace argues that, despite the similarities, the Squire is seen as 'charming and incongruous', while Perkyn is 'ridiculous and dangerous'. While I would agree that the portrait of Perkyn is more troubling, I would suggest that the portrait of the Squire does contain a minor satiric critique of youthful fantasies. For a reading of the Squire as possessing 'fashionable but superficial manners and frivolities', see Robert P. Miller, 'Chaucer's Rhetorical Rendition of Mind: *The Squire's Tale*', in *Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction*, ed. by Leigh A. Arrathoon (Rochester, MI: Solaris Press, 1986), pp. 219-40 (p. 219). Miller's description is echoed in Scattergood's description of Perkyn being like the 'would-be fashionable [...] wastrels'. See Scattergood, 'Perkyn Revelour', p. 185.

[153] Interestingly, one now lost Chaucer manuscript offers some indication that medieval audiences recognised the *Cook's Tale's* failure as a narrative. A manuscript once owned by the antiquarian John Selden is described by Selden as containing a 'praeludium' [*prologue*] which 'integrum est' [*is complete*], followed by the text of *Gamelyn* (a text thought not to be authored by Chaucer, but which often follows the *Cook's Tale* in manuscripts). However, Selden records that this 'praeludium' ends with the couplet '[a]nd had a wife that held for countenance/A Shop and swived for her sustenance' (which are actually lines 4422-23 of the *Cook's Tale*), before 'statim scripsit Chaucerus' [*Chaucer immediately writes*] the couplet '[a]nd there withall he lough and made chear/And said his tale, as ye shullen after hear' (which are actually lines 4363-64 which conclude the *Cook's Prologue*). This manuscript thus appears to have taken the fragmentary *Cook's Tale* and implanted it within his *Prologue*, where its lack of a narrative seems less incongruous. For details of this manuscript, see Richard Beadle, '"I wol nat telle it yit": John Selden and a Lost Version of the *Cook's Tale*', in *Chaucer to Shakespeare: Essays in Honour of Shinsuke Ando*, ed. by Toshiyuki Takamiya and Richard Beadle (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), pp. 55-66. The translations are my own. For a discussion of the wider manuscript context of the tale and the appearance of *Gamelyn*, see Stephen Partridge, 'Minding the Gaps: Interpreting the Manuscript Evidence of the *Cook's Tale* and the *Squire's Tale*', in *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths*, ed. by A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie and Ralph Hanna (London: The British Library, 2000), pp. 51-85 (esp. pp. 54-61).

the terms of his indenture: such abandonment risked 'property loss from theft' and lost trade for the apprentice's master.[154] The 'ridyng' thus is a disruptive presence in the poem, as it conflicts with the orderly running of the shop. Once on Cheapside, Perkyn engages in various other forms of socially disruptive behaviour: he 'daunced wel' (I.4380), he gathers a group who 'hoppe and synge' (I.4382), and he plans future meetings to 'pleyen at the dys in swich a streete' (I.4384). While primarily social infractions, Perkyn's gambling and merry-making are also presented as causing further financial loss to his master as Perkyn was 'free/Of his dispense [...] That fond his maister wel in his chaffare,/For often tyme he foond his box ful bare' (I.4387-90). Perkyn's dice-playing – which again was probably prohibited in his indenture[155] – is associated with indiscrete liberality. As William F. Woods notes, these lines establish a binary between 'two contrary worlds of exchange. The orderly transactions within the shop increase the master's wealth [...] the dicing and other "transactions" outside the shop constitute a limitless, organic consumption of those resources'.[156] Accumulation is conflictual here as commerce and ceremony are antithetical. When Perkyn leaps '[o]ut of the shoppe' to watch a 'ridyng' on Cheapside he moves between two mutually oppositional worlds, one foregrounding order and frugality, the other foregrounding disorder and profligacy.

Alongside these commercial infractions, Perkyn may also be guilty of political infractions. As discussed previously in this section, the widespread shutting up of shops in 1384 was viewed as a 'signum insurrectionis' [*sign of insurrection*]

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[154] The quotation is from Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 165. Stephanie Hovland notes that apprentice indentures often stipulated that apprentices were responsible for looking after their masters' goods and preventing damage to the business. See her 'Apprenticeship in Later Medieval London, c.1300-c.1530' (unpublished PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2006), p. 74.
[155] Thrupp argues that apprentice indentures place a constant emphasis on the 'prudent use of money' and notes that '[a]pprentices were forbidden to play with cards or dice' (*Merchant Class*, p. 166).
[156] Woods, *Chaucerian Spaces*, p. 82.

(5.2).[157] Perkyn's abandoning of his shop could therefore be read not just as defying his master, but also defying the civic authorities who promoted open trade. A more compelling example of a political infraction is Perkyn's gathering of 'a meynee of his sort' (I.4381). Both Strohm and Wallace argue that this phrase evokes the anti-associational rhetoric circulating in London during this period, although Benson has argued that 'Chaucer [...] ignores the possibility of political insurrection' as Perkyn's 'gang seem primarily interested in fun'.[158] Benson's intervention into this argument is important, for it is possible to overstate the prevalence of anti-associational rhetoric in this period. As shown above, the specific rhetoric which Wallace cites was the product of a single man, Nicholas Brembre, who had quite possibly been dead for a decade by the time that Chaucer wrote the *Cook's Tale*.[159]

Nevertheless, there were still anxieties about, and attempts to prohibit, illicit assemblies in the 1390s.[160] I would suggest, therefore, that the act of forming a 'meynee' would have been read as a subversive act, although seemingly not the deeply troubling act envisaged by Wallace and Strohm. That it has subversive undertones is suggested by the fact that this is the only moment in the poem when Perkyn is associated with order: the 'meynee' gather and they 'setten stevene for to meete,/To pleyen at the dys in swich a streete' (I.4384-84). Here, Chaucer stresses the planned nature of their future meetings in Cheapside, and this presents Perkyn and his friends as not mere idle merry-makers caught up in the wake of a 'ridyng'.

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[157] See above, pp. 56-63.

[158] Strohm cites a post-1381 discourse concerning illicit gatherings, while Wallace cites the 1383-84 mayoral proclamation discussed above. See Strohm, '"Lad with revel"', p. 165; Wallace, 'Absent City', pp. 72-75; C. David Benson, 'London', in *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, ed. by Steve Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 66-80 (p. 78).

[159] I make no comment here on the date of the *Cook's Tale*. The difficulties of dating Chaucer's work are usefully enumerated in Kathryn L. Lynch, 'Dating Chaucer', *Chaucer Review*, 42, 1 (2007), 1-22. Due to its fragmentary state, the *Cook's Tale* strikes me as being particularly difficult to date, and – while there's no evidence to assume it predates Chaucer's beginning work on the *Canterbury Tales* – I would hesitate before offering a firmer date.

[160] See *CLBH*, p. 437 for a 'proclamation against conventicles' made in 1397. It's also noteworthy that Maidstone's *Concordia* has the king complaining against 'conventiculum' (528).

Rather, they consciously assemble in order to be profligate with money, riot, and deviate from the terms of their indentures.

That Perkyn accumulates various political, commercial and social infractions is a point which has not gone unnoticed, and lengthier explorations of these infractions can be found in Scattergood's articles, in which he depicts Perkyn as 'a character who breaks every precept'.[161] In the remainder of this section, I want to explore a topic which has received less critical attention: the failure of the civic authorities to contain Perkyn. The most prominent voice of authority in the poem is Perkyn's 'maister'. An apprentice master was a surrogate father to the young apprentice, and had to provide him not only with skills pertinent to his craft, but also to instil in him the values to thrive in a city. Masters 'had a duty [...] to chastise his apprentice for wrongdoing', and if they failed to ensure that their apprentices behaved acceptably they 'were held responsible [...] in the courts'.[162] The initial description of Perkyn's infractions is followed by the response of his master:

> But atte laste his maister hym bithoghte,
> Upon a day, whan he his papir soghte,
> Of a proverbe that seith this same word:
> "Wel bet is roten appul out of hoord
> Than that it rotie al the remenaunt."
> So fareth it by a riotous servaunt;
> It is ful lasse harm to lete hym pace
> Than he shende alle the servantz in the place.
> Therfore his maister yaf hym acquitance,
> And bad hym go, with sorwe and with meschance! (4403-12)

The meaning of these lines has proven elusive. Reginald Call refuted the interpretation of Skeat, Manly, and Robinson that line 4404 reads as *when the master*

[161] John Scattergood, 'The Cook's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales I*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 75-92 (p. 85). See also Scattergood, 'Perkyn Revelour', pp. 183-91.
[162] Hanawalt, *Growing Up*, p. 135; Hovland, 'Apprenticeship', p. 139.

examined his account books.[163] Call argued instead that 'he' (I.4404) refers to Perkyn, and the 'papir' refers to some written 'proof of service' – either 'a formal certificate, an informal letter' or 'his cancelled indentures' – which Perkyn seeks now that 'he was almost out of his apprenticeship'.[164] Call's argument has been widely accepted: it is, for example, cited approvingly in the *Riverside Chaucer*, while Craig E. Bertolet agrees that the 'master appears to retain Perkyn for the full term of servitude'.[165] I am not, however, convinced by this reading. Firstly, this reading implies that the apprenticeship ended relatively amicably: Call even argues that the master was 'fond' of his apprentice.[166] The subsequent lines, however, reveal that the master was antipathetic towards his apprentice, and that he actively made the choice to give him his acquittance shortly before the term of the apprenticeship was up. Secondly, 'he', in line 4404 is more obviously read as the 'maister'. Thirdly, and finally, *papir* had a specific semantic resonance in the context of apprenticeships. The *Annales Londoniensis* state that the names of all apprentices were enrolled 'in papirio in camerae Gildaulae',[167] and the existence of these centralised 'papers of apprentices' are well-attested to.[168] However, alongside these centralised papers, there is also evidence that individual guilds possessed their own such papers which

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[163] Reginald Call, '"Whan he his papir soghte": Chaucer's *Cook's Tale*, A 4404', *MLQ*, 4 (1943), 167-76 (p. 173).
[164] Call, '"Whan he his papir soghte"', p. 176.
[165] Craig E. Bertolet, '"Wel bet is Roten Appul out of Hoord": Chaucer's Cook, Commerce and Civic Order', *Studies in Philology*, 99, 3 (2002), 229-46 (p. 243).
[166] Call, '"Whan he his papir soghte"', p. 176. Seven years was the minimum term of an apprenticeship; Hovland lists several terms lasting eleven years and over ('Apprenticeship', pp. 87-88).
[167] The *Annales Londoniensis*, produced by London's chamberlain, Andrew Horn, is published in: *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, I, 85-86. See also s.v. 'papir(e (n.)', *MED*, def. c: 'a document or charter; a record book'.
[168] For discussions of these papers, see Hovland, 'Apprenticeship', esp. pp. 151-55.

listed their apprentices: in 1345, for example, the Grocers required that new apprentices be 'entered in the public paper as is ordained'.[169]

Given these points, I would argue that these lines should be read as: *when he [the master] examined his paper [a record kept by his guild listing the names of apprentices], he remembered the proverb and gave Perkyn acquittance*. This reading necessitates no interpretative gymnastics. The only objection that might be raised is my reading of 'soghte' as 'examined'. However, this is a permitted reading of the line: the *MED* does offer 'examine, study' as definitions of *sechen*, and cites Chaucer's use of this sense in *Troilus and Criseyde*: 'if a wight alwey his wo compleyne/And seketh nought how holpen for to be,/It nys but folie' (4.1255-57).[170] This reading of the line also fits the context more precisely: the master reflects on the disruption an individual could do within a group, and this reflection would be particularly apposite if he was viewing a document which listed Perkyn alongside his fellow apprentices.

If this reading is accepted, the master's actions here are problematic. It was certainly not uncommon for there to be an 'irretrievable breakdown in the relationship between master and apprentice', in which eventuality the apprentice would be released from their term of service, or transferred to another master.[171] But, Perkyn's master's actions are unilateral: he does not seek support from his guild or

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[169] Hovland, 'Apprenticeship', p. 172. Hovland quotes here from *Facsimile of the First Volume of the MS Archives of the Worshipful Company of Grocers of the City of London, A.D. 1345-1528*, ed. by J. A. Kingdon, 2 vols (London: Grocers' Company, 1886), I, 9. Hovland cites several other examples of guilds recording apprentice information.
[170] s.v. 'sechen (v.)', *MED*. See also the description of Troilus, who 'up and doun [...] he the forest soughte' (V.1237).
[171] Hovland, 'Apprenticeship', p. 91. The most serious cases were heard in the mayor's court, but there are other examples of apprentices and their masters agreeing terms of release outside of any judicial process. See Hovland, 'Apprenticeship', esp. p. 130.

the London authorities, where such releases could be recorded.[172] Equally, his

actions are untimely: the narrator's 'atte laste' provides an implicit critique of the

master's lethargic response to the 'roten appul' in his shop. The master also acts in a

self-interested way. In interpreting the proverb, he reads the 'hoord' as his shop and

the 'remenaunt' as his servants. But the poem countenances a different reading of the

proverb. The repetition of *all* – 'al the remenaunt', 'alle the servantz' – evokes a

sense of expansiveness, and permits the possibility of reading 'hoord' as referring

more broadly to the whole city. This reading is supported by the fact that we know

who the 'remenaunt' are that Perkyn associates with: they are a 'meynee of his sort',

a reference to apprentices under other masters. The proverb is rendered meaningless;

it possesses no objective signification, and can instead be interpreted narrowly by the

self-interested master who does not address the problem of Perkyn, but merely

displaces it. There is a certain irony in the concluding lines of this section in which

the master 'bad hym go, with sorwe and meschance!'. Through a prototypic form of

free indirect discourse, the master's voice penetrates the narrative. But, whereas a

master is supposed to release their apprentice into the city with the skills and values

necessary for them to thrive, Perkyn's master releases his apprentice into the city

'with sorwe and meschance!'. Perkyn exits the shop with a curse which will leave

him as a disorderly presence in the city; he is abandoned by his master and left to

'riote al the nyght' (I.4413).

Alongside Perkyn's master, the civic authorities also briefly intrude into the

poem to punish Perkyn, who is 'somtyme lad with revel to Newegate' (I.4402).

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[172] Bertolet, arguing that Perkyn serves out his entire term, says that '[b]y honouring the term length of the apprenticeship, the master could be protecting himself legally so that Perkyn could not return to him later with a lawsuit over an early dismissal' ('"Wel bet is Roten Appul out of Hoord"', p. 243). In my interpretation of these lines, the master certainly does leave himself open for such action. However, I would suggest that given Perkyn is a disaffected, undriven youth, the master is calculating that Perkyn would not bring such an action.

Strohm stresses the effectiveness of such processing 'with revel', as it creates an 'image of revelry bound over'.[173] For Strohm, Perkyn – the archetypal 'prentys revelour' (I.4391) – is punished through a procession which re-inscribes his crimes, and ensures that revelry is 'controlled within a closed narrative system that generates its ultimate rejection'.[174] To an extent, this argument is plausible: this chapter has already explored the case of John de Stratton to argue that processions through Cheapside 'with revel' ('cum tubis et fistulis') were carefully-choreographed events that emphasised order.[175] However, these processions were also exemplary in nature, and served to make transparent the crimes committed and to emphasise the power of the civic authorities. In this respect, Perkyn's journey differs from contemporary civic practice, for the *Cook's Tale* declares that '[r]evel and trouthe' are 'ful wrothe al day' (I.4397-98). If revelry and truth are inimical, then Perkyn's parade through Cheapside becomes an empty symbol, for Cheapside ceases to be the place 'where lies were purged and truth proclaimed'.[176] The parade's ultimate failure is made explicit at the poem's end; far from being chastened, Perkyn is free to join his 'compeer', who 'lovede dys, and revel, and disport' (I.4419-20). Revelry in the poem only ever symbolises disorder, and so the punishment of Perkyn reinforces his deviant behaviour, rather than restraining it. The *Cook's Tale* is thus not only about Perkyn's infractions, it is also about the failures of the official instruments of the city to contain those infractions in a timely and effective manner.

The *Cook's Tale* has no known source, and critics have productively read the poem within the context of surviving urban records.[177] Chaucer's general familiarity

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[173] Strohm, '"Lad with revel"', p. 170.
[174] Strohm, '"Lad with revel"', p. 171.
[175] See above, pp. 53-54.
[176] Harding, 'Cheapside', p. 91.
[177] Earl de Witt Lyon argues that 'the London records of Chaucer's time, and before, afford [...] parallels to the elements of the *Cook's Tale*'. Benson similarly sees the 'surviving records of London

with laws and with legalistic records seems certain: he was involved in legal cases as the accused, testifier, and mainpernor, while his role as justice of the peace saw him inquiring 'by sworn inquest concerning all kinds of felonies, trespasses [...] walking or riding armed in conventicles [and] offences of laborers against labor laws'.[178] While there is no evidence for Chaucer's close knowledge of London's courts, he was associated with Ralph Strode, who had served as common sergeant of London from 1373-1382. The common sergeant (or common pleader) acted as the city's 'Director of Public Prosecutions', and it was the common sergeant Robert Pell who accused John Godefray of producing caps that 'sunt false & deceptorie facte' (3.2), as discussed above.[179] Additionally, while Chaucer may not have been familiar with a volume such as *Letter-Book H*, he would have experienced the public manifestations of the civic authorities' power: proclamations, processions, recitations of judicial procedures, and the public burning of false goods.

While there is, therefore, some justification for reading the *Cook's Tale* through the prism of the urban records, I would disagree with the view that they can be read as 'parallel' texts.[180] Instead, I would posit that they should be considered as antithetical texts. For, the extracts from *Letter-Book H* are closed narratives,

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municipal court cases' as providing 'an important context' for Chaucer's poem. Earl DeWitt Lyon, 'The Cook's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'*, ed. by W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1941), pp. 148-54 (p. 152); Benson, 'Literary Contests', p. 129. See also Wallace, pp. 61-65; Scattergood, 'The Cook's Tale', pp. 75-92.

[178] For a useful recent summary of Chaucer's connection to the law, see Braswell, *Chaucer's "Legal Fiction"*, pp. 21-31. For Chaucer accused in the case of Cecily Chaumpaigne, see Christopher Cannon, '*Raptus* in the Chaumpaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 74-94. For Chaucer the testifier in the Scrope-Grosvenor trial, see Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 179-87. For Chaucer the mainpernor see, as one example of many, the case of John Hende in *Chaucer Life Records*, ed. by Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 281. For Chaucer as justice of the peace, see *Chaucer Life-Records*, p. 349.

[179] On the position of common sergeant see Barron, *London*, p. 189. On Strode see J. D. North, 'Strode, Ralph (*d*.1387)', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26673>, [Last accessed: 12 December 2011]; on the relationship between Strode and Chaucer, see Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 42-46, 57-59.

[180] Benson, 'Literary Contests', p. 137; Lyon, 'The Cook's Tale', p. 152.

recounting in an ordered fashion the plea, the deliberation, the judgement, and the punishment. These texts are dominated by the forceful voice of the civic authorities, and they envisage Cheapside as a commercial space associated with transparent and purposeful punishments. The *Cook's Tale*, by contrast, is an open narrative, recounting crimes that go unpunished, subjective authoritative judgements, and punishments that perpetuate the crime. The text lacks any dominant narrative voice, and envisages Cheapside as a site of conflict, a site of competing modes of action and exchange, and a site where the discourse of truth is inevitably placed in opposition to instruments of revelry. It could be argued that the tale's openness and narration of unpunished crimes are symptoms of the poem's unfinished state; certainly, the continuation of the poem in Bodley 686 ensures that Perkyn is eventually dragged through Cheapside to Tyburn and hanged.[181] However, this continuation is unsatisfying as it fails to resolve the conflicts on Cheapside or provide an exemplary punishment for Perkyn.[182] It is difficult to imagine how Chaucer could have satisfactorily continued this tale, particularly when he had already done so much to emphasise conflict, to obscure the authoritative narratorial voice, and to stress the ineffectiveness of proverbs, guild officials, and civic officials.[183]

Given such a disillusionment with authoritative discourses in the poem, it is tempting to return to a thesis propounded most notably by E. G. Stanley that the

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[181] For discussions of this continuation, see David Lorenzo Boyd, 'Social Texts: Bodley 686 and the Politics of the *Cook's Tale*', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 58, 1 (1995), 81-97 (p. 91); J. Pinti, 'Governing the *Cook's Tale* in Bodley 686', *Chaucer Review*, 30, 4 (1996), 379-88.
[182] The continuation does emphasise the exemplary nature of the punishment, as the narrator warns 'yonge men' about 'mysgovernaunce'. But this warning is directed at the poem's audience; the punishment of Perkyn is not envisaged as performing any exemplary function within the narrative. The text is printed in *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, ed. by John M. Bowers (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), ll. 88-90.
[183] For a discussion of critical responses to the poem's unfinished state, see Scattergood, 'The Cook's Tale', pp. 77-82.

Cook's Tale actually is finished.[184] For Perkyn to drift away, ending up unemployed and lodging with a 'compeer' whose wife 'hadde [...] A shoppe' and 'swyved for hir sustenance' (I.4421-22) is a rather apposite ending for such a purposeless narrative. It also offers a final inversion of the letter-book entries. For, whereas they provide resolution, isolating the crime and punishing it appropriately to restore social harmony and commercial transparency, the *Cook's Tale* ends without resolution. It ends with the perpetuation of crimes, as Perkyn continues to 'riote' (I.4414), while it also introduces a new form of commercial deceit. The *Cook's Tale* is *verba vana*; it contains no narrative direction, no structure, no authoritative voices, and no obvious purpose, and in its emptiness it contrasts with the letter-book entries where the civic officials go to great lengths to legitimise their words. I do not want to argue that Chaucer is deliberately inverting the letter-books, as such an argument is far too narrow. However, I would stress that *Letter-Book H* and Chaucer's *Cook's Tale* are written from opposite extremes. In one, the authorities are a dominant force; in the other, the authorities are marginalised entirely. It would be fallacious to argue that either of these extremes offers a true image of London: we are dealing in both cases not with an absent city or a present city, but with an authorially- constructed city. And for Chaucer, his construction of the city involves a thought experiment, imagining a London where hierarchies are dissolved and where power is perpetually in flux.

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[184] E. G. Stanley, '"Of this cokes tale maked Chaucer na moore"', *Poetica*, 5 (1976), 36-59. See also Jim Casey, 'Unfinished Business: The Termination of the *Cook's Tale*', *Chaucer Review*, 41 (2006), 185-96.

Conclusion

Cheapside, the street at the heart of the city of London, was a site of accumulation. On Cheapside there was a diversity of people, interests, objects, perspectives, signs, and discourses. Such accumulation is reflected in the texts explored in this chapter, which diverge in their representation of the street. The civic officials deny that Cheapside was a site of accumulation, and emphasise instead its commercial importance. Cheapside is the site for meaningful, authoritative and transparent actions, just as *Letter-Book H* is the textual site for meaningful, authoritative and transparent words. Maidstone depicts Cheapside as the site of mutual coexistence between the king and the city, although he reflects pessimistically on the power of gossip to disrupt that coexistence. Chaucer constructs a vision of Cheapside where accumulation inevitably leads to conflict, as commerce and ceremony, truth and revelry, are antithetical. The perpetuation of such accumulated conflict leads to ultimate irresolution, both on the streets of the city, and in the manuscripts of Chaucer's work.

The *Stores*-poet appears to be acutely aware of Cheapside's centrality and its plurality of associations. He begins his poem with concepts that are not identifiably urban: 'pira pomaq*ue* regia thron*us*' [*pears and apples, palace and throne*] (1a.1).[185] The subsequent reference to 'Chepp' – the heart of the city – serves to ground the poem in an urban space for the first time, and heralds some more identifiably urban images: 'stupha, coklana, doliu*m*, leo' [*the Stews, Cock Lane, the Tun, the Lion*] (1a.2). But 'Chepp' does not just ground the reader in London, it also bridges the gap between the urban and non-urban imagery. For Cheapside was the site of markets

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[185] These images are discussed at the beginning of chapter 4, see pp. 220-21.

(selling 'pira pomac*ue*'), of regal ceremonies (suggested metonymically by 'regia thron*us*'), of prostitution (again, suggested metonymically by 'stupha, coklana'), of processions to prisons (the 'doliu*m*'), and of public houses ('leo').[186] The reference to Cheapside thus functions to add coherency to the stanza; while critics suggest the poem contains 'incongruous elements', 'Chepp' provides a focal point around which the disparate aspects of London life revolve.[187] In this respect, the *Stores*-poet's approach is similar to Maidstone's: both recognise and permit accumulations, and both imply that such accumulations do not have to be conflictual.

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[186] On 'doliu*m*, leo' see the start of chapter 2, pp. 95-97.
[187] Clarke, *Literary Landscapes*, p. 127.

'[D]olium, leo verbaque vana': Strategies of Legitimation in the 1388 Guild Petitions

Introduction

In the *Stores of the Cities*, the phrase *verba vana* follows references to 'dolium' and 'leo'. Interpreting 'leo' as a reference to a tavern, Rigg argues that *verba vana* 'may be pub chatter' and cites as an example the description of a raucous tavern from *Piers Plowman*: '[t]here was laughyng and louryng and "let go the cupp,"/And seten so til euensonge and songen vmwhile,/Tyl Glotoun had y-globbed a galoun an a Iille'.[1] The imagery here of Gluttony, excessive drinking, and merry-making is conventional in the sins of the tongue tradition, which drew parallels between overindulgence in eating and drinking and a lack of control in speech.[2] I would certainly concur with Rigg's understanding of 'leo' as a pub, although I would argue that it refers specifically to the Lion, a large tavern located on the south side of Cheapside.[3] Where I diverge from Rigg is in my interpretation of *verba vana*, a term that can be read as something more than just idle 'pub chatter'. As Hanawalt has noted, taverns were 'complex institutions of medieval life and social regulation',

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[1] Rigg, 'Stores', p. 134; William Langland, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts, together with Richard the Redeless*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), B-Text, Passus V, ll. 344-46.

[2] For typical elements of the sins of the tongue tradition, see Craun, *Lies, Slander and Obscenity*, pp. 10-24; Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues*, p. 43. For specific work on *Piers Plowman*, see Joan Heighes Blythe, 'Sins of the Tongue and Rhetorical Prudence in *Piers Plowman*', in *Literature and Religion in the Later Middle Ages: Philological Studies in Honor of Siegfried Wenzel*, ed. by Richard G. Newhauser and John A. Alford (Binghampton: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 119-42.

[3] Keene and Harding, 'St. Pancras Soper Lane 145/37', *Gazetteer*. For further commentary on this tavern, see Appendix 1b, pp. 309-10.

which were breeding grounds for 'insurrection'.[4] That London taverns were sites of insurrectional speech is evidenced by Thomas Usk's tesimony that 'J[ohn] Willynghames taverne' was one of the sites where Northampton's faction met to sow discord.[5] Of course, tavern speech could be political without being insurrectional. Anne Sutton has argued that in taverns such as the Lion or the Tumbling Bear the Mercers would have conducted their business matters, reflected on the events of the day, and discussed controversial topics such as the wool staple.[6] These meetings were not by necessity insurrectional; however, they were socially and politically engaged.

That the *Stores*-poet encourages his reader to consider *verba vana* as something more than 'laughyng and louryng' in a pub is indicated by his pairing it with 'doliu*m*'. This pairing is established by the words' adjacency, and reinforced through the punning on 'doliu*m*' which refers to a cask and to the Tun prison.[7] As a polyseme, 'doliu*m*' intertwines the first half of the line (about illicit sexuality punished through imprisonment in the Tun) with the second half (about the London taverns, home to casks of wine). The Tun housed two categories of prisoner: those who had been convicted of immoral acts, and those who had been caught in immoral acts during the night and were awaiting their appearance in court.[8] Rexroth argues that the Tun assumed a particular significance in London public life: it was a 'magnet for spectators' wishing to glimpse the ne'er-do-wells locked inside, while it

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[4] Barbara A. Hanawalt, *"Of Good and Ill Repute": Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 105, 111. For a discussion of the politically-problematic space of the tavern, see Ralph Hanna III, 'Pilate's Voice/Shirley's Case', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 94 (1992), 793-812.
[5] Usk, '*Appeal*', ll. 6-7. On this tavern, see Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 8-9.
[6] Sutton, *Mercery*, p. 72. See also her Anne F. Sutton, 'The *Tumbling Bear* and its Patrons: A Venue for the London Puy and the Mercery', in *London and Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by Boffey and King, pp. 85-110.
[7] For a discussion of 'doliu*m*', see Appendix 1b, pp. 308-9.
[8] For examples of these cases, see Appendix 1b, p. 308.

was also a site of 'legible punishment' with music and pageantry drawing especial attention to prisoners being processed there.[9] The Tun was thus very much a public prison, and its prisoners would have provoked discussion. And, given the Tun's proximity to the Lion tavern, it is reasonable to speculate that the Lion's patrons would be amongst those passing comment on their licentious fellow Londoners. By having 'doliu*m*, leo' precede *verba vana*, the *Stores*-poet thus gives these 'empty words' a particular inflection. These words are not mere 'pub chatter'; instead, they can be read as insurrectional speech or, more generally, as politically informed speech which, prompted by the nearby prison, reflects on the workings of the city's judiciary. And, considering that many of the people in the Tun were awaiting trial, such speech could be pre-judicial in character.

This chapter is about the politically engaged, pre-judicial words of London communities. It explores fifteen petitions produced collaboratively by nineteen London guilds and now mostly housed in the Ancient Petitions collection at the National Archives.[10] These petitions were produced following the arrest of erstwhile mayor of London, Sir Nicholas Brembre, on the 1st of January 1388, and were submitted to the parliamentary session at which Brembre was accused of treason.[11] To produce these petitions, the guilds evidently came together and collaborated to

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[9] Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 177.

[10] Fourteen of these petitions are contained within the Ancient Petitions series. These are: SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers' Petition*); SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*); SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); SC 8/20/1000 (*The Embroiderers' Petition*); SC 8/21/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition*); SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders' Petition*); SC 8/21/1003 (*The Pinners' Petition*); SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths' Petition*); SC 8/94/4664 (*The Drapers' Petition*); SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths' Petition*); SC 8/199/9925 (*The <...>steres' Petition*); and SC 8/277/13829 (*The Anglo-Norman Mercers' Petition*). A fifteenth petition, C 49/10/3 (*The Tailors' Petition*), is now housed amongst Chancery miscellany. Transcriptions and translations of these petitions appear in Appendix 7. For details of the Ancient Petitions series, see Gwilym Dodd, 'Parliamentary Petitions?: The Origins and Provenance of the "Ancient Petitions" (SC 8) in the National Archives', in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, ed. by W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 12-46 (p. 14).

[11] Andrew Prescott, 'Brembre, Sir Nicholas (*d.*1388)', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3312>, [Last accessed: 12 January 2012].

produce documentary evidence narrating the various crimes of Brembre. Ostensibly,

therefore, these petitions are purposeful texts, written for a receptive audience who

themselves sought Brembre's execution.[12] However, it is notable that within their

petitions the guildsmen express a degree of anxiety about their textual and political

endeavours. The guildsmen can be seen to deploy a range of devices to legitimise

their own words and to prevent the accusation that they were merely producing

empty pub chatter or, more seriously, political propaganda or subversive writings.

This chapter analyses the petitioners' strategies of legitimation, although it

will also provide a general introduction to the fifteen documents. Although there has

been a recent resurgence of interest in the petitionary form,[13] the 1388 guild petitions

have received little attention, with the notable exception of the famous *Mercers'*

Petition.[14] Such neglect is understandable: hitherto the majority of these petitions

have been neither transcribed nor translated.[15] Nevertheless, such neglect is also

regrettable, for the 1388 petitions are rich texts, and a close analysis of them shines

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[12] This argument is taken up by Turner who states that '[f]ar from being a document of protest and rebellion, then, the *Mercers' Petition* in fact seems to be a document written at the demand of, and in the interests of, the dominant political power' (*Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 28).

[13] A catalyst for this renewed interest in petitioning was the AHRC-funded project 'Medieval Petitions: A Catalogue of the "Ancient Petitions" in the Public Record Office' directed by W. M. Ormrod. For recent work emerging from this project, see the essays in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, ed. by W. Mark Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), and Gwilym Dodd's *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[14] For discussions of the *Mercers' Petition*, see Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 1-5; Lindenbaum, 'London Texts', pp. 288-91; Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 73-76; Mooney, 'Chaucer's Scribe', pp. 106-112; Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 8-30. The exception here is Wendy Scase, who does place the *Mercers' Petition* alongside the other 1388 texts. See her *Literature and Complaint in England, 1272-1553* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 67-77.

[15] The petitions of the Drapers, Saddlers, Cutlers, Cordwainers, and Tailors are the exceptions. See, respectively, A. H. Johnson, *The History of the Worshipful Company of Drapers of London*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914-22), I (1914), 208-11; John W. Sherwell, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Guilds of Saddlers of the City of London* (London: Harrison, 1889), pp. 41-44; Charles Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company of London and of the Minor Cutlery Crafts*, 2 vols (London: The Cutlers' Company, 1916), I, 263-71; *Rotuli Parliamentorum, ut et Petitiones, et Placita in Parliamento Tempore Ricardi II*, ed. by John Strachey, 6 vols (London: Record Commission, 1783), III, 226-27; I. S. Leadam and J. F. Baldwin, *Select Cases Before the King's Council, 1243-1482* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), pp. 74-76. The *Mercers' Petition* has been transcribed several times; the most commonly cited edition is *BoLE*, pp. 33-37.

new light on, amongst other topics: the development of the petitionary form; the personnel and processes behind civic textual production; the position of English in a multilingual community; the nature and extent of guild networks in the city; and the imperatives impacting upon the production of documentary texts. Given the centrality of these issues in much recent scholarship, a comprehensive introduction to the form, content, and context of these petitions is long overdue.

The 1388 Guild Petitions: Context and Form

To understand the petitions it is necessary to understand the context in which they were produced. The petitions were submitted to the parliamentary session convened on the 3rd of February 1388, a session popularly dubbed the 'Merciless Parliament' and at which many of Richard II's closest advisors were appealed of treason.[16] This challenge to Richard's authority had its direct origins two years earlier.[17] In the October parliament of 1386, with rising public anxiety over a possible French invasion, the chancellor Michael de la Pole requested the commons' assent for a tax increase to help improve the coastal defences. The tax was rejected by the commons, who demanded the removal of de la Pole from his office for his perceived mishandling of the economy. Richard, having retreated to Eltham, responded fiercely to this, saying that 'he would not dismiss so much as a kitchen scullion from office at

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[16] We owe our knowledge of this name to Henry Knighton, who records that the 1388 session 'uocatur [...] "parliamentum sine misericordia"'. See *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337-1396*, ed. and trans. by G. H. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 414.

[17] The following account of the Merciless Parliament is drawn from primary accounts by Thomas Favent and the Monk of Westminster, and secondary accounts by Saul and Bird. See *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 166-343; Thomas Favent, 'History or Narration Concerning the Manner and Form of the Miraculous Parliament at Westminster in the Year 1386, in the Tenth Year of the Reign of King Richard the Second after the Conquest, Declared by Thomas Favent, Clerk', trans. by Andrew Galloway, in *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England*, ed. by Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 231-52; Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 157-204; Bird, *Turbulent London*, pp. 86-101.

their request'.[18] With both sides at an impasse, Richard agreed to receive a deposition from parliament. Thomas of Woodstock and Thomas Arundel went to the king and informed him that ancient statutes allowed for the king to be deposed if he refused to listen to good counsel. Faced with this threat, Richard had no choice but to appear at Westminster and dismiss de la Pole, who was then impeached by the commons. The commons gained an additional concession from the weakened king: a year-long 'great counsel' was convened 'to survey and examine [...] both the estate and government of our [Richard's] household [...] and the estate and government of all our realm'.[19] This council was granted an unprecedented insight into how the king and his closest advisors governed their affairs, while it also had the power to influence on-going economic policy. This indicated a key shift in the royal prerogative for, as Dodd notes, through this council a new principle was established: 'an act of parliament, with the assent of the commonalty, was stronger and carried more weight than the wishes of a king who was divinely appointed'.[20]

Following the establishment of this council, neither party behaved admirably. The council sought to gain further powers and to prolong its life, while Richard traversed the country trying to gain ideological and military support for his cause. Richard, emboldened by Chief Justice Robert Tresilian's ruling that anyone who accroached royal power was guilty of treason, returned to London in November 1387 hoping to punish those opposed to him. However, on the 17th of November, three of the five men who would become known as the lords appellant – Thomas of Woodstock, Richard FitzAlan, and Thomas de Beauchamp – formally accused five of the king's closest allies of treason: the aforementioned de la Pole and Tresilian, as

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[18] Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 157-58.
[19] *Westminster Chronicle*, p. 169.
[20] Gwilym Dodd, 'Crown, Magnates and Gentry: The English Parliament, 1369-1421' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of York, 1998), p. 261.

well as Robert de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, Nicholas Brembre, former mayor of London, and Alexander Neville, the Archbishop of York. Richard lacked sufficient popularity or military might and, with the failure of de Vere to triumph at Radcot Bridge, he had no choice but to submit to the lords appellant. At the parliamentary session opened in February 1388, the five lords appellant – that is, the aforementioned Gloucester, Arundel, and Warwick, joined by Henry, the Earl of Derby, and Thomas Mowbray – accused de la Pole, de Vere, Tresilian, Brembre, and Neville of 'encrochantz as eux roial poair' [*accroaching to themselves royal power*].[21] Successful prosecutions were brought against all five men, although de la Pole, de Vere and Neville had fled, leaving only Brembre and Tresilian to be publicly executed as traitors. But these were not the only figures targeted by the the lords appellant: four of Richard's chamber knights – Simon Burley, James Berners, John Salisbury, and John Beauchamp – were also found guilty as they 'accrocherent a eux roial poair' [*accroached to themselves royal power*].[22] Similarly, lesser figures including Thomas Usk, then under-sheriff of Middlesex, were executed as they 'avoient acroche a eux roial poair' [*accroached to themselves royal power*].[23]

It appears to be in their attempts to gather evidence against Nicholas Brembre that the lords appellant sought testimony from the London guilds. Representatives of the guilds were first summoned to Westminster on the 18th of January 1388, when they were asked to bring out any 'gravamina sive querimonie' [*grievances or quarrels*] that they might have as:

> Nam constat omnibus nobis vos nullatenus esse unanimes utrobique quia, ut apparet, una ars istius civitatis aliam delere affectat; quod est absurdum.

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[21] *PROME*, III, 232.
[22] *PROME*, III, 243.
[23] *PROME*, III, 241.

[*It is evident to us all that the different elements among you are by no means of one mind when, as it seems, one city craft is seeking to destroy another; which is senseless*].[24]

However, the guilds refused to make any complaints 'quia videbatur eis non equaliter eos stare cum omnibus prout decet' [*because it seemed to the citizens that the members of the tribunal were not as impartial in their sympathy for all parties as they should have been*].[25] Following the commencement of Brembre's trial on the 17th of February, Londoners were again summoned to provide evidence. However, their testimony proved ineffective: 'circa verba superflua vacantes demum sine effectu ad propria redierunt' [*after spending some time in needless chatter these people at length returned home with nothing accomplished*].[26] Frustrated, the lords summoned Nicholas Exton, then mayor of London, William Cheyne, the recorder, and certain aldermen. When addressed about the treasonous activities in the city, they 'dixerunt ipsum [Brembre] putantes pocius de hujus<modi> scire quam nescire' [*said that they supposed he was aware rather than ignorant of them*].[27] On the grounds that he had concealed treasons, Brembre was declared guilty and executed.[28]

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[24] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 234-235.

[25] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 234-235.

[26] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 312-313.

[27] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 314-315.

[28] It should be noted that Thomas Favent's account of the Merciless Parliament differs somewhat. He recounts how the crafts were summoned and related the 'many injuries and extortions tortuously committed and carried forward against them elsewhere by the same Nicholas Brembre. And since the crafts themselves swore on their souls that they were not corrupted by hatred, fear, or favour of anyone or any reward [...] Brembre then stood undone at last'. See Thomas Favent, 'History or Narration', p. 245. I am privileging the account in the *Westminster Chronicle* here partly because it is well-informed on parliamentary matters, but also because it is not overtly factional. Antonia Gransden notes the chronicle's 'ambivalent' attitue to Richard, who he 'praises' and 'includes criticism' about, and a similar ambivalence can be detected about Brembre. The chronicler notes reprovingly that he was elected 'non habuit vota singulorum' [*not having universal support*] but also notes that he died a meek death. See *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 62-63; 314-315. Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, c.1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 184. For Favent's partisanship, see Oliver, *Parliament and Political Pamphleteering*, *passim*. For an article which usefully qualifies Oliver's work, see Gwilym Dodd, 'Was Thomas Favent a Political Pamphleteer?: Faction and Politics in Later Fourteenth-Century London', *Journal of Medieval History*, 37 (2011), 397-418. I return to the issue of Favent below, see pp. 142-43.

The terms used in these accounts of the London guilds' testimony – 'unanimes', 'equaliter', 'absurdum', and 'verba superflua' – reveal some of the problems in engaging in political discourse and producing personal testimony: how does one compensate for the partiality of one's audience? how does one conceal one's own partiality? how does one present one's testimony as meaningful and important? and how does one present multiple voices as unanimous and not discordant? These questions assume a particular pertinence in late fourteenth-century London given the existence of a 'local climate of hostility to clerkly writing' and an 'atmosphere of distrust and suspicion'.[29] The idea that London was an unsympathetic environment for the production of personal testimony and political discourses, is illustrated in the famous case of Thomas Usk.[30] His *Appeal* was perceived as the product of an inconsistent and partisan turn-coat and his *Testament of Love* records his consequent stigmatisation in the public eye. His *Appeal* was also subject to rewriting and re-deployment, a process which led to the 'effacement' of Usk and the removal of his personal testimony.[31] For Usk, the consequences of his personal testimony were disdain, social and textual marginalisation, and eventual execution.

This, then, is the historical and cultural context within which the 1388 guild petitions were produced. The precise date of the petitions' composition is unclear, and many discussions of the petitions still erroneously date them to 1386.[32] Dating any petition is made problematic partly because of the petitionary form's lack of dating clauses, but also because of the formation in the nineteenth century of the

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[29] Lindenbaum, 'London Texts', p. 291; Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 16.

[30] On Usk, see Turner, 'Usk and the Goldsmiths', pp. 139-77; Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 93-129; Strohm, 'Politics and Poetics', pp. 83-112. Turner explicitly notes that 'Usk made himself vulnerable because he wrote things down' ('Usk and the Goldsmiths', p. 174).

[31] See Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, pp. 145-160 (p. 155).

[32] The petitions are dated to 1386 in *BoLE* and *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, and this date is followed by several modern scholars. See: *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, III, p. 225; Bird, *Turbulent London*, p. 80; Lindenbaum, 'London Texts', p. 290; Firth Green, *Crisis of Truth*, p. 1; Richardson, *Middle-Class Writing*, p. 69.

Ancient Petitions series which reorganised the petitions and disassociated contemporaneous petitions.[33] The 1388 petitions themselves contain some textual clues about their date: they were evidently produced before Brembre's guilty verdict of the 20th of February 1388, while they cannot have been produced prior to the 28th of September 1387, as this was the day when Hugh Fastolf was elected sheriff.[34] Based on this, and other textual evidence, a date of composition between October 1387 and January 1388 has become the consensus, and the petitions are viewed as 'hav[ing] their origins' in the 'search for evidence' which the lords appellant undertook during these months.[35]

However, a third reference in the *Westminster Chronicle* to the London guilds suggests that we can further narrow this date down. Later in his chronicle, the Monk of Westminster records that:

> in principio parliamenti quidam merceri, aurifabri, pannarii et alii inquieti in civitate London' porrexerunt billas in dicto parliamento contra piscarios et vinetarios, asserentes eos fore vitallarios, judicantes eos indignos tam celebrem regere civitatem. Isti namque turbatores eorum perversis adinvencionibus et maliciis illam pocius nituntur destruere quam permittere, ut apparet, sua libertate gaudere, nam majorem eorum Nicholaum Exton' pecierunt deponi et [...] per extraneum judicem examinari ac eciam judicari.
>
> [*at the beginning of the parliament certain mercers, goldsmiths, drapers, and other restless elements in the city of London presented in the parliament bills of complaint against the fishmongers and the vintners, whom they described as victuallers, unfitted in their judgement to control a city so illustrious. These trouble-makers, with their wrong-headed new doctrines and their ill-natured behaviour, apply their efforts rather to the city's undoing than to letting it enjoy its liberties, as events show, for*

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[33] On this, see Dodd, 'Parliamentary Petitions?', pp. 12-46 (p. 14). See also the introduction to *Index of Ancient Petitions of the Chancery and the exchequer Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1892), esp. p. iii.

[34] The *Cutlers' Petition* names 'Hugh ffastolf' as the 'Viscounte de loundres' (7l.10). Fastolf served as sheriff between 1387 and 1388, and was sworn in on the 28th of September 1387. See Barron, *London*, p. 335; Pamela Nightingale, 'Fastolf, Hugh (*d.*1392)', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52175>, [Last accessed: 8 Nov 2010].

[35] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 193, fn. 69. See also *PROME*, 'Appendix: February 1388'; Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 28. Nightingale dates the petitions specifically to November 1387, although she gives no compelling arguments for this date (*Medieval Mercantile Community*, p. 312).

they petitioned that their mayor, Nicholas Exton, should be deposed and examined and have judgement passed upon him by a judge from outside].[36]

On the assumption that a third appearance by the London guilds is unlikely, I would suggest that this entry refers to the guilds' second appearance where they are accused of producing 'verba superflua'.[37] Of the various references to the London guilds' testimony by both Thomas Favent and the Monk of Westminster, this is the only one to mention written 'billas' and there are several reasons for assuming that 'billas' here refers to the 1388 guild petitions.[38] Firstly, we have surviving submissions from the three guilds named (and there are no other surviving contemporary 'billas' from the goldsmiths or drapers). Secondly, the vast majority of the guild petitions quote the 1382 statute forbidding victuallers from holding judicial offices within and without London.[39] Thirdly, and finally, the term the Monk uses to describe the documents (*billa*) is the same term used by the petitioners: the Leathersellers and Whittawyers, for example, describe their text as 'ceste bille' (7m.7).[40] The only problematic aspect of the Monk's narration is the reference to Nicholas Exton. The only text that petitions for Exton's removal is the *Cutlers' Petition* (7m.9), and this does not phrase the request as vituperatively as the Monk records. However, given that the Monk is writing this entry at a temporal distance, it is plausible to assume that he here distorts, consciously or unconsciously, the tenor of the petitions. If we do accept that this entry refers to the submission of the 1388 petitions to parliament,

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[36] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 334-37.

[37] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 312-13.

[38] Turner has previously argued that it is 'highly likely' this passage refers to the 1388 petitions (*Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 26). Turner was unaware of the existence of the *Goldsmiths' Petition* when she wrote this, and the emergence of the Goldsmiths' testimony makes the connection even more compelling.

[39] Three petitions do not mention the statute: the <...>*steres' Petition* and the *Tailors' Petition* survive only as fragments, and we can assume that the missing sections did mention it. The *Embroiderers' Petition*, by contrast, is complete and is thus the only complete petition to omit it.

[40] This is a common term to describe petitions: for example, the petition to the mayor of London by the commons regarding Nicholas Exton is described as a 'billam' (2a.6). On the terminology, see also Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 1, fn. 2.

then we can sketch in a preliminary chronology. The guilds were summoned by the lords on the 18th of January, a point at which they evidently had no written evidence to submit. After being accused of not being 'unanimes', and becoming suspicious of their audience's partiality, the guildsmen went away. In preparation for their next summons, they elected (or were directed) to draft written testimony which they submitted in February. We can thus posit a date for the petitions between the 18th of January and the 17th of February 1388.

This narrative has consequences for how we approach the petitions. Turner has argued that the petitions were written for 'the new sovereign voice' of the lords appellant, and as such the Mercers' presentation of themselves as 'oppressed victims' is a distortion.[41] Turner's view that the petitions were produced for the 'ascendant side' seems entirely plausible. The accusation that appears throughout the petitions is that Brembre 'accrocha sur l<uy> roial poair' (7a.2), and this echoes the charge being laid by the lords appellant against Brembre and the others. While this charge had some common currency – Bellamy explores its general use to 'describe an accepted treason or felony and to afforce the gravity of the offence'[42] – its infrequency in parliamentary contexts does suggest that the guildsmen were receiving instructions from the lords appellant as to its use.[43] However, while the petitions were produced for the ascendant side, it would be wrong to consequently read them as self-assured or triumphalist documents. As the *Westminster Chronicle*

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[41] Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 28.
[42] Bellamy, *Law of Treason*, p. 73, 112.
[43] There are 55 uses of forms of the verb *accrocher* in the parliament rolls of Richard's reign. 35 of these are from the Merciless Parliament and a further fourteen are from the 1397 parliament at which the king accused Arundel, Warwick, and Gloucester of 'accrochantz a eux roial poair' (*PROME*, III, 377). Alan Rogers suggests that Richard's use of the parliamentary appeal of treason in 1397 was 'revenge' against the Lords Appellant, and this may explain the echoed phrase. See Alan Rogers, 'Parliamentary Appeals of Treason in the Reign of Richard II', *The American Journal of Legal History*, 8 (1964), 95-124 (p. 118). Of the remaining six uses of the term, five refer to the accroaching of something other than royal power. This leaves only one other example of the phrase's use: in 1383, the accusation is made that Thomas Trivet 'acrochez poair roial' (*PROME*, III, 157).

reveals, there were tensions between the lords appellant and the London guilds: the former were anxious about the lack of unanimity in the city, while the latter were anxious about the partiality of the lords. Given the fluidity of political and factional divisions in this period, as well as the perils associated with documentary production, it is unlikely that the guildsmen would have approached drafting their petitions with complacency. The uncertainty that can be detected in their documents thus does not have to be read as affected.

Before commencing an analysis of the documents, it is necessary to briefly reflect on their form. Recent work has questioned whether the guilds' texts are actually petitions. Scase, for example, notes that the documents' large size means that they 'physically resemble appeals more closely than private petitions', and argues that the documents may 'have been modelled on appeals'.[44] Dodd supports Scase's thesis, arguing that Thomas Usk's *Appeal*, the *Mercers' Petition*, and a fifteenth-century Middle English petition by Thomas Paunfield should all be classified as 'appeals' because they share certain features, namely each used 'the first-person tense [*sic*]; each subdivided its narrative into separate paragraphs; and each document provided full, rather than summarised, details of the accusations'.[45] In a more recent article, Dodd has developed this argument further, arguing that the existence of these Middle English documents reveals a quasi-legal form of appeal grounded in the English language.[46] Such attempts to re-classify the documents as appeals are, in my view, problematic. Dodd's attempts to use the language of composition and the use of the first-person voice to re-classify solely the *Mercers'*

[44] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 72.
[45] Gwilym Dodd, 'Thomas Paunfield, the "heye Court of Rightwisnesse" and the Language of Petitioning in the Fifteenth Century', in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, ed. by W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 222-41 (pp. 233-34).
[46] Dodd, 'The Spread of English', p. 255.

Petition are certainly not compelling. For, as this chapter will show, the Middle

English *Mercers' Petition* cannot be disassociated from the other 1388 guild texts,

all of which are in Anglo-Norman, and the majority of which eschew the first-person

voice.

The unusual size and the use of paragraph divisions in these documents are

harder to counter. It is true that the typical petition comprises of a single paragraph,[47]

while the 1388 petitions range from containing three paragraphs (in the case of the

Pinners' Petition) to twelve (in the case of the *Mercers' Petition*). However, there

are precedents for petitions with multiple paragraphs,[48] and it is worth recognising

the fluidity of the petitionary form. The petition was adapted to a variety of contexts

in this period; while its parliamentary context has received particular attention

recently, the petition also appeared in religious and civic contexts.[49] The adaptability

of the petition means it should not be surprising that a complainant seeking to make

lengthy accusations would experiment by expanding the petition's traditional single

paragraph structure. That the London guilds are experimenting with the petitionary

form rather than adopting the appeal form is made clear in the structure and language

of their documents. Dodd has itemised the typical petitionary diplomatic, which

comprises the: address; identification of the petitioner; statement of grievance or

difficulty; request for redress; and appeal for remedy.[50] The opening paragraph of

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[47] This is how petitionary texts are presented in formularies. See, for example, *Anglo-Norman Letters and Petitions from All Souls College, MS 182*, ed. by M. Domenica-Legge (Oxford: Blackwell, 1941).
[48] Dodd himself prints several such examples in his co-edited collection of petitions. See, for example, the petitions numbered 57, 112, 129, and 192 in *Petitions to the Crown from English Religious Houses, c. 1272-c. 1485*, ed. by Gwilym Dodd and Alison K. McHardy (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010).
[49] On the religious petitions, see Norman Zacour, 'Ecclesiastical and University Administration', in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. by F. A. C. Mantello and A. G. Rigg (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 183-94 (pp. 187-88). On civic petitions see, for example, Nicholas Exton's petitions copied within the wider judicial process found in Appendix 2a.5.
[50] For a lengthier account of the 'recognized petitionary canon', see Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 281-83; Paul Brand, 'Petitions and Parliament in the Reign of Edward I', in *Parchment and People:*

each of the 1388 petitions follows this formula exactly, as it contains: an address to 'tresredote s*eignour* le Roy' and the 'sages s*eignour*s diceste p*r*esent p*ar*lement'; an identification of the 'pou*er*ez liges' who '[s]upplient treshu*m*blement'; a statement of their complaint; a request for the king to 'fair*e* due remedie'; and a final appeal, 'p*our* dieu & en eou*r*e de charite' (7a.1). However, what is notable is that subsequent paragraphs adopt a similar structure. While the address is omitted, the other elements are maintained: each paragraph begins with a formulaic phrase such as '[i]tem les ditz suppliantz se pleignont v*er*s [...]' (1b.2), contains a statement of their complaint, makes a request to 'faire solonc ce qils ont des*er*ui', and concludes with the appeal 'p*our* dieu & en eoure de charite' (7c.2).[51] The London guilds are certainly expanding what a petition typically does by including multiple paragraphs. However, this expansion is done firmly within the framework of the recognised petitionary diplomatic. As such, the description of these texts as petitions remains appropriate.

To explore this series of petitions, this chapter will be divided into two main parts. The second part seeks to analyse the narrative about civic life under Brembre that the petitioners produce. This part focuses on the language and style of the petitions to examine how they seek to authenticate their own voices while simultaneously delegitimising Brembre's. The first part of this chapter seeks to recreate the process by which these petitions were drafted. Scase has previously stated that there was 'some co-ordination of effort' behind the petitions and she has

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Parliament in the Middle Ages, ed. by Linda Clark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 14-38 (pp. 27-29); Gwilym Dodd, 'Writing Wrongs: The Drafting of Supplications to the Crown in Late Fourteenth-Century England', *Medium Aevum*, 80, 2 (2011), pp. 217-46 (pp. 223-26). The petition's conventional phraseology emerges from the *ars dictaminis* tradition; for details, see Malcolm Richardson, 'The Ars Dictaminis, the Formulary and Medieval Epistolary Practice', in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. by Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), pp. 52-66 (esp. p. 56).
[51] There is inevitably some variation in the terms the petitions use. The *Leathersellers' Petition*, for example, uses 'monstrent' where the other petitions use 'pleignont'. However, both 'monstrent' and 'pleignont' are common within the petitions (see Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 282), and while the terminology differs, the petitions all share the same underlying structure.

posited the existence of a 'common model'.[52] However, Scase recognises the limitations of her analysis, noting that '[t]he dependencies among the twelve [*sic*] texts would repay further study'.[53] This chapter will begin where Scase left off in an attempt to discern what the dependencies amongst the petitions are. This information is summarised in Table 4;[54] for ease of reference I replicate relevant extracts from this table in the body of this chapter. As Table 4 shows, the petitions can be sub-divided into three groups, and this chapter intends to examine each of these three groups in turn to build up a collective picture of how the London guilds collaborated to produce their petitions.

Group One: Modelling Petitions

Of the nine petitions in group one, eight demonstrate close dependencies and evidently shared a common model.[55] The correspondences amongst these petitions are illustrated in Table 1:

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[52] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, pp. 71-72.

[53] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 69.

[54] See Table 4 printed in Appendix 10, pp. 473-74.

[55] The ninth petition, the *Tailors' Petition*, is somewhat problematic. It survives as a fragment, containing only one paragraph, but as this paragraph begins '[i]tem' the presumption is that a lengthier petition once existed. The paragraph describes Brembre's seizing of their charter, which granted them their liberties and sought to regulate 'ext*ra*neos irregulatos' (7n.1). The only two other petitioners that mention this charter are the Saddlers and Goldsmiths. All three guilds complain that Brembre seized their charter '& vnqore detient la d*i*te chartre' (7n.1), '& unqor*e* detient' it (7h.1). Where the petitions differ is that the Tailors copy the text of the charter into the body of their petition, while the Saddlers and Goldsmiths say that its purport will 'pleinement' appear in 'le copie annexe diceste' (7h.1). There are no strong verbal parallels to associate the *Tailors' Petition* with these other two petitions. However, these are the only three petitions that mention this charter, and it is tempting to read these three texts together. Doing so would offer a possible explanation for the current condition of the *Tailors' Petition* and its location amongst Chancery miscellany: while the Saddlers and Goldsmiths attached a copy of their charter on a separate scrap of parchment which could be detached and sent to the Chancery, the Tailors copied their charter at the bottom of the petition. Their document was torn, with the lower portion being sent to the Chancery (where it still remains), and the upper portion (which followed closely the petitions of the Goldsmiths and Saddlers) either being immediately disposed of or lost in the intervening years.

	PiP	FoP	DrP	PaP	ArP	stP	GoP	SaP	TaP
A^1							1	1	
A^2									1
B^2	1	(1)	(1)	1	1	1	2	2	
C			(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(3)	(3)	
F^1	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	
H				4	4	4	5	5	
I^1	3	3	(4)	5	5	5	6	6	
J^1				6	6	6	7	7	

Table 1 – The Correspondences amongst the Group 1 Petitions

Appendix 10 contains a detailed explanation of how to read this table, but it is useful to summarise this here. The top row abbreviates the names of the petitions, and the left hand column abbreviates specific accusations (to decode these abbreviations, see Appendix 10, pp. 474-76). The numbers in the table refer to the paragraph of each petition within which the accusation can be found. Where the petitions share very similar phraseology, this number appears unbracketed; where the petitions share some phraseology but also contain significant variations, the number appears bracketed. So, for instance, Table 1 records that eight of the group one petitions contain accusation F^1 (that Brembre produced biased indictments), and that each of these petitions phrases this accusation in a virtually identical manner. The guilds appear to have responded to the accusation that they were not 'unanimes',[56] by drafting a set of petitions which are distinctive for their unanimity.

To consider the dependencies between this group of petitions in more depth, I want to turn to the opening sections of accusation B^2. Describing the mayoral election of 1383, this section states that Brembre accroached to himself royal power in that:

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[56] *Westminster Chronicle*, p. 234.

par la ou ad estez vsee en la dite Citee toutz temps dount nule memoire ne court & par lour chartre des Roys grauntez & confermez qaunt le maire de loundres serra esluz y serra esluz par la communealte & ffrank gentz du dite Citee la les auan<t> ditz seignour Nichol oue les autres ses acomplices par lour conspiracie & faux ymaginacioun pour destruire bones gentz du dite Citee & encountre la franchise dicell fisrent somondre certeins gentz queux feurent de lour assent al Gyhall du dite Citee en la ffeste de seynt Edward le Roy lan du regne nostre seignour le Roy qorest eoptisme pour eslire vn maire. (7d.1)

Barring minor changes in spelling, this passage appears in identical form in the petitions of the Painters, the <...>steres,[57] and the Goldsmiths. The *Saddlers' Petition* contains a minor alteration: it reads 'par la quil ad estee usee' (7h.2) at the start, a possible scribal alteration. The petitions of the Pinners and Armourers similarly each contain one minor variation. Where the majority of the group one petitions read 'pour destruire bones gentz du dite Citee', the Pinners read 'pour destruire bonez gentz du dit Citee & le bone gouernaile' (7a.1), and the Armourers read 'pour destruire touz eouerours du dite Citee' (7e.1). These are minor changes which are the only occasions where these two petitions differ from the model. As such, I have not bracketed these paragraphs in Table 1.

The petitions of the Founders and Drapers contain more marked variations. The *Founders' Petition* includes three variant readings. One of these appears to be mere scribal error: the petition reads 'par la ou astee vsee' (7b.1), the scribe seemingly conflating 'ad' and 'estee'. The other two, however, are more significant and speak to a wider strategy of the Founders. They rewrite 'destruire bones gentz du dite Citee' to read 'destruire bonez gent de diuerses mistiers du dite Citee' (7b.1), and they alter 'serra esluz par la communealte & ffrank gentz' to read 'serra esluz par la communealte du dite Citee & nemye par estrangers ne par vitailers' (7b.1). Here, the Founders modify general references to the 'bones gentz' and the 'ffrank

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[57] The full name of this guild is missing. For a consideration of what the name could be, see the opening note to Appendix 7f.

gentz' of the city to foreground instead civic identities and guild politics.[58]

Nightingale has cautioned historians of fourteenth-century London against adopting

simplistic assumptions about the existence of a victualling versus non-victualling

divide.[59] Nevertheless, while Nightingale is evidently right to stress the fluidity of

the city's factional divisions, it is noteworthy that the Founders deny such fluidity.

They couch social division in simplistic terms and demonise the victuallers, whom

they pair with 'est*ra*ngers', the typical *bête noire* of civic writers.[60] The Founders are

by no means alone in demonising the victualling guilds; the majority of the 1388

petitions cite the Latin statute forbidding victuallers from holding judicial office.

However, the Founders are alone amongst the group one petitions in adapting the

model to enhance their attack on the victuallers.

The *Drapers' Petition* provides a more substantial re-phrasing of this

accusation. It states that Brembre accroaches to himself royal power as he:

> encontre lo*ur* chartre des Roys g*ra*unte & conferme de lo*ur* fraunchise de
> la dite Citee & en mayntenance de sa <...>[61] <so>mondre fist c*er*teins
> gentz q*ue* furent de son assent al Gyhall du dite Citee en le feste de seint
> Edward lan le Roy qorest viij pur eslire vn mair. (7c.4)

It should be stressed that while the *Drapers' Petition* here seems remarkably

dissimilar to the other group one petitions, it resembles them more closely at other

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[58] Such foregrounding occurs thrice elsewhere in the *Founders' Petition*. Whereas in the other petitions Brembre commands 'chescun home de la d*i*te Citee' (7a.1) not to come to the election, the Founders have Brembre commanding 'chescun hom*m*me de la d*i*te Citee que fuissent eou*er*ours' (7b.1). Similarly, whereas the other petitions have Brembre arming 'certein gentz sibien fo<r>eyns <com>e autres' (7e.1), the Founders have him arming 'certeinz gentz s<i bien> foreyns come vitaillers du dite citee' (7b.1). Finally, whereas the other petitions simply pray that the statute forbidding victuallers from holding office be 'meyntenant mys en execucion nient encountr*e* esteant ascun estatut ou ordinance fait en le countr*e*' (7d.5), the Founders want the statute 'meyntenant mys en execucion p*our* les g*ra*unt extorcio<ns> q*ue* est fait de io*ur* en autr*e* & q*ue* ne soit lessez p*our* ascun estatut ou ordinance fait al encountr*e*' (7b.3).
[59] Nightingale, 'Capitalists', pp. 3-35.
[60] On the 'stranger', see Derek Pearsall, 'Strangers in Late-Fourteenth-Century London', in *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, ed. by F. R. P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain van d'Elden (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 46-62.
[61] The damage to the manuscript means we have lost one or two words here.

points. The *Drapers' Petition* is characterised in this quotation, and elsewhere, by its concern for brevity.[62] It omits the elaborate reference to the running of 'temps'; it names the 'fraunchise' of the city without elaborating on what it means; it omits the reference to the 'conspiracie & faux ymaginacio*u*n' of Brembre and his allies; and 'seynt Edward le Roy' becomes simply 'seint Edward'. The omitted or simplified material is not integral to the narrative of the petition; rather, it serves as glosses on the narrative, defining terminology and heightening the outrageousness of Brembre's actions. Dodd has argued that '[b]revity and clarity [...] were a principle accorded some importance in a petitionary context',[63] and this principle can seemingly be detected in the *Drapers' Petition*. It shares its structure and much of its phraseology with the other group one petitions, but it abbreviates superfluous parts of the material to produce a more concise account.

In producing one particular accusation, the group one petitions depart more radically from the model. Table 1 shows that no two petitions use the same phraseology when narrating accusation C, which concerns the events on Cheapside in February 1384.[64] The *Painters' Petition* provides the briefest and most impersonal account of Brembre's actions. They claim he:

> venoit en chepe oue g*ra*unt multitude des gentz armez a g*ra*unt doute &
> affray des toutz bones gentz du dite Citee & moultz autres gentz de
> mesme Citee emp*ri*sona a g*ra*unt doute de lo*ur* vies & p*er*de de lo*ur*
> biens. (7d.2)

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[62] Compare, for example, the Pinners' description of Brembre arming men in the Guildhall 'p*our* fair*e* celle electio*u*n & p*our* auoir mys a mort toutz autres gentz q*ue*ux ne furent pas somo*u*ns sils eusent la venuz p*our* la d*i*te ellection' (7a.1), with the Drapers' description of Brembre arming men in the Guildhall 'p*our* faire cele elecccio*u*n' (7c.1).

[63] Dodd, 'Writing Wrongs', p. 224. For a similar discussion of petitions' need to 'have grievances expressed precisely and succinctly', see Dodd, 'Thomas Paunfield', p. 239.

[64] These events are discussed above, pp. 56-63.

The fragmentary <...>*steres' Petition* reads similarly: Brembre 'venoit en chepe oue g*ra*nt multitude des <...>[65] dite m<es>tier a g*ra*nt doute de lo*ur* vies & p*er*de de lo*ur* bienz' (7f.2). The words missing from this fragment make specific comment on this passage difficult, although we can detect a greater degree of personalisation in this petition: it is not 'autres gentz' who fear for their life, but specifically men of the 'dite m<es>tier' of the <...>steres. The Drapers provide a lengthier account, describing how Brembre:

> venoit en chepe oue g*ra*u<nt> multitude des gentz armez a g*ra*unt affray
> & doute <d>e tous bons gentz du dite citee. Et ap*res* p*our* malice p*ri*st
> diu*er*ses gentz du dit mistier <&> eux mis en p*ri*sonement a g*ra*unt doute
> <de> lo*ur* vies & p*er*de de lo*ur* biens. (7c.2)

This account adds emotive glossing, by noting that Brembre acted 'p*our* malice', while it also similarly foregrounds the 'dit mistier' of the Drapers. The Armourers employ a similar construction, narrating that Brembre:

> venoit en chepe <...> oue g*ra*unt multitude des gentz armes auxi <b>ien
> for<eyns> {come} autres a g*ra*unt doute des bones gentz du dite Citee &
> a g*ra*unt affray. Et ap*res* p*our* malice prist certeins gentz du dite mestier
> & les emp*ri*sona greuousement a g*ra*unt doute de lo*ur* vies & p*er*de de
> lo*ur* bienz. (7e.2)

The emotional intensity of the narration is heightened here through the use of 'greuousement', while an additional charge is laid against Brembre of consorting with 'for<eyns>'.

The petitions of the Saddlers and the Goldsmiths provide the most detailed and personalised account of events on Cheapside.[66] The Saddlers narrate how Brembre:

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[65] We are missing about twenty words here due to the fragmentary nature of this petition.
[66] It is worth noting that these were the two guilds with the most extensive property holdings on Cheapside. The Saddlers were located to the west of the street, and owned many properties around Foster Lane. This was also where the Saddlers' Hall was built in around 1395. See George Unwin,

venoit en chepe oue *gra*unt multitude des gentz {armez a graunt} doute
de t*ous* les bones <gentz> du dite <Cit>ee & ille*oque*s ad mys a mort
John Costantyn Cordewaner. Et ap*res* vient as schopes des diu*ers*es
gentz de sell<ers> & eux manasa dauoire <...> en mesme la maner*e* p*our*
quel ascun de eux f<uw>erent hors de la d*i*te Cite & ne cosoient
ille*oque*s venir p*our* doute de p*er*dre lo*ur* vies. Et ap*res* le dite s*eignour*
Nichol prist certeinz gentz <...> <me>stier & eux mist en p*risou*n sannz
ascun response ou ley a *gra*unt doute de lo*ur* vies & pe*r*de de lo*ur* biens.
(7h.3)

This account provides a more precise narration of Brembre's actions, naming people

(John Constantyn), guilds ('sell<ers>') and buildings ('schopes'). This is also a

more emotionally revealing narrative. Phrases such as 'doute de p*er*dre lo*ur* vies' are

commonplace in petitions, serving to 'add additional colour to the prose'.[67] But the

Saddlers prevent the audience from reading such comments purely as rhetorical

colouring, for they narrate the actual consequences of such 'doute': Saddlers

'f<uw>erent hors de la d*i*te Cite'. The Goldsmiths' accusation was originally of

equal length, although much of their petition is now illegible. We can, however,

decipher the accusation that Brembre came into Cheapside 'et apres myst Richard

Merdon & R<...> <...>dernesse Or<feue>re en prison [...] horriblement p*ar* quel

empris<onmen>t [...] sont mort' (7g.3). This narrative is the most personalised

account: the Goldsmiths are alone amongst the group one petitioners in naming

members of their own guild, and this inscribing of names serves to memorialise

those who died as a result of Brembre's imprisonments.

    The last two paragraphs reveal how personal testimony has become

incorporated into the framework of the collaborative petition. The phrase 'personal

testimony' must be used advisedly; Dodd has warned on two separate occasions that

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The Gilds and Companies of London (London: Methuen, 1908), p. 181. Goldsmiths' Row, running
between Bread Street and the Cheapside Cross, was the 'most beautiful frame of fayre houses and
shopes, that bee within the Walles of London'. Stow, *Survey of London*, I, p. 345.
[67] Dodd, 'Writing Wrongs', p. 230. Dodd specifically cites only '*doute de mort*' and '*salvacion de
lours vies*' as commonplaces, but the phrases that appear in the 1388 guild petitions are obviously
variations on these.

we should not seek to locate in petitions the 'authentic voice of the petitioner'.[68]

Dodd emphasises the petition's 'rather predictable and stereotyped form', and

suggests that petitions were products of the 'centre [...] reacting and responding to a

political discourse determined by the functionality and principles underlying

government action'.[69] Dodd's argument is particularly applicable to the 1388

petitions which are closely associated with centralised discourses. As well as

adopting the stereotyped form of the petition, these documents are also mimicking

the national political discourse of the lords appellant (by accusing Brembre of

accroaching royal power), while they also follow a localised political discourse

through their use of a single model. However, given these triple constraints on

adding authentic testimony to the petitions, the guilds' personalised narrations of

events in Cheapside become all the more remarkable. Here, each guild breaks away

from the model,[70] and improvises their own short narrative about Brembre's actions

and their emotional responses to those actions.

Noting the existence of this personal testimony is useful as it reveals

something fundamental about the production of the 1388 guild petitions. While they

are part of a centralised, communal endeavour, each petition was produced by the

London guild itself and not by a government clerk or a freelance scribe copying from

a model and simply adding each guild's name into the appropriate space.[71] This

argument is evidenced not only by the existence of the personal testimony, but also

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[68] Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 302; Dodd, 'Thomas Paunfield', p. 239.
[69] Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 314, 279.
[70] If, as I posit below, the *Goldsmiths' Petition* provided the model, this might explain why the other petitions break away at this point. The other guilds may not have wanted to re-copy the highly personalised testimony of the Goldsmiths, and so instead improvised their own testimony.
[71] Writing about the 1388-89 guild certificates, Jan Gerchow envisages many of the documents being produced in this centralised way. Gerchow argues that the documents were 'produced' or 'edited' centrally by Chancery scribes, and cites as evidence of this the fact that groups of certificates share language and 'were evidently written down by the same scribe on pieces of parchment of the same size'. See Jan Gerchow, 'Gilds and Fourteenth-Century Bureaucracy: The Case of 1388-89', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 40 (1996), 109-48 (pp. 113, 119-20).

by the variety of scribal hands and of parchment sizes which further preclude the

idea of central production and favour localised production within the guilds.[72] We

are now in a position to reflect on the nature of this localised production. A model

evidently circulated amongst these guilds, and while some idiosyncrasies can be

detected in the petitions (the Drapers desire to abbreviate, the Founders demonisation

of the victuallers), the guildsmen mostly followed the phraseology of this petition

closely, producing an unanimous set of petitions. The petitions do not, however,

appear to have copied the model exhaustively, and one key difference between them

is their length. It is notable that the length of the petition mostly corresponds to the

political prestige of the guild producing it.[73] We could speculate that the lesser guilds

deliberated produced abbreviated petitions, perhaps in a further attempt to prevent

the triers in parliament from being inundated with testimony.

A question remains concerning the nature of the model the guilds were

following. It is possible that a model text was produced which was sent around the

guilds and then destroyed. However, an alternative possibility is that one of the 1388

guild petitions functioned as the model. As I will show in the following sections, the

petitions of the Cutlers and Embroiderers appear to have circulated amongst the

other guilds and, given these precedents, we could hypothesise that one of the

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[72] Scase has previously noted this variety, and concluded that it is likely that the petitions 'were produced by clerks working for the individual guilds', a view I concur with. See Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 71, fn. 105. I give the size of the parchment at the start of each of the transcriptions that appear in Appendix 7.

[73] It is difficult to recreate hierarchies amongst the guilds. However, we can somewhat ascertain each guild's political dominance through analysing the strength of their representation on the common council. Between 1381 and 1387, the Pinners and Founders (who produce the shortest petitions) had two and nine representatives respectively. The Painters and Armourers had eleven and thirteen representatives, while the Saddlers, Tailors and Goldsmiths (who produce the lengthiest petitions) had twenty, forty-eight, and fifty-three representatives. A correlation can thus be seen between the petition's length and the political prestige of the guild. This correlation is disrupted by the Drapers: they had the most representatives of all the guilds – seventy-three in total – but produce the second shortest petition. However, I do not think that this necessarily invalidates the wider point; for the Drapers work independently to abbreviate their petition, and they should thus be distinguished from the other texts. On the make up of the common councils, see Bird, *Turbulent London*, pp. 123-30.

lengthier petitions in group one – those of the Goldsmiths, Saddlers, or perhaps the Tailors – served as the model. Several pieces of evidence point to the *Goldsmiths' Petition* as being the likeliest candidate. Firstly, there are several minor differences in phraseology between the *Goldsmiths' Petition* and the *Saddlers' Petition* where the remaining petitions agree with the Goldsmiths' readings.[74] Secondly, while several of the petitions survive in excellent condition, the *Goldsmiths' Petition* shows signs of having been handled: there are tears to three of the corners and holes in the manuscript; there is creasing throughout; some of the text is faded; and several stains obscure words. There is no single discernible cause for these defects,[75] but they could all have arisen if this petition was being carelessly passed between guildsmen. Thirdly, and finally, the Goldsmiths' guild was a powerful guild with previous involvement in factional politics, and it is possible – as I discuss below – that they were the directing force behind the production of the 1388 petitions.[76] As such, it would be appropriate for them to produce the foundational petition. Given the uncertain state of the *Tailors' Petition*, we cannot prove that the *Goldsmiths' Petition* served as a model for the other petitions. However, it does seem likely that either the *Goldsmiths' Petition* or a very similar petition was passed amongst the other guilds and formed a model for their own textual productions.[77]

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[74] The Saddlers include the phrase 'p*ar* la q*u*il ad estee usee' (7h.2), whereas the Goldsmiths and the other petitions have the phrase 'p*ar* la ou <ad e>stees vs<ee>' (7g.2; 7a.1; 7d.1; 7e.1). Similarly the Saddlers state that men were summoned 'p*ar* assent du dite s*eignour* Nichol' (7h.2), whereas the Goldsmiths and the others state they were summoned 'p*ar* lour assent' (7g.2; 7a.1; 7c.1; 7d.1; 7e.1). Finally, the Saddlers state Brembre summoned men '<queu>x furent al Gyhall' (7h.2), whereas the Goldsmiths and the others state that Brembre summoned men 'queux furent armez a la Gyhall' (7g.2; 7a.1; 7b.1; 7c.1; 7d.1; 7e.1). The poor condition of both of these petitions hinders a comprehensive analysis of verbal parallels.

[75] The *Saddlers' Petition* too survives only as a fragment, but this has a single cause: the lower left-hand corner of the manuscript has been torn off and lost.

[76] See below, pp. 141-43. For the Goldsmiths involvement in factional politics, note that the 'Goldsmithes' hall was one of the sites where John Northampton and his party congregated. See Usk, '*Appeal*', l. 141.

[77] For the sake of concision, in the following sections I use the *Goldsmiths' Petition* to represent the model.

Group Two: Expanding Models

In comparison to the relatively straightforward group one petitions, the two petitions in group two – the *Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths' Petition* and the *Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition*[78] – are more problematic as, while they appear to be familiar with the model provided by the *Goldsmiths' Petition*, they do not follow it closely.

	GoP		LeP	CuP
A^1	1			
B^1			(1)	(1)
B^2	2			(2)
C	(3)		(2)	(3)
E			3	
F^1	4		(4)	(4)
G			(7)	(7)
H	5		(5)	(5)
I^1	6		6	6
J^1	7		(8)	
J^2				(8)
Q				9
R				10
S				11

Table 2 – The Correspondences amongst the Group 2 Petitions

As can be seen in Table 2, in the production of only one of these accusations (I^1) do the Cutlers and the Leathersellers closely follow the phraseology of the model. In producing a further three accusations (C, F^1, H), the Cutlers and Leathersellers demonstrate a familiarity with the model's phraseology, but also introduce their own distinctive alterations and additions. Elsewhere, these two petitions work independently of any model: they introduce novel accusations and phraseologies

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[78] For simplicity's sake, these two petitions are subsequently referred to as the *Cutlers' Petition* and the *Leathersellers' Petition*.

which are either unique to their own petition (accusation E in the *Leathersellers'*
Petition, and accusations Q, R, and S in the *Cutlers' Petition*), or shared only with
each other (G, B[1], J[2]).

The complex relationship between these two petitions is exemplified by their
narration of accusation B[1] which concerns the 1383 election. The Cutlers describe
how Brembre 'fist garnir les bon*n*es & franches gentz de mesme la Cite com*m*e la
ffranchise est & vsage de mesme la Citee destre a le Gildhalle' (7l.1). At the
Guildhall 'aucuns de son assent qui ouec luy yfurent p*re*sens baterent & trayrent
c*er*taynes c*er*taines[79] gens' so that they would not 'demourer p*our* doubte de lo*ur*
vies' (7l.1). The Leathersellers similarly describe how Brembre 'fist garnir les bones
gentz franks de meisme la Cite solonc la f<ranchise &> vsage dicelle, destre a la
Guyhald du d*i*te Cite' where 'as<c>uns qils furent a la d*i*te Guyhall de lassent du dit
s*eignour* Nichol p*our* la cause susd*i*te bateront greuousement treteront & defouleront
c*er*teines bones gentz' so that 'p*our* <dou>te de mort noeseront pas dem*our*er s*ur*
lour eleccio*u*n' (7m.1). While these passages are not identical, they do share several
terms, such as 'garnir', 'bateront', 'demourer', and 'certaines', which are absent
from the other petitions. This suggests that one of these petitions may have been
pendant on the other, although the direction of exchange is difficult to determine.
For, what is notable is that both of these petitions appear to have had independent
access to the model petition. As Table 2 shows, the Cutlers' accusation B[2] could not
have been sourced from the Leathersellers, while the Leathersellers' accusation J[1]
could not have been sourced from the Cutlers. We could envisage, therefore, one of
these sets of guilds working with, and freely adapting, the petitionary model to form

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[79] The repetition appears in the manuscript.

their own petition which they then passed, together with the model, to the other set of guilds who used both in producing their own contribution.

While the petitions in group one valued unanimity, the group two petitions innovate freely. Such innovation does not have to be discordant; the Leathersellers unique paragraph (accusation E), for instance, serves to further enhance the case against Brembre by further itemising his electoral malpractices. However, the Cutler's unique paragraphs (accusations Q, R, and S) are more problematic. In these paragraphs, the Cutlers seek the reinforcement of a statute controlling the sale of wine and they request that 'Nicholas Exton' ore maire de loundres soit descharge de son Office' (7l.9) and that 'William Cheyne Recordour & hugh ffastolf <vi>scount de loundres soient descharges de lo*ur* Offices po*ur* tous io*urs*' (7l.10). These added paragraphs are inapposite: they add nothing to the case against Brembre. Even though figures such as Exton and Fastolf were known associates of Brembre, the lords appellant appear to have made a strategic decision not to pursue them, and so the Cutlers appear to be acting unilaterally here.[80] But the Cutlers' idiosyncrasies serve to disrupt the sense of unanimity fostered by the other petitions and reminds the audience of the subjective and singular voices behind the texts.

The controlled and centralised discourses that can be detected in the group one petitions are thus dismantled here. The reasons for the emergence in these two petitions of these idiosyncratic voices are unclear. However, it is interesting to note that these are the only petitions produced by multiple guilds. The *Leathersellers'*

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[80] Dodd describes the lords appellant's support for Exton as 'ruthlessly pragmatic'. See Dodd, 'Thomas Favent', pp. 404-5, 412-14. On Exton's relationship with Brembre, see Paul Strohm, 'Exton, Nicholas (*d.*1402)', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com /view/article/52173>, [Last accessed: 30 December 2011]. On Fastolf's partisanship, see Nightingale, 'Fastolf, Hugh (*d.*1392)', *ODNB*. Cheyne had served with little controversy as recorder since 1377, and it is unclear what he did to earn the Cutlers' wrath.

Petition is the product of two closely allied guilds,[81] while the *Cutlers' Petition* is the product of a more disparate band of mostly weapon manufacturers.[82] There was consequently a further set of imperatives impacting upon the production of these petitions: as well as responding to the stereotyped features of the petitionary form, the central direction from the lords appellant, and the model provided by the *Goldsmiths' Petition*, these petitions were also responding to disparate voices from within several guilds. This could account for the incongruous appearance of the paragraph on the sale of wine. However, this explanation does not alter the fact that the *Cutlers' Petition* in particular strikes a discordant note and has a detrimental effect on the overall purpose of these petitions.

Group Three: Experimentations with Language, Rhetoric, and Voice

The group three petitions share the innovativeness of the group two petitions although they are not discordant. It is this group of petitions that contains the famous *Mercers' Petition*, which has been celebrated as the 'oldest parliamentary text in English'.[83] Given this petition's fame, and its frequent appearance in recent

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[81] The Leathersellers and Whittawyers worked alongside each other and eventually merged in 1479. The relevant petition requesting the merger is printed in William Henry Black, *History and Antiquities of the Worshipful Company of Leathersellers of the City of London* (London: [n. pub.], 1871), p. 38.

[82] Brief accounts of the histories of these five guilds can be found in W. Carew Hazlitt, *The Livery Companies of the City of London: Their Origin, Character, Development and Social and Political Importance* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892), pp. 105-6 (Bladesmiths), 141-42 (Spurriers), 374-76 (Bowyers), 461-67 (Cutlers), 486-88 (Fletchers).

[83] Norman Davies, *The Isles: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 424. I cite Davies here as he usefully testifies to how the fame of the *Mercers' Petition* spreads beyond medievalists. Petitions in this period were still routinely produced in Anglo-Norman, and Ormrod has suggested the 'shift from French to English' over the fifteenth century was characterised by its 'slowness and uncertainty'. See W. Mark Ormrod, 'The Language of Complaint: Multilingualism and Petitioning in Later Medieval England', in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England, c.1150-c.1500*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 31-43 (p. 38).

scholarship, I intend to devote some considerable space here to teasing out its relationship with the other 1388 petitions.

	GoP	CuP	CoP	EmP	MeP
A[1]	1				
B[1]		(1)			
B[2]	2	(2)			
B[3]			1	1	(1, 2)
C	(3)	(3)	(2)		
D				(2)	(3)
E					
B[4]			3	3	(4)
F[1]	4	(4)	(4)		
G		(7)	(5)		
H	5	(5)			
I[1]	6	6	6		
J[1]	7				
J[2]		(8)	(7)		
K				(4)	(5, 6)
L				(5)	(7)
M					8
N					9
O					10
P				(6)	(11)
I[2]					12

Table 3 − The Correspondences among the Group 3 Petitions

Table 3 demonstrates this group's innovativeness. It shows that these three petitions share two paragraphs that appear nowhere else (B[3] and B[4]). An additional four paragraphs are shared between the Embroiderers and the Mercers (D, K, L, and P), while a further four paragraphs are unique to the *Mercers' Petition* (M, N, O, and I[2]). Table 3 is also revealing about these three texts' relationship with the other 1388 petitions. The *Cordwainers' Petition* contains one accusation (G) which appears in the petitions of both the Cutlers and Leathersellers, while its phraseology of another

accusation (J^2) closely resembles that used by the Cutlers.[84] This suggests that the Cordwainers were working from the *Cutlers' Petition*, although they do not follow it faithfully. Significantly, the *Cordwainers' Petition* is not dependent on any other petition, and there is no evidence that the Cordwainers were familiar with the petitionary model.

While these three petitions may share the Cutlers' innovativeness, their innovations are very different in character. For the additions that they make are apposite: they enhance the case against Brembre, either through adding novel accusations (as can be seen in D, K, L, M, and N), or through rhetorically and dramatically expanding on the shared accusations. This expansion can be seen in accusation B^4. Although this paragraph concerns the familiar topic of the 1383 election, the group three guilds fashion a livelier account of events. The Cordwainers describe how Brembre set up ambushes of armed men who awaited Brembre's opponents and:

> sailleront sur eux oue g*ra*unt noise criantz tuwez tuwez lour pursuiantz hydousement p*ar*ount les ditz bones gentz p*our* paour de mort se fuwyrent & ascondirent en mesons & autres liewes secretz come en t*er*re de guerre. (7i.3) [85]

Through the use of the adverb 'hydousement' and the 't*er*re de guerre' simile, the dramatic quality of this narrative is heightened and the outrageousness of Brembre's

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[84] Compare, for instance, the Cordwainers' description of the Book containing 'touz les bones articles appurtinantz al bone gou*er*naille du dite Citee' (7i.7), with the Cutlers' 'tous les bons Articles appo*ur*tenans au bon gou*er*naille de la d*i*te Citee' (7l.8). Equally, compare the Cordwainers' description of the Book being sworn on 'al honour de dieu & p*ro*fit de co*mmun*e people' (7i.7), with the Cutlers' 'al honno*ur* de dieu & le p*ro*ufit de com*m*un peuple' (7l.8).
[85] The Embroiderers similarly describe how the men 'sailleront hors sur les ditz bones gentz oue g*ra*unt noyse criantz tuwez tuwez hidousement lour pursuiant<z par>ount les ditz bones gentz p*our* paoir de mort se fuwyrent & ascondirent en mesons & autres lieux secretz come en t*er*re de guerre' (7j.3). The Mercers equally state that the ambushes 'breken vp armed, cryinge with loude voice sle, sle, folwyng hem, wherthourgh the peple for feere fledde to houses & other <hidy>nges as in londe of werre' (7k.4).

actions is foregrounded. This dramatisation is furthered in the passage's use of direct speech, a device used nowhere else in the 1388 petitions.

Direct speech is not untypical of the petitionary form, and W. Mark Ormrod has discussed how it 'add[s] immediacy and colour to otherwise mediated texts'.[86] Such speech is, according to Ormrod, a 'dramatic device [...] used as a means of emphasising the "outrageous" or "horrible" nature of the offences'.[87] Interestingly, Ormrod cites as an example of such direct speech a petition by Raymond Durant, who complains that forty men belonging to the party of the vicomte of Tartas attacked his castle 'criaunt Tarthas Tarthas' [*crying "Tartas! Tartas!"*].[88] The exclamation 'Tarthas Tarthas' structurally parallels 'tuwez tuwez' and 'sle sle'. This repetition of a single key word suggests that we should not view these bursts of direct speech as an accurate record of what was said. Rather, they appear to be carefully crafted intrusions into the narrative which summarise in a single echoed word the wider concerns of the petition.

Ormrod has suggested that such inclusion of direct speech reflects 'the oral context in which petitions were [...] judged'.[89] Notably, the petitions in group three appear to pay particular attention to their oral context. This is apparent not only in the petitions' use of direct, but also in their rhetorical flourishes.[90] Patterning of three, for example, is used throughout these petitions: the petitions all describe how John Northampton was removed from office 'oue fort main & debat & gr*a*unt

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[86] W. Mark Ormrod, 'Murmur, Clamour and Noise: Voicing Complaint and Remedy in Petitions to the English Crown, *c.* 1300-*c.* 1460', in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, ed. by W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 135-55 (p. 145).
[87] Ormrod, 'Murmur, Clamour and Noise', p. 145.
[88] London, National Archives, SC 8/163/8126. The translation is my own. See Ormrod, 'Murmur, Clamour and Noise', p. 145.
[89] Ormrod, 'Murmur, Clamour and Noise, p. 145.
[90] While Burnley notes that such patterning is not untypical of curial prose ('Curial Prose', p. 596), it is untypical of the 1388 petitions.

multitude du poeple' (7j.1);[91] the Cordwainers and Embroiderers describe how

Brembre's actions destroy the 'plusours bones lib*er*teez franchises & custumes de

mesme la Citee' (7j.1);[92] the Embroiderers state that men are 'enditeez & ou*er*tement

desclaundrez & tenuz disloialx & tretours' to the king (7j.4);[93] and the Embroiderers

and the Mercers claim Brembre 'destruyd the kynges trewe lyges, som with open

slaughtre, some bi false emprisonementz, and some fledde the citee' (7k.3).[94] These

passages are unique to the group three petitions but, unlike the Cutlers' innovations,

they do not strike a discordant note. For, the focus remains on Brembre, and the

innovations serve to enhance the attack on him by rendering the accusations in a

dramatically and rhetorically potent way.

Recontextualising the *Mercers' Petition*: The Mercers as Translators

Correspondences between the *Mercers'* and *Cordwainers' Petitions* have been

previously recognised by Scase, although they were not strong enough for her to

speculate on a direct relationship between the two texts.[95] However, the

correspondences between the *Mercers' Petition* and the hitherto-unpublished

Embroiderers' Petition are noticeably stronger. These similarities can be seen in

Table 3, which records the accusations that these two petitions uniquely share (D, K,

L, and P). The parallels between these two texts are also represented in Appendix 8,

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[91] The Cordwainers have 'forte main debat & g*ra*unt multitude des gentz' (7i.1). The Mercers have the same accusation, but the pattern of three is disrupted: 'with strong honde as it is ful knowen, & thourgh debate & strenger partye' (7k.2).
[92] The Cordwainers have 'plusours bones lib*er*teez franchises & aunciens custumes' (7i.1).
[93] The Mercers again disrupt the pattern of three: they are 'endited, and we ben openlich disclaundred, holden vntrewe & traitours to owre kyng' (7k.6).
[94] The Embroiderers have 'ascuns mist au mort ascuns fauxem*ent* emprisona & ascuns fist fuwyr hors du d*i*te citee' (7j.2).
[95] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, pp. 68-69.

which presents the two petitions side-by-side highlighting the verbal overlaps.[96] Recognising these correspondences is hugely significant; the *Mercers' Petition* is frequently read in isolation, and has even been described as 'idiosyncratic' by Turner.[97] However, the strong correlations between the two petitions problematise any attempt to isolate the Middle English text. Indeed, so close are these correlations that we can hypothesise that one petition is a loose translation of the other. There has been previous speculation that the *Mercers' Petition* was the first of the 1388 petitions produced: Scase posits that it 'was the basis for the French petitions', and the new edition of the *Parliament Rolls* similarly suggests that it 'formed the basis for the subsequent petitions'.[98] However, a close examination of the two petitions reveals the opposite to be the case: the *Mercers' Petition* is a translation of the Anglo-Norman *Embroiderers' Petition*.

This is evidenced in part by the *Mercers' Petition's* language, which uses lexical borrowings from the French hitherto unrecorded in English. The Mercers produce the first recorded usage given in the *MED* for 'busshmentz' (7k.4) meaning 'a body of troops lying in ambush',[99] while the Embroiderers' 'embusshementz' (7j.3) is an Anglo-Norman word in use at least as early as *c.*1300.[100] Similarly, while the Mercers use the common English verb 'crye' (7k.4) where the Embroiderers use 'proclamer' (7j.3), the Mercers share with the Embroiderers the noun 'proclamatio*u*n' (7k.4; 7j.3), its first use in English.[101] A more problematic lexical item in the *Mercers' Petition* is 'enarmynges', a term used when the Mercers state

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[96] See Appendix 8, pp. 462-67.
[97] Turner, 'Conflict', p. 265.
[98] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 77; *PROME*, 'Appendix: February 1388'.
[99] s.v. 'busshement (n.)', *MED*.
[100] s.v. 'embuschement', *The Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, ed. by David Trotter et al (2001-), available online via the *Anglo-Norman Online Hub*, <http://www.anglo-norman.net/>, [Last accessed: 30 January 2012].
[101] s.v. 'proclamacioun (n.)', *MED*.

that Brembre 'made dyu*er*ses enarmynges bi day & eke bi nyght' (7k.3). The meaning of *enarmings*, a neologism formed through affixation, is problematic here; the *MED* offers the definition '[a]n armed attack', for which the *Mercers' Petition* is the sole witness, but this definition is unconvincing in the context.[102] The word's derivation from the root verb *enarmen* meaning 'to equip (someone) with arms',[103] would suggest a more plausible definition for *enarming* would be simply the practice of equipping someone with arms.[104] This would, however, render the phrase 'made diu*er*ses enarmynges' clumsy and resistant to straightforward translation.

The *Embroiderers' Petition* includes at the equivalent point the accusation that Brembre 'fist diu*er*ses armeez en la dite Citee p*ar* noet & p*ar* iour' (7j.2). This may on first reading seem a problematic passage; 'armeez' can be the past participle of *armer*, meaning 'to arm',[105] and the term appears in this form four times in the *Embroiderers' Petition*.[106] However, 'armeez' in this context is evidently to be read not as a past participle, but as a plural form of the noun *armee*, meaning an 'army, armed force'.[107] The accusation thus reads simply that Brembre *raised various armed forces in the said city by day and by night*.[108] The slipperiness surrounding the term, however, possibly accounts for the Mercers' invention of the problematic 'enarmynges'. If they initially read 'armeez' as a past participle, but then recognised

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[102] s.v. 'enarming (ger.)', *MED*. The *Anthology of Chancery English* agrees with this definition, glossing 'enarmynges' as 'attacks'. See *An Anthology of Chancery English*, ed. by J. H. Fisher, M. Richardson and J. L. Fisher (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), p. 334.
[103] s.v. 'enarmen', *MED*.
[104] The *MED* offers a second definition for *enarming* along these lines: '[t]he action of equipping a ship for war'. s.v. 'enarming (ger.)', *MED*. The term is glossed as 'armings' in a partial transcription of the *Mercers' Petition* printed in *In Forme of Speche is Chaunge: Readings in the History of the English Language*, ed. by John H. Fisher and Diane Bornstein (London: University Press of America, 1984), p. 86.
[105] s.v. 'armer', *AND*.
[106] See 'sibien foreins come autres feurent armeez' (7j.3), 'p*ro*clamee q*ue* nul voisist en la d*i*te citee armeez' (7j.3) and the twice-used 'gentz armeez' (7j.3).
[107] s.v. 'armee, armé', *AND*.
[108] In translating 'fist' as 'raised' rather than 'made' I am taking my lead from an entry in the *Parliament Rolls*, where a mention of 'diversez armeez par vous [...] faitz' is translated as 'various armies raised by you'. See *PROME*, V, 61.

that the syntax of the sentence required not a verb but a noun, they may have sought

to compromise by searching for a verb functioning as a noun, thereby inventing the

gerund *enarming*. This is speculative; however, it is easier to develop a plausible

scenario for the Anglo-Norman 'armeez' becoming the Middle English

'enarmynges' than it is for the neologistic 'enarmynges' becoming the common

'armeez'.

Alongside this linguistic evidence, the quality of the two petitions also

testifies to the Embroiderers' precedence. The *Embroiderers' Petition* is the more

polished text: it expresses its points with clarity and rhetorical force, while the

Mercers' Petition is a clumsier and less rhetorically effective text.[109] The

Embroiderers' Petition is also the more consistent text, as it deploys conventional

documentary diplomatic throughout by, for example, referring to Brembre as 'le dit

mons*eignour* Nichol' (7j.1) and London as the 'd*i*te Citee' (7j.1). The *Mercers'*

Petition, by contrast, refers to London as 'the same citee' (7k.2), 'the citee' (7k.3),

and 'this Citee' (7k.9), and it refers to Brembre as 'the forsaid Nichol' (7k.3), 'the

same Nichol' (7k.4), 'hym Nichol' (7k.5), and 'he Nichol' (7k.7). This inconsistency

could be the result of a careless translator, who neither consistently omits nor

includes such formulaic elements.

The translator's carelessness is further evidenced when the *Mercers' Petition*

describes how Brembre, 'ayeins the pees bifore purueyde, was chosen mair' (7k.2).

This is a comprehensible passage, although the depiction of London's 'pees' being

artificially 'purueyde' or *created* is a little incongruous given that the city's peace is

often presented not as an artificial construct, but a natural, perfect state.[110] The

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[109] The Mercers, for example, disrupt several of the patterns of three; see footnotes 91 and 93 above.
[110] Consider, for example, Turner's discussion of Usk fantasising about 'the natural state of urban peace', or Frank Rexroth's work on how peace was conceived of as an inviolate 'social fact [...] a

equivalent passage in the *Embroiderers' Petition* is not incongruous: it states that Brembre, 'encontre la peas p*ar* auiseme*nt* purvoiez feust fait maire' (7j.1). Here 'purvoiez' modifies 'auisement', and serves to accuse Brembre of acting with malice aforethought. The incongruity of the Mercers' description could be explained as a consequence of scribal eye-skip causing the omission of 'p*ar* auiseme*nt*'.

A final piece of evidence to suggest that the *Mercers' Petition* is a translation is provided by its distinctive voice. The Mercers' use of the first person is significant as it deviates from traditional petitionary practice. Ormrod states categorically that '[p]etitions are written not in the first person but the third', while Dodd similarly notes that petitions 'routinely represented the views of the petitioner in the third person'.[111] While the Mercers certainly do use the first person, it is worth noting that the petition does not begin in the first person: it is 'the folk of the mercerye of London, as a <me>mbre of the same citee' who complain (7k.1), and the opening paragraphs contain nothing in the first person, referring instead to an anonymous 'some' (7k.3) being threatened, 'no man' being commanded to attend the election (7k.4), 'what man' being imprisoned (7k.5), and 'any man' being impeached (7k.5). Indeed, the first use of the first-person is not until the sixth paragraph, when the Mercers describe the consequences if Brembre's falsehood was 'ayeinsaide, as of vs togydre of the mercerye, or othere craftes' (7k.6).

The equivalent point in the *Embroiderers' Petition* provides a problematic textual crux. I have transcribed it as 'si la fauxine du dit mons*eignour* Nicholl feusse contredit p*ar* nous Brouderers ou ascun autre mistier' (7j.4). However, the word preceding 'Brouderers' is unclear: the initial two minims could be rendered as either

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good worth preserving'. See Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 125; Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 43.
[111] Ormrod, 'Murmur, Clamour and Noise', p. 137; Dodd, 'Thomas Paunfield', p. 228.

uous or *nous*. If it is 'uous Brouderers', we could read *uous* as an alternative form of *vostre*, the possessive pronoun.[112] This reading suits the typical petitionary use of the third person, and we could speculate that the Mercers misread the 'u' for an 'n' accounting for their switch in voice.[113] However, *vous* is not a common form of *vostre*.[114] Equally, the scribe of the *Embroiderers' Petition* consistently renders an initial u/v as distinct from an internal u/v in words such as 'vorroit', 'vsee', 'vn', and 'venir'. Scribal practice thus favours the reading *nous brouderers*.

There is a precedent amongst the 1388 petitions for the temporary use of the first person. The *Founders' Petition*, which follows the model of the other petitions closely, contains one unique clause: when describing Brembre's creation of indictments against his opponents, it states that 'le meir*e* qorest n*ous* c*er*tefia en place de record' (7b.2). We could, therefore, view the *Embroiderers' Petition* as following this precedent: in both the first person is used only once, perhaps as a deliberate attempt to add greater immediacy to a specific passage, or perhaps as simply a casualty of a careless writer. But, whilst the Embroiderers revert back to the third person, the Mercers retain the first person. So, for the Mercers it is 'vs' that are 'disclaundred' (7k.7), while for the Embroiderers it is 'les ditz bones gentz' who are 'declaundrez' (7j.5). Similarly, the Mercers are anxious about the consequences 'if any of vs [...] be apeched' (7k.11), while the Embroiderers are anxious about the consequences 'sils ou ascun de eux soient [...] empeschez' (7j.6). We can thus theorise that the Mercers began composing their petition in the conventional third person but, after noticing the temporary switch in the *Embroiderers' Petition*,

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[112] s.v. 'vostre', *AND*.

[113] Such a mis-reading can be detected elsewhere. While the Embroiderers describe the 'g*ra*unt noyse' (7j.3) of Brembre's supporters, the Mercers describe their 'loude voice' (7k.4) possibly suggesting they misread 'noyse' as 'voyse'.

[114] It is used a couple of times in *PROME* when, for instance, the commons claim that Cheshire malefactors have rioted 'et les files de vous liges ravissont' (*PROME*, III, 42).

decided to seize on this and continue in the first person, recognising the added

immediacy it would bring. This theory is revealing as it implies that the adoption of

the first-person was not a conscious decision that the Mercers made prior to

composition beginning, but a serendipitous discovery they made as they were

writing.[115]

Analysing the *Mercers' Petition*: The Mercers as Innovators

The preceding discussion of the relationship between the two petitions has not

provided incontrovertible proof that the *Mercers' Petition* was the translation: such

proof is hard to come by. However, the balance of probabilities suggests that the

Mercers' Petition is a translation, and it is worth offering some brief comments here

on the Mercers' translation practice. The Mercers translate freely; while their work

follows exactly the order of the material in the *Embroiderers' Petition*, there are

relatively few occasions where the Anglo-Norman is rendered verbatim into English.

Particularly noticeable is the Mercers' omission or simplification of passages which

reflect documentary diplomatic. While the Mercers do open their first paragraph with

the familiar address and naming of the supplicants, elsewhere such formulaic

material is absent. For example, the *Embroiderers' Petition* contains familiar dating

clauses, such as the description that the election is made 'chescun an le iour de seint

Edward le Roy' (7j.1) and that Brembre's proclamation was made 'lan du regne

n*ost*re dit s*eignour* le Roy septimse' (7j.3). By contrast, the *Mercers' Petition*

contains at the same points 'at o day in the yere' (7k.2) and 'the next ye<r>e after'

(7k.4), respectively. Similarly, conventional defining clauses are omitted: 'le dit

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[115] The spontaneous nature of the deployment of the first-person questions attempts by Dodd to use the petition's voice to re-classify the petition. See Dodd, 'Thomas Paunfield', pp. 233-34.

mons*eignour* Nicholl' (1) becomes 'Nichol Brembre' (7k.2); 'a d*i*te Gyhall' (7j.3)

becomes 'the Guyldehalle' (7k.4); 'du d*i*te citee' (7j.2) becomes 'the citee' (7k.3);

'n*ost*re dit s*eignour* le Roy' (7j.4) becomes 'owre kyng' (7k.6); and, finally,

Nicholas 'fist diu*er*ses armeez en la dite citee' (7j.2) becomes simply 'made

dyu*er*ses enarmynges' (7k.3). In these examples the *Mercers' Petition* lacks the

conventions of documentary writing: the *dites*, the geographical specificity, and the

honorifics are absent. The Mercers are not, however, consistent in removing such

references, and the result is a somewhat clumsy text. This clumsiness has not gone

unnoticed, with critics commenting on the 'tortured English' and 'tortuous syntax' of

the petition.[116] But this clumsiness should be viewed as the Mercers' attempts –

sometimes confident, sometimes faltering – at producing a translation.

It would, however, be reductive to view the *Mercers' Petition* solely as a

translation, for the Mercers also introduce new material. As Table 3 shows, eight of

the twelve paragraphs of the *Mercers' Petition* follow the *Embroiderers' Petition* in

whole or in part. Of the remaining four paragraphs, one (I^2) concerns the statute

forbidding victuallers from holding judicial office. This is an accusation found in

most of the other petitions, although there are no verbal overlaps between these

petitions and the *Mercers' Petition*. This paragraph appears to have been a later

addition,[117] and it may be that having produced an initial draft of their text based on

the *Embroiderers' Petition*, the Mercers subsequently learnt of the other petitioners'

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[116] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 75; Green, *Crisis of Truth*, p. 1.

[117] There is a six-centimetre gap between this paragraph and the preceding paragraph (enough for some six lines of text). It is debateable whether this paragraph was a later addition, or whether the scribe simply left a gap with another paragraph in mind to copy. It is unclear what this paragraph would be: there are certainly no substantial sections from the *Embroiderers' Petition* omitted which the scribe could have been intending to copy here. The final paragraph is indented half a centimetre further to the left than the petition's preceding paragraphs, while it also begins with an uncharacteristic form of the letter A. The scribe (and there is a single scribal hand throughout the whole document) consistently begins paragraphs starting with an 'a' by using a large Anglicana two-chamber 'a' often with an elaborate curl on the upper loop. In this paragraph, by contrast, we have an uncrossed capital 'A'. The alignment and the uncharacteristic letter-form possibly suggest that the scribe was returning to this document at a slightly later date.

references to this statute and so added a supplementary paragraph. The three other unique paragraphs are, to borrow Turner's term, 'idiosyncratic'.[118] Paragraphs eight and nine are discursive paragraphs which narrate how barefoot 'gode women' (7k.8) approached the king, accuse Brembre of misusing the king's commandment, and pun on 'brembre' and 'Brere' (7k.9). Paragraph ten, meanwhile, is a summative paragraph containing a request for remedy.

It may be objected that the existence of these passages undermines the thesis that the *Mercers' Petition* is a translation of the *Embroiderers' Petition*, and implies instead the existence of another now-lost Anglo-Norman petition. However, the language and style of these passages imply that the Mercers are here not translating an Anglo-Norman text, but composing a Middle English one. For example, the language bears few traces of French loanwords: terms such as 'domesman' (7k.9), 'ragged' (7k.9), and 'vnkonnyng' (7k.8) are either English or Norse in origin and have no immediate parallel in French.[119] More compelling is the Mercers' pun: the Mercers label Nicholas the 'Brere', punning on the fact that 'brembre' is an uncommon form of *bramble*.[120] This pun appears to have had some common currency in Latin texts,[121] but it is only in an English text that 'Brembre' and 'brere' could appear in the same sentence.[122] The pun's dominant position in this paragraph implies that the Mercers are not following an Anglo-Norman source here.

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[118] Turner, 'Conflict', p. 265.

[119] s.v. 'domes-man (n.)'; 'dom (n.)'; 'ragged(e (adj.)'; 'unconning(e (ger.)'; 'connen (v.)', *MED*.

[120] s.v. 'brember (n.)', 'brembel (n.)', *MED*.

[121] In Gower's *Cronica Tripertita*, Brembre is referred to as 'Tribulus' [*briar*] in the body of the poem and 'Nicholaus Brembel' in the Latin gloss. He is 'Nichol Brembul' in Knighton's *Chronicle*. See *Cronica Tripertita*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), IV (1902), p. 318, l. 155; *Knighton's Chronicle*, p. 460. Scase suggests compellingly that the pun was 'notorious [...] or at least one promoted by the Appellants' (*Literature and Complaint*, pp. 76-77).

[122] The Anglo-Norman word for briar is 'runce', which does not work as a pun. s.v. 'runce', *AND*.

One distinctive feature of these unique paragraphs is their heightened use of formulaic elements. The Mercers use 'saide', 'forsaid' or 'bifor saide' six times in these invented paragraphs (by contrast these terms appear only twice elsewhere). Equally, deferential references to 'owre lige lorde (7k.8) and 'owre lyge lorde the kyng' (7k.10) appear seven times in these three paragraphs, twice in paragraphs where the Mercers deviate significantly from their source (7k.5,7), and only twice in paragraphs where the Mercers follow the Embroiderers closely. Specific aspects of the petitionary diplomatic can also be detected in these paragraphs. Two of these paragraphs begin with a conventional petitionary address, to 'thy graciouse lordes' (7k.9) or to 'yow moost worthy moost ryghtful & wysest lordes & conseille to owre liege lorde the kyng' (7k.10). Equally, the second paragraph begins with an appropriate verb-adverb combination: 'biseche mekelich' (7k.10) which mirrors the formulaic '[s]uppliont treshumblement' (7j.1). Finally, there are requests modelled on the Anglo-Norman 'qe plese' formula, asking the lords 'lyke it to yow to take hede' of the abuse of power by Brembre (7k.9), asking the lords 'that it lyke to yowre lordeship to be graccious menes' (7k.10), and finally stating that 'if it lyke to yow' more wrongs could be shown (7k.9). Comments such as 'if it lyke to yow' have troubled Turner, who argues that these 'imply that the lords themselves act purely according to their own desires'.[123] Turner's cynicism is somewhat justified: certainly there is an element that the phrases recognise the subjective judgements of the auditor. However, this is equally true of the 'qe plese' formula which is a staple of the petitionary form.[124] The Mercers are thus not doing anything unique in appealing to a lord's individual desire; rather they are mimicking the conventional voice of an Anglo-Norman petition.

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[123] Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 26.
[124] See Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 282-83.

The *Mercers' Petition* may consequently begin to resemble a somewhat contradictory document. On the one hand, when translating directly from its Anglo-Norman source, it substantially innovates, omitting much of the petitionary diplomatic and the formulaic elements of documentary writing, and re-casting the material into the first person. On the other hand, the moment it breaks away from its specific petitionary model to formulate new accusations is the moment it becomes most explicitly dependent on that petitionary tradition. Having attempted to break free of conventional diplomatic, the Mercers seek refuge in it as a way of structuring and authenticating their novel text. We can thus perhaps detect a certain anxiety here from the Mercers about their project of translation.

The Language of Petitioning: A Second *Mercers' Petition*

That the Mercers were anxious about their textual endeavours is further evidenced by a hitherto-unnoticed second petition produced by the guild. This document, written in Anglo-Norman and Latin, is badly damaged, and only a fragmentary transcription of it is included in the appendices.[125] While it is currently dated to 1386 by the Ancient Petitions catalogue, three pieces of evidence suggest that this petition should be associated with the other 1388 guild petitions. Firstly, the document structurally resembles the other 1388 petitions as it too is sub-divided into paragraphs. Secondly, the document contains a distinctive hole in the top margin, a feature that Scase notes is present on many of the other guild petitions and is a possible sign of their having

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[125] See Appendix 7o.

been publicly displayed.[126] Thirdly, the content of this document overlaps with the content of the other 1388 petitions. Its first paragraph discusses the statute forbidding victuallers from holding judicial office, while a subsequent paragraph complains how a multitude of men 'soit endite<z> [...] sibien de traison come dautre felonie' (7o.4). These shared aspects of form and content place this Anglo-Norman text in the same political moment as the Middle English *Mercers' Petition*.

This petition also, however, differs from the 1388 petitions in several notable respects. It contains no verbal overlaps with them, while it also does not accuse Brembre of accroaching royal power. Moreover, three of its five paragraphs contain accusations that appear in none of the 1388 petitions. These paragraphs request that the statute allowing all victuals to be sold in the city be upheld; that mayors should be forbidden from serving consecutive terms; and that all statutes concerning fishers and victuallers should be upheld.[127] In light of these differences, it would be wrong to directly associate this petition with the English *Mercers' Petition*. These two petitions certainly do not follow the example of the Thomas Paunfield petitions, where the Anglo-Norman text functions as a 'precis' of its Middle English counterpart.[128] The *Anglo-Norman Mercers' Petition's* unique features suggest that it addresses a context somewhat different from that addressed by the other 1388 petitions. Of particular note is the absence of references to Nicholas Brembre, from which we could conclude that this text post-dates his execution on the 20th of February 1388, and thus post-dates the other 1388 petitions. The petition was produced not as an attempt to indict Brembre, but to encourage the lords appellant to

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[126] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 72. There is no other evidence to support the notion that these petitions were publicly displayed, and the holes could just be a sign that the 1388 petitions were filed together prior to their submission to parliament.
[127] I have been only able to partially transcribe this petition; in making sense of the fragments, I am using the summary given in the Ancient Petitions catalogue.
[128] Dodd, 'Thomas Paunfield', p. 237.

intervene in the running of the capital, which would explain why the paragraphs all contain specific and achievable requests for modifications to the city's political systems and trading regulations. The Mercers' decision to produce this second petition speaks to their anxiety about the effectiveness of their Middle English petition. They seemingly felt they had not gained the lords' support through their discursive English petition and so produced a more formal, constrained, and specific text to encourage intervention.

This discussion of the *Anglo-Norman Mercers' Petition* can usefully lead us to reflect on why the Mercers produced their original petition in Middle English. English does appear to have been used in parliament, and Dodd has suggested that it is 'perfectly feasible to suppose' that Anglo-Norman petitions 'were loosely translated into English [...] for the purposes of quick and easy aural comprehension'.[129] However, as discussed above, the *Mercers' Petition* is more than just a loose translation; it also innovates substantially through adding novel accusations, and through its use of the first-person and its shunning of petitionary diplomatic. Interestingly, these innovations all work towards a similar purpose: they serve to enhance the effectiveness of the *Mercers' Petition* as an oral text by bringing an immediacy and a comprehensibility to it. This is not to say that the Anglo-Norman petitions were somehow unsuited to oral delivery; as this chapter has argued, the petitions of the Embroiderers and Cordwainers show particular concern

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[129] Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 292. Dodd has written further about the gap between the petitions as written records and the petitions in their oral context in Gwilym Dodd, 'The Rise of English, the Decline of French: Supplications to the English Crown, c. 1420–1450', *Speculum*, 86 (2011), 117-50. On the nature of parliamentary speech, see W. M. Ormrod, 'The Use of English: Language, Law, and Political Culture in Fourteenth-Century England', *Speculum*, 78 (2003), 750-87 (pp. 777-778). Ardis Butterfield has recently suggested that while oral English was growing in strength, so too was French 'increasing its oral presence', and it is reasonable to assume both vernaculars could be heard in parliament. Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 322-23.

with their oral context.[130] However, the *Mercers' Petition* appears to seize additional opportunities to enhance the oral potency of their petition.

It is useful to look at the three distinct features of the *Mercers' Petition* together: these are its use of English, its use of the first-person voice, and its omission and abbreviation of formulaic elements. Taken together, the Mercers treatment of these features questions the extent to which there was a carefully-planned strategy at work behind the *Mercers' Petition*. For the omission of elements from the petitionary diplomatic is done haphazardly and inconsistently, while the decision to adopt the first person voice appears to have been made mid-way through composition. There is a discernible improvisatorial quality to the *Mercers' Petition*, and it would thus be misguided to argue that the Mercers' use of the English vernacular was necessarily a conscious, politicised decision.[131] The Mercers' improvisation and the trepidity of their textual endeavours, suggest that it would be unwise to view the *Mercers' Petition* as indicative of a wider 'triumphing' of English.[132] The Middle English *Mercers' Petition* marks neither a beginning nor an end-point; rather it occupies a middle-point among the 1388 petitions, as it translates or adapts the Anglo-Norman *Embroiderers' Petition*, but is then superseded by the *Anglo-Norman Mercers' Petition*. The *Mercers' Petition* does not, therefore, testify to a fundamental shift in language use. Rather, it suggests that the deployment of English is, like the use of the first person voice or the omission of formulaic

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[130] More generally, Ormrod explores in some depth how petitions in any language imagine a 'vocalised conversation' ('Murmur, Clamour and Noise', p. 138).

[131] On the political dimension of the vernacular, see Nicholas Watson, 'The Politics of Middle English Writing', in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), pp. 331-52.

[132] Cottle, *Triumph of English*, pp. 23-25. See also John H. Fisher, 'Chancery and the Emergence of Standard Written English in the Fifteenth Century', *Speculum*, 54, 4 (1977), 870-99. Arguments about the triumph of English have recently come under scrutiny, with critics noting that Anglo-Norman continued to dominate parliamentary proceedings through into the middle of the fifteenth century. See Dodd, 'The Rise of English' pp. 117-50; Dodd, 'The Spread of English', pp. 225-66; Ormrod, 'Use of English', pp. 750-87.

elements, a strategy complainants could utilise with varying degrees of confidence to enhance the effectiveness of their texts within specific contexts.

Preliminary Conclusions

We are now in a position to produce a speculative narrative about the process of production of the 1388 petitions. This process was instigated by the Goldsmiths or, perhaps, the Saddlers or Tailors, who constructed a model for the other guilds to follow. Eight guilds copied the model faithfully, while the Cutlers and Leathersellers used the model more loosely. The *Cutlers' Petition* formed the model for the Cordwainers, whose petition served in turn as a model for the *Embroiderers' Petition* which was then adapted into Middle English by the Mercers. These fourteen petitions were then submitted to parliament. Following Brembre's execution, the Mercers produced a second petition in which they urged the lords appellant to intervene in civic governance. A distinctive feature of this narrative is its anonymity: nowhere in this account (and nowhere in the 1388 petitions) is anyone cited as instigating and directing these petitions. The petitions deny the existence of a singular, subjective force behind their texts. We can assume, however, that there must have been some directing force, and now that we have surveyed all fifteen petitions, we can offer some speculative comments on this person's identity. This person probably belonged to one of the first guilds to produce their testimony. If, as discussed above, the *Saddlers' Petition* can be discounted as the model,[133] this leaves two guilds in contention: the Goldsmiths and the Tailors. That our directing force come from one of these guilds seems eminently plausible; these guilds were amongst

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[133] For this discussion, see pp. 118-19 and fn. 74.

those 'companies most implicated in the civic upheavals of the 1380s', and they also both had their own halls within which their textual strategies could have been discussed.[134]

If we were to ask *cui bono* then the first figure to come to mind is Nicholas Twyford. Twyford was 'the most prominent and prosperous goldsmith' in London, and it is he who benefits most from the power shift in this period as he gains the mayoralty in October 1388.[135] There are several other reasons for associating Twyford with the 1388 petitions. Firstly, the petitions show a particular concern with Brembre's electoral malpractices and particularly his use of armed men to intimidate his opponents. This accusation would have had particular resonance for Twyford as he stood against Brembre in 1384, and it was his supporters who were violently intimidated.[136] Secondly, Twyford may also have been resentful towards Brembre as it was Brembre who, in 1378, had Twyford removed from his position as sheriff.[137] Thirdly, Twyford is considered to be a moderate figure who implemented 'strife-reducing measures' and 'maintained a cautious distance' from both Brembre and Northampton.[138] Such moderation is apparent in those petitions which closely follow the model: none of these petitions demonise Exton or attempt to celebrate Northampton, but instead produce focused and mostly non-partisan accusations against Brembre.

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[134] Turner, 'Usk and the Goldsmiths', pp. 148-51 (p. 149). The Tailors' and Goldsmiths' halls were amongst the locations used by Northampton to stir up political dissent. See Bird, *Turbulent London*, pp. 135-36. On guild halls, see also Unwin, *Gilds and Companies*, pp. 176-79.
[135] Paul Strohm, 'Twyford, Sir Nicholas (*d.*1390/91)', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27923>, [Last accessed: 15 January 2012].
[136] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 102-3.
[137] *CLBH*, p. 99.
[138] Strohm, 'Twyford, Sir Nicholas', *ODNB*.

Fourthly, and finally, Dodd has recently argued that Twyford may have been the intended audience for Favent's *Historia*.[139] The *Historia* and the petitions have a similar outlook on civic life, as they both cast 'the divisions within the city in terms of personalities rather than policies or factions'.[140] The *Historia* also speaks approvingly of the 1388 petitioners; Favent notes that the petitioners were not 'corrupted by hatred, fear, of favour' but instead spoke only 'the truth'.[141] Favent also presents the petitions as efficacious: while the Monk of Westminster narrates the lords' displeasure and their summoning of various civic officials, Favent states that Brembre 'stood undone at last' because of the petitioners.[142] The praise for the petitioners serves no particular role in his narration, but its inclusion would seem less incongruous if it was produced for the man who was the driving force behind the petitions. Given what scant evidence we have, I cannot think of a more likely candidate to be the driving force behind these petitions than Twyford. However, given the scantiness of the evidence, his candidacy remains an intriguing possibility, rather than an established fact.

'[O]ue *gra*unt noyse': Strategies of Legitimation

This discussion of the process of producing the 1388 guild petitions already reveals the key ways in which the guilds sought to legitimise their textual endeavours: they produced texts which were anonymous and unanimous. The guilds anonymise their petitions by voicing the complaints not of a subjective individual, but of a community of guildsmen. The communal voice of each individual petition is then

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[139] Dodd, 'Thomas Favent', pp. 397-418.
[140] Dodd, 'Thomas Favent', p. 415.
[141] Favent, 'History or Narration', p. 245.
[142] Favent, 'History or Narration', p. 245; *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 312-15.

extended by its appearance in a sequence of petitions which, for the most part, are unanimous in their purpose and phraseology. Such harnessing of communal voices had a judicial purpose for, as Scase notes, a plurality of voices was necessary to generate 'proof of notoriety'.[143] To secure a conviction against Brembre based on 'notoriety of treason', the facts had to be 'well-attested' to.[144] In part, the petitioners emphasise the notoriety of Brembre's actions in the text of their petitions by suggesting that Brembre's crimes are 'ou*er*tement' known (7i.1). However, this notoriety is also stressed through the unanimous set of petitions which repeatedly echo the same set of charges against Brembre. Such an 'appearance of unity and unanimous assent' was particularly valued by parliament, as unanimity 'was the surest defense [*sic*] against accusations that one was speaking or acting for private or singular interests'.[145] The petitions' unanimity does not, therefore, just serve a specific judicial necessity, but also works to legitimise the petitioners' voices by pre-empting accusations of self interest. There are, however, other strategies of legitimation employed in these petitions which merit attention.

One of the most notable ways that the guilds seek to legitimise their own voice is to delegitimise Brembre's. Turner has previously discussed Londoners' use of a 'rhetoric of scapegoating', and this rhetoric can be clearly detected in the 1388 petitions which focus their attack firmly on Brembre.[146] While the petitions do not allege that Brembre had no confederates, they do diminish the significance of his supporters who remain an amorphous and nameless group of 'acomplices' (7b.1), of 'autres ses acomplices' (7c.2), of 'certein gentz si bien foreyns come autres' (7d.1), and of 'autres auant ditz de sa couygne' (7e.3). That these people are mere

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[143] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 67.
[144] Rogers, 'Parliamentary Appeals', p. 112.
[145] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, pp. 55-56. Giancarlo goes on to explore how such unanimity is problematised during this period.
[146] Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 106.

appendages to Brembre is indicated in the petitions' grammar; for in phrases such as 'Nichol [...] oue lassent des autres sez acomplices accrocha sur luy roial poair en ceo q*u*il venoit en chepe' (7d.2) the verbs are in the singular. Brembre is thus the lone actor in the narrative.

Brembre is presented in the petitions as a deviant figure who acts against legal and societal norms. For example, he is accused of acting 'encountr*e* ley & la corone' (7h.2), 'sanz droit ioustice & p*ro*ces du ley' (7j.2), '<encoun>tre la ffranchise' (7e.1), 'sanz comandement' of the king (7g.1), 'encountre la corone & ley de t*er*re' (7c.1), 'ayeins the forsaide fredam' (7l.4), and 'encountre droit & reson' (7j.3). These examples all invoke established laws and traditions against which Brembre can be objectively judged. The petitions place particular emphasis on Brembre's electoral malpractices, and their approach is encapsulated in the Saddlers' statement that whereas the election should be made 'p*ar* le comunealte & frank gentz' of the city, it was actually made 'p*ar* lo*ur* conspiracie & faux ymagination' (7h.2). The syntactical balancing here of 'comunealte' and 'conspiracie' and 'frank' and 'faux', a paralleling enhanced through alliteration, expands upon the nature of Brembre's deviancy. Brembre's mayoralty was run on flawed principles: it was run by the 'faux' not by the 'frank', and it was run by secretive 'conspiracie' rather than open 'comunealte'.

This demonising of a single figure is somewhat typical of the petitionary form, a form which allowed petitioners to draw 'attention to the power and unscrupulous nature' of their 'oppressors'.[147] However, the 1388 petitioners become particularly distinctive as they present not only examples of Brembre's political wrongs, but also examples of his documentary malpractice. For instance, they

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[147] Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 297.

censure Brembre for ignoring important texts, such as the 'ch*art*re des Roys' (7d.1) that determined the correct way to run elections, and 'lestatut' forbidding victuallers from holding judicial office (7d.5). Similarly, they censure Brembre and his faction for their active attempts to negate or destroy documentary texts, such as the guilds' 'chartre' which Brembre seized and retained (7g.1), or the 'liure q*ue* feust appellee le Iubilee' which is burnt by Exton (7j.7). Finally, they censure Brembre for manipulating and distorting documentary forms, such as the false indictments upon which he put 'ceux q*ue* feurent del affinite & assent' of himself (7a.2), the 'famulerlich' misuse of the king's name (7k.8); and the 'ch*art*re des p*ar*doun' which he secretly sued for (7l.7).

The image of Brembre constructed by the guilds here echoes the image that Brembre constructs of himself in the extracts from *Letter-Book H* discussed in chapter one.[148] In *Letter-Book H*, Brembre foregrounds his identity both through the ostentatious heading (see figs 17 and 18) and through his anti-associational rhetoric. This allows Brembre to depict himself as being in ultimate control of documentary discourses in the city.[149] The petitions concur with this as they, too, present Brembre as in ultimate control, although they present this control negatively. This point can be amplified on by returning to Brembre's anti-associational rhetoric. As discussed in chapter one, this totalising rhetoric allowed Brembre to define as iniquitous any social gathering that displeased him. While chapter one focused particularly on the proclamations made by Brembre in 1384, two subsequent proclamations were more overtly political. Around the time of the 1385 and 1386 elections, Brembre proclaimed:

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[148] See above, pp. 54-63.
[149] Such control can also be seen in the fate of Nicholas Exton with which this project began. Brembre nullifies previous mayoral judgements, and has them crossed out in *Letter-Book H*. See above, pp. 14-16 and appendices 2a, 2b, and 2c.

> que null ne soit si hardi de aprocher ne venir ala dite Guihalle a iour del
> eleccioun de mair sinoun les mair aldermans & bones gentz somons a
> yceo. Ne que null ne face congregacioun assemble signe ne continance
> que puisse soner en destourbance de la peas. (6e.2)[150]

In this proclamation, Brembre invokes concerns over the 'peas' of the city as his excuse for limiting popular gatherings. But this seems disingenuous, for Brembre can here be seen allying his anti-associational rhetoric to his desire for re-election. He attempts to control the space of the Guildhall by determining who will and who will not be present. Brembre thus uses the proclamation to consolidate his political stranglehold over the city.

However, once Brembre and his faction had lost power, his use and abuse of documentary discourses could be deployed against him. The majority of the 1388 petitions include the accusation that in 1383 Brembre:[151]

> fist proclamer que nul soit si hardy de venir a la Guyhall du dite Citee
> pur faire la electioun de lour maire fors ceux qi feurent pur iceo somons
> les queux fuerent somons par soun assent. (7j.3)[152]

What is notable here is that the petitioners do not drastically distort Brembre's original words, but instead closely approximate the phraseology of his original proclamation. However, whereas this phraseology originally served to empower Brembre, it here serves to condemn him. The petitioners' single addition of 'par soun assent' verbalises the unspoken principle behind Brembre's text: that he capriciously chose those who could appear at the election. Brembre is thus ultimately

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[150] See also Appendix 6f for the same proclamation issued in 1386.
[151] The 1383 date is somewhat problematic here as *Letter-Book H* records this proclamation being made only in 1385 and 1386. It is possible that Brembre did issue this proclamation (as a citizen, rather than as the mayor) in 1383. However, this seems unlikely; more likely is that the petitioners are conflated the events of several different election campaigns into a single year. This is supported by the fact that the accusation that Brembre 'ordineront certeinz gentz si bien foreyns come autres' in 1383 (7d.1), appears to refer to the events of 1384 (for which see the *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 102-3) rather than 1383..
[152] The only petitions that do not include this charge are the *Anglo-Norman Mercers' Petition* and the fragmentary *Tailors' Petition*.

hoist by his own petard. As mayor, he forcefully asserted and developed a cult of individuality stressing his singular control over London life. As a prisoner accused of treason, he is confronted with wrongdoings in London which the 1388 petitioners stress he was in sole control over.

There is, perhaps, another element to the petitioners' attacks on Brembre's proclamations. Several of the petitions speak of Brembre acting 'oue lassent des autres auant ditz de sa couygne' (7d.3). '[C]ouygne' is not an uncommon word;[153] however, given the petitioners' familiarity with Brembre's proclamations, it is tempting to argue that the petitioners deliberately echo Brembre's anti-associational rhetoric here. This argument gains some support from a section elsewhere in the petitions which states that Brembre and his allies 'fis<rent gra>unt assembles en diu*er*ses lieux de la d*i*te citee p*ar* diu*er*se foitz p*ar* diu*er*ses gentz de la dite citee' (7d.4). This is one of the most rhetorically sophisticated passages to appear in the group one petitions: the tricolon and the echoing of 'diu*er*ses' gives to this passage a rhythmic forcefulness, thereby drawing especial attention to it. It is possible that the guilds sought to draw particular attention to this passage as it highlighted the hypocrisy of Brembre in deploying his anti-associational rhetoric. Certainly the petitioners were aware that Brembre was an hypocrite: the Embroiderers, for instance note that Brembre proclaimed 'q*ue* nul voisist en la d*i*te citee armeez', but then he himself brought armed men to the election 'encontre sa p*ro*clamatio*un*' (7k.3). It is, therefore, possible that the petitioners were deliberately appropriating Brembre's anti-associational rhetoric and using it against him.

Alongside Brembre's documentary malpractices, the petitions also delegitimise Brembre's voice through associating it with noise. Works on literary

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[153] Dodd notes that in petitions malefactors 'are often said to belong to a *coven*' ('Writing Wrongs', p. 230).

manifestations of the theme of noise have drawn attention to its association with social turbulence and disruption.[154] Developing this, Ormrod has suggested that in parliamentary contexts, noise and clamour, while polyvalent, possess a fundamental '*commonness*' and an association with 'public disquiet or discord'.[155] The Leathersellers address the theme of noise directly, although they associate it more with *uncommonness* than *commonness*. The Leathersellers describe how Brembre is elected 'sanz la co*mmun*e vois' and how he intimidates those who come to make the election 'p*ar* voie de paix' (7m.1). In these quotations, Brembre is placed in opposition to communal and peaceful voices. Subsequently, the Leathersellers draw a distinction between how Brembre should have been elected, 'p*ar* co*mmune* vois [...] peisiblement', with how he actually was elected, 'oue [...] horrible noise forciblement' (7m.3). The parallel constructions here position 'vois' and 'noise' as antitheses: one is associated with peace and the commonalty, the other with force and discordancy. This careful juxtaposing of voice and noise is unique to the *Leathersellers' Petition*, although other petitions do associate Brembre with noise when, for instance, his followers are said to rise up 'oue g*ra*unt noise' (7j.3). Brembre is thus closely associated with two types of *verba vana*: he is identified with empty noise rather than meaningful voices, while he is also presented as a textual deviant who ignores, manipulates and negates authoritative writings.

Alongside this delegitimising of Brembre, the petitioners also seek to legitimise their own voices. This is partially achieved through the role in civic life that the petitioners imagine for themselves. The petitioners adopt a veneer of humility and feign ignorance. This humility is certainly affected; the Goldsmiths

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[154] See, for example, B. Boyd, 'Chaucer's Decibels', *Florilegium*, 10 (1991), 99-105; John M. Ganim, 'Chaucer and the Noise of his People', *Exemplaria*, 2 (1990), 71-88.
[155] Ormrod, 'Murmur, Clamour and Noise', p. 151, 152.

description of themselves as 'pou*er*ez liges' is entirely unjustified, but reflects the traditional self-presentation of petitioners.[156] The claim that the actions that went on in London 'diceo non sachantz ou encontre lour volunteez' (7k.6) is probably also affected. Such affectation may have been a political necessity seeing that Brembre was eventually convicted not of performing treasons, but of concealing knowledge of them.[157] But it is also dramatically useful as it allows the guilds to present themselves as the passive and oppressed victims of Brembre. The passivity of the guilds is indicated in their personal testimony about events on Cheapside. The petitions variously describe how Brembre: 'prist' and 'manasa' them (7h.3); 'mis' them 'en p*ris*onem*en*t' (7c.2); 'emp*ris*ona' them (7e.2); and 'fist coper la teste' of one of them (7j.2). These narratives are certainly detached from historical reality and have little in common with the descriptions of guilds closing their windows and marching through the streets discussed in chapter one.[158] However, the petitioners are not aiming at historical accuracy; instead they present their guilds as powerless before the totalising power of Brembre.

The petitioners can be seen here to function as antitypes to the figure of Brembre: whereas Brembre in the narratives is an active figure whose cult of individuality and distinct voice are foregrounded, the guildsmen are passive figures who conceal their identities and their individual voices through their unanimous and anonymous series of petitions. However, the petitioners also function as antitypes in a more significant way, as they draw a distinction between their attitude to documentary texts and official discourses, and Brembre's attitudes to these texts and discourses. As this chapter has suggested, the petitioners censure Brembre for

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[156] Dodd notes that petitions' identification clauses 'most frequently included an association of the petitioner with poverty' (*Justice and Grace*, p. 282).
[157] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 314-15.
[158] See above, pp. 56-58.

ignoring, concealing, and distorting official forms of writing. The petitioners, by contrast, exhibit a more open attitude to official writings. They conform to edicts even when, in the case of Brembre's proclamations, they are commanded 'to vnnedeful & vnleueful dyu*erse* doynges' (7k.8). Equally, rather than concealing documents, they desire that they should be made public, as in the case of the false indictments which they request should 'venir' (7d.3) before the king.

The petitioners' attitude to official texts can be best exemplified through a close exploration of their treatment of the statute that forbade victuallers from holding judicial office. This statute, originally enacted in 1382, appears to have had some popular currency in this period.[159] As well as being copied into the vast majority of the 1388 guild petitions,[160] the statute is also copied in to the lengthy commons petitions submitted to the Cambridge parliament of 1388.[161] An additional indication of the particular prominence of this statute is provided by its appearance in *Letter-Book H*. Across a single opening, the letter-book contains a copy of all the statutes enacted by the king at Westminster on the 24th of October 1382 (see fig. 12).[162] A particular prominence, however, is given to the statute forbidding victuallers from holding judicial office:[163] its associated marginal gloss is larger than other glosses on the page, while the statute's initial 'Item' is presented in engrossed letters which are larger than the other 'items' included on this opening (see figs 13-14).

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[159] The statute is 6 Ric II, st. 1, c. 9, for which see *The Statutes at Large of England and Great Britain*, ed. by Thomas Edlyne Tomlins, 20 vols (London: George Eyre and Andrew Strahan, 1811), II, 66. For discussion of the political context of this statute, see Bird, *Turbulent London*, pp. 78-80; Nightingale, *Medieval Mercantile Community*, pp. 275-77.

[160] The statute does not appear in the *Tailors' Petition*, although we could suspect it originally did. The *Embroiderers' Petition* is thus the only complete petition to omit it.

[161] The complete petition is recorded in *Westminster Chronicle*; see pp. 366-67 for the statute regarding victuallers.

[162] The complete set of statutes are printed in *Statutes at Large*, II, pp. 60-70.

[163] The statute is transcribed in Appendix 9.

The letter-book draws especial attention to the statute, and a similar strategy

appears to lie behind the petitions. The fact that the commons, the civic officials, and

the guilds could all make copies of this statute suggests that it was a familiar text that

was in circulation. As such, the guilds did not by necessity have to copy it into their

petitions.[164] Certainly, copying out the statute would have been an aid to the

authorities, who would often use the text of a petition as the basis for any resulting

writ or warrant.[165] But this would require only one of the 1388 petitions to include it,

and so does not fully explain why at least thirteen petitions include it. A more likely

possibility is that the guilds used the copying of the statute to establish constrasts

between their approach to texts and Brembre's approach. Whereas Brembre is

depicted as ignoring official statutes, the petitioners request that such statutes 'soit

tenuz' (7c.4). And whereas Brembre takes and conceals the charters of the

Goldsmiths, the petitioners propagate the statute by faithfully recording it. The

petitioners thus transparently make documentary writings public.

Turner has detected a 'lack of concern for truth' in the *Mercers' Petition* and

in the actions of the lords appellant more generally.[166] However, this is perhaps an

unduly negative reading; for once read together, the 1388 guild petitions demonstrate

a particular concern with openness and transparency. We have already seen this

concern with openness in the copying of the 1382 statute and their faithful

summarising of Brembre's proclamation. But this concern can also be detected in

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[164] We can presume it would have circulated within statute books, on which see Don C. Skemer, 'Reading the Law: Statute Books and the Private Transmission of Legal Knowledge in Late Medieval England', in *Learning the Law: Teaching and the Transmission of English Law, 1150-1900*, ed. by Jonathan A. Bush and Alain Wijffels (London: The Hambledon Press, 1999), pp. 113-31. That the Mercers included references to this statute in both of their petitions (a reference which they did not draw from the *Embroiderers' Petition*) suggests that they possessed a version of this statute from which to copy, perhaps included in a book of statutes or earlier copied into their accounts. On such guild texts, see Sutton, *Mercery*, pp. 172-81.

[165] Dodd, 'Writing Wrongs', pp. 236-37. Such duplication in phrasing can be seen in Brembre's petition and Richard's warrant transcribed in Appendix 12a and 12c, and discussed below, pp. 202-6.

[166] Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 29.

their inclusion of supporting materials alongside their petitions. The Saddlers and

Goldsmiths each attach a 'copie' of their 'ch*art*re' (7b.1) to their petitions, while the

Cordwainers, Cutlers, and Leathersellers attach a 'copie' of the 'chartre de p*ar*don'

(7m.8) given to Brembre to their petitions.[167] The 1388 guild petitions thus cease to

be single texts; they are not just petitions, but become repositories of a range of

documentary forms from the period. And in their transparent and faithful

reproduction of existing texts, the petitioners distinguish themselves from Brembre,

who manipulated and concealed such texts.

To an extent, the petitioners' concern with transparency and openness is a

result of the nature of their texts. The petitions are very different from a text like

Usk's *Appeal*. While the *Appeal* narrates conspiratorial meetings hidden from the

public view, the petitions mostly narrate events that took place in the public eye,

events which are 'ou*er*tement' known (7i.1). However, there also seems to be a

genuine belief amongst the petitioners that openness is a social good. Another

accusation that dominates these petitions concerns the false indictments produced by

Brembre.[168] The petitioners accuse Brembre of placing on the inquests those 'queux

feurent de male fame come ou*er*tement serra prouez si les enditemens feurent deuant

vo*us*' (7a.2). This quotation is significant for what it reveals about how the

petitioners viewed their own textual endeavours. They accuse Brembre's allies of

being of 'male fame', *fame* here to be interpreted as reputation, as 'the public talk

that continually adjusts honor and assigns rank'.[169] But what is significant is that the

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[167] Most of these added texts appear to have been lost, although a stub catalogued alongside the
Leathersellers' Petition may be Brembre's charter of pardon. See Appendix 11.
[168] The accusation appears in similar terms in all the petitions barring those of the Tailors,
Embroiderers and Mercers. The latter two do, however, include their own innovative paragraphs on
Brembre's use of indictments (7k.4-5, 7j.5-7).
[169] Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail, 'Introduction', in *Fama: The Politics of Talk & Reputation
in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (London: Cornell University
Press, 2003), pp. 1-11 (p. 3).

petitioners do not expect their audience to give credence to this 'fame': they want the indictments to be brought into the open, at which point the truth of the fame will be 'prouez'.

This suggests that the petitions should be read as something more than clamour texts.[170] For, they are not concerned solely with affirming through plaint the notoriety of Brembre's treasons. Instead, they want to restore openness and transparency in judicial proceedings. Through this restoration, emphasis will be placed not just on 'fame' (or indeed on the words of the petitioners), but on objective proofs of wrongs. The petitioners thus limit the potency of their own textual creations: they are not asking for their text to be believed unconditionally, nor do they solely work to legitimise their own voice. Rather, they seek to have Brembre judged against objective measures, and they endeavour through their petitions to publicise the authoritative documentary texts against which Brembre can be judged.

Conclusion: *Verba Superflua*

The process behind the construction of the petitions nicely parallels the end to the second line of the *Stores*. Brembre was arrested and imprisoned in Gloucester Castle (his very own 'doliu*m*') on the 1st of January 1388. Ahead of his trial, the London guilds evidently met, possibly in the Goldsmiths' Hall, possibly in the Lion tavern ('leo'), and collaborated to produce a set of petitions to submit to the Merciless Parliament. They submitted these petitions which were, in the words of the Monk of Westminster, mere 'verba superflua' ('verbaq*ue* vana').[171] The Monk's words

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[170] On the texts as demonstrating *clamour*, see Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, pp. 67-77.
[171] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 312-13.

indicate that there is a certain disconnect here: this chapter has painted a somewhat

positive picture of the petitions which I have argued mount an effective attack on

Brembre, and yet the Monk heavily censures the guilds. Moreover, the guilds were

evidently ignored by the lords: none of the requests in the petitions was heeded,

while the lords' decision to reimpose the Statute of York, thereby removing

London's liberties and establishing freedom of trade for aliens and denizens,

suggests that the lords were uninterested in aiding Londoners.[172] This response

strikes me as rather unjust, while the Monk's condemnatory words are a crude over-

simplification of the nuanced strategies of the petitioners. It may be that the

discordant notes struck by the Cutlers' innovations were enough to enrage the

lords.[173] Or the disconnect between my reading of the petitions and the Monk's may

just indicate another of the dangers of documentary production. However carefully a

text is wrought, the responses to it are determined by subjective, partisan and

irrational audiences.

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[172] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 334-37; Nightingale, *Medieval Mercantile Community*, pp. 319-20.
[173] The Monk is particularly displeased about the petitioners' seeking Exton's removal, and seeing this accusation is only apparent in the *Cutlers' Petition* this provides some indication of the dangers of their discordant petition. *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 334-35.

'Lancea cu*m* scutis': Language and Violence in Exemplary Narratives and Historical Records

Introduction

In the *Stores of the Cities*, the phrase *verba vana* is followed by a reference to a potentially even more troubling feature of London society: '[l]ancea cu*m* scutis' (1a.3).[1] Late fourteenth-century London was not famed for its military prowess; indeed, Barron has posited that a distinctly 'non-militaristic ethos' emerged in this period.[2] This ethos can certainly be detected when, in 1388, the authorities of London refused to provide military support for Richard as Londoners were 'artificers et mercatores nec in bellis multum expecti' [*craftsmen and merchants, with no great military experience*].[3] But '[l]ancea cu*m* scutis' does not have to refer to bellicose weaponry; for such weaponry also performed a non-militaristic function as part of the spectacles and displays performed on London's streets. For example, in ceremonies such as mayoral ridings and royal entries, Londoners would parade armed through the streets of the city.[4] Equally, Londoners would have used such weaponry in play: FitzStephen pictures young men rowing down the Thames in boats towards a mounted shield, with the aim that they 'scutum illud lancea percussurum' [*might strike that shield with the lance*], while many watch 'ridere

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[1] While this phrase means 'lance and shields', there is evidence that this collocation could refer more generally to a collection of weaponry. See the definition of *scutum et lancea* in Charles du Fresne Sieur du Cange, et al., *Glossarium Mediæ et Infimæ Latinitatis*, editio nova a Leopald Favre, 10 vols (Niort: L. Favre, Imprimeur-Éditeur, 1883-87), VII, 381. Rigg glosses the phrase as the 'military force of London' ('Stores', p. 133).
[2] Barron, *London*, p. 17.
[3] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 216-17.
[4] On the mayoral riding see Lindenbaum, 'London Texts', esp. pp. 301-2. On royal entries, see the description of the guildsmen being arranged in 'phalangas' in Maidstone's *Concordia*, l. 100.

parati' [*ready to laugh*].[5] In these examples, weaponry is deployed as part of staged tableaux, and these tableaux encourage responses and commentary from Londoners.

This chapter is concerned with the interplay between violence and commentary. In particular, it examines the ways in which words incite violence, and the ways in which words are used to give meaning to that violence. To explore this, I want to focus on how the executions of several disparate figures are narrated and glossed across a range of texts circulating in London in the late fourteenth century. These figures are Cornide, whose execution is narrated by Chaucer and Gower; Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, whose executions are narrated several times by Gower; and John Constantyn, Cordwainer, whose execution is narrated by Brembre, Richard II, the Cordwainers, and the Monk of Westminster.

In attempting to gloss and give meaning to these executions, many of the texts to be examined in this chapter draw on wider traditions of exemplary writing. For many years, the exemplum was viewed as a closed, monovocal form with an obvious utilitarian purpose. Jacques Le Goff, for instance, labels the exemplum as an 'instrument' which is 'useful for instruction and/or edification', while Andrew Welsh describes the form as producing narratives 'to illustrate, to enact, and finally to confirm an idea, some general observation or moral principle about human nature and experience'.[6] Moreover, on the specific topic of speech in the exemplum, Eugene Green argues that speech acts contain straightforward 'meaning and purpose'

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[5] Stow, *Survey of London*, I, 227.
[6] Jacques le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 80, 78; Andrew Welsh, 'Story and Wisdom in Chaucer: *The Physician's Tale* and *The Manciple's Tale*', in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmission in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*, ed. by Robert Boenig and Kathleen Davis (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), pp. 76-95 (p. 85).

due to their context within the exemplum.[7] However, as other critics have recently explored, exemplary works can be read as more problematic texts: Larry Scanlon notes that they are not 'static' narratives, while J. Allen Mitchell explores how such works 'open themselves to a diversity of responses'.[8] This is particularly true of speech acts in exemplary texts which, far from promoting a single truth, serve instead to register multiplicity and uncertainty. Building on this work, this chapter explores a group of exempla which invite and encode multiple interpretations. Their authors are aware of the flexibility of the exemplum, and rather than using it to propound a single, static, moral meaning, they encode within their writings a multiplicity of perspectives through which individual speeches, glosses, and narrations cease to be purely, or even primarily, instructive. My chosen texts share an interest in the discursive vacuum which follows an execution. The executions at the heart of these texts are not presented as conclusive, but rather serve to prompt further commentary reflecting on the legitimacy, purpose and effectiveness of those executions. This chapter seeks to analyse how disparate writers treat this discursive space.

The Rest is Never Silence: Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale* and Questions of Doubt

Of the various texts to be examined in this chapter, the *Manciple's Tale* has received the most critical commentary; consequently, I will only briefly touch on this work to

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[7] Eugene Green, 'Speech Acts and the Art of Exemplum in the Poetry of Chaucer and Gower', in *Literary Computing and Literary Criticism: Theoretical and Practical Essays on Theme and Rhetoric*, ed. by Rosanne G. Potter (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 167-87 (p. 167).
[8] Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 5; J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), p. 13. On the development of the exemplum, see also Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, esp. pp. 13-64.

establish the themes and issues which will be explored more thoroughly in the

ensuing sections. The tale narrates the death of an unnamed woman, who is

murdered by Phebus, her husband, after his crow reveals her adulterous behaviour.

As critics have repeatedly noted, the *Manciple's Tale* is preoccupied with language.[9]

The theme of language is raised first in the prologue, in which the Manciple

demands that the Cook, '[h]oold cloos thy mouth' (IX.37), and continues to

dominate the tale that contains a proliferation of speech acts and proverbial

utterances, and that also includes an extended digression on the Platonic assertion

that the 'word moot nede acorde with the dede' (IX.208). The tale's ending

reinforces this concern with language and provides the ostensible moral of the piece:

it calls for a moratorium on speech, advising the reader to 'kepe wel thy tongue'

(IX.320). The tale itself appears to reinforce this moral by dramatising a movement

from speech to silence. Every character is reduced to silence by the poem's end: the

woman is killed, Phebus 'brak his mynstralcie' (IX.267), and the crow is attacked by

Phebus, who 'refte him all his song,/And eeke his speche' (IX.306).[10] Given this

movement, critics have detected an 'anti-language discourse' at work,[11] and have

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[9] The earliest pertinent work is Harwood's essay, arguing that the very 'subject of the tale is language'. Subsequent to Harwood's essay, Cox analyses the poem's exploration of feminized prolixity, Grudin discusses the difficulties of truth-speaking, Storm argues that the tale dramatises reflexive speech, and Cannon comments on the tale's emphasis on the effectiveness of language. See Britton J. Harwood, 'Language and the Real: Chaucer's Manciple', *Chaucer Review*, 6, 4 (1972), 268-79 (p. 268); Catherine S. Cox, 'The Jangler's "Bourde": Gender, Renunciation and Chaucer's Manciple', *South Atlantic Review*, 61, 4 (1996), 1-21; Michaela Paasche Grudin, 'Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale* and the Poetics of Guile', *Chaucer Review*, 25, 4 (1991), 329-42; Mel Storm, 'Speech, Circumspection, and Orthodontics in the *Manciple's Prologue* and *Tale* and the Wife of Bath's portrait', *Studies in Philology*, 92, 2 (1999), 109-26; Christopher Cannon, 'The Language Group of the *Canterbury Tales*', in *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, ed. by Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 25-40.

[10] Notably, these two events are not found in Chaucer's sources. For which, see Edward Wheatley, 'The Manciple's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales II*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 749-73.

[11] Grudin, '*Manciple's Tale*', p. 331.

repeatedly turned to Shakespeare to find an epitaph for this poem: at the end of the *Manciple's Tale*, 'the rest is silence'.[12]

However, while the characters within the poem are reduced to silence, I would suggest that the poem presents a more complex and nuanced exploration of language. The poem makes problematic the idea that silence is a moral imperative. In part, this is achieved through the ironising of the Manciple's dame's speech against speaking. This speech is vast in length, and in it the dame quotes not only canonical literary writers – 'Reed Salomon [...] Reed David [...] Reed Senekke' (IX.344-45) – but also Flemish proverbs (IX.349). As critics have noted, this speech and the tale itself resemble little more than 'jangling against jangling'.[13] Alongside the ironic verbosity of the tale, the work also undermines its moral message through its treatment of the crow. According to the moral of the tale, the crow should be censured for his speech. But it is notable that the crow begins not by speaking but by remaining silent: he watches the betrayal 'and seyde nevere a word' (IX.241). The narrator draws attention to the crow's silence, thereby implicating him in the betrayal of his lord which he failed to speak against. Equally, the next time the crow is censured it is not for his counterfeiting of human speech, but for his mimicking a bird cry. The crow flies to his lord and cries out 'Cokkow! Cokkow! Cokkow!' (IX.243), and while this is an inappropriate and tactless way for the bird to announce the news, it is not a verbalised sin.

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[12] The quote appears in John M. Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 155; Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of the 'Canterbury Tales'* (London: University of California Press, 1976), p. 304; Mark Loveridge, *A History of Augustan Fable* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 91. Lindahl resists quoting Hamlet, although he too suggests that the tale concludes with 'the option of silence'. Carl Lindahl, *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the 'Canterbury Tales'* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 155.
[13] Cox, 'The Jangler's "Bourde"', p. 12.

The crow does eventually 'countrefete' (IX.134) human speech and announces the news to Phebus of his wife's adultery. However, problems arise as to whether the audience is supposed to condemn the bird at this point. As Peter C. Herman has revealed, through sleeping with someone of 'litel reputacioun' (a detail added by Chaucer to his sources), Phebus's wife is committing treason according to the 1352 Statute of Treason.[14] As such, far from there being a moral imperative for the crow to be silent, the imperative is to do the exact opposite: the bird has a moral and legal compulsion to reveal the betrayal to his master. As Herman goes on to note, this does not absolve the crow of all criticism as the 'manner [...] of his revelation' remains 'objectionable'; but nevertheless the bird had to speak.[15] Following the execution of his wife, Phebus attempts to gloss the death, a gloss which fails to be *à propos* in any respect.[16] Phebus valorises his wife, who is '[f]ul giltelees' and 'eek so trewe' (IX.277, 75), and censures the crow, who he labels a '[t]raitour' (IX.271). This gloss is, however, unsustainable. The narrator explicitly records that Phebus is given the news of his wife's infidelity '[b]y sadde tokenes and by wordes bolde' (IX.258), and the chiasmatic structure here serves to firmly link the crow's 'wordes', which could be partial or deceitful, with the 'tokenes', which are objective proofs of the infidelity. Phebus's receipt of these tokens invalidates his attempt to gloss his wife as 'trewe' and 'giltelees', and calls into question his subsequent attack on the crow. Phebus is presented as a fallible glossator, and his suggestion that his wife's death is the result of the crow's 'tonge of scorpioun' (IX.271) is not supported by the poem.

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[14] Peter C. Herman, 'Treason in the *Manciple's Tale*', *Chaucer Review*, 25, 4 (1991), 318-28.
[15] Herman, 'Treason', p. 323.
[16] The inappropriateness of Phebus's speech has been previously noted: Harwood, for example, describes him as demonstrating 'bathetic delusion' ('Language and the Real', p. 276).

The *Manciple's Tale* thus fails as an exemplum exhorting its readers to silence: not only is it a remarkably noisy text, but the tale also fails to unproblematically condemn the crow for its speech. Marc M. Pelen has previously noted the tale's failure to end in silence, and suggested instead that it ends with 'verbal gabble', a gabble which reveals that 'an exposition of a traditional legend by conflicting human interests can result only in contradictions and inconsequences'.[17] While I would concur with the thrust of Pelen's argument, I think that the poem does more than present 'gabble'. For the term 'gabble' suggests that the voices within the tale are given equal validity, whereas this section has argued that the ironicised voice of the dame and the inappropriate voice of Phebus are both invalidated. And notably, it is these two characters who are most invested in the exemplary process. It is these two who attempt to fill the discursive vacuum that emerges following an execution: they seek to gloss it and to give it a clear meaning. By having these powerful voices present in his narrative, Chaucer foregrounds the exemplary process. But, by ultimately invalidating them, Chaucer also undermines the notion that one single act can be imbued with a fixed and clear moral meaning. After the *Manciple's Tale*, the rest is not silence. Rather, the significance of the execution, and the meaning of the tale itself, is left open and unresolved.

'Hold conseil and descoevere it noght' (III.779): Gower's 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' and the Triumphing of Silence

While Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale* has been of persistent interest to critics over the last twenty years, Gower's version of the tale, seemingly composed independently of

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[17] Marc M. Pelen, 'The Manciple's "Cosyn" to the "Dede"', *Chaucer Review*, 25, 4 (1991), 343-54 (p. 345).

Chaucer's,[18] has received considerably less attention. This lack of attention is unfortunate; Gower's tale is an intriguing iteration of the story, which makes several notable changes to the material that Gower sourced from the Ovidian tradition.[19] Gower's version of the story shares the exemplary purpose that is ostensibly found in Chaucer's tale: Genius uses the tale to instruct Amans that 'if tho miht hiere/In privete what thei have wroght,/Hold conseil and discoevere it noght'.[20] However, whereas Chaucer adapts the Ovidian material to open up some of the interpretative cruxes that the story raises about speech and violence, Gower adapts the Ovidian material to close down such cruxes.

There are two particular changes that Gower makes which warrant attention, both of which concern how he conceives of the character of the raven.[21] The first of these is apparent in Gower's introduction of the raven, describing it as this 'fals bridd' who '[d]iscoevereth all that evere he cowthe' (III.792-94). While all the versions of the story depict the bird using pejorative terms such as 'fals', Gower is alone in emphasising the bird's predisposition to gossip. By stating that the bird '[d]iscoevereth all', Gower constructs him from the outset as a flawed figure: the bird is defined as a jangler. Regardless, therefore, of how the reader interprets the bird's specific revelation of Cornide's affair, his propensity to indulge in verbal sins makes his eventual punishment particularly satisfying. The second change is

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[18] There has been some suggestion that Chaucer knew and was parodying Gower's work; see, Richard Hazelton, 'The Manciple's Tale: Parody and Critique', *JEGP*, 62 (1963), 1-31. It is not implausible that Chaucer knew Gower's work or *vice versa*, although Wheatley has suggests that 'there is no conclusive evidence that Chaucer knew Gower's version' ('The Manciple's Tale', p. 750). I can detect no clear overlaps, and given that both poems can be productively read independently, I see no reason to posit a connection between the two.

[19] By Ovidian tradition here and elsewhere, I refer to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Guillaume de Machaut's *Voir Dit*, and the *Ovide Moralisé*. Gower appears to be working most closely with Ovid, but I cite these other Ovidian works to draw attention to the tradition's common elements.

[20] John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), II (1901), bk III, ll. 776-78. Subsequent references to the *Confessio* will appear parenthetically within the text.

[21] Notably, Gower agrees with Ovid's *Metamophoses* and the *Ovide Moralisé* in presenting the bird as a raven. For Chaucer and Guillaume, the bird is a crow.

apparent in the position within the household that Gower envisages for the raven. In the Ovidian tradition, and in Chaucer's work, the bird is owned or closely associated with Phebus: the *Metamorphoses* states that the raven is the 'ales [...] Phoebeius' [*bird of Phebus*];[22] the *Ovide Moralisé* narrates how 'Phebus ot lors un [...] oisiau' [*Phebus then owned a bird*];[23] Guillaume de Machaut's *Voir Dit* has the crow greeting Phebus as his 'biau sire' [*good sir*];[24] while the *Manciple's Tale* has the crow being owned by Phebus who 'taughte it speke' (IX.132). By contrast, Gower's 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' introduces the 'fals bridd, which she [Cornide] hath holde/And kept in chambre of pure yowthe' (III.792-93). This change is significant for, by switching the bird's ownership from Phebus to Cornide, Gower removes the lord-servant relationship which is problematically imagined in Chaucer's work. There is thus no social or legal obligation upon the bird to reveal to Phebus the news of his wife's affair. Indeed, the only potential social obligation upon the raven is to not reveal the truth, as through the revelation he betrays his mistress. These changes serve to emphasise the unattractive qualities of the raven, and ensure that his revelation is presented as the negative act of one who uses 'wicke speche' (III.805).

That the raven's speech is 'wicke' is made explicit in the narration of Cornide's execution. Gower recounts how:

And he that schrewe al that he can
Of his ladi to Phebus seide;
And he for wraththe his swerd outbreide,
With which Cornide anon he slowh. (III.798-801)

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[22] *Ovidius: Metamorphoses*, bk 2, ll. 544-45.
[23] *Ovide Moralisé: Poème du Commencement du Quatorzième Siècle*, ed. by C. de Boer, 5 vols (Amsterdam: Johannes Muller, 1915-38), I (1915), l. 2152. The translation is my own. The scene is quoted in full in Wheatley, 'The Manciple's Tale', p. 757.
[24] Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Livre dou Voir Dit (The Book of the True Poem)*, ed. by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, trans. by R. Barton-Palmer (New York: Garland, 1998), l. 8035.

In its substance, this passage follows the Ovidian tradition closely. However, the structure and style of the passage is unique to Gower, and through his careful structuring of these lines, Gower does not just narrate the execution but also simultaneously glosses it to reinforce the tale's exemplary message. Particularly worthy of note are the parallel constructions deployed in the opening of lines 798 and 800. The paralleling, as well as the use of anaphora, creates a certain ambiguity over the meaning of 'he' in line 800. Given its referent is the raven in line 798, the audience may be forgiven for assuming that the raven is similarly the referent in line 800, and we are only disabused of this notion following the reference to the 'swerd'. Through this construction, Gower elides the characters of the raven and Phebus, thereby establishing a direct connection between the bird's speech and Phebus's action. Such a connection is reinforced in this passage's use of *disjunctio*, that is the use of verbs at the end of successive clauses.[25] By ending each line with a verb, an equivalence is drawn between these actions: knowing and saying, arming and slaying, become closely linked in this quartet of lines. One final way in which Gower draws a connection between speech and action is through his positioning of Cornide. While lines 799 and 801 do not grammatically parallel each other, it is notable that Cornide occupies the same metrical space in each line as both the 'ladi' (III.799) and 'Cornide' (III.801). This echoing reinforces Cornide's status as a double victim: she is the victim both of the raven's words and Phebus's violence.

These lines thus serve stylistically and grammatically to elide the raven with Phebus, and to elide speech with violence. Through this elision, the lines reinforce the exemplary purpose of the text by suggesting that unrestrained speech is equivalent to wrathful violence. These tautly-crafted lines work to pre-empt the

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[25] The term and definition are taken from Stephen Knight, *rymyng craftily: Meaning in Chaucer's Poetry* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1973), p. 239.

emergence of a discursive vacuum: the execution is narrated and simultaneously glossed, and the audience has no cause to question the anti-language moral being drawn. Whereas in the *Manciple's Tale* the execution was followed by the problematic glosses of Phebus and the Manciple's dame, the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' follows the execution with no such problematic material. Phebus does not speak in the narrative, while his vengeance on the bird, who 'was transformed' from 'snow whyt' to 'colblak' (III.807-09), appears to the audience to be an entirely proportionate response. Genius does seek to gloss the story, advising Amans '[b]e war therfore and sei the beste' (III.816), but unlike the Manciple's dame, Genius's gloss is brief and to the point. The short 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' thus functions effectively as a stand-alone exemplary narrative. Gower modifies his sources to construct a focused narrative which demonises the raven and forcefully links inappropriate speech with violence. For Gower, the significance of the execution is not problematised; for Gower, the rest can be silence.

Gower's 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' in Context

An important objection might be raised in response to the above discussion: by reading the tale independently of its immediate context, this discussion could underplay certain moral ambiguities which permeate the text. To an extent, reading Gower's individual tales outside of their immediate context within the *Confessio Amantis* is a legitimate enterprise; from early on it its transmission, tales from the *Confessio* were extracted from the collection and presented independently.[26] However, A. S. G. Edwards notes that the extraction of Gower's tales happened less

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[26] See Kate Harris, 'Ownership and Readership: Studies in the Provenance of the Manuscripts of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of York, 1993), esp. p. 46.

frequently than the extraction of comparable works by Chaucer and Lydgate, and given that Gower evidently thought of his *Confessio* as a whole, it is important to situate the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' within its textual and extratextual contexts.[27] It is in this process of situating tales within their immediate contexts that critics of the *Confessio* have begun to detect incongruities in Gower's moral and philosophical ideologies. Kurt Olsson, for example, has argued that Gower plays the role of '*tumultator*, one who causes debates' by deliberately arranging each tale 'to spill over the distinction or topoi introduced to contain it'.[28] Similarly, James Simpson has suggested that the juxtaposition of mutually-incompatible exemplary texts reveals Genius's intellectual and philosophical 'blind spots'.[29] Moreover, J. Allen Mitchell has shown that the *Confessio* is 'filled with exemplary teachings that demonstrate contrary things'.[30]

The relatively straightforward exemplary message of the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' does appear to be somewhat undermined through Gower's positioning of it between the 'Tale of Tiresias' and the 'Tale of Jupiter and Laar'. These three tales are told by Genius to exemplify the specific sin of 'Cheste' (III.417), or *conflict*. From the start, Genius conceives of 'Cheste' as a verbal sin: his description of it opens with references to Cheste's 'mowth' being 'unpinned' (III.424) and his 'lippes' being 'unloke' (III.426), while there are also references to Cheste's 'croked eloquence' (III.440). This concern with verbal sins is also apparent in the two tales that bookend the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide'. The 'Tale of Tiresias' narrates how Tiresias is asked by Jupiter and Juno to judge whether 'man or wif' is the more

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[27] A. S. G. Edwards, 'Selection and Subversion in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1998), pp. 257-67.
[28] Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the 'Confessio Amantis'* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), p. 14, 11.
[29] James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's 'Anticlaudianus' and John Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 196.
[30] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*, pp. 49-50, fn. 35.

amorous (III.746). Tiresias, 'without avisement' (III.751), declares against Juno who in a rage blinds him. In response Jupiter makes him a 'Sothseiere' (III.761), and Genius moralises the story by advising Amans 'hold thi tunge stille clos' (III.769). The 'Tale of Jupiter and Laar' narrates how Jupiter 'kutte' out the 'tunge' of Laar (III.823) after she revealed '[h]ow Jupiter lay be Jutorne' (III.821). The moral of this story is to not let 'tunges gon unteid' (III.830), and Genius concludes these three tales with a final admonition to Amans: 'be thou non of tho,/To jangle and telle tales so' (III.831-32).

There is an obvious anti-language inflection given to these three tales, each of which ostensibly promotes silence. However, the juxtaposing of these texts works to problematise the moral they expound. There is, in part, a certain irony in Genius's attack on those who 'telle tales', given his own role in disseminating stories. But these three tales raise a more fundamental problem concerning the moral schema that Genius is working with here. As Mitchell argues, there are 'profound incongruities' present in these tales as they imply that a 'discipline of the tongue eclipses moral considerations such as truthfulness or honesty' and privileges 'self-interest' instead.[31] Silence is less a moral imperative in these texts than a practical expedient. Should Laar, the raven and Tiresias have remained silent, they would not have accrued any moral benefits; they would just have spared themselves from the actions of vengeful gods. But Mitchell is wrong to suggest that 'truthfulness' is eclipsed in these tales. The opening tale conceives of truth in positive terms: Tiresias is turned into a 'Sothseiere' (III.761), and the tale explicitly presents this as a positive thing, describing it as a 'bienfait (III.758) and as a 'grace' (III.759). But having elevated

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[31] J. Allan Mitchell, 'John Gower and John Lydgate: Forms and Norms of Rhetorical Culture', in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture, c. 1350-c. 1500*, ed. by Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 569-84 (p. 574).

the role of the soothsayer in this tale, Genius proceeds in the following two tales to

condemn those who speak truths and urges instead a pragmatic silence. By ordering

the tales in this way, Gower subtly detracts from Genius's moralising. Genius is

certainly not presented as so flawed a glossator of actions as the Manciple's dame or

Chaucer's Phebus, and the execution of Cornide does not become a contested act.

Nevertheless, the audience are made aware of discontinuities in Genius's narratives,

and come to recognise that the single totalising morals he draws from the narratives

are not entirely sustainable.

Alongside seeking discontinuities through Gower's juxtaposing of different

tales, recent work on the *Confessio* has focused particularly on the Latin apparatus

that accompanies the poem. Robert F. Yeager was one of the first critics to

foreground the Latin verses and the Latin prose glosses, both of which he viewed as

authorial.[32] Yeager argued that for Gower 'the page [of a manuscript] itself can

embody the message', and Gower can only be fully understood by reading his work

through these glosses.[33] In more recent criticism, the *Confessio's* scholarly apparatus

has been viewed from one of two primary perspectives. On the one hand, some

critics have emphasised the utilitarian nature of these glosses: Kurt Olsson has

suggested that the glosses are a useful indexing tool; Andrew Galloway has viewed

the glosses as serving to 'simply summarize' the narratives; and Joyce Coleman has

argued that the glosses allowed clerics to quickly get a précis of the story before

elaborating on its moral complexities.[34] On the other hand, some critics have viewed

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[32] Robert F. Yeager, 'English, Latin, and the Text as "Other": The Page as Sign in the Work of John Gower', in *Medieval English Poetry*, ed. by Stephanie Trigg (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 203-16.
[33] Yeager, 'English, Latin', p. 214.
[34] Olsson, *John Gower*, p. 9; Andrew Galloway, 'Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, the *Prick of Conscience*, and the History of the Latin Gloss in Early English Literature', in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. by Malte Urban (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 39-70 (p. 50); Joyce Coleman, 'Lay Readers and Hard Latin: How Gower may have Intended the *Confessio Amantis* to be Read', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 24 (2002), 209-35 (pp. 219-225).

the glosses as creative in character: Yeager has described the glosses as 'skilfully musical', and has suggested that they function as an 'authoritative, directing presence' supplanting Genius; Ardis Butterfield has argued that in the glosses Gower is 'experimenting with different locations for authorship'; and Patricia Batchelor has viewed the glosses as a deliberate attempt to proliferate competing voices all vying 'for control of each tale'.[35] I want to explore the Latin gloss to the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' primarily because it provides an interesting re-narration and re-glossing of the execution of Cornide. However, through exploring this gloss, I also want to speculate further on Gower's intent behind producing this scholarly apparatus.

The gloss to the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' reads:

Et narrat qualit*er* quedam auis tunc albissimia no*min*e Coruus consiliu*m* d*omi*ne sue Cornide phebo denudauit vnde contigit no*n* solu*m* ip*s*am Cornide*m* interfici *s*et et coruu*m* qui antea tanquam nix albus fuerit in piceum colorem pro perpetuo transmutari.[36]

[*And he narrates how a certain bird, then the whitest, the raven by name, revealed the counsel of his mistress Cornide to Phebus; thereupon it happened that not only was Cornide herself killed, but the raven who formerly was snow white, was changed forever into pitch black.*]

There is some evidence to support the view that medieval audiences used these glosses as an indexing tool. One late fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Confessio*, MS M.126 now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, contains an index to the poem written in the hand of the poem's main scribe, Ricardus Franciscus.[37] The index

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[35] Yeager, 'English, Latin', pp. 210-11; Ardis Butterfield, 'Articulating the Author: Gower and the French Vernacular Codex', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003), 80-96 (p. 82); Patricia Batchelor, 'Feigned Truth and Exemplary Method in the *Confessio Amantis*', in *Revisioning Gower*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1998), pp. 1-15 (p. 10).

[36] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.126, f. 55. Macaulay includes the glosses in the margins of his edition of the *Confessio* (see p. 247), but I cite MS M.126 here as I will return to this manuscript shortly. The translation is my own.

[37] For details of this manuscript and an edition of the index, see Harris, 'Ownership and Readership', pp. 239-41, 308-28. For other discussions of the manuscript, see Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1390-1490*, 2 vols (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1996), II, 322-25; Martha Dana Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 117-64; Martha Driver, 'Women Readers and Pierpont Morgan MS M.126', in

entry for the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' reads: 'Cornudephobo how she made the white crowne to be chaunged into blak'.[38] This entry provides an obviously problematic summary of the narrative; it misreads the plot and elevates Cornide to the role of protagonist, severely mangling her name in the process. Kate Harris notes that this index is incomplete and was probably 'something of an afterthought', and this in part accounts for its problematic nature.[39] However, its problematic nature can be further accounted for if we posit the idea that the scribe was working with the gloss in producing this index. Two pieces of evidence suggest that the scribe was using the Latin gloss rather than the Middle English text. Firstly, while the index entry is an incomplete summary of the tale, what it does include follows the last few lines of the Latin gloss closely: the 'white crowne' (the 'coruum qui [...] albus fuit') is 'chaunged' ('transmutari') 'into blak' ('in piceum colorem'). Secondly, the mangled name 'Cornudephobo' bears a distinctive Latin case ending. And notably, the Latin gloss in MS M.126 includes the names 'Cornide' and 'Phebo' alongside each other on the same line,[40] and given this it would not be improbable to assume that a scribe unfamiliar with the story might elide these two names into one.[41] It remains unclear why the scribe elevates Cornide to the position of protagonist. Martha Driver has argued that MS M.126 was produced for 'an aristocratic female', and it may be that the scribe wanted to place particular emphasis on the female characters.[42] However, it is equally possible that the scribe's Latin failed him,[43] or that he was so frustrated by the gloss's frequent use of the passive voice that he

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John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts, ed. by Malte Urban (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 71-107.

[38] MS M.126, f. 208. See also Harris, 'Ownership and Readership', p. 312.

[39] Harris, 'Ownership and Readership', p. 239.

[40] MS M.126, f. 55.

[41] It is worth noting that in MS M.126 the 'p' of 'phebo' is not given any particular emphasis and the two words are easily elided.

[42] Driver, 'Women Readers', p. 71.

[43] That the scribe translates 'coruus' as 'crowne' rather than raven suggests there were weaknesses in his linguistic abilities.

searched for the only proper name he could find to give agency to the actions he was summarising.

If we accept that the scribe of MS M.126 was utilising the Latin glosses to produce his index,[44] then this provides ostensible support for the view that Gower's glosses are utilitarian in character. However, while this index may provide evidence that the glosses were used as indexing aids, it also suggests that Gower never intended them for this purpose. For, while the index's problematic summary of the tale appears partly to be the result of the scribe's carelessness and poor language skills, it can also be read as symptomatic of the fact that the Latin gloss is not a particularly helpful summary of the tale. The gloss does not deviate substantially from the narrative of the tale, but it does provide a distinct iteration of the material which deviates from the Middle English tale in its emphases. Given this chapter's concern with speech and violence, it is particularly notable that the Latin gloss minimises the violent act. The execution itself is narrated in the passive voice, Cornide 'interfici' by an unnamed force, while the construction 'non solum [...] set et' marginalises the execution and places the focus on the fate of the raven rather than on Cornide. Alongside minimising the violent act, the gloss also draws particular attention to the speech act. There are only three active constructions in the gloss: two concern the telling or the progression of the tale ('narrat', 'contigit'), leaving 'auis [...] denudauit' as the only active event recounted in the gloss. In his exploration of Chaucer's 'language group' of tales – those of the Friar, Nun's Priest, and Manciple – Christopher Cannon suggests that Chaucer depicted words as doing 'consequential work'. For Chaucer, Cannon argues, words 'are not simply equivalent

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[44] While there has been no sustained analysis of the index, Harris does note that the Latin glosses probably 'greatly facilitated the prospective indexer's task'. Harris, 'Ownership and Readership', p. 241.

to actions: they *are* actions'.[45] While Cannon's focus is on Chaucer, this argument can be usefully applied to Gower's Latin gloss. For in this gloss, the construction 'auis [...] denudauit' is given prominence, thereby making the raven's revelation the ultimate driving force behind the subsequent events that lack an agent. The gloss makes explicit the consequential work that words do, for it is because of words that the death and transformation occur.

This suggests that Gower's Latin glosses can be read as creative in character; the gloss to the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' functions not as a summary of the tale but as a discrete re-narration of it. However, I would not necessarily concur with the view expressed by Batchelor that the glosses are destabilising because of the way each gloss 'sometimes contradicts the text or obfuscates the presumed sentence of the narrative'.[46] For rather than having the gloss contradict the text, Gower uses the gloss to the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' to develop a strategy he deployed in the tale. In the tale, Phebus is partly marginalised through eliding him with the raven and eliding his violent actions with the raven's speech. This marginalisation is pursued further in the gloss, which denies Phebus an active role in the narrative. Both the tale and the gloss thus complement each other in their focus on the dangers of speech, and Gower's exemplary purpose is consequently less problematic than Chaucer's. Whereas Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale* depicted a discursive vacuum emerging as a result of the execution of Phebus's wife, Gower's 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' fills that vacuum with a moral about the benefits of withholding speech. While that moral is somewhat problematised through the tale's association with the story of Tiresias, other features of its textual and extratextual context serves to reinforce the moral. For Gower, unlike for Chaucer, the death of Cornide does not become a contested act.

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[45] Cannon, 'Language Group', p. 32.
[46] Batchelor, 'Feigned Truth', p. 1.

'This thing is knowen overal' (III.1893): Gower's 'Tale of Orestes' and the Fame of Death

The preceding discussions of the *Manciple's Tale* and the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide' have served to foreground certain key issues surrounding the relationship between speech and violence, as well as to introduce recent trends in Gowerian criticism. With these discussions in mind, I now want to focus in more detail on one of the longest tales from Book III of the *Confessio Amantis*: the 'Tale of Orestes'. This tale, which Gower sources primarily from Benoît de Saint-Maure's *Roman de Troie*,[47] is purportedly told as an exemplum against murder. Genius, 'touchende of Homicide' (III.1863), seeks to illustrate the fatal results when 'wit' is overturned 'into malice' (III.1876-77). However, the tale is more complex than these lines would suggest, and this complexity emerges as a result of the proliferation of executions that the tale narrates. Over the course of the tale, four characters die, and three of these deaths raise interpretative problems both for the characters within the narrative and for the audience of the *Confessio*. That the tale has problematic elements has not gone without note. In one of the most famous dismissals of the tale, Derek Pearsall states that it 'fails completely to make its point or even to extract a single story line'.[48] For Pearsall, these failures are a consequence of the fact that

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[47] See Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, ed. by Léopald Constans, 6 vols (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1904-12), IV (1908), ll. 27925-90, 28155-283, and 28399-402. Gower was also familiar with Guide delle Colonne's version of the story, for which see *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, trans. by Mary Elizabeth Meek (London: Indiana University Press, 1974), bk 33, ll. 1-127. Macaulay notes that Gower was acquainted with both sources but 'preferred the French because he perceived it to be better' (Gower, *Complete Works*, II, 499). Peter Nicholson agrees with Macaulay's comments and suggests that out of all of the Trojan tales told in book III of the *Confessio*, it is in Orestes's tale that Gower 'follows Benoît most closely'. See Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 48. While Nicholson is evidently correct to note that Gower followed Benoît closely, it should be noted that Gower does deviate from his source on several occasions, as will be discussed in this chapter.
[48] Derek Pearsall, 'Gower's Narrative Art', *PMLA*, 81, 7 (1966), 475-84 (p. 483). Peter Nicholson lists other criticisms of the tale in his *Love and Ethics*, pp. 203-04.

'Gower is simply not equipped to cope with' his source material.[49] However, in this section I want to attempt a rehabilitation of the tale, to argue that its problematic features arise not because of Gower's poetic inadequacies but because of his wider concern with the interpretative problems which executions raise. Gower explores in this tale the related concepts of fame and shame, and it is through his exploration of these concepts that he comes to produce a more nuanced and complex account of the relationship between speech and violence, an account that explicitly recognises the fallibility of tale-tellers and moralisers.

Gower's interest in fame is signalled at the tale's opening: Gower refers to the 'noble toun' of Troy, '[w]hos fame stant yit of renoun/And evere schal to mannes Ere' (III.1885-87). *Fama* is a notoriously slippery concept which, as Fenster and Smail note, functions within a 'wide semantic range' and can mean variously 'rumor', 'idle talk', 'reputation', 'memory', 'glory', 'infamy' and 'defamation'.[50] In the opening to the 'Tale of Orestes', Gower uses 'fame' to mean *reputation* or perhaps *glory*, and he presents it as a primarily aural phenomenon which reaches 'mannes Ere'. Gower also accentuates the positive associations of 'fame' by linking it with nobility and 'renoun'. Throughout the opening sections of the 'Tale of Orestes', Gower continues to emphasise the positive uses to which 'fame' can be put.

Genius declares his 'matiere' (III.1895) to be the story of how 'Agamenon [...] was deceived' (III.1896-98), and it is with this story that the tale begins. Genius narrates how Agamemnon, returning home from the Trojan War, is unaware that his wife Clytemnestra has been consorting with Aegisthus. Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, who 'weren bothe of on assent' (III.1918), agree to murder Agamemnon, and so

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[49] Pearsall, 'Gower's Narrative Art', p. 483.
[50] Fenster and Smail, 'Introduction', p. 2.

Aegisthus '[b]e treson slowh him in his bedd' (III.1919). In the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide', the execution was presented as an uncontested and contained act that drew no response from a wider populace. But the execution of Agamemnon is not a contained act as two loose strands remain: firstly, there is Orestes, the son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, and secondly there is fame.

It is fame that keeps the ghost of Agamemnon alive: following his execution, Genius narrates how 'moerdre, which mai noght ben hedd,/Sprong out to every mannes Ere,/Wherof the lond was full of fere' (III.1920-22). The sentiment is commonplace, and serves to dramatise how violence engenders speech.[51] Fame, here having the sense of *rumour*, could be read negatively in these lines. The news of Agamemnon's death means that the populace are subjugated by fear, and as such fame could be viewed as the instrument of the tyrant. However, the narrative immediately conceives of a more subversive and proactive role for speech. We are told of Taltabius, who has the young Orestes in his keeping, that:

> whan he herde of this tidinge,
> Of this treson, of this misdede,
> He gan withinne himself to drede,
> In aunter if this false Egiste
> Upon him come, er he it wiste,
> To take and moerdre of his malice
> The child, which he hath norrice:
> And for that cause in alle haste
> Out of the lond he gan him haste. (III.1930-1938)

In part, the spread of rumour here has a beneficial effect as it incites those seeking to resist the tyrant's control into action. But 'this tidinge' also has a greater importance for Gower. The potency of tidings has not gone unnoticed by literary critics, with

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[51] See, for example, the use of '[m]ordre wol out' in Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale* (VII.576) and the *Nun's Priest's Tale* (VII.3052).

particular critical emphasis being placed on Chaucer's *House of Fame*.[52] Typically, critics have suggested Chaucer viewed tidings as problematic; Turner and Grudin, both situating Chaucer's work in an urban context, have suggested that tidings posed a 'very real danger' and are associated with 'destruction'.[53] And Chaucer is not alone in censuring tidings; the *Book of Vices and Virtues*, for example, lists the speaking of 'newe tyþynges' that make 'men yuele at ese' as one of the verbal sins to be shunned.[54] Gower, however, envisages a more constructive role for tidings. While the figure of Taltabius appears in Benoît's *Roman*,[55] Gower freely adapts his source here by introducing and foregrounding 'this tidinge'. This foregrounding is achieved through the opening tricolon which functions to elide three aspects: the speech ('this tidinge'), the act ('this misdede'), and the gloss ('this treson'). The elision of speech, act, and gloss is significant as it reveals Gower's interest in the performative dimension of tidings. Tidings serve not only to memorialise an action, but they also serve to moralise about that action. And in this case that moralisation takes on a specifically judicial character: for, the tricolon suggests that to speak the tiding is to simultaneously lay against Aegisthus the accusation of treason.

Later in the narrative, Gower returns to explore the positive judicial function news can have. Orestes, having come of age, seeks to avenge his father and travels to the city of Cropheon where he meets the lord Phoieus. At this point in Gower's source, Benoît narrates how the lord reveals that:

> Une fille, cui il aveit [...]
> Li ot donee en mariage:
> Guerpie l'aveit e laissiee,

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[52] See, as examples, Braswell, *Chaucer's "Legal Fiction"*, pp. 58-62; Michaela Paasche Grudin, *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 43-47; Larry D. Benson, 'The Love-Tydynges in Chaucer's *House of Fame*', in *Chaucer's Dream Visions and Shorter Poems*, ed. by William A. Quinn (New York: Garland, 1999), pp. 221-41.
[53] Grudin, *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse*, p. 66; Turner, 'Greater London', p. 35.
[54] *Book of Vices and Virtues*, p. 56.
[55] Benoît, *Roman de Troie*, ll. 28081-87. Benoît names him 'Taltibius'.

Por Clitemestran reneiee.[56]

[*A daughter, who he had, he had given in marriage: he [Aegisthus] had forsaken and abandoned her, renounced {her} for Clytemnestra*]

As a result of Aegisthus's previous betrayal, Orestes gains military support in the form of 'treis cenz chevaliers armez' [*three hundred armed knights*].[57] Gower expands and slightly alters this scene. He narrates how Pheoieus reveals that:

> Egiste in Mariage
> His dowhter whilom of full Age
> Forlai, and afterward forsok,
> When he Horestes Moder tok.
>   Men sein, 'Old Senne newe schame':
> Thus more and more aros the blame
> Ayein Egiste on every side. (III.2029-2034)

Gower here follows Benoît's *Roman* but makes three significant alterations. Firstly, he adds the fact that Aegisthus '[f]orlai' the lord's daughter, thereby emphasising the outrageousness of his actions. Secondly, he omits the reference to Orestes receiving the support of three hundred of Phoieus's knights. Thirdly and finally, he invents three lines describing the 'blame' which arises against Aegisthus 'on every side'. Through these changes, Gower alters the focus of this passage. In Benoît's *Roman*, as well as Guido's *Historia*, the passage is about how Orestes gathers an army to ride against Aegisthus. In Gower's *Confessio*, by contrast, the passage is about how Orestes gathers an even more potent weapon to use against Aegisthus: he gathers the support of *notoriety*.

The argument that Gower uses the public voice for moral effect is not new. Mitchell, for example, notes that Gower deploys a 'dissident murmur' to enforce the

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[56] Benoît, *Roman de Troie*, ll. 28333-38. All translations from Benoît are my own. Guido agrees with Benoît, narrating how 'Aegisthus had turned away from the daughter [...] on account of the love of Clytemnestra, and had sent her a notice of repudiation' (*Historia Destructionis Troiae*, 33.18-20).
[57] Benoît, *Roman de Troie*, l. 28345. In Guido he similarly gets 'three hundred knights' (*Historia Destructionis Troiae*, 33.22-23).

moral of his tales, while Giancarlo argues that Gower uses the voice of the public 'to assume a licit voice of critique'.[58] While the scene in the 'Tale of Orestes' is thus not unprecedented in Gower's opus, I would argue that the popular decrial of Aegisthus takes on not just a moralistic character, but also a legalistic one. The 'blame' against Aegisthus can be read as a form of 'clamour of the people'. While clamour and notoriety had a judicial significance since at least the reign of Edward II, Scase has noted how these terms took on a particular resonance in the late fourteenth century.[59] Most topically, the judicial process at the Merciless Parliament of 1388 sought a conviction of those accused of treason 'based on notoriety'.[60] And the criteria for establishing a conviction based on 'notoriety of treason' was to ensure the facts of the case were 'well-attested' to.[61]

Such a process of establishing notoriety of treason provides a useful context within which to read Gower's 'Tale of Orestes'.[62] When Gower comes to narrate the death of Aegisthus, the charge of treason is emphasised: Aegisthus practices 'tresoun' (III.2086), he is treated like a 'tretour' (III.2096), he is found guilty of 'tresoun' (III.2098), and finally he is 'unto the gibet drawe', where he hangs above all others '[a]s to a tretour belongeth' (III.2104-06). The intensity of references to treason in these twenty lines has no parallel in Benoît's *Roman*,[63] and allows Gower to legitimise Orestes's act of violence, thereby pre-empting the emergence of a

[58] J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 85; Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 115. Russell A. Peck also comments on the power of the 'voice of common profit' in Gower's work; see his *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (London: Feffer & Simons, 1978), p. 13.

[59] On the origins and development of 'clamour', see Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, pp. 54-65.

[60] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 66. Scase reads the 1388 guild petitions discussed in chapter two of this thesis as 'generating proof of notoriety' (p. 67). On the legal process adopted in 1388, see also Rogers, 'Parliamentary Appeals', pp. 95-124.

[61] Rogers, 'Parliamentary Appeals', p. 112.

[62] Rogers, 'Parliamentary Appeals', p. 112.

[63] Benoît, for instance, narrates how Aegisthus 'fu as forches levé./Tant i estut, tant i pendi' [*was raised to the gallows. So there he was; so there he hung*] (*Roman*, ll. 28396-97), without naming him as a 'tretour'. It should be noted that Benoît does elsewhere in the *Roman* label Aegisthus's actions 'traïson' (e.g. l. 28058, 28089). But he references treason far less frequently than Gower.

discursive vacuum. This legitimation of Orestes's actions is not, however, achieved purely through Genius's insistence on labelling Aegisthus a traitor. Rather, Aegisthus's guilt becomes self-evident through Gower's harnessing of the clamour of the people to attest to the notoriety of Aegisthus's treasons. In Benoît's and Guido's accounts of this story, Orestes leaves the city of Cropheon[64] with three hundred armed men to help him wreak vengeance on Aegisthus. In Gower's account, however, military might becomes marginalised; Orestes leaves the city not with three hundred armed men but with the knowledge that 'blame' has arisen against Aegisthus, 'blame' which provides judicial legitimation of Orestes's vengeance. Gower here presents speech and the dissemination of tidings as judicially beneficial, and the 'Tale of Orestes' thus differs drastically from the criticism of idle jangling that appears in the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide'.

'Diverse opinion ther is' (III.2114): Clytemnestra's Death and Orestes's Shame

Gower is not, however, insensitive to the problems associated with fame and tidings. For instance, in his account of the fate of Aegisthus, Gower demonstrates an awareness of the partiality of tidings. After Gower records how Orestes had assembled a large army, ransacked Micene, and killed Clytemnestra, he describes how '[t]idinges' came to the 'Ere' of Aegisthus (III.2080). However, these tidings are selective: Aegisthus only learns '[h]ow that Micenes was belein,/Bot what was more herd he noght sein' (III.2081-83), and as a result of this partial information he

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[64] In the *Roman*, the city is named 'Trofion' (l. 28327); in the *Historia* it is named 'Trozen' (33.12).

'cam in rescousse of the toun' (III.2085).[65] Aegisthus is, as the audience knows, too late to save the town, and thus the partiality of tidings works to Orestes's advantage by leading Aegisthus to his doom. Elsewhere in the 'Tale of Orestes', Gower explores how the spread of tidings can work to Orestes's disadvantage. While the deaths of Agamemnon and Aegisthus are presented unproblematically in the narrative, the death of Clytemnestra proves more troubling and sees Gower adopting a more ambivalent attitude to fame.

The critical consensus on the tale is that Orestes's murdering of his mother, Clytemnestra, is justified and even 'satisfying'.[66] The story, in the words of Nicholson, adopts 'a simple sin-and-punishment form', as Clytemnestra deviated from reason and Nature, Orestes's actions are the 'proper response'.[67] The tale itself strongly supports this view as it presents Clytemnestra as an active agent in the execution of her husband, an action about which she is remorseless. Moreover, Orestes's execution of her is narrated in such a way as to stress the validity of the act. For her punishment, Clytemnestra is brought into the public sphere: she is brought 'tofore the lordes alle/And ek tofor the poeple also' (III.2052-53). In this public space, Orestes recites 'his tale' (III.2054) and Clytemnestra is charged with 'treson' which 'stant of such record' (III.2060). As with the execution of Aegisthus, the emphasis is placed here on the notoriety of her treason. This is not, however, the only justification Orestes cites for his actions. Prior to her death, in a speech invented by Gower, Orestes states that he is following societal expectation in seeking vengeance 'for mi fader sake' (III.2062) and that he is following the Gods who have

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[65] This is another expansion by Gower. Benoît narrates the execution of Clytemnestra, and then simply says 'Egistus ot la chose oïe:/O estrange chevalerie/Veneit socorre la cité' [*Aegisthus had heard that thing: he came with foreign knights to help the city*] (ll. 18379-81).

[66] Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 54.

[67] Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*, pp. 204-5. For a further discussion of the just nature of the execution, see Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, pp. 190-91.

'comanded' (III.2064) him to kill his mother. Orestes even pre-empts the accusation that he is acting against the laws of Nature, arguing that '[u]nkindely for thou hast wroght,/Unkindeliche it schal be boght' (III.2065-66). Here, one unnatural act merits another; matricide follows mariticide.

Orestes thus delivers his own gloss on his actions in an attempt to prevent a discursive vacuum emerging following the execution of Clytemnestra. Divine law, natural law and positive law all coincide in legitimising Orestes's murder of his mother. Nevertheless, protestations about Orestes's actions emerge from within Gower's narrative. Following the deaths of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, we are told that:

> Tho fame with hire swifte wynges
> Aboute flyh and bar tidinges,
> And made it cowth in alle londes
> How that Horestes with hise hondes
> Climestre his oghne Moder slowh.
> Some sein he dede wel ynowh,
> And som men sein he dede amis,
> Diverse opinion ther is:
> That sche is ded thei speken alle,
> Bot plenli hou it is befalle,
> The matiere in so litel throwe
> In sothe ther mihte noman knowe
> Bot thei that weren ate dede:
> And comunliche in every nede
> The worst speche is rathest herd
> And lieved, til it be ansuerd. (III.2107-22)

Gower is expanding here on a scene he found in Benoît's *Roman*, which describes at the equivalent point how:

> Par tote Grece fu retrait
> E dit ço qu'Orestès ot fait,
> Come il aveit sa mere ocise.
> Parlé en ont en mainte guise:
> Li un diënt qu'il aveit dreit,
> E li autre que nen aveit
> [...]

Ensi diseit la gent comune'[68]

[*Through all Greece it was related and said concerning how Orestes had done, how he had killed his mother. They spoke in many ways: the one said that he had done right, and the other that he had not. Thus said the common man.*]

Gower's most notable alteration here is the addition of fame, and the image of fame we get is redolent of Virgil's *Fama*, with her 'pedibus celerem, et pernicibus alis' [*quick feet and swift wings*].[69] In the *Aeneid*, Virgil famously depicts the monstrous nature of *Fama*, and describes how she 'tum multiplici populos sermone replebat [...] et pariter facta atque infecta canebat' [*spread a rumour amongst many people, and recited equally facts and fictions*], through which rumour-spreading she incites the populace.[70] In Virgil's *Aeneid* and in this scene from Gower's *Confessio*, as well as in Chaucer's *House of Fame*, the emphasis is placed upon the partiality and unreliability of fame's tidings.[71] Gower does not follow Virgil in associating fame with 'infecta' [*fictions*], but he does record how the partiality of fame can rebound against an individual. For the only tiding that comes 'in alle londes' is the news that Orestes 'his oghne Moder slowh' (III.2111). Clytemnestra's treason, the execution of Aegisthus, and Orestes's glossing of Clytemnestra's death go unrecorded by fame. And while Gower is following Benoît in depicting the responses of the populace, he adds the concluding line that 'the worste speche is rathest herd'. The sentiment is a common-place,[72] but its familiarity does not lessen its problematic nature. For these voices testify to the fact that just as *fama* is partial and not objective, so too are

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[68] Benoît, *Roman*, ll. 28399-411.
[69] Virgil, *Aeneid I-VI*, ed. by R. Deryck Williams (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996), bk IV, l. 180. The translation is my own. For a full translation, see Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. by W. F. Jackson Knight, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958).
[70] Virgil, *Aeneid*, bk IV, ll. 189-90.
[71] On the treatment of the 'unreliability of traditional information' in the *House of Fame*, see esp. Sheila Delany, *Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 2.
[72] See, for example, the courtiers in the *Squire's Tale*, who 'demen gladly to the badder ende' (V.224) which I discuss in the next chapter, pp. 225-30.

audiences who are driven less by a concern with ascertaining the truth and more with a natural propensity to cynicism.

In the 'Tale of Orestes', the rumours about Orestes are emphatically 'ansuerd', and they are answered through the formation of a parliament:

> The lordes of comun assent
> A time sette of parlement,
> And to Athenes king and lord
> Togedre come of on acord,
> To knowe hou that the sothe was. (III.2129-33)

Gower's parliaments have received little critical attention. In his investigation of parliament and literature, Matthew Giancarlo touches on them only briefly while acknowledging the 'complexities' of the *Confessio*.[73] Elliot Kendall has offered a fuller account, stressing that Gower's parliaments 'have more in common with English parliaments of the thirteenth century than with either ancient civic and judicial institutions or, more pertinently, the parliaments of Gower's own day'.[74] As he notes, this is certainly true of the Athenian parliament convened in the 'Tale of Orestes' where the emphasis is on 'the lords' and the 'king and lord'.[75] The phrase 'of o acord' to some extent mirrors the late fourteenth-century's concern with establishing a parliamentary voice 'that is individual and multiple'.[76] However, it is notable that this parliamentary assembly does not envisage any space for the commons nor does it establish a representative voice of authority, two others features

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[73] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 126.
[74] Elliot Kendall, *Lordship and Literature: John Gower and the Politics of the Great Household* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), p. 239.
[75] Of this parliament, Kendall says that its process of judging is 'constituted by acts of personal, aristocratic management of justice enabled by household bonds and their extensive coordination'. *Lordship and Literature*, p. 240.
[76] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 126.

which Giancarlo cites as being of increasing importance to parliamentary discourses during the fourteenth century.[77]

The only voice heard in this parliament is that of Menestheus, who re-narrates the many reasons why Orestes is innocent: Orestes did a 'thing of the goddes bede,/And nothing of his crualte' (III.2148-49); Clytemnestra deserved her punishment because of her '[s]pousebreche' (III.2158); and Clytemnestra deserved it as a punishment for being 'of hire oghne lord moerdrice' (III.2162). Menestheus's words convince the assembly: '[i]t thoghte them alle he seide skile', and so '[w]hen thei upon the reson musen,/Horestes alle thei excusen' (III.2167-68). In many respects, Menestheus serves as a surrogate for Genius, as he is involved in providing a gloss for actions. Just as Genius inveighs against immoral characters and privileges Reason,[78] so too does Menestheus attack Clytemnestra for murder and the moral vice of adultery, while also exercising reason ('skile' and 'reson') to convince the assembled members. Menestheus is seemingly a compelling voice of authority through whose speech the execution of Clytemnestra is re-glossed and the innocence of Orestes is finally confirmed, allowing him to be 'coroned king' afterwards (III.2171).

However, this parliament is not entirely satisfying. From the *Confessio's* audience's perspective, there is a redundancy to Menestheus's words which serve merely to reiterate Orestes's own glossing of his actions. No new interpretative frameworks are offered through which to view the execution. But also, from the perspective of the people within the poem, it is unclear to what extent the parliament is able to answer the negative fame spread about Orestes. The parliament is

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[77] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, esp. p. 55, 112.
[78] For a discussion of Reason's power see Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, pp. 191-92; Michael D. Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1987), p. 108.

convened in such a way as to exclude the populace, but it is this populace who are inclined to believe the 'worst speche' and who need it 'ansuerd'. The parliament can officially exculpate Orestes; it cannot, however, purify his reputation in the public sphere. Indeed, elsewhere Gower suggests that Orestes is perpetually blemished by his execution of Clytemnestra. Orestes is introduced as the nameless 'Sone' of Agamemnon in line 1924, and it is a further thirty-four lines before he is named as 'Horestes' (III.1958). Following this naming, the narrator immediately declares '[s]uch was the childes riht name,/Which after wroghte mochel schame/In vengance of his fader deth' (III.1959-60). The rhyming of 'name' and 'schame' is distinctive as it associates from the outset Orestes's identity, his 'name', with public disapprobation, with 'schame'.

A notable incongruity emerges here: the 'Tale of Orestes' meticulously works to gloss Orestes's actions as justified, but opens by presenting those same actions as shameful. Recent work by Mary C. Flannery has done much to illuminate our understanding of the complex workings of shame in the medieval period.[79] As Flannery notes, shame could be both a positive or negative force, which was distinguished by 'the way it defined and directed both appropriate and inappropriate conduct'.[80] For Gower, shame is an explicitly negative force which defines inappropriate and immoral actions. The word 'schame' is used infrequently in Book III of the *Confessio*; it appears on only four occasions and its appearances are limited to the 'Tale of Orestes'. Alongside the description of Orestes' 'schame', the term is also used in the proverb, '[m]en sein "Old Senne newe schame"/Thus more and more aros the blame/Ayein Egiste' (III.2033-35), and in Genius's final gloss on the tale,

[79] See Mary C. Flannery, 'The Concept of Shame in Late-Medieval English Literature', *Literature Compass*, 9, 2 (2012), 166-82 (p. 167); 'A Bloody Shame: Chaucer's Honourable Women', *Review of English Studies*, 62 (2010), 337-57.
[80] Flannery, 'Concept of Shame', p. 177.

which states 'who that thenkth his love spiede/With moerdre, he schal with worldes schame/Himself and ek his love schame' (III.1998-2000). In these examples, shame is not constructive, but condemnatory, and is associated with the committing of either a general 'Senne' or the specific sin of murder. By stating that Orestes 'wroghte mochel schame', Gower associates Orestes with these other sinners, even while his tale works to define Orestes's actions as not sinful. This incongruity can be understood as a symptom of the power which fame exerts over the life of Orestes. The 'Tale of Orestes' imagines a select audience, an audience comprising Genius, Menestheus, the parliament, and the *Confessio's* audience. This audience possesses a detailed knowledge of the facts through which they can judge Orestes's actions and determine his innocence. But this audience cannot control Orestes's public reputation. Questions of shame, and particularly male shame, are debated in the public arena,[81] and they are debated by people who naturally believe the 'worst speche'. Orestes may not deserve to be shamed, but the 'Tale of Orestes' forcefully demonstrates that the concepts of fame and shame are not meritocratic, and that parliaments, glossators, and authors are ultimately unable to contain or circumscribe actions with a single definitive gloss.

'[T]ho befell a wonder thing' (III.2172): Gower's Women and the Problems of Tale-Telling

In his 'Tale of Orestes', Gower demonstrates a notably conflicted attitude to *fama* and public discourse: he gives it a valid and useful role in a legal context, but also recognises its fallibility, partiality and its destructive nature. I would contend that

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[81] On the different contexts within which male and female honour and shame are judged, see Flannery, 'A Bloody Shame', p. 341.

part of the reason that Gower was unable to fully reconcile the position of *fama* in

his work is because he recognised how fully implicated he was in the process of

transmitting fame. For Sheila Delany, the task of a poet 'is not merely to collect

opinions, but to choose among them in order to construct his own vision of the

truth'.[82] In this view, the author is an arbiter of *fama*, who sifts through tidings and

tales and shapes them into his own visions of truth, into his own narratives.[83]

However, Gower expresses a degree of anxiety about his position as the arbiter of

fama, and seeks to make transparent to the audience his role as appropriator and

glossator of texts. This anxiety comes through in part in the fate of Orestes: Gower

constructs a story to defend him, but recognises that even his textual endeavours

cannot absolve Orestes from the world's shame. However, Gower's anxieties about

fama become more pronounced if we turn to examine his treatment of two of the

female characters in the Orestes story: Aegisthus's daughter, Erigona, and

Clytemnestra.

For A. S. G. Edwards, Gower's 'women seem to be presented as lacking in

intrinsic interest, and to be of significance primarily as aspects of male-focused

narratives'.[84] The example of Erigona serves to support this thesis; she is an

afterthought in the poem who is not introduced until Orestes has been crowned king,

and is dispatched shortly afterwards. Following Orestes's coronation, we are told:

> And tho befell a wonder thing:
> Egiona, whan sche this wiste,
> Which was the dowhter of Egiste

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[82] Delany, *Chaucer's 'House of Fame'*, p. 5.

[83] On this point, see also Flannery's discussion of how authors have a 'textual access' to a subject's 'reputation and can control the shaping and transmission of that reputation', as well as controlling the 'fate of tidings and reputations'. See her 'Brunhilde on Trial: *Fama* and Lydgatean Poetics', *Chaucer Review*, 42 (2007), 139-60 (p. 148, 151).

[84] A. S. G. Edwards, 'Gower's Women in the *Confessio*', *Mediaevalia*, 16 (1993), 223-237 (p. 224). For an opposing view arguing that Gower was not 'straightforwardly anti-feminist', see Diane Watt, 'Gender and Sexuality in *Confessio Amantis*', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 197-213 (p. 198).

And Soster on the moder side
To this Horeste, at thilke tide,
Whan sche herde how hir brother spedde,
For pure sorwe, which hire ledde,
That he ne hadde ben exiled,
Sche hath hire oghne life beguiled
Anon and hyng hireself tho. (III. 2172-2181)

This passage is closely modelled on a similar passage in Benoît's *Roman de Troie*:

Une merveille oïr poëz:
Erigona, une pucele,
Fille Egistus, durement bele,
Suer Orestès de part sa mere
Ceste ot tel duel e tel misere
De ço qu'il esteit delivrez,
Qu'il n'ert eissilliez ne dampnez,
Tant en fu sis cuers d'ire pleins
Qu'el se pendi o ses dous mains.[85]

[*You might hear a marvel: Erigona, a maiden, daughter of Egistus, very beautiful, sister to Orestes on the side of her mother, had such pain and such misery concerning what he had done, {and} that he was not banished or damned. So full of sorrow was her heart that she hung herself with her two hands.*]

However, despite initial similarities in content, the force of these two passages is very different. For in Benoît's *Roman*, Erigona has been previously introduced as '[u]ne fille' of Aegisthus five hundred lines earlier in the poem.[86] The appositive constructions used in these lines thus serve to reintroduce the character to the audience. By contrast, in Gower's *Confessio*, this is the first appearance of Erigona whose existence has been hitherto concealed from the audience. Malte Urban has plausibly argued that Gower would have expected his readers to have some knowledge of Troy 'through the popular Troy books of Benoît and Guido'.[87] However, I doubt this knowledge would stretch to a familiarity with the character of

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[85] Benoît, *Roman*, ll. 28524-32.
[86] Benoît, *Roman*, l. 28055.
[87] Malte Urban, *Fragments: Past and Present in Chaucer and Gower* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 160.

Erigona, who has a very small part to play in both Benoît's and Guido's narratives. Her sudden and unheralded introduction into the *Confessio* is thus somewhat unsettling. Kendall has argued that the death of Erigona is the 'final erasure' of Clytemnestra's offence, and this implies that the death functions as a way of bringing satisfactory closure to the narrative.[88] However, I would argue that far from bringing closure to the tale, it problematises the tale and opens it up for renewed speculation.

Particularly unsettling is Gower's statement that Erigona was 'on,/Which forto mordre Agamenon/Yaf hire acord and hire assent' (III.2185-87), a detail added by Gower. My preceding discussion in this chapter has been predicated on the assumption that the audience of the *Confessio*, along with Genius, Menestheus and the Athenian parliament, assume a superior position in the 'Tale of Orestes'. For they have a full understanding of the facts, unlike the general populace who are familiar only with partial 'tidinges'. But the intrusion of Erigona into the narrative, and Gower's explicit statement that she '[y]af hire acord' to Agamemnon's death, deflates this sense of superiority. The audience are forced to recognise that Genius has previously delivered a partial, selective account of events. And such a recognition raises problematic questions: did Orestes know about the existence of his sister? If he did, then why does he not enact vengeance on her as well? If he did not, then surely his knowledge of Agamemnon's death is rendered as partial as the *Confessio's* audience's? And if his knowledge is partial, then is his quest for vengeance as righteous as he and the Athenian parliament (not to mention the *Confessio's* audience) initially judge it to be? These are troubling questions which cause the audience of the *Confessio* to re-evaluate their relationship with the matter and narrative strategies of the text. A critic less well-disposed to Gower could argue

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[88] Kendall, *Lordship and Literature*, p. 240.

that these questions arise because of Gower's failings as a poet. We could, for example, invoke Pearsall's judgement that the 'Tale of Orestes' is based on 'sources' which 'Gower is simply not equipped to cope with'.[89] However, such an argument would be reductive and would fail to account for the effective way in which this concluding scene complements the tale's wider concern with questions of fame. It is appropriate that just as only partial tidings about the siege of Micene reach Aegisthus, and just as only partial tidings about Orestes's execution of his mother spread through 'alle londes', so too are only partial tidings about the death of Agamemnon transmitted to Menestheus, to the Athenian parliament, and to the *Confessio's* audience.

Flannery has argued that the poet 'has a good deal of control over the fate of tidings and reputations'.[90] Flannery goes on to suggest that individual poet's responses to this control differed: while Chaucer adopts a degree of 'uncertainty' over his ability to manage '*fama*', Lydgate embraces such control and consciously defines himself as someone able and willing to control 'the transmission of textual *fama*'.[91] Gower, I would argue, resembles Chaucer in that while he demonstrates authorial control over the fate of tidings, he also demonstrates a certain anxiety over this control. Gower presents his surrogate Genius as a partial tale-teller, and through this Gower reminds the audience that fame and reputation are constructs. Reputations are forged and shaped independently of any individual. And fame and reputation are by no means solely authorial constructs: in the 'Tale of Orestes', the hero's reputation is constructed through his actions, his own glosses of his actions, the words of Menestheus, the judgement of the Athenian parliament, and the partial

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[89] Pearsall, 'Gower's Narrative Art', p. 483.
[90] Flannery, 'Brunhilde on Trial', p. 151.
[91] Flannery, 'Brunhilde on Trial', p. 154.

and uncontrollable 'tidynges' that circulate about him. Gower relegates the authorial voice to sit alongside these textual voices; it is divested of its authority and is presented as one of many voices fashioning selective narratives about the life of Orestes..

Gower's 'Tale of Orestes' in Context: The Many Lives and Deaths of Clytemnestra

This emphasis on fame and reputation as constructs is furthered by the material which surrounds the 'Tale of Orestes' in manuscripts of the *Confessio*. This material places particular emphasis on the character of Clytemnestra, whose life and death are re-narrated and re-glossed several times. Through such re-glossing and re-narration, Gower draws renewed attention to his role as someone who 'construct[s] his own vision of the truth' and controls the 'fate of tidings and reputations'.[92] The character of Clytemnestra initially offers further evidence to support the view that Gower's women are 'lacking in intrinsic interest'.[93] She conspires with Aegisthus to kill her husband, but she otherwise has little active role in the narrative, and her voice never intrudes into the poem. It is thus all the more distinctive that the Latin gloss to the story privileges her character. The gloss states:

> Et narrat quali*ter* Climestra vxor Regis Agamenontis cu*m* ipse abello troiano domi redisset co*n*silio Egisti que*m* adultera peramauit sponsu*m* suu*m* in cubili dormiente*m* sub noctis silencio trucidabat cuius morte*m* fili*us* eius horestes tunc minoris etatis postea diis admonitus crudelissima seueritate vindicauit.[94]
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> [*And he narrates how Clytemnestra, wife of King Agamemnon, when he came home from the Trojan war – by the counsel of Aegistus who she,*

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[92] Delany, *Chaucer's 'House of Fame'*, p. 5; Flannery, 'Brunhilde on Trial', p. 151.
[93] Edwards, 'Gower's Women', p. 224.
[94] MS M.126, f. 62. Macaulay includes the gloss in his edition (see p. 277). The gloss printed by Macaulay differs slightly as it reads 'seueritate crudelissima' rather than 'crudelissima seueritate'.

>*the adulteress, worshipped in love – slaughtered her husband asleep in bed under the silence of night. The death of whom Horestes, her son, little of age, commanded by the gods, then avenged with cruel severity*].

As with the gloss accompanying the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide', this gloss again seems to have provided inspiration for the compiler of the index to MS M.126. The index entry reads 'Climestra the wiff of Agamenon',[95] and the spelling of 'Climestra' agrees here with the Latin gloss against the Middle English text (which uses the spelling 'Climestre'). And, as with the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide', this gloss proves unhelpful to those seeking a summation of the Middle English story.

The Latin gloss offers a distinct iteration of the life of Clytemnestra which differs from the Middle English narration. The most drastic change is the shift in agency. In the text of the *Confessio*, Gower states that while Aegisthus and Clytemnestra 'weren bothe of on assent', it was only Aegisthus who '[b]e treson slowh him [Agamemnon] in his bed' (III.1916-19). In the gloss to the *Confessio*, by contrast, Clytemnestra becomes the literal mariticide: while Aegisthus offers her 'co*n*silio', she is the active agent in killing Agamemnon. Details in the gloss work to further demonise Clytemnestra. For instance, the description of the execution happening 'sub noctis silencio' serves to emphasise the tranquil state of Agamemnon and presents Clytemnestra as breaking this peace. Moreover, the appositional term 'adultera', which is redundant to the sense and grammar of the line, works to explicitly focus the audience's mind on the fact that Clytemnestra is a character whose sins are not limited to murder. The gloss functions as a more satisfying exemplary narrative than the 'Tale of Orestes'. Notably, the gloss does not envisage a public audience for either death, and this allows it to contain the two deaths and prevent them from being contested. The glossator is able to unproblematically

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[95] MS M.126, f. 208. See also Harris, 'Ownership and Readership', p. 312.

impose meaning on the events. He can present Clytemnestra's deceitful and sinful nature to ensure her execution of Agamemnon is depicted as an illegitimate act. Conversely, the glossator can present Orestes's actions as legitimate through depicting him as acting in the cause of vengeance (he 'vindicauit' his father's death), and in obedience to the commands of the gods. The gloss thus provides the 'simple sin-and-punishment' narrative which the 'Tale of Orestes' fails to deliver.[96]

This gloss, however, assumes a problematic relationship with the Middle English text it accompanies. In the case of the 'Tale of Phebus and Cornide', the tale and the gloss differed in content but agreed in their overall strategy of eliding words and actions. In the case of the 'Tale of Orestes', however, the tale and the gloss differ drastically in content and in strategy. The consequence of this is to further foreground both the constructed nature of fame and the role of Gower as transmitter and manipulator of textual *fama*. For the intersection of text and gloss here denies the existence of a single, static and unchanging narrative about Trojan life. Instead, it reminds the audience of the susceptibility of stories to revision and reinvention.

The susceptibility of stories to revision and reinvention is not solely emphasised within the *Confessio* and its apparatus. Several *Confessio* manuscripts contain a re-telling of the story of Clytemnestra found in Gower's *Traitié pour Essampler les Amantz Marietz* (henceforth the *Traitié*). The French *Traitié*, a series of eighteen balades praising constancy in marriage and condemning adultery, has received little scholarly attention, and the attention that it has received has been mostly directed towards ascertaining the context for the work's production.[97] Critics

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[96] Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*, pp. 204-5.
[97] For the most recent account of the poem's purpose and dating, see Cathy Hume, 'Why did Gower write the Traitié?', in *John Gower, Trilingual Poet: Language, Translation, and Tradition*, ed. by Elisabeth Dutton, with John Hines and R. F. Yeager (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), pp.

have argued that the poem was produced for a 'merchant pui', for Gower's wedding to Agnes, or for the benefit of the adulterous John of Gaunt.[98] None of these arguments strikes me as compelling, and I am inclined to follow Yeager's suggestion that the poem was produced for 'posterity'.[99] While the *Traitié* and the *Confessio* were composed independently, the two works are associated in several manuscripts: of the thirteen manuscripts in which the *Traitié* appears it follows the *Confessio* in nine.[100] The majority of the stories recounted in the *Traitié* also appear in the *Confessio*, and the two texts speak to each other in interesting ways.

One story shared between the *Confessio* and the *Traitié* is the story of Clytemnestra. In the *Traitié*, the story of Clytemnestra is redeployed as an exemplum against adultery, rather than an exemplum against murder. The story is narrated over three stanzas, each of which ends with the refrain: 'Horribles sont les mals d'avolterie'.[101] The various deaths are recorded in the third stanza of the poem, which reads:

> Agamenon de mort suffrist penance
> Par treson qe sa femme avoit confite;
> Dont elle apres morust sanz repentance:
> Son propre fils Horestes l'ad despite,
> Dont de sa main receust la mort subite;
> Egiste as fourches puis rendist sa vie:
> Horribles sont les mals d'avolterie.[102]

> [*Agamemnon suffered the penance of death because of the treason that his wife had confected; because of which she afterwards died without*

263-75. See also R. F. Yeager, 'John Gower's Audience: The Ballades', *Chaucer Review*, 40, 1 (2005), 81-105.

[98] John H. Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 83; Macaulay, 'Introduction', in Gower, *Complete Works*, I, pp. lxxxiii-lxxxiv; Hume, 'Why did Gower write the Traitié?', p. 269.

[99] Yeager, 'John Gower's Audience', p. 89.

[100] Derek Pearsall, 'The Manuscripts and Illustrations of Gower's Work', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 197-213 (pp. 78-79).

[101] John Gower, *Le Traitié pour Essampler les Amantz Marietz*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), I (1899), section IX, l. 7, 14, 21.

[102] Gower, *Traitié*, IX.15-21. The translation is my own.

repentance. Horestes, her own son, had contempt, and so [she] received sudden death by his hand; Aegisthus then surrendered his life on the gallows. The wrongs of adultery are horrible].

Yeager has characterised the *Traitié* as being 'narratively thin'.[103] He argues that the poem includes stanzas which are overtly 'intended to persuade' and consequently lack the discursive elements found in the *Confessio*.[104] The stanza quoted above certainly fits this characterisation: Gower narrates the key events of this story in a concise and unembellished way. The *Traitié* places particular emphasis on the character of Clytemnestra: while she is not named in the stanza, she assumes a dominant role in the narrative and four of the stanza's seven lines focus on her. Although here Clytemnestra is not presented as a mariticide, she is indirectly depicted as the cause of Agamemnon's death as she 'avoit confite' the 'treson'.

Throughout this stanza, causality is stressed (evidenced by the echoing of '[p]ar' and '[d]ont'), and through this echoing the deaths are given an exemplary meaning. The stanza works to stress that committing 'treson' causes deaths: Agamemnon dies '[p]ar treson' confected by his wife, while Clytemnestra in turn dies 'dont' her treasonous actions. A clear moral schema is thus developed in this brief stanza which allows 'treson' to be the ultimate driving force behind subsequent violence. Such a schema is furthered by Gower's configuration of the characters in the narrative as fundamentally passive. The stanza focuses on the victims of violence rather than the perpetrators. The narrative is silent about who is directly responsible for Agamemnon's and Aegisthus's death and, while Orestes is named as Clytemnestra's killer, the narrative emphasises her victimhood as she is the subject of the verbs 'morust' and 'receust'. The *Traitié* does not encourage the reader to

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[103] R. F. Yeager, 'John Gower's French', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 137-51 (p. 150, 149).
[104] Yeager, 'John Gower's French', p. 149.

view the characters as self-determining individuals, and we are not invited to reflect on the motivations of those who kill. Rather, the poem occludes individual characters to focus instead on the corruptible power of 'treson'. In this respect, the *Traitié* functions effectively as an exemplary narrative as it moves away from the individual and the specific to offer a broader commentary on the treasonous sin of adultery.

As with the *Confessio Amantis*, the *Traitié* also contains Latin glosses which sit problematically alongside the vernacular text. The gloss to the *Traitié's* story of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra reads:

> Qualiter Egistus, Climestram regis Agamenontis vxorem adulterando, ipsum regem in lecto noctanter dormientem proditorie interfecit, cuius mortem Orestes filius eius crudelissime vindicauit.[105]
>
> [*How Aegisthus, committing adultery with Clytemnestra, the wife of King Agamemnon, treacherously killed that king asleep in bed that night. The death of whom Horestes, his son, avenged cruelly*].

While the glosses to the *Confessio*, which Yeager suggests are 'very likely to have been' Gower's 'own creation', have received quite a bit of critical attention, little has been said about the glosses to the *Traitié*.[106] Interestingly, the two sets of glosses contain verbal overlaps. The *Traitié's* gloss narrates the death of Agamemnon 'in lecto [...] dormientem' and states that 'cuius mortem Orestes filius eius crudelissime vindicauit'. Similarly, the *Confessio's* gloss narrates the death of Agamemnon 'in cubili dormiente*m*' and states that 'cuius morte*m* fili*us* eius horestes [...] crudelissima seueritate vindicauit'.[107] The overlaps here are significant as they suggest some unity of purpose behind the two texts. While their adjacency in many

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[105] Gower, *Complete Works*, I, p. 385..
[106] Yeager, 'English, Latin', p. 207. The *Traitié's* glosses are mentioned briefly in R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), p. 88. There is by no means a consensus that the *Confessio's* glosses are by Gower, although given the parallels between the *Confessio's* and the *Traitié's* glosses, Gower's authorship strikes me as fairly certain.
[107] MS M.126, f. 62.

manuscripts offers some indication that Gower thought of them as complementary works, the echoed glosses offers further support for this point.

What is particularly interesting is that both glosses envisage identical roles for Orestes: in each gloss he is the cruel avenger enforcing moral codes against murder or adultery through violence. And if the similar depiction of Orestes in these glosses encourages the audience to associate the two texts, then the significant shifts in presentation that the other characters undergo becomes all the more noticeable. In the gloss to the *Confessio*, Clytemnestra is the adulteress and the mariticide who is spurred on by the background figure of Aegisthus. In the gloss to the *Traitié*, by contrast, Aegisthus is the traitor, the murderer, and the adulterer and Clytemnestra is occluded entirely and has no role in the death of her husband. The two glosses thus offer distinct iterations of the story, but it is also significant that both glosses work against the vernacular poems they accompany. As noted above, while the *Confessio* names Aegisthus as the killer of Agamemnon, its gloss places Clytemnestra in the role of mariticide. A similar disjunction is apparent in the *Traitié's* gloss: while the *Traitié* itself foregrounds the character of Clytemnestra and blames her 'treson' for the murder, its gloss sidelines Clytemnestra and restores Aegisthus to his role as homicide.

Butterfield has suggested that in manuscripts of the *Confessio*, Gower is 'experimenting with different locations for authorship'.[108] This strikes me as a compelling way of approaching Gower's complex narratorial practices. In the various tellings of the Orestes story, we have seen Gower offering four distinct authorial narrations: from Genius, from the *Confessio's* glossator, from the *Traitié's* narrator, and from the *Traitié's* glossator. And Gower does not seek to hide these

[108] Butterfield, 'Articulating the Author', p. 95.

experimentations with authorship from his audience. Indeed, he appears to take particular pleasure in confronting his reader with this plurality of authorial spaces by offering incompatible iterations of the Orestes story. Moreover, Gower situates these authorial voices alongside his fictive tale-tellers and glossators such as Orestes, Menetheus, and Fama. The cumulative effect of this is to remind the audience that the story of Orestes is not a fixed, static, and indisputable point in history. The lives and reputations of Agamemnon, Aegisthus, Orestes, and Clytemnestra are all subject to construction and reinvention. The story of Orestes thus fails to work as an exemplum against murder: rather than offering a single authoritative viewpoint on the morality of murder, the tale offers multiple murders, multiple murderers, and multiple perspectives on the efficacy and legitimacy of murder. Gower does not privilege any of these perspectives, and we are left with a pervasive sense of uncertainty about the story's events and its meaning. Gower here can be seen to embrace the discursive space that emerges following an execution and to fill it with multiple perspectives. This encourages his readers to reflect on the vicissitudinous nature of fame, the moral valences of murder, and the susceptibility of narratives to partial tellings, artificial glossings and drastic reimaginings.

The Life, Death, and Afterlives of John Constantyn, Cordwainer

Thus far, this chapter has been concerned with tellings and re-tellings, glossings and re-glossings, of deaths sourced from Ovidian legend and Trojan myths. I seek now, however, to move away from fictional narratives to consider how executions are narrated in the historical record. My focus here is on the execution of the

Cordwainer, John Constantyn,[109] who was killed by Nicholas Brembre in February 1384. Constantyn is one of those distinctive historical figures who are known in death but go unknown in life. The name 'Costantyn' is, as Thrupp notes, 'widespread' in this period, so attempts to track down references to a specific individual are problematic.[110] These attempts are rendered particularly problematic by the existence within London at this time of another John Constantyn whose sister, Petronilla, married John Northampton.[111] We do have a reference to an 'Iohannem Constantyn cordewaner' amongst the forty names listed as associates of Northampton in one of the inquisitions taken into the former mayor's actions.[112] But otherwise Constantyn is absent from the textual record prior to his execution in 1384. However, over the course of the four years following his execution, Constantyn becomes a more prominent figure in civic writings, and his death gets narrated and re-narrated across a disparate body of texts. The concluding sections of this chapter seek to explore how Constantyn's death gets narrated and glossed.

I have previously touched on the events of February 1384 in my discussion of the indictment produced by Brembre against More and Norbury.[113] This indictment does not, however, mention John Constantyn. Constantyn's exact actions in February

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[109] Otherwise Constantine, Costantine, or Costantyn.

[110] Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, p. 334.

[111] This Constantyn survives into the fifteenth century, and is usually referred to as 'John Constantyn of London' or 'John Constantyn of London esquire'. See *Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Records Office: Richard II, Volume III: A. D. 1385-1389*, ed. by H. C. Maxwell Lyte (London: Mackie, 1921), p. 138; *Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Records Office: Richard II, Volume IV, A. D. 1389-92*, ed. by H. C. Maxwell-Lyte (London: Mackie, 1922), p. 552. As well as being related by marriage to Northampton, this Constantyn is also associated with him in 1379 when Northampton serves as a witness to his divorce from Philippa, daughter of John Pecche (*CLBH*, pp. 141-42). It is possible that the two Constantyns were related: Bird suggests that John Constantyn, Cordwainer, was probably a member of the wider Constantyn family (*Turbulent London*, p. 8). However, this is speculative, and even if there were familial connections they may have been very distant indeed. Based on this information, Galloway suggests that John Constantyn, Cordwainer, 'was probably a relation of Northampton by marriage', but this seems to me to overstate the evidence. I can find no compelling evidence of any personal connection between the Cordwainer and Northampton. See Galloway, 'Brembre, Nicholas (*d.*1388)', *ODNB*.

[112] Bird, *Turbulent London*, p. 134. Constantyn's name appears twenty-third in a list of forty, with no especial attention being drawn to it.

[113] See above, pp. 56-63.

1384 remain unclear, and modern historians have envisaged different roles for him. Rexroth suggests he was the 'ringleader' behind the social unrest and was 'Northampton's confidant', a view echoed by Nightingale who regards him as 'one of the leaders of the planned uprising'.[114] Clive Willcocks envisages a similar dominant role for Constantyn, but rather than depicting him as a social malcontent, Willcocks defines him as a 'Cordwainer hero'.[115] Barron is somewhat more circumspect, and on two separate occasions has simply referred to Constantyn as a 'cordwainer', without implying that he was the main protagonist in the events of 1384.[116] These diverse assessments of the dominance of Constantyn nicely mirror the diverse assessments of him we get in the contemporary civic records. There are no truly objective accounts of the 1384 riots, and I am doubtful as to the possibility of ascertaining whether Constantyn was the ring-leader or a useful scapegoat. For the purposes of this chapter, I will assume each iteration of Constantyn discussed is a fictive construction, and so recreating the historical actuality is unnecessary.

Less speculative is the reason for his execution. Barron, Bird and Nightingale all agree that Constantyn was made 'an example of' in an attempt to 'shock the city into order'.[117] The majority of the texts explored in this section differ from the Gowerian and Chaucerian material discussed above as they are not overtly exemplary in character. However, they are texts written about an exemplary action, and they share with exemplary texts a desire to impose meaning on actions, and it is this process of imposing meaning which will be the focus of this section. As well as concurring about the reason for Constantyn's actions, modern historians also agree

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[114] Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 140; Nightingale, *Medieval Mercantile Community*, p. 285.
[115] Clive Willcocks, *Cordwainers: Shoemakers of the City of London – A History of the Worshipful Company of the Cordwainers of the City of London* (London: Worshipful Company of Cordwainers, 2008), p. 15.
[116] Barron, 'Richard II and London', p. 146; Barron, *London*, p. 24.
[117] The quotation is from Bird, *Turbulent London*, p. 83.

on its efficacy: Barron argues that Brembre 'was successful in that the more extreme rioting was brought under control'; Bird states that the actions seem 'to have been successful'; and Nightingale suggests that Brembre's 'strategy worked' and by mid-1384 'Brembre had triumphed'.[118] I would, however, query just how effective Constantyn's death was. While Constantyn's death is an historic reality, it can be productively contextualised within this chapter's previous exploration of how fictional deaths are narrated and glossed. Just as fictional deaths raise interpretative problems and establish a discursive vacuum, Constantyn's death too raises questions and ushers in a range of competing viewpoints. As a consequence, this section argues, while some short-term benefit accrued to Brembre following Constantyn's execution, the execution also allowed those antipathetic to Brembre to challenge his authority with varying degrees of success.

The earliest post-mortem text to examine is a petition seeking ratification of the execution of Constantyn which was submitted to the king by 'voz liges Nichol Brembre mair Aldermans & Viscountes de v*ostr*e Citee de Loundres'.[119] While the petition is submitted on behalf of the city's key office holders, the language of the text is distinctly Brembresque. The text attacks 'touz conspiratours & confederatours des malveises conuenticles & congregacions' (12a.1), a quotation which contains the familiar anti-associational rhetoric of Brembre. Brembre's voice can also be detected in the fundamental accusation that the text levels against Constantyn, who was seized while

> conseillaunt confortaunt & fesaunt aultres gentz de clore lour shopes &
> de les exciter destre aherdauntz as malueysetees p*our*poses as g*ra*unt

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[118] Barron, 'Richard II and London', p. 147; Bird, *Turbulent London*, p. 83 Nightingale, *Medieval Mercantile Community*, p. 286.
[119] London, *TNA*, SC 8/173/9147. For a transcription and translation, see Appendix 12a, paragraph 1, pp. 479-80.

rumour affray turbacion & insurrection p*our*posee felonousement. (12a.1).

The language here is redolent of the language Brembre uses in the indictment against More and Norbury discussed in chapter one, which describes the 'turbacio rumor tumultus & insurrectio' that is caused in the city.[120] According to Brembre's petition, Constantyn's crimes were twofold. Firstly, he was 'vn des primers q*ue* close ses huys & ses shopes' (12a.1) and secondly he then went 'conseillaunt confortaunt and fesaunt' others to join him. Interestingly, it is this second accusation that is given prominence in the petition: Constantyn is sanctioned less for his actions than for his verbal rabble-rousing.

The petition thus testifies to the power of words: it is as a result of Constantyn's speech that peace in the city was threatened, and it is as a result of Constantyn's speech that he had to be executed. While the petition works primarily to condemn Constantyn, it also serves to exculpate Brembre. Constantyn's death is not presented in the narrative as a sudden act; rather, Constantyn is 'arraine & p*ar* tesmoigne iurez & examinez & p*ar* sa conussance p*ar* iugement mys ala mort & decolle' (12a.1). This sentence provides several frameworks within which to justify Constantyn's execution: the legalistic lexis emphasises the fact that proper judicial process was followed; the reference to 'p*ar* tesmoigne' demonstrates that it was not an unilateral action, but was based on witness testimony; and the mention of 'p*ar* sa conussance', presumably meaning *by his [Constantyn's] confession*,[121] shows that Constantyn incriminated himself. The petition states that ultimately Constantyn was killed 'p*ar* iugement'; however, through the echoing of the 'p*ar*' construction twice elsewhere, the audience of the petition views this 'iugement' as the consequence of

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[120] See Appendix 5, paragraph 2.
[121] s.v. 'conoissance', *AND*.

an extended legal process which involved external witnesses and the interrogation of Constantyn.

Barron has argued that Brembre's request for ratification from the king was necessary as the mayor had exceeded his judicial power in executing Constantyn.[122] This is undoubtedly true, but the petition is more than simply a legal necessity. I would suggest that Brembre recognised the dangers of post-mortem speech, and sought to fill the discursive vacuum with his definitive gloss on the execution. He sought to achieve this by eliding his own voice with that of the king. We can see this process of elision in action if we trace the history of the petition. Brembre's petition, unlike the petitions discussed in chapter two, is not a parliamentary text. It is addressed solely to 'n*ost*re t*re*sredote s*eignour* le Roi' and was submitted to him at some point between the eleventh of February 1384 and the fourth of April 1384.[123] It was on the fourth of April that the king acted on the petition: while at the 'Chastel de Berkh*a*mstede' he issued a royal warrant commanding that 'facez fere noz l*ett*res souz n*ost*re g*ra*nt seal sur le purport de la supplicacion' (12b.1). This warrant, along with the petition, was then sent presumably to the Chancery, where a letter patent was issued ratifying the execution.[124] The letter patent, as was customary, was enrolled in the Patent Rolls[125] while the petition and the warrant were kept amongst the chancery documents until probably 1890. It was at this time that the Ancient Petitions series was formed through the combining of several thousand parliamentary

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[122] Barron, *London*, pp. 37-38.
[123] Parliament was not sitting in this period. However, given Brembre's closeness to the king even if it was sitting it is unlikely that this petition would have been submitted to the parliament. For the dates of parliament in 1384, see Musson and Ormrod, *Evolution of English Justice*, p. 204.
[124] Letters Patent were customarily issued by Chancery. Equally, the royal warrant survives today amongst the Chancery records suggesting that this was almost certainly where the petition was sent. On letters patent, see Peter Beal, *A Dictionary of Manuscript Terminology, 1450-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 231.
[125] *TNA*, C 66/317, membrane 16. See also *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Records Office: Richard II, A. D. 1381-85* (London: Mackie, 1897), p. 391.

petitions with many thousands of other petitions found amongst Exchequer and Chancery material.[126]

However, the letter patent is not solely enrolled in the Patent Rolls: it is also copied into *Letter-Book H* (see Appendix 12c).[127] What is immediately noteworthy is that this Latin letter patent follows the text of the vernacular petition very closely. For example, it states that Constantyn was taken while

> consulendo confortando & faciendo gentes d*ic*te ciuitatis shopas suas claudere & iniquis p*ro*positis in rumore com*m*ocio*ne* turbacione & insurrectione ibidem felonice p*ro*positis [...] inherere excitando. (12c.2)[128]

> [*advising, encouraging and making men of the said city close their shops and inciting {them} to partake in the wrongs put forward, to the rumour, commotion, disturbance, and insurrection feloniously devised*].

Equally, it describes the process of judgement upon Constantyn, who was 'arenatus & p*er* testes iuratos & examinatos ac cognic*io*nem suam iudiciali*tur* morti com*m*issus & decollatus' [*arraigned and by witnesses sworn and examined, and by his own acknowledgement by judgement put to death and beheaded*] (12c.2).[129] Finally, it seeks to punish 'conspiratores & confederatores huiusmodi Conventiculo*rum* & congreacionu*m*' [*the conspirators and confederators of these conventicles and congregations*] (12c.2).[130] Such linguistic recasting is not untypical; Dodd has stated that texts produced as a result of petitions were 'directly informed by the tone of the original petition' and that elements that 'appeared in a petition as part of an appeal might later inform the articulation of a royal command or edict'.[131]

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[126] On this reorganisation, see Dodd, 'Parliamentary Petitions?', pp. 26-27.
[127] This text is translated in *Memorials*, pp. 482-83. It has been discussed in passing by critics, but no-one has fully understood its context before now. \see Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 192-93; Grudin, *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse*, pp. 90-91.
[128] For the Anglo-Norman passage, see above, p. 202.
[129] For the Anglo-Norman passage, see above, p. 203.
[130] For the Anglo-Norman passage, see above, p. 202.
[131] Dodd, 'Writing Wrongs', pp. 236-37.

But the effect of such recasting is significant. As modern scholars, we assume a privileged position, as we can read the petition, warrant, and letter patent to trace how the words of the vernacular petition are transformed into the Latin letter. But for Brembre's London contemporaries, the only text they would have had access to is the Latin letter. This project has focused before on Brembre's control of documentary records in the city,[132] and the textual aftermath of Constantyn's execution provides a further example of this control. While Brembre produced the petition in part as a legal necessity, I would suggest he also wanted to produce the petition as a way of harnessing the king's voice. As a result of producing his petition, Brembre is able to have copied into *Letter-Book H* a self-justificatory and self-interested text in which he absolves himself of responsibility for Constantyn's death and blames confederacies for stirring up discord in the city. But, Brembre is able to conceal his self-interested voice behind that of the king; it is the king who absolves Brembre of responsibility and it is the king who attacks confederacies, thereby ostensibly giving support to Brembre's crusade against popular gatherings. Brembre thus carefully fills the discursive vacuum that emerges following Constantyn's death by co-opting the king's voice to gloss the significance of that death.

Brembre did not, however, succeed in preventing dissenting voices emerging. A month after the ratification was issued William Mayhew, a grocer, is charged with having said that the city was badly governed and

> etiam q*uo*d Joh*ann*es Costantyn Cordewaner qui nup*er* decollat*us* fuit in Chepe p*er* insurrect*ione* q*ua*m ip*s*e & alij complices sui fec*er*unt [...] in magnu*m* affraiamentu*m* tocius Ciuitatis p*redicte* & suburbior*um* suis false & iniquis condampnat*us* fuit ad mortem [...] qui quidem Will*elm*o cognouit ead*em* v*er*ba se dixisse. (13.1)

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[132] See above, pp. 54-63, 144-50.

[*and also that John Constantyn, Cordwainer – who recently was
beheaded on Cheapside for the insurrection that he and his other
accomplices made, to the great fear touching the aforesaid city and its
suburbs – was falsely condemned to death. The which William
acknowledged he said the same words*].

It is interesting that the first recorded person to criticise Brembre is one of his fellow

grocers, as this serves as a reminder that factional allegiances were fluid in this

period.[133] Ostensibly, this text provides further evidence of Brembre's control over

speech in the city: the discordant words of Mayhew are punished by a fine, and

Mayhew himself is silenced as he swears not to say 'talia v*er*ba' again (13.1). But

signs of anxiety can be detected in this text. Partly, this is apparent in the complaint

that Mayhew's words have resounded 'in dedecus & obp*ro*briu*m* maioris

ald*ermann*or*um* & alior*um* gub*er*nator*em*' (13.1). Just as Orestes seeks to defend his

reputation in the public eye, the civic authorities too share a concern over the need to

preserve their reputation and an awareness of the fragility of that reputation. But an

anxiety can also be detected in the manner in which Mayhew's words are reported.

The quotation above states that 'Will*elm*o cognouit ead*em* v*er*ba se dixisse',

implying that Mayhew's words are copied *verbatim* into the text. But they clearly are

not; everything between 'p*er* insurrect*ion*e' and '& suburbior*um*' is evidently the

moralising voice of the civic authorities. Even though the text states that Mayhew's

words were said 'false & maliciose', the civic officials refuse to allow Mayhew's

account of Constantyn's execution to appear unfiltered in the civic records. Instead

they ensure that their own gloss on Constantyn's death, that it was the result of an

'insurrect*ion*e' and that he caused 'magnu*m* affraiamentu*m*', infiltrates the text and

disrupts Mayhew's testimony. To an extent, this testifies to the civic authorities'

power as they forcibly silence Mayhew's voice. But it also testifies to their anxiety

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[133] This point is noted in passing by Bird in her *Turbulent London*, p. 67, fn. 2.

about such voices which possess a forcefulness even when contained within a wider legal process.

Constantyn goes unmentioned for four years but, when the balance of power in London begins to shift, his name reappears in the textual records. The *Cordwainers' Petition* is a text this project has already discussed, but it is useful to return to it here.[134] As discussed in chapter two, when the London guilds came to narrate the events on Cheapside in February 1384 they introduced personal testimony into their narratives. For the Cordwainers, this personal testimony involved them narrating the execution of one of their guildsmen, John Constantyn. They narrate how Brembre brought 'gentz armez' into Cheapside, 'et illeoq*ue*s sodeynement sanz droit ioustice & p*ro*ces du ley fist coper la teste dun Johan Costantyn Cordewan*er*' (7i.2). This account of Constantyn's death contrasts sharply with Brembre's own narrative. Brembre focuses on Constantyn's inciting speech to justify the execution, while he also presents his process of arriving at a 'iugement' on Constantyn as a lengthy one which involved the questioning of witnesses and of Constantyn. The Cordwainers, by contrast, present Constantyn as a passive figure, while they also suggest Brembre enacted his punishment 'sodeynement' and independently of any legalistic concern with justice or process.

The terms used are particularly revealing here: Stephen A. Barney has focused on the uses of 'proces' and 'sodeynly' in Chaucer's canon, and has argued that the terms are 'opposite[s]'. '[S]uddenness' is associated with 'unwise' and rash actions, while 'proces' is associated with a careful 'protraction' and thoughtfulness.[135] I have argued in chapter two that the petitions established norms

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[134] See above, pp. 125-28.
[135] Stephen A. Barney, 'Suddenness and Process in Chaucer', *Chaucer Review*, 16 (1981-82), 18-37 (p. 28, 30).

against which to objectively judge Brembre, and the antitheses that the Cordwainers deploy here serve a similar purpose. The Cordwainers case Brembre as a deviant mayor who acts in a manner opposed to the accepted standards. Brembre's attempts to harness the king's voice to ratify his actions and inscribe his careful judicial process into the civic records thus were ultimately unsuccessful. They failed to either convince the London guilds that Constantyn was guilty or to awe them into silence by virtue of the king's authoritative voice.

Two things of note happened in 1388. Firstly, on the 20th of February, Brembre was executed.[136] As discussed in the preceding chapter, Brembre's eventual punishment appears to have had little to do with the petitioners; indeed, the petitions ultimately seem to have been fairly ineffective except for possibly aggravating the lords appellant. Secondly, on the 25th of February, five days after Brembre's execution, and four years and fourteen days since Constantyn's death, the sheriffs of London were ordered to 'take from Ludgate the head of John Costantyn [...] and deliver it to Alice who was his wife, to be buried with his body in consecrated ground'.[137] This is a significant event: it suggests that Constantyn's death remained in the public mind and was still perceived to be unjust. Presumably, after four years, his head would have decomposed beyond recognition, and so the memory of Constantyn would have been more verbal than visual. And it may be that the *Cordwainers' Petition* played a part in this verbal memorialisation. While the 1388 guild petitions appear to have achieved little, the fact that Constantyn's fate is resolved shortly after the petitions' submission to the parliament raises the possibility that it was these petitions that prompted the action. That people remember Constantyn is the reason why I would take exception to the idea that Brembre's

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[136] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 314-15.
[137] *Calendar of the Close Rolls [...] A. D. 1385-1389*, pp. 373-74.

actions in 1384 were effective. While he gained a short-term peace, he opened

himself up for subsequent reprisals by his fellow guildsmen such as Mayhew and by

the other guilds of London. Despite his attempts to restrictively gloss the execution,

violence ultimately engendered dissenting speech.

'[U]t volunt quidam': Constantyn, the *Westminster Chronicle*, and the Spread of Public Speech

Having explored the presentation of Constantyn's death in several short civic texts, I

want to conclude this chapter by exploring the rather problematic account of his

death narrated in the *Westminster Chronicle*. The fame of Constantyn's death spread

far enough that his story was incorporated into several national chronicles. The

Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi gives a very brief account, stating that 'uno

de fautoribus dicti Iohannis, Roberti Knollis consilio decollato, ciuitas conquieuit'

[*The city was at rest after one of the partisans of the said John [Northampton] was

beheaded by the counsel of Robert Knolles*].[138] A slightly lengthier account is

provided by Thomas Walsingham, who records how one 'ex arte sutoria' [*from the

guild of shoemakers*] incited the 'communitatis' [*commonalty*]. As a result, Robert

Knolles commanded that he 'domo sua tractus et decollatus est' [*is dragged from his

house and beheaded*].[139] Neither of these accounts provides much in the way of

narrative detail. The *Westminster Chronicle*, by contrast, provides a fuller and

livelier narration of Constantyn's death. This account is not comprehensive – it does

not, for example, mention Robert Knolles's role in events – but it is the longest

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[138] *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi*, ed. by George B. Stow, Jr ([np]: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), p. 80. The translation is my own.

[139] Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. by Henry Thomas Riley, 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864), II, 111. The translation is my own.

account, and is the only account to correctly give the date of Constantyn's death and to record the fate of Constantyn's head.

The *Westminster Chronicle* is a composite work assumed to be the product of two main writers: the first writer chronicled the period from 1381-83, while the second writer (commonly referred to as the Monk of Westminster) continued the chronicle up until 1394.[140] The most common critical assessment of the *Westminster Chronicle* is that it is 'well-informed'.[141] The Monk demonstrates a close familiarity with events at the Abbey and at parliamentary sessions, while he also demonstrates an awareness of, and an interest in, London politics. He often records who is elected as mayor and explores the divisions that arise between Londoners at their elections.[142] Equally, he records mayoral proclamations and speaks approvingly of individual Londoners such as Adam Bamme and John Hadley.[143] Alongside this concern with London, the Monk also demonstrates a particular interest in the power of speech. He records, for instance, the 'verbis persuasibilibus' [*winning language*] of Richard and the verbal 'facundia' [*eloquence*] of Lancaster.[144] He also explores the power of 'fama loquaci' [*tongue of rumour*] and holds forth on the dangers of 'murmur populi' [*popular murmuring*].[145] In narrating Constantyn's death, the Monk's interests in speech and London political life intersect.

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[140] For speculative comments on the chronicle's authorship, see Hector and Harvey, 'Introduction', in *The Westminster Chronicle*, pp. xiii-lxxvii (p. xiii).

[141] The description 'well-informed' appears in: Saul, *Richard II*, p. 314; Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 140; 'Introduction', *Westminster Chronicle*, p. lviii; and Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), p. xx. John Taylor does not use the description 'well-informed' but he does describe the *Westminster Chronicle* as 'informed' and as 'a source of first-rate historical value' which 'is full of the most minute detail'. See his *English Historical Literature in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 84-85.

[142] See, for instance, his discussion of William Venour's election in 1389 (*Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 404-5).

[143] On the proclamations, see *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 136-37 and pp. 452-53. For the Monk's comments on Bamme, see pp. 474-75 and on Hadley, see pp. 516-17.

[144] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 54-55, 66-67.

[145] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 190-91, 484-85.

The chronicler begins by recounting how a cordwainer:

spiritu diabolico agitatus, ut volunt quidam, discurrebat per plateas civitatis commovens populum assurgere in majorem, asserens majorem velle omnes adherentes J. Northampton in frusta delere, innuens per hoc ut illi subito et inopinate majorem extinguerent.

[*excited, as some will have it, by a spirit sent from the Devil, careered through the streets of London urging the populace to rise against the mayor, whom he declared to be bent on smashing all those who supported John Northampton, and whom he thereby meant to imply they should suddenly surprise and destroy*].[146]

This narrative in part echoes Brembre's account of Constantyn's actions. In particular, the Monk of Westminster follows Brembre in placing an emphasis on Constantyn's verbal sins. Constantyn uses words to spread lies about the intentions of Northampton and his associations, and to incite the 'populum assurgere'. The narrative is not limited purely to what Constantyn said; the Monk also includes inferences about his intent. Through using the phrase 'innuens per hoc', the Monk introduces his own gloss into the narrative, moving away from objective facts to speculate on Constantyn's hidden intent.

This passage differs from Brembre's petition, however, in including more vivid narrative details. Most notable is the description of Constantyn being 'spiritu diabolico agitatus', a description which associates the cordwainer with demonic and unchristian forces. The *spiritu diabolico* formula has some currency in other European texts. Its appearance in Florentine court procedurals has drawn particular attention, and Samuel Kline Cohn has argued that it is deployed as one of a number of 'formulaic phrases' which are used to deny any form of conscious motivation in

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[146] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 64-65. I include Hector and Harvey's translation here and elsewhere in this chapter. This translation is a little loose at times, and my analysis of the *Westminster Chronicle* is based on the Latin text, not this translation.

rural crimes.[147] The phrase is a product of the power hierarchies apparent in judicial procedures and is employed to deny speech and rationality to the marginalised in society, most notably women and the poor.[148] In the Monk of Westminster's account, the phrase similarly works to deny Constantyn any form of legitimate motivation by marking out his behaviour as aberrant. Interestingly, however, the Monk obscures his own narrative voice at this point in his narrative; the accusation that Constantyn was agitated 'spiritu diabolico' is not made by him, but is instead shrouded behind how 'volunt quidam'. Formulae such as 'ut volunt quidam', 'ut vocatur', 'ut quidam assertive volunt', and 'ut dicebatur' appear throughout the *Westminster Chronicle* and are one of the Monk's stylistic quirks.[149] But they are more than just stylistic flourishes, and can serve the Monk's moral and political purposes. For instance, in a politically sensitive passage describing a plot to kill the Duke of Lancaster, the Monk says that the plot had Richard's approval 'ut dicebatur' [*it was said*].[150] Here the Monk distances himself from any perceived critique of Richard by simply reporting the view of a passive and anonymous speaker. There is no such pragmatic need for the Monk to distance himself from the critique of Constantyn, and it may be that he used this phrase here purely through force of habit. However, as his account of Constantyn's death progresses, his use of 'ut volunt quidam' appears to take on a more deliberative character.

When the Monk comes to narrate the actual death of Constantyn, the tone of his narrative changes. He states that:

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[147] Samuel Kline Cohn, *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 34.
[148] Cohn, *Women in the Streets*, p. 34. See also Samuel Kline Cohn, *Creating the Florentine State: Peasants and Rebellion, 1348-1434* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 138; Trevor Dean, *Crime and Justice in Late Medieval Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 32-33.
[149] *Westminster Chronicle*, p. 64, 124, 110, and 96, respectively.
[150] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 110-111.

Set Deus justus et misericors noluit quod tanta sedicio in tam populosa civitate foret exorta ut pretextu unius persone unus forsan extingueret alium, immo pro meliori disposuit ut unus cicius moreretur quam tantorum sanguis innoxius funderetur. Propter quod sutor predictus fuit captus et coram omnibus valencioribus de civitate de mendacio convictus morti fuit legittime adjudicatus.

[*A righteous and merciful God, however, unwilling that the emergence of serious sedition in the densely populated city should lead, because of a single individual, to people's destroying one another, ordained a better course for events in choosing rather that one man should die than that the innocent blood of the many should be spilled. And so the cordwainer was arrested, and upon his conviction of spreading false statements, he was condemned to death in conformity with the law*].[151]

This narrative about Constantyn's execution is redolent of the narrative that Orestes constructs about Aegisthus's and Clytemnestra's deaths. Orestes re-states his victims' crime of committing 'treson' (III.2060), he emphasises the fact that he is following the wishes of the gods who 'comanded' him to act (III.2064), and he is presented as acting 'be the lawe' (III.2103). Similarly, the Monk re-states Constantyn's crime of uttering a 'mendacio',[152] he emphasises the divinely-sanctioned nature of the death, and he presents the death as lawful, as it 'fuit legittime adjudicatus'. The articulations of these disparate executions invoke similar interpretative frameworks through which to legitimise those executions. But in legitimising this execution, the Monk appears to write more in sorrow than in anger.[153] The Monk does not censure Constantyn, nor does he celebrate his death. Instead, his narrative takes on a homiletic character at this point, and the Monk's presentation of the cordwainer as the 'unus' who 'moreretur' to preserve 'tantorum sanguis innoxius' is a rather affecting image. Through placing Constantyn's death

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[151] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 64-65.

[152] '[M]endacium' is one of the particular sins of the tongue isolated by Peraldus. See Craun, *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity*, p. 15.

[153] Such a tone is typical of the Monk of Westminster. Given-Wilson, for instance, notes that the chronicle writes with 'a sense of sadness' rather than anger about Richard's 'lack of statesmanship'. *Chronicle*, p. 155. Equally, Hector and Harvey suggest that the Monk offers criticism of the king 'more in sorrow than in anger'. See 'Introduction', *Westminster Chronicle*, p. xxxiv.

within a wider understanding of God's providential plan for maintaining peace and harmony, the Monk gives a spiritual meaning to that death. It is perhaps with this passage in mind that the Monk chose to add 'ut volunt quidam' to the description of Constantyn being agitated 'spiritu diabolico'. For, the Monk does not seem to view Constantyn as a demonic or malevolent figure, but someone whose minor crime threatened wider social discord and so had to be punished forcefully.

But there is, I would suggest, a more significant dimension to the Monk's use of 'ut volunt quidam'. Following the description of Constantyn's execution, the Monk's narrative becomes somewhat more problematic. He follows the death by saying that:

> Verumptamen de predicto sutore dixerunt quidam eum fuisse bone vite [...] nec erat intencionis sue ut verba sua quempiam moverent offendere tante civitatis majorem: unde concludebant eum fore male peremptum, ac mors sua verisimile est in posterum ut gravem expeteret ulcionem.
>
> [*There were nevertheless some people who said of this cordwainer that he was a man of godly life [...] and that it was no part of his intention that his language should prompt anyone to an outrage against the mayor of that great city; from which they argued that he had been wrongly made away with and that in time to come a stern revenge would probably be exacted for his death*].[154]

In recording what 'dixerunt quidam', the Monk's narrative is again redolent of the 'Tale of Orestes' which follows Clytemnestra's death by recording what '[s]ome sein' (III.2112). However, Gower explores the multiplicity of responses that arise: '[s]ome sein he dede wele ynowh,/And som men sein he dede amis,/Diverse opinion ther is' (III.2112-14). The Monk, by contrast, does not include such diversity, and instead allows a lengthy defence of Constantyn to be mounted within his narrative. And interestingly, this defence stands in opposition to the Monk's own narrative about Constantyn's actions. For the Monk claimed that he knew what Constantyn

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[154] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 64-65.

was truly 'innuens' through his words, namely that his followers 'majorem extinguerent'. But the 'quidam' suggests that the Monk is labouring under a misapprehension, for they state that 'nec erat intencionis sue ut verba sua quempiam moverent offendere tante civitatis majorem'. The Monk's role as partial and subjective interpreter of actions is thus brought to the fore by the intrusion of this 'quidam'.

Just as Gower gives us multiple Clytemnestras, the Monk of Westminster furnishes us in a single paragraph with multiple Constantyns. These Constantyns are articulated by the Monk, and by two opposing groups of anonymous figures. The Monk's narrative is bookended by the words of 'quidam': it begins with 'quidam' presenting Constantyn as possessed by the devil, and ends with 'quidam' presenting Constantyn as a godly and peaceable man. I would suggest that neither of these groups' interpretations of the character of Constantyn is privileged in the narrative. The view that Constantyn was possessed by the devil is undermined by the Monk's account of the providential wisdom of God. Similarly, the view that Cosntantyn was entirely innocent is undermined by the Monk's account of his uttering a 'mendacio'.

In part, this bookending is typical of the Monk's wider concern with exploring multiplicity. The Monk is not rigidly partisan or prejudiced in his assessment of characters. This is particularly true of the Monk's representation of Richard II. As Antonia Gransden has noted, the Monk adopts an 'ambivalent' attitude to Richard: 'he praises Richard' and '[h]e includes criticism of Richard'.[155] Gransden is not alone in noticing this phenomenon, although other critics have suggested that the Monk is not simply ambivalent, but his attitude to the king evolves over the years from initially presenting him 'in a damaging light' to

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[155] Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 184.

subsequently presenting him as 'of a mild and kindly nature'.[156] This suggestion that

the Monk's attitude evolves over time is not convincing, for the Monk is positive

about Richard in the early sections of the narrative when, for example, he praises his

'verbis persuasibilibus' [*winning words*].[157] Gransden's emphasis on the Monk's

fundamental ambivalence is more compelling, particularly as this ambivalence can

also be detected in the Monk's attitude to civic figures. For instance, the Monk is

ambivalent about John Northampton, whom he compliments for acting 'rigide'

[*severely*] but 'digne' [*properly*], but later censures for his 'incompositos mores'

[*undisciplined behaviour*].[158] Equally, the Monk is ambivalent about Brembre, who

was, he records, elected 'licet non habuit vota singulorum' [*despite his not having

universal support*], but whom he later presents as dying with 'contricio et devocio'

[*contrition and devotion*].[159]

In part, such ambivalence is symptomatic of the Monk's wider strategy to, in

the words of Duls, 'tell an honest story with a minimum of prejudice'.[160] However, if

we return to the Monk's account of the death of Constantyn, this ambivalence can be

seen to serve a more significant purpose. The competing articulations of Constantyn

serve to communicate the fractured and factionalised nature of London life. The

Monk understands that actions in London are susceptible to mutually incompatible

interpretations, interpretations driven by the factional identities of Londoners. But

the Monk also envisages the ideal response to this fractured and factional

atmosphere. His account of Constantyn's death ends with his remarking that:

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[156] 'Introduction', *Westminster Chronicle*, p. xxxiv, lxxiii. A similar point is also made in Saul,
Richard II, p. 314 and Taylor, *English Historical Literature*, p. 86.
[157] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 54-55.
[158] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 60-61, 92-93.
[159] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 62-63, 314-15.
[160] Louisa Desaussure Duls, *Richard II in the Early Chronicles* (Paris: Mouton, 1975), p. 227.

Confestim major predictus sumpto sano consilio artes civitatis adinvicem discordantes quas potuit cum omni diligencia pacificavit.

[*On good advice the mayor now set industriously to work to appease those he could of the city crafts which were in conflict with each other*].[161]

That the Monk of Westminster encodes moral and practical counsel into his narratives is not a new point. Strohm, for instance, explores how in recounting the case of a woman caught having an affair with a priest, the Monk's narrative shares 'affinities to the *exemplum*' in its 'moralizing' against adultery.[162] Although the Monk's account is not moralistic in character – he does not censure Constantyn or use him to expound on a general moral truth – the narrative does have a didactic quality. The narrative itself provides the audience with 'sano consilio', as it encourages them to adopt a philosophical attitude towards factionalism. We are made aware of the conflictual nature of urban life through the competing speeches of each 'quidam', but the Monk prevents us from privileging either faction. The narrative thus counsels its to develop a tolerance of difference and to avoid taking sides. This advice is encapsulated in the conclusion to the chronicle, which imagines the mayor not seeking refuge with his faction, nor attempting to engage with his opponents, but instead working to pacify all the 'artes' of the city regardless of their factional identities. The Monk does thus draw practical counsel from his narrative. And, whereas Gower's exemplary method was disrupted through the multiple iterations of Clytemnestra, Constantyn's exemplary message is established through such multiplicity.

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[161] *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 64-65.
[162] Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, p. 135.

Conclusion

While this chapter has explored a disparate body of narrative materials, a common concern with the discursive vacuum that emerges following an execution can be detected in these texts. Executions occupy a space in the public sphere: executions encourage speech and analysis, and consequently executions get told and re-told, glossed and re-glossed. Several of the texts examined in this chapter attempt to contain this flourishing of post-mortem speech. Gower's 'Phebus and Cornide', and Brembre's petition and Richard's ratification, seek unproblematically and categorically to define the reasons for the executions to forestall debate. But other texts demonstrate a degree of interest in this post-mortem speech. Gower's 'Tale of Orestes', Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale*, and the Monk's iteration of Constantyn's death all capture the multiplicity of voices that emerge following an execution and explore how such voices can be by turns efficacious and destabilising. And through imagining either their fictional counterparts or an imagined 'quidam' glossing and tale-telling, these writers also come to reflect on their own role in filling the discursive vacuum that executions produce. What these writers share is an awareness of the fundamental potency of words, speeches, and tales which can either condemn the dead to history, or reanimate them from the dead.

'[P]ira pomaq*ue* regia thron*us*': Judging Speech in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide*

Introduction

For the final chapter of this thesis, I want to turn to the opening line of the *Stores*: '[h]ec su*n*t londonis, pira pomaq*ue* regia thron*us*' [*these are London's: pears and apples, palace, throne*] (1a.1). This line is somewhat incongruous, for the features it mentions are hardly specific to London. Apples and pears were evidently grown in the city,[1] but fruit was not uniquely (or even notoriously) produced in London.[2] Moreover, 'regia thron*us*', refers not to London but to Westminster Palace and to the King Edward's Chair (or the Coronation Chair) housed in the palace. Even if read metonymically, to refer to the king's regal power in general, the terms still evoke Westminster which, by the end of the fourteenth century, had become the 'recognised headquarters of royal justice'.[3] These lines ostensibly describing London actually imagine a much broader space. This incongruity has been addressed by Turner, who has posited the existence of a conceptual space which she terms 'Greater London': a space comprising of London, Westminster and Southwark, areas which had 'many shared interests, despite the idiosyncrasies of each location'.[4]

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[1] For a discussion of the poem's reference to pears and apples, see the notes in Appendix 1b.

[2] To take at random Norwich, one of the other cities referred to in the *Stores*, we find that the Cathedral Priory of the Holy Trinity made 4s. and 7 1/2 d. through the sale of pears and apples. See 'Houses of Benedictine Monks: The Cathedral Priory of the Holy Trinity, Norwich', in *A History of the County of Norfolk: Volume 2*, ed. by William Page (London: Archibald Constable, 1906), pp. 317-28, available electronically at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=38258>, [Last accessed: 2 July 2011].

[3] While Richard II was more itinerant than his predecessor, he still maintained a firm connection with Westminster, which was the '"perfect capital city" which London seemed so conspicuously unable to provide' (Barron, 'Richard II and London', p. 131). Westminster was the site of the settled courts of the realm, including the Chancery, the Exchequer, the King's Bench, and the Court of Common Pleas. For details, see Anthony Musson and W. M. Ormrod, *The Evolution of English Justice: Law, Politics and Society in the Fourteenth Century* (Hampshire: MacMillan Press, 1999), pp. 12-28 (esp. p. 14).

[4] Turner, 'Greater London', p. 26.

While the existence of this space is entirely plausible, I do not think Turner's argument fully accounts for this line's complexity. Turner's argument is based upon Rigg's edition of the poem, which differs from my own in erroneously reading 'pira pom*usque*' rather than 'pira pomaq*ue*'.[5] Rigg interprets 'pira pom*usque*' as a reference to 'sceptre and orb', and argues that this entire line focuses on the 'regal aspect of the capital'.[6] However, once the correct reading of 'pira pomaq*ue*' is given, these regal associations become less compelling. And this reading also questions Turner's analysis of this line, for the reference to pears and apples evokes a space even broader than her Greater London. There is an alternative explanation for this incongruity: this opening line should be read as an introduction to the entire poem. The line functions not just to describe London, but also to contextualise London – and the following six cities – within a wider impression of the nation. London and the other cities are ruled over in the poem by nature (represented by 'pira pomaq*ue*') and the crown (represented by 'regia thron*us*'). This hierarchical framing device ensures that each city named is not presented as an autonomous state, but as a single element within a broader vision of nature and national authority.

Following this cue, the final chapter of this project seeks to move away from the spaces of the city to explore two poems concerned with nature and the court. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and John Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide* initially seem far removed from civic and national politics: the former is set in the distant land of Tsarev, the latter in a dreamscape. Nevertheless, both poems can be productively read as politically informed texts that engage in interesting ways with the issue at the centre of this project: the ambiguous potency of words. In each poem questions are raised about speech's potency, and about its capacity to be truthful,

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[5] On this reading, see Appendix 1b, p. 307.
[6] Rigg, 'Stores', p. 131.

transparent, productive, and unifying. Each poem begins by foregrounding and celebrating dominant figures of regal authority: Cambyuskan, the 'just' (V.20), 'wys' (V.19), and 'noble kyng' (V.12), is the focus of the opening lines of Chaucer's romance, while the God of Love, the 'myghty' and 'grete [...] lorde', is the focus of the opening stanzas of Clanvowe's poem.[7] Ostensibly, these figures are posited as the ultimate arbiters of the value of speech and action, a role in keeping with the traditional medieval ideal of a king as 'the source of justice', who swore at his coronation that he would cause 'fieri in omnibus iudiciis tuis equam et rectam iusticiam et discrecionem in misericordia et ueritate' [*to be done, in all your judgements, equal and right justice and discretion in mercy and truth*].[8] However, as this chapter seeks to explore, the regal figures in the *Squire's Tale* and the *Boke of Cupide* fail to deliver justice: they are marginalised and undermined as sources of authority. If, as I argue at the end of this chapter, the two texts are dated to the late 1380s, then their irresolute status and their concerns over the failures of regal authority can productively be read within the context of the Merciless Parliament.

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[7] *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe*, ed. by V. J. Scattergood (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1972), l. 2. The *Boke of Cupide* has been edited more recently by Dana M. Symons and by John W. Conlee, but Scattergood's remains the best critical edition. See *Chaucerian Dream Visions and Complaints*, ed. by Dana M. Symons (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004); *Middle English Debate Poetry: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by John W. Conlee (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1991). Subsequent references to Scattergood's edition appear parenthetically within the text.

[8] The quotation is from Michael Hicks, 'Lawmakers and Lawbreakers', in *An Illustrated History of Late Medieval England*, ed. by Chris Given-Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 206-228 (p. 209). Hicks goes onto produce a concise account of the king's ultimate authority over individual courts in the land. The coronation oath is printed in *English Coronation Records*, ed. by Leopald G. Wickham Legg (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1901), p. xxxi. The translation is my own. The oath was of particular significance to Richard II, who delivered it on two separate occasions: once at his coronation, and again in 1388 to reaffirm his authority. See *Westminster Chronicle*, p. 342; Saul, *Richard II*, p. 195.

'[S]he brast on forto wepe' (*Boke of Cupide*, 210): Competitive Speechifying

The Squire's Tale and the *Boke of Cupide* both narrate verbal competitions. The speeches of two or more characters are presented in opposition, and through such opposition questions are raised about the transparency, veracity, and usefulness of words. The *Squire's Tale* is a 672-line romance set in the court of Cambyuskan. In its first part, an emissary arrives from '[t]he Kyng of Arabe and of Inde' (V.110) and presents four magic gifts to Cambyuskan. Amongst these gifts is a ring which is taken by Canacee, the king's daughter, who uses it in the tale's second part to listen to the complaint of a falcon lamenting the faithlessness of her tercelet lover. Part two concludes with an ambitious summary of how the narrative will progress, but the poem ends suddenly and without explanation two lines into part three.[9]

The *Squire's Tale* begins not with competitive voices, but with the single voice of the emissary who provides an ostensibly authoritative account of his identity and his gifts. He assumes the character of a glossator, presenting the court with four gifts and then elaborating on each gift's 'vertu' (V.146, V.157).[10] The gifts

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[9] A useful overview of critical responses to the *Squire's Tale* and its unfinished state is provided in Lawton's *Chaucer's Narrators*. I concur with Lawton's argument that Chaucer did not intentionally set out to produce an incomplete tale, although I will return to this issue below (see pp. 276-88). Since Lawton's essay three articles have offered fresh insights, with notable work by Partridge and Dane shedding new light on the manuscript evidence: John Burrow, 'Poems Without Endings', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 13 (1991), 17-37; Partridge, 'Minding the Gaps', pp. 51-85; Joseph A. Dane, '"Tyl Mercurius house he flye": Early Printed Texts and Critical Readings of the *Squire's Tale*', *Chaucer Review*, 34, 3 (2000), 309-16.

[10] The emissary's role as glossator assumes particular prominence in the Ellesmere Manuscript. As the emissary discusses the 'vertu' of the gifts, the Ellesmere Manuscript contains marginal glosses reading 'of the vertu of the steede of bras', 'of the vertu of the mirour', 'of the vertu of the ryng', 'of the vertu of the swerd'. The emissary and the manuscript glossator thus share a linguistic sphere. See *The New Ellesmere Chaucer Monochrome Facsimile (of Huntington Library MS EL 26 C 9)*, ed. by Daniel Woodward and Martin Stevens (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1997), ff. 116v-117. These glosses also appear in three other manuscripts which follow Ellesmere – AD[3], Ra[1], TC[2]. For details, see *The Squire's Tale: A Variorum Edition of The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by Donald C. Baker (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), pp. 82-83.

all have the potential to resolve communicative problems. As Michaela Paasche

Grudin notes, the gifts seem to be 'particularly connected with such powers as relate

to human understanding and communication'.[11] This is evidently true of the ring,

which allows an individual to 'openly and pleyn' understand the 'langage' of a bird

(V.151-52), and the mirror, which 'openly' reveals hidden 'tresoun' (V.139-41). But

Grudin shows that it is also true of the horse, which is associated with the 'verbal

dishonesty of Sinon', and the sword, which 'can be symbolically interpreted as a

reference to thought and speech' in its ability to simultaneously wound and heal.[12]

These gifts thus have the potential to open up an unfiltered and uninhibited

communicative space where differences of race and species are dissolved, and where

speech is purified from any taint of hidden treachery.

However, the gifts prove problematic; for, while they have the ability to

resolve communicative problems, they also serve to remind the audience of the

pervasiveness of such problems. The themes of deception, treason, and

miscommunication are thus foregrounded even while they are ostensibly being

obviated. The audience is encouraged to be suspicious of speech, and such

encouragement leads us to recognise the lacunae in the emissary's speech. Far from

providing authoritative glosses on the gifts, the emissary provides a selective account

of their power. For instance, the emissary describes how the horse of brass can

'[b]eren youre body into every place/To which youre herte wilneth for to pace'

(V.119-20) and how it can 'fleen as hye in the air/As dooth an egle' (V.122-23). But

he provides no account of how the horse's power can be realised. As a result, rather

than dissolving physical and geographical boundaries, the horse merely '[s]tant in

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[11] Grudin, *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse*, pp. 117-18.
[12] Grudin, *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse*, pp. 117-18. I return to discuss the Trojan horse below.

the court, stille as any stoon' (V.171), for it 'may nat be remewed,/It stant as it were to the ground yglewed' (V.180-81). There is certainly an element of Chaucerian humour here: there is a comedic dexterity in the transformation of the horse from something that could transcend physical barriers into something that is itself a physical obstacle. But there is also a wider significance to these similes: the fantasy of idealised communicative exchange between disparate lands and cultures is disrupted. One common criticism that has been directed towards the Squire as a storyteller is that he 'creates [...] a series of expectations without fulfilment'.[13] However, here it is explicitly the emissary who raises expectations which go unfulfilled because he has withheld crucial information about how to harness the horse's power.

The lacunae in the emissary's speech result in a proliferation of new and competing voices of '[d]iverse folk' (V.202) who attempt to re-gloss the horse. As the '[d]iverse folk' approach the horse it is described as 'so horsly' (V.194), a somewhat problematic term. It appears to be a neologism,[14] and while it could be read as a neutral term functioning in a similar way to 'manly' (V.99),[15] it is notable for its unimaginativeness.[16] It functions to demystify the magic horse which becomes stripped of its unique 'vertu', that thing which made it *unhorsly*: its ability to fly. The horse becomes a sign without a referent; because the emissary did not fully explain its significance, the '[d]iverse folk' of the court can – like amateur taxidermists –

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[13] John P. McCall, 'The Squire in Wonderland', *Chaucer Review*, 1 (1966-67), 103-09 (p. 105).

[14] Chaucer's is the only use of the word cited by the *MED*, while the *OED* only has one other usage cited (which is from 1552). s.v. 'horsli', *MED*; s.v. 'horsely', *OED*.

[15] This argument is propounded in Henry B. Hinckley, *Notes on Chaucer: A Commentary on the Prolog and Six Canterbury Tales* (Northampton, MA: Nonotuck Press, 1907), p. 222.

[16] The problematic nature of the term is recognised by R. Allen Shoaf, who notes that it might cause some 'disgruntlement', and by Allen and Moritz, who argue that it is an 'incongruous' word. See Richard Allen Shoaf, *Chaucer's Body: The Anxiety of Circulation in the 'Canterbury Tales'* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), p. 73; Judson B. Allen and Theresa A. Moritz, *A Distinction of Stories: The Medieval Unity of Chaucer's Fair Chain of Narratives for Canterbury* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1981), p. 146.

stuff the horse full of their own ideas about its significance. In their attempt to comprehend the significance of the horse and the other gifts, the '[d]iverse folk' invoke a wide array of authorities from a range of disciplines, including: classical legends, in their musing on the 'olde poetries' (V.206) about Pegasus and Troy; the supernatural, in their suggestion that the horse was an 'apparence ymaad by som magyk' (V.218); the Europeans' skill at horse-breeding, in their reference to the 'steede of Lumbardye' (V.193); classical authorities, in their discussion of 'Aristotle' (V.233); modern science, in their consideration of 'anglis and of slye reflexiouns' (V.230) and new 'medicynes' (V.244); and modern craftsmanship, in their description of 'hardyng of metal' (V.243).

The plurality of perspectives that arises in this section has not been fully appreciated by critics. Strohm, for example, has explored in detail Chaucer's use of polyvocality, a term sourced from Mikhail Bakhtin and referring to a work containing '[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices'.[17] While Strohm sees polyvocality as a 'special property' of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, he argues that this section of the *Squire's Tale* remains resolutely monologic due to the narrator's 'single-mindedness', which ensures that the scornful 'perspective is consistently controlled'.[18] Such a reading of these lines is common in criticism of the *Squire's Tale*,[19] and there is certainly some merit to it. The narrator describes how the people:

> [...] demeth comunly

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[17] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 6. For Strohm's discussions of 'polyvocality', see especially his *Social Chaucer*, pp. 168-72; and his 'Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Writers as Readers of Chaucer', in *Genres, Themes, and Images in English Literature*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Anne Torti (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988), pp. 90-104 (esp. pp. 90-91).
[18] Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, p. 168, 170.
[19] Consider, for example, Charles Larson's argument that '[n]ever a democrat [...] Chaucer surprises no-one by putting down the "lewed peple" here'. Charles Larson, '*The Squire's Tale*: Chaucer's Evolution from the Dream Vision', *Revue des Langues Vivantes*, 43, 1 (1977), 598-607 (p. 603).

> Of thynges that been maad moore subtilly
> Than they kan in hir lewednesse comprehende;
> They demen gladly to the badder ende. (V.221-224)

There is undeniably an element of scorn in these lines. However, there are several reasons for suggesting that this perspective does not deny the emergence of polyvocality in this passage.

Firstly, the idea that the narrator's voice dominates this section is debatable. Of the seventy-three lines devoted to the '[d]iverse folk' (V.189-62), seven lines are unmediated direct speech, fifty-five lines are neutral narrative, and at the very most eleven lines are delivered scornfully (V.202-05, 220-24, 257, 261), although some of these could be read neutrally. The narrator's voice thus does not dominate this passage. Secondly, we may be misguided in viewing the term 'lewed' (V.221) as particularly pejorative. Elsewhere in his corpus, Chaucer uses it in relation to his own creative endeavours: he describes himself as a 'lewde compilator' in the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*,[20] the eagle labels the narrator a 'lewed man' in the *House of Fame* (862), while in the *Legend* Alceste describes how 'Chaucer' has made 'lewed folk delyte' (F.415). Chaucer, his narrative persona, and his audience are all described as 'lewed' and this implies that the term may not be damning, but instead has a similar force to 'dull' which is used playfully in Chaucer's dream visions.[21] Thirdly, and finally, Chaucer elsewhere has an evident fondness for '[d]iverse folk'. The line '[d]iverse folk, diversely they demed' (V.202) is repeated by Chaucer in various forms on three other occasions (I.3857, II.211, IV.1469), and the line can be viewed as encapsulating the very spirit of the *Canterbury Tales'* project. Chaucer's interest in diversity suggests that he was engaged by, rather than disdainful of,

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[20] 'Treatise on the Astrolabe', prologue, ll. 61-62.
[21] On the nuances of 'dull', see Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators*, p. 47.

'[d]iverse folk', which would account for why a large proportion of the *Squire's Tale* is taken up with recording their speech.

There is thus no authoritative voice dictating our response to the '[d]iverse folk'. Instead, their varied responses to the gifts – suspicion, wonder, intellectual curiosity, competitiveness – are all placed on an equal footing within the narrative leading to a true polyphony of voices. This is not to say, however, that this scene is unproblematic; for such polyphony can be 'debilitating'.[22] The tale's audience is presented with a cacophony of opinions, a cacophony replicated in the repetitiveness of the language, with numerous terms sourced from the semantic field of communication and perception: 'wonder' (V.199, 248, 256) 'wondred' (V.225, 236), 'demed' (V.202, 221, 224, 261), 'seyden' (V.207, 217, 228, 231, 248, 252, 253), 'speken' (V.232, 243, 244, 247), 'speche' (V.238), 'jangle' (V.220, 257, 261).[23] These terms – twenty-four in total – are indicative of the density of speech and wonderment presented in these lines.

However, it is not only their scale that makes these lines debilitating; the actual content of the speeches is also problematic. The competition becomes aggressive: one courtier states that another 'lyeth' (V.217). Similarly problematic is one speaker's suspicion that the horse:

> was the Grekes hors Synon,
> That broghte Troie to destruccion,
> As men in thise olde geestes rede.
>   "Myn herte," quod oon, "is everemoore in drede;
> I trowe som men of armes been therinne,
> That shapen hem this citee for to wynne.
> It were right good that al swich thing were knowe". (V.209-15)

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[22] The term is used by John M. Fyler; see his 'Chaucerian Romance and the World Beyond Europe', in *Literary Aspects of Court Culture: Selected Papers from the Seventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society*, ed. by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 257-63 (p. 257).
[23] In grouping these terms I have categorised multiple verb forms together.

There is undoubtedly a comedic element to this passage: if the horse is 'horsly', it is presumably not substantially larger than any other horse and it remains unclear from where 'men of armes' are going to emerge. There is also, however, something troubling about this passage as it demonstrates the spread of paranoia in Tsarev. For, the 'oon' who is paranoid about the horse seeks to publicise his suspicions to ensure that 'al swich thing were knowe'. The emissary initially offered through his gifts an ideal of open communication, but here open and unfettered speech is presented as perilous due to the seeds of doubt it can sow.

Much of the criticism of the *Squire's Tale* has focused on the tale's 'insistent Orientalism'.[24] Some critics have even argued that the tale is informed by detailed historical knowledge of the empire of Khan Özbeg.[25] However, such a focus on the tale's orientalism can detract from the poem's familiar, urban aspects. The paranoid 'oon' is concerned here not about the threat to the foreign court or the entire empire; rather, it is 'this citee' which is under attack. Of course, directly 'this citee' refers to the Russian city of Tsarev. However, by invoking the story of Troy, the passage opens up a chain of associations which link Tsarev with London as both are New Troys.[26] And, moreover, the speech of the 'oon' is far from exotic, and closely resembles the socially turbulent speech of late-fourteenth century London. The '[d]iverse folk' of Tsarev who 'jangle' (V.220), desire that untruths 'were knowe'

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[24] The quotation is from Kathryn L. Lynch, 'East Meets West in Chaucer's Squire's and Franklin's Tales', *Speculum*, 70, 3 (1995), 530-51 (p. 531). Some of the best essays on Chaucer's orientalism can be found reprinted in *Chaucer's Cultural Geography,* ed. by Kathryn L. Lynch (London: Routledge, 2002). This volume also contains a piece by Kenneth Bleeth offering a useful overview. See Kenneth Bleeth, 'Orientalism and the Critical History of the *Squire's Tale*', in *Chaucer's Cultural Geography*, pp. 21-31. Two interesting works that postdate this volume are: Carol F. Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003); Alan S. Ambrisco, '"It lyth nat in my tonge": Occupatio and Otherness in the *Squire's Tale*', *Chaucer Review*, 38, 3 (2003-04), 205-228.
[25] Vincent J. DiMarco, 'The Historical Basis of Chaucer's Squire's Tale', *Edebiyât: A Journal of Middle Eastern and Comparative Literature*, n. s. 5, 2 (1989), 1-22; Carmel Jordan, 'Soviet Archaeology and the Setting of the *Squire's Tale*', *Chaucer Review*, 22 (1987-88), 128-40.
[26] For a discussion of how the concept of Troynovaunt, or New Troy, was utilised by politicians and poets, see Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 56-92; Federico, *New Troy*, passim.

publicly, and who 'demen gladly to the badder ende', are redolent of the London citizens attacked by Thomas Usk as 'janglers' who spread 'false wordes [...] so wyde' and who 'arne spekynge rather of yvel than of good'.[27] The lacunae in the emissary's speech thus lead to a multiplication of voices in the poem, all competing to determine the gifts' significance. And such multiplication is presented as dangerous: the competing voices lead to socially problematic speech which stokes up fear and paranoia.

Sir John Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide* similarly explores problematic speech, although the problems derive not from a cacophony of voices but from the intersecting of two contradictory voices. The *Boke of Cupide* is a 290-line poem blending the dream vision and debate forms. In it, the sleepless narrator sits in a field listening to the harmonious melodies of the birds and the river which slowly send him to sleep. In his dream he overhears a debate between a cuckoo and a nightingale about the power of the God of Love. After a particularly harsh verbal attack by the cuckoo, the nightingale bursts into tears and the narrator intervenes by throwing stones at the cuckoo. The nightingale flies off to seek help from her fellow birds who decide to hold a parliament to debate the issue. However, before the parliament can convene, the nightingale sings so loudly that the narrator awakes and the poem ends. While the debate is primarily concerned with the power of Love/love, the quality of each bird's speech is also debated. So, the debate begins with the nightingale attacking the cuckoo's song as 'elynge' (115) and the cuckoo claiming the nightingale's song is 'queynte' (123).[28] The *Boke of Cupide* is thus both a contest *of*

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[27] Thomas Usk, *Testament of Love*, ed. by Gary W. Shawver (London: University of Toronto Press, 2002), bk i, chap. 4, ll. 55-57.
[28] Several critics have drawn attention to the poem's commentary on musical styles, arguing that the nightingale represents vain polyphony and the cuckoo represents simply monophony. There evidently are these parallels in the poem and this is reflected in language such as 'breke' (119), 'pleyn' (118) not to mention 'songes' (115) and 'synge' (113). However, these parallels are explored in only a small

words and a contest *about* words. It is a debate poem which addresses the subject of Love and the subject of language, two topics which it presents as intricately connected.

Central to the birds' debate are questions of truth and transparency, and these are established as ideal qualities to be possessed by both speech and Love. So, the cuckoo claims that both the nightingale and the God of Love lack transparency: while 'euery wight may vnderstonde' the cuckoo's speech (121), the nightingale's speech is indecipherable and the God of Love is 'blinde' (202) and 'hath no reson but his wille' (196). Conversely, the nightingale contends that it is the cuckoo who is irrational – he is 'wode' (188) and 'out of thy mynde' (146) – and that the God of Love's judgements are entirely opaque and consistent as he 'his seruant euermore amendeth' (191). She also claims that the reason the cuckoo cannot understand her is because he is a 'fole' (126), not because her utterances lack transparency. Additionally, both birds lay claim to speaking the truth: the cuckoo says his words are 'trewe' (118), while the nightingale also modifies her arguments with 'truly' (151). The paralleling between the birds here is significant, not least because it reveals that truth is an empty term that is simply a weapon in a rhetorician's armoury. For both birds to be able to stake a claim to truth reveals that 'truth' itself is a mere construct, devoid of any objective weight.[29]

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part of the poem; I am suggesting that the debate on the value of the spoken word is explored more widely. See Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, p. 257, note to ll. 113-20. Elizabeth Eva Leach explores in more general terms the dynamics of songs in the poem. See Elizabeth Eva Leach, *Sung Birds: Music, Nature, and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Cornell University Press, 2007), esp. pp. 238-54.

[29] The idea of debate poems leading to a recognition of truth that is 'a construct rather than an absolute' is also made by Alan J. Fletcher in his discussion of the *Owl and the Nightingale*. See his 'Middle English Debate Literature', in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. by David Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 241-56 (p. 242).

But the parallels between the birds assume a greater significance as they problematise the audience's attempts to pass judgement on the matter of the poem. The extent to which either bird can be said to 'win' the debate has exercised critics of Clanvowe's poem. However, before reflecting on these critical responses, it is worth noting that attempts to judge the merits of each bird's argument begin not with modern critics, but within the fiction of the poem: the dreamer enacts a judgement on the debate when he gets 'a stone,/And at the cukkow hertely I cast' (217-18). This should not be taken as a serious attempt at judgement. The dreamer is clearly 'one of the nightingale's partisans',[30] and he is subjected to ridicule in the narrative. This ridicule is partly constructed through the passage's mock-heroic lexis. In the *MED*, the adverb 'hertely' more commonly modifies the actions of heroic men: Arthur's knights in the *Morte Arthure*; the Trojans in Lydgate's *Troy Book*; the eponymous hero of *Havelok the Dane*; and Cleopatra and Antony's army in the *Legend of Good Women*.[31] Alongside this mock-heroic tone, the scene is also comic because of the dreamer's ineffectiveness. In a poem which is so concerned with voice, it is significant that the narrator's stone-throwing only results in the cuckoo being chased '[t]ill he was fer al out of sight awey' (225). This moment can be usefully contrasted with a scene from Jean de Condé's *La Messe des Oisiaus*, a poem possibly known by Clanvowe.[32] In this poem, the cuckoo who intrudes into the religious service is made to fly 'away silenced into the forest'.[33] Whereas Condé's cuckoo is explicitly silenced in the poem, Clanvowe's cuckoo is only driven out of sight by the narrator.

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[30] The phrase is Leach's, though the sentiment can be found in the majority of essays on the poem. Leach, *Sung Birds*, p. 243.

[31] s.v. 'hert(e)li', 2(a), *MED*.

[32] Scattergood, 'Introduction', pp. 10-11. See also Julia Boffey, 'English Dream Poems of the Fifteenth Century and their French Connections', in *Literary Aspects of Court Culture: Selected Papers from the Seventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literary Society*, ed. by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 113-21 (pp. 114-15).

[33] Jean de Condé, 'La Messe des Oisiaus et li Plais des Chanonesses et des Grises Nones', in *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues*, ed. by B. A. Windeatt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982), pp. 104-19 (p. 107).

The dreamer begins by wishing that he will not hear the 'leude cukkow syng' (50), a conventional desire which is also the focus of Deschamps' *Ballade CCCCLXXVI*, where the narrator's refrain is that he hears 'seulement que le chant du cucu'.[34] However, Clanvowe's dreamer, like Deschamps', is unable to silence the voice of the cuckoo.

Critics writing about the *Boke of Cupide* have frequently sought to argue that one bird wins the debate. Most commonly, the cuckoo is said to triumph: Scattergood states that the cuckoo is the 'victor' as the nightingale is 'argued [...] into silence'; Leach suggests that the nightingale fails as she 'sings only of love for Cupid'; David Chamberlain contrasts the aggressive nightingale with the cuckoo who 'speaks its mind truthfully' and 'is associated with Truth (the cross and God)'; Patterson similarly argues that the cuckoo has the 'discourse of truth', a discourse excluded from the 'ideologically-bound nightingale'.[35] Contrastingly, one critic at least favours the nightingale: David E. Lampe argues that the cuckoo demonstrates 'bitterness and rage', while the nightingale triumphs due to his association with Christian love.[36] These responses deny that the poem raises problematic issues about the veracity of speech and the emptiness of 'truth'. For, they suggest that one bird – typically the cuckoo – is able to harness an objective 'discourse of truth'.

One strategy that critics use to justify the argument that the cuckoo triumphs is to reduce the poem to a simple binary opposition between the cuckoo and the

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[34] Eustace Deschamps, 'Ballad CCCCLXXVI', in Eustace Deschamps, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. by Le Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et C[ic], 1882), l. 8, 16, 24.
[35] *Works of Sir John Clanvowe*, ed. by Scattergood, pp. 84-85; Leach, *Sung Birds*, p. 246; David Chamberlain, 'Clanvowe's Cuckoo', in *New Readings of Late Medieval Love Poems*, ed. by David Chamberlain (London: University Press of America, Inc., 1993), pp. 41-65 (p. 58); Lee Patterson, 'Court Politics and the Invention of Literature: The Case of Sir John Clanvowe', in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. by David Aers (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 7-41 (p. 23).
[36] David E. Lampe, 'Tradition and Meaning in *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 3, suppl. (1967), 49-62 (p. 51).

nightingale who represent, in Helen Barr's words, 'the opposition between plain truth and proud ornament'.[37] The attempt to reduce the debate to this binary – which also appears in the work of Patterson and Chamberlain – is certainly a strategy of the cuckoo, who claims that 'my songe is bothe trewe and pleyn' (118), whereas the nightingale's song is 'nyse' and 'queynte' (123). However, critics' unquestioning acceptance of the cuckoo's claim to be 'trewe' is problematic because it fails to recognise that it is a deliberate strategy of the cuckoo. He is merely a self-appointed speaker of 'plain truth' and, as noted above, the nightingale also claims to speak truth. These twin claims to truth are best exemplified in the middle section of the debate: the nightingale claims that 'that ys sothe, alle that I sey' (161), and the cuckoo responds by saying 'for al that, the sothe is the contreyre' (167). '[S]othe' is a meaningless concept here; neither bird empirically proves the veracity of its argument, and these neighbouring appeals to truth demonstrate that any claim to the 'discourse of truth' is merely a debating strategy.

There is a further reason why attempts to reduce the poem to an oppositional binary based on the styles of each bird's delivery are problematic: the dictions of the two birds are not sufficiently differentiated to sustain the argument that the nightingale speaks in an ornate manner while the cuckoo speaks plainly. They share a similar lexis – 'euery wight' (114, 121), 'wonder' (128, 166), 'companye' (138, 156), 'shame' (158, 174) – and the structure of their utterances is equally similar – '"What!" quoth he' (116), '"What!" quoth she' (146), 'ffor therof truly cometh al goodnesse' (151), 'For ther of cometh disese and heuynesse' (171). It is true that Patterson has previously noted the similarity in the two birds' speech, arguing that the similarity develops over the 'course of the poem' as the cuckoo moves from

[37] Helen Barr, *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 182.

being an independent figure to becoming 'the stock figure of court satire'.[38]

However, the quotations above are taken from throughout the debate, and show that

from the beginning Clanvowe invites the audience to recognise the similarities

between the birds. This similarity, therefore, means it is fallacious to argue that the

cuckoo's judgements, because of the alleged plain style that they are couched in, are

superior.

The argument that the cuckoo triumphs in the debate if further undermined

by recognising that he is a partisan speaker. In his central attack on the God of Love,

the cuckoo says:

> love hath no reson but his wille;
> For ofte sithe vntrew folke he esith,
> And trewe folke so bittirly displesith,
> That for defaute of grace hee let hem spille.
>
> With such a lorde wolde I neuer be,
> For he is blynde and may not se.' (197-202)

This passage testifies less to the ability of the cuckoo to convincingly condemn the

God of Love and more to the cuckoo's own partisanship. Partly, this is evidenced by

the use of 'trewe' and 'vntrew', a concept that this chapter has already noted to be

fluid and lacking any objective force. But it is also apparent in the tautologous

phrase 'he is blynde and may not se'. In this phrase, the cuckoo plays upon the two

meanings of 'blind': the God of Love is both literally 'blynde' – as he was depicted

in medieval imagery and literature[39] – but he is also metaphorically blind in his

inability to perceive the 'trewe' folk who deserve justice. Erwin Panofsky has argued

that in medieval moralizing work, Cupid's blindness is allegorised in a fashion 'as

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[38] Patterson, 'Court Politics', p. 24.
[39] For an account of medieval images of Cupid, see Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), pp. 95-128.

unflattering as possible',[40] and this argument is certainly supported by the cuckoo's

words and by contemporary texts such as Gower's *Confessio Amantis* in which

Genius draws parallels between Love and Fortune, saying that 'love is blind and may

noght se,/Forthi may no certeinete/Be set upon his jugement'.[41] However, other

contemporary works suggest that these negative interpretations of Cupid's blindness

did not predominate. Indeed, Theresa Tinkle has modified Panofsky's argument and

suggested that the image of 'blind Cupid' draws its significance not from any

specific pejorative connotations, but because of its polysemousness, its 'essential

ambiguity' and 'capacity to absorb meaning' from the context in which it appears.[42]

So, for example, Chaucer is interested in Cupid as a visual image, and imagines

several depictions of the God where his blindness is a physical attribute lacking a

moral dimension. In the *Knight's Tale* we are told 'blynd he was, as it is often seene'

(I.1965), and in *Troilus and Criseyde* 'daun Cupide' is 'blynde and wynged'

(iii.1808).

More significant than these neutral descriptions is the positive allegorising of

the God of Love's blindness present in Guillaume de Machaut's *Dit Dou Vergier*. In

Machaut's poem, the narrator meets the God of Love who explains that the reason

why '[s]ans yex sui et goute ne voy' [*I have no eyes and can't see at all*] is that it

ensures he pays no consideration to 'biauté, richesse, ne linage', and thus his

blindness ensures 'cils qui sert plus loiaument,/Cils ha le milleur paiement' [*that the

man who serves the most loyally/Receives the best reward*].[43] Obviously, we cannot

be certain what texts Clanvowe was reading; he evidently knew some of Chaucer's

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[40] Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, p. 107.
[41] Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, book I, ll. 47-49.
[42] Theresa Tinkle, *Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, and English Poetry* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 134.
[43] Guillaume de Machaut, 'Story of the Orchard (Dit Dou Vergier)', in *The Fountain of Love (La Fonteinne Amoureuse) and Two Other Love Vision Poems*, ed. and trans. by R. Barton Palmer (London: Garland Publishing, 1993), pp. 21-87 (l. 405, 410, ll. 467-68).

work, and it seems probable that he was familiar with at least one continental work, Jean de Condé's *La Messe des Oisiaus*.[44] Many other elements of his poem – the springtime opening, the wish not to hear the cuckoo, the references to Valentine's Day, the praise for the God of Love – could derive from continental work by Machaut, de Condé, or Deschamps, but their conventionality means it is difficult to pinpoint a specific source. M. C. Seymour does show that Clanvowe was a regular participant in hostilities against France and suggests that '[t]he war clearly shaped him [...] in developing a self-confidence and awareness of European ideas and customs'.[45] While Seymour does not explicitly mention literary exchanges, Clanvowe had every opportunity to be confronted with French works. Equally, he evidently moved in a circle of men who were book-owners and writers.[46]

So, while there is, therefore, no evidence that Clanvowe knew Machaut's work or the *Dit dou Vergier* specifically,[47] he seems to have been widely read and would thus probably be aware that the image of blind Cupid was a multivalent one. So, when he has the cuckoo emphasise the God of Love's blindness, Clanvowe is participating in a wider cultural trend of deconstructing the pagan deities, a trend which highlighted the polysemous nature of these deities. The cuckoo appears

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[44] See Scattergood, 'Introduction', pp. 10-12.

[45] M. C. Seymour, 'Sir John Clanvowe 1341-1391', *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society*, 75 (2005), 35-58 (p. 37).

[46] Clanvowe served in France with Richard Stury who owned a *Roman de la Rose* and whose name appears in a manuscript of Baudouin de Condé's verse. Clanvowe's fellow chamber knights included Lewis Clifford, whose name also appears in the de Condé manuscript and who brought Deschamps' lyrics to England, and John Montagu, who is said to have written lyrics that have not survived. Clanvowe is also famously named in 1380 as a witness at the release of Chaucer for charges of 'raptus' against Cecily Chaumpaigne. The Baudouin de Condé manuscript is Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale MS 9411-26 and is cited in: Boffey, 'English Dream Poems', p. 116. Stury's *Roman de la Rose* is now BL MS Royal 19 B XIII and is mentioned in: John Scattergood, 'Literary Culture at the Court of Richard II', *Reading the Past: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), pp. 114-29 (p. 120). For Clifford, see Scattergood, 'Literary Culture', p. 123; for Montagu, see Scattergood, 'Introduction', p. 24; and for the Chaumpaigne case, see *Chaucer Life-Records*, p. 343.

[47] There is no evidence that the *Dit Dou Vergier* circulated in England, and it is not one of Machaut's works we can be certain Chaucer knew. For evidence of Chaucer's use of Machaut in his early dream poetry, see *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, ed. and trans. by B. A. Windeatt.

oblivious to this trend; he offers a totalising narrative about the God of Love's flaws which attempts to foreclose disagreement. However, the polysemous nature of the God of Love prevents this foreclosure; Clanvowe and his audience would be familiar with alternative interpretations and recognise that the cuckoo's voice fails to supplant either the nightingale's or the God of Love's, as his critical faculties are flawed. The cuckoo is blinded by partisanship, and cannot recognise the semantic fluidity surrounding words such as 'trewe' and images such as the blind Cupid.

In comparison to the cuckoo, the nightingale has received substantially more opprobrium from recent critics, who have labelled her 'vengeful', and suggested that she displays 'vindictiveness', 'fury', and 'intolerance'.[48] To some extent these judgements are overstated: the nightingale is not as reprehensible a character as some critics suggest. For example, her ostensibly aggressive demand that the cuckoo 'go somme where thy wey' (112) need not be seen as exemplifying her intolerance. The silencing of an opponent is the ultimate aim of both debaters, and the wish for the opponent to disappear is a convention of the debate genre. For instance, in the *Owl and the Nightingale*, the owl is told 'awei Þu flo'; in the *Clerk and the Nightingale*, the clerk tells the bird to 'ffle a-way out of Þis londe'; and in the *Thrush and the Nightingale*, the thrush tells the nightingale to 'fle' and the nightingale says '[o]f lone ich wille Þe sende'.[49]

Equally, the nightingale is more transparent than some critics allow for. When the cuckoo says that her cry of '"ocy! ocy!"' (124) is unintelligible, the

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[48] Lampe, 'Tradition and Meaning', p. 52; Chamberlain, 'Chaucer's Cuckoo', p. 54; Staley, *Languages of Power*, p. 22; A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 179.
[49] *The Owl and the Nightingale: Text and Translation*, ed. by Neil Cartlidge (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001), l. 33; 'The Clerk and the Nightingale', in *Middle English Debate Poetry*, ed. by Conlee, l. 12; 'The Thrush and the Nightingale', in *Middle English Debate Poetry*, ed. by Conlee, l. 84, 96.

nightingale responds by translating it for the cuckoo, saying that it means 'that I wolde wonder fayne/That alle tho wer shamefully slayne,/That menen oght ayen love amys' (128-30). While the actual meaning of the words are undoubtedly reprehensible, the nightingale does demonstrate a willingness to translate her words for the cuckoo and the translation is accurate.[50] This willingness somewhat undermines Barr's thesis that the nightingale's speaking in French encodes into the poem 'the Wycliffite concern for the Bible to be translated into English'.[51] Unlike the Church, the nightingale shows no resistance to having her words translated. More significantly, the poem implies that the act of translation is not beneficial, but actually rebounds against the nightingale, as it exposes her violent tendencies. All this is not said to elevate the voice of the nightingale, who is, as critics argue, a flawed character. She shares similarities with the cuckoo, she fails to harness the discourse of truth, and she is aggressive. Moreover, while the cuckoo uses imagery which opens itself to being challenged, the nightingale lacks the wit to vocalise the opposing interpretation of the God of Love's blindness, and instead declares that she 'can for tene sey not oon worde more' (209). However, the nightingale is not so flawed a character that she loses the argument by default; both the cuckoo and the nightingale are presented as equally fallible and at the debate's end neither bird has secured victory.

What we are offered in the *Boke of Cupide* is not so much a 'genuine polyphony of fully valid voices',[52] as a genuine duophony of fully invalid voices. Truth and transparency are valued attributes of language in the poem, but neither the

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[50] The translation is accurate in that 'oci' in French is the imperative form of ocire 'to kill, to slay'. However 'oci' in the dictionary is also defined as the 'call of the nightingale', and the word is an attempt to capture onomatopoeically the nightingale's call and as such is meaningless. s.v. 'oci', 'ocire', in Alan Hindley, Frederick W. Langley, Brian J. Levy, *Old French-English Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[51] Barr, *Socioliterary Practice*, p. 182.

[52] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 6.

cuckoo nor the nightingale can lay claim to either. Speech becomes emptied of any

objective value; speech itself becomes a tool deployed by debaters who, while

claiming they speak for truth and transparency, are both corrupted by their own

partisanship and inner anger. And just as the *Squire's Tale* envisaged social unrest as

a result of inopportune speech, so too does the *Boke of Cupide* show speech leading

to emotional distress – the nightingale 'brast on forto wepe' (210) – and violence –

as the dreamer 'gatte a stone' and 'cast' it at the cuckoo (217-18).

'[A]l that euere he wol he may' (*Boke of Cupide*, 16): The Failures of Regal Authority

In both poems a regal figure is initially posited as an ultimate judge, as an arbiter of

truth. However, each poem subsequently undermines the regal figure's ability to

control and judge speech. Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide* begins by foregrounding a

single figure of regal authority: '[t]he god of love, a! benedicite,/How myghty and

how grete a lorde is he!' (1-2). It might be initially protested that the God of Love

should be read as a figure of religious, rather than regal, authority, an argument

supported by the religious lexis of the opening line of the poem. However, this

religious lexis does not feature heavily elsewhere in the poem; the second line

describes the God of Love as a 'lorde' – a word with religious and secular

associations – while later in the poem there are references to the God of Love's

'court' (204) and the 'seruise' (149) which men do to him, language which is

redolent of the relationship between a monarch and his subjects. Moreover, the

powers of the God of Love are those possessed by a monarch: 'he can glade and

greve whom hym lyketh' (18); '[h]e can bynde and vnbynde eke' (9); '[a]yenst him

ther dar no wight say nay' (17); and he can 'dystroye vise' (14).[53] For this reason, critics who have written about the God of Love in Clanvowe's poem have been quick to draw parallels between him and Richard II, in much the same way that the God of Love in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* is viewed as an allegorical version of Richard.[54] Patterson, for example, suggests that the poem is, in part, a 'critique of Richard's tyranny', while Staley suggests that the 'mighty and censorious Cupid' reflects a negative version of a king, with the intention of urging 'more authority' on 'any kingly "listener"'.[55]

Much of Clanvowe's description of the power of the God of Love is conventional; the opening lines are drawn from the *Knight's Tale*, while Clanvowe's note that the God of Love 'can make of wise folke ful nyse' (13) might echo Guillaume de Machaut's *Dit dou Vergier*, which similarly says the God of Love can 'fais le sage mesure/Trespasser, raison, et droiture' [*force the wise/To disregard reason, temperance, and justice*].[56] However, despite its conventionality, Clanvowe injects some rhetorical force into this description. His use of *contentio* gives a clear structuring principle to the passage and emphasises the power of the God of Love, while the contrasts the narrator draws are occasionally given added emphasis through alliteration, as in 'glade and greve' (18). The third stanza is particularly effective:

> To telle his myght my wit may not suffice,
> For he may do al that he can deuyse;
> For he can make of wise folke ful nyse,
> And in lyther folke dystroye vise,

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[53] Many of these powers were employed by Richard II. For example, his appointment of de Vere to Duke of Ireland in 1385 against other's counsel indicates how he could 'glade [...] whom hym lyketh'. He also overruled the parliament's impeachment of Michael de la Pole thereby 'unbinding' him.
[54] For discussions of the *Legend of Good Women*, see Ann W. Astell, *Political Allegory in Late Medieval England* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 73-93; Staley, *Languages of Power*, pp. 19-25; Barr, *Socioliterary Practice*, pp. 80-105.
[55] Patterson, 'Court Politics', p. 13; Staley, *Languages of Power*, p. 19, 22.
[56] Machaut, 'Story of the Orchard', ll. 317-18.

And proude hertys he can make agryse. (11-15)

Clanvowe here experiments with his verse form, as he abandons his usual AABBA
rhyme scheme and has all five lines rhyming. Notably, however, his typical verse
form is retained in the stanza's grammar: each of the 'A' lines ends in an infinitive
verb. The end verbs establish a contrast between the dreamer and the God of Love.
The dreamer stresses his own inability through the initial modesty topos: 'my wit
may not suffice'. By contrast, the God of Love 'may do al that he can devyse',
including the fact that 'proude hertys he can make agryse'..

        Given this opening insistence on the God of Love's power, the audience may
be forgiven for expecting him to appear in the poem. But he never does: he is an
invoked, rather than a physical, presence, and in this respect Clanvowe deviates from
texts such as Machaut's *Dit dou Vergier* and Chaucer's *Legend* in which the God of
Love does play an active role in the narrative. The subsequent poem also questions
the extent of the God of Love's power. The cuckoo declares 'myn entent' is never to
be drawn 'in loves yoke' (139-40), and here he stakes a claim to his own 'entent',
thereby denying the God of Love's power over him. The cuckoo proceeds to attack
the God of Love, claiming he 'hath no reson but his wille' (197), a particularly
devastating critique as it attacks the philosophical principle underpinning much of
the complaint genre: that if a lover will be loyal and constant to his lady and the God
of Love then he will eventually be successful in love.[57] It is at the poem's end that
the God of Love's marginalisation is cemented. The nightingale, seeking redress for
the perceived slight from the cuckoo, flies to the other birds and asks them for
support. Such appeals for judgement are common in the debate poem genre, and the

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[57] This figures particularly in the Boethian tradition, and can be found in Usk, whose narrator is
advised to 'take it paciently' (2.11.1115) and the *Knight's Tale*, where Arcite advises Palamon to
'taak al in pacience' (I.1084). It is also present in the *Dit dou Vergier* where the unsuccessful narrator
is told to remain faithful and he will triumph (l. 79).

judge varies from being an authoritative figure, such as the king of Bohemia,[58] to an

ambiguous figure, such as 'Maister Nichole of Guldeforde',[59] or a specially

convened assembly, such as the court of Love that was presided over by the God

Love.[60] Clanvowe's contemporary audience – attuned to the conventions of the

debate genre – would have expected the invocation of a form of authority at the

poem's end: an independent figure, perhaps the God of Love himself, who could

judge the matter of the debate. However, rather than the summoning of a court of

love, the birds instead declare that 'we wol haue a parlement' (275), and this

parliament will be comprised exclusively of birds. Whereas the poem began with the

God of Love being 'lorde' (2), the 'egle' has now become the 'lorde' (276) thereby

finally sidelining the God of Love.

There is clearly an alternative narrative that Clanvowe could have pursued, a

narrative which would have seen the God of Love emerging to take control and

authoritatively judging the matters raised in the poem. This alternative narrative is

played out in the *Parliament of Love*, a short anonymous poem belonging to the so-

called 'Suffolk-Poems', a collection of twenty early- to mid-fifteenth-century poems

found in MS Fairfax 16.[61] This series has received relatively little critical attention,

beyond considerations of their authorship and their significance as a verse series.[62]

Scholars have noted these poems' indebtedness to Lydgate, but no-one has yet

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[58] Guillaume de Machaut, 'Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaigne', in *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, ed. by Windeatt
[59] *Owl and the Nightingale*, l. 191.
[60] On *Le Jugement d'Amours*, which usefully typifies elements of the court of Love tradition, see William Allan Neilson, *The Origins and Sources of the 'Court of Love'* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1899), pp. 7-8.
[61] *Bodleian Library: MS Fairfax 16*, intro. by John Norton-Smith (London: Scolar Press, 1979).
[62] Derek Pearsall, 'The Literary Milieu of Charles of Orléans and the Duke of Suffolk, and the Authorship of the Fairfax Sequence', in *Charles d'Orléans in England (1415-1440)*, ed. by Mary-Jo Arn (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 145-56 (p. 153); Julia Boffey, '"Cy ensuent trois chaunceons": Groups and Sequences of Middle English Lyrics', in *Medieval Texts in Context*, ed. by Denis Renevey and Graham D. Caie (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), pp. 85-95; Henry Noble MacCracken, 'An English Friend of Charles of Orleans', *PMLA*, 26, 1 (1911), 142-80.

suggested that the last poem in the series – the *Parliament of Love* – may be indebted to Clanvowe. In Clanvowe's poem, 'oon brid' speaks 'for alle by assent' (271), saying that '[t]his mater asketh good avysement,/ffor we be fewe briddes her in fere [...] therfore we wol haue a parlement' (272-75). This can be compared to the *Parliament of Love*, in which a group of human petitioners go 'by one assent' to the God of Love where 'he that was spekar for hem alle' petitions the God of Love to 'voyd Daunger' from the court. The God of Love replies that 'I wyll that ye haue knowlech, alle in fere,/Thys mater axeth gret avysement', so he decides to 'ajourn my parlement to a later date'.[63] These passages are thematically very similar, while the *Parliament's* line '[t]hys mater axeth gret avysement' is sufficiently close to Clanvowe's wording for us to posit that this later poem is referring back to Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide* (which also appears in MS Fairfax 16).[64] Noticeably, the *Parliament of Love* restores the God of Love to his traditional position: it is *his* parliament and it is he who has the burden of judgement. By contrast, in the *Boke of Cupide*, royalty is sidelined; the right to proclaim a judgement on the debate lies with the parliament of birds, not with either the God of Love or the queen. The God of Love remains silent and the power he wields remains theoretical.

The focus of the opening section of the *Squire's Tale* is similarly on a regal figure: Cambyuskan, ruler of the court at Tsarev. While there have been some brief discussions of the sources of Cambyuskan as a character – notably by Vincent J. Dimarco, who argues that Chaucer bases his depiction of Cambyuskan on the historical figure Khan Özbeg who led 'his empire to its political, cultural and military apogee', and by J. D. North, who suggests that Cambyuskan is strongly

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[63] Johannes Petrus Maria Jansen, *The 'Suffolk' Poems: An Edition of the Love Lyrics in Fairfax 16 Attributed to William de la Pole* (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Groningen, 1989), ll. 602-35. I am indebted to Dr Jansen for sending me a copy of this dissertation.
[64] *Bodleian Library: MS Fairfax 16*, ff. 35v-39v.

'associated with Mars'[65] – he has not attracted the same critical attention that Chaucer's other regal figures have received.[66] Where comment has been offered on Cambyuskan, it has been overwhelmingly positive: he is 'like Arthur an idealized ruler' and he is the 'ideal ruler'.[67] Certainly, this idealization is apparent in the opening lines of the poem. The effusiveness of the narrator's praise is encapsulated in a formula repeated at the beginning and the end of the description: 'ther was nowher in no regioun/So excellent a lord' (V.14-15) and 'ther was nowher swich another man' (V.27). The repetition serves to emphasise that Cambyuskan is superlative both as a man and as a ruler. As a man Cambyuskan is praised because he is an honest pagan, who 'kepte his lay' (V.18). As a ruler, his martial spirit is emphasised – he is '[y]ong, fressh, and strong' (V.23) – three modifiers which are also applied to Troilus (v.830), although Cambyuskan's youthfulness is not as impetuous as Troilus's, as his vigour is modified by his also being 'pitous', 'just', and 'benigne' (V.20-21). These latter qualities are particularly significant; the *Legend* expresses some anxiety over how rulers become flawed through demonstrating impartiality and irrationality, and Alceste has to entreat her husband to be 'gracious and merciable' (F.347), 'ryghtwis' (F.373), and to show 'compassyoun' (F.390).[68] These anxieties do not manifest themselves in the opening to the *Squire's Tale* as Cambyuskan is a temperate figure. He is '[t]his noble kyng' (V.12) a description echoed throughout the tale (V.28, V. 275, V.302, V.338), thereby repeatedly affirming his regal authority and nobility, while also associating

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[65] Dimarco, 'Historical Basis', p. 8; J. D. North, *Chaucer's Universe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 266.

[66] See, for example, Minnis on Theseus, Rayner on kings in general and Astell on the *Legend's* God of Love and the kings in the *Monk's Tale*. A. J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982); Samantha J. Rayner, *Images of Kingship in Chaucer and his Ricardian Contemporaries* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008); Astell, *Political Allegory*.

[67] Robert R. Edwards, *Ratio and Invention: A Study of Medieval Lyric and Narrative* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1989), p. 135; Rayner, *Images of Kingship*, p. 127.

[68] Astell, *Political Allegory*, p. 99. See also the anxieties of the Embroiders and Mercers that Richard II should be an 'euen iuge' (7k.6)/'owel juge' (7j.4).

Cambyuskan with Chaucer's other pagan protagonists, whose nobility is similarly emphasised: the 'noble duc' Theseus (I.873, I.2569, I.2715), and the 'noble knight' Troilus (ii.331, v.1557, v.1752).

So effusive is this praise that the audience could be forgiven for expecting the story to be about Cambyuskan. This certainly seems to have been how later creative poets reacted to the poem: Milton famously described the *Squire's Tale* as '[t]he story of *Cambuscan* bold', while Wharton named his continuation of the poem *Cambuscan, An Heroic Poem, in Six Books* and Boyse, Ogle, and Sterling named their continuation *Cambuscan; or, the Squire's Tale of Chaucer*.[69] Cambyuskan also dominates John Lane's continuation of the poem; Cambyuskan declares that 'I play a knightes, husbandes, fathers part', a quotation testifying to his dominance across various spheres of life.[70] However, in Chaucer's work Cambyuskan does not prove to be the dominant king that these initial lines cast him to be. It is notable that Cambyuskan does not actually do anything in the *Squire's Tale*. He sits 'in his nobleye,/Herknynge his mynstralles hir thynges pleye' (V.77-78); he listens to the emissary; he then 'Roos fro his bord' (V.267), but only to then be 'set upon his trone' (V.275) where he watches the dance. Not only is Cambyuskan a spectator in his own court, he is also a silent spectator as none of his speeches are directly spoken in the narrative. For a poem interested in mediating speech, it is significant that the figure who ostensibly should arbitrate speech remains mostly silent, and only has his words presented indirectly.

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[69] John Milton, 'Il Penseroso', in John Milton, *Complete English Poems, Of Education, Areopagitica*, ed. by Gordon Campbell (London: Everyman, 1993), ll. 109-10; Richard Wharton, 'Cambuscan, An Heroic Poem', in *Fables: Consisting of Select Parts from Dante, Berni, Chaucer and Ariosto. Imitated in English Heroic Verse*, 2 vols (London: T. Bensley, 1804), II; Samuel Boyse, George Ogle and Joseph Sterling, *Cambuscan; or, the Squire's Tale of Chaucer* (Dublin: J. Hill, 1785).
[70] *John Lane's Continuation of Chaucer's 'Squire's Tale'*, ed. by Fredk. J. Furnivall (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1890), canto quinto, l. 200.

Cambyuskan's ineffectiveness is perhaps best exemplified if we return to the 'hors of bras' (V.181) which '[k]an in the space of o day natureel [...] Beren youre body into every place/To which youre herte wilneth for to pace' (V.116-20). As discussed above, while the emissary reveals the 'vertu' of the horse, he withholds the instructions, leaving the court to idly and dangerously speculate. Cambyuskan, however, shows no ability to tame this unbridled speculation. Indeed he can be interpreted as contributing to it, when the narrator states:

> But fynally the kyng axeth this knyght
> The vertu of this courser and the myght,
> And preyde hym to telle his governaunce. (V.309-11)

The theme of miscommunication is again apparent here. Cambyuskan has already been told the 'vertu [...] and the myght' of the horse, but he seemingly failed to understand, or even to listen to, the words. By asking for a repetition of those words, Cambyuskan serves merely to encourage the further duplication of existing discursive patterns, rather than definitively resolving the question of the nature of the horse. There is possibly an element of frustration being expressed by the narrator here, as indicated by the opening '[b]ut fynally'. To an extent, 'fynally' is simply functioning as a metrical make-weight; the constructions 'but fynally' and 'and fynally' are conventional in Chaucer's work and appear at the start of a line twenty one times. However, its rhythmic function does not leave the word semantically empty, and it appears incongruous in this context. Whereas '[b]ut finally' after 'a yeer or two' (V.574-76) the tercelet reveals his true nature and whereas '[a]nd finally' (I.1204) Arcite is released after his imprisonment has passed 'yeer by yeer' (I.1033), Cambyuskan 'fynally' speaks after a few hours at most. '[F]ynally' could thus be read as a rather pointed comment; not only has Cambyuskan let jangling go

on unrestrained in his court, but when he 'fynally' does comment on the horse, his question is fatuous.

The argument that Cambyuskan is being mildly critiqued here is thrown into relief if Cambyuskan's treatment of the horse is contrasted with the horse's treatment in two French analogues to the *Squire's Tale*: *Li Roumans de Cléomadès* by Adenès li Rois, and *Le Roman du Cheval de Fust, ou de Meliacin* by Girard d'Amiens.[71] In both of these romances, a stranger enters the court bringing a horse which he claims can speedily travel great distances. In *Li Roumans de Cléomadès*, Cléomadès (the king's son) is suspicious of the horse's ability, and immediately wants to 'sachiez [...] se ce est veritez ou non' [*know if it [the horse's value] is true or not*]. In response to his son's questioning, the king 'assentoit 'l'esprouver' [*assented to prove it*] and so Cléomadès says to the stranger that 'savoir/Veut dou cheval se tel povoir' [*he would know if the horse had such power*].[72] Similarly, in *Meliacin*, the king speaks to the stranger, offering him 'tout quanque me savrez querre/Se c'est voirs que vous me contez!' [*all that you seek to know from me, if it is truly as you inform me*].[73] The stranger then says 'je suis touz aprestez [...] del esprouver' [*I am fully prepared to prove it*] and that he will show '[l]e pooir' [*the power*] of the horse, and the king responds, saying he will 'volentiers' [*willingly*] go to see the horse's power proven.[74] In these examples, there is a strong desire from the king (or his son) for the

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[71] For a discussion of *Cléomadès* as an analogue for the *Squire's Tale*, see H. S. V. Jones, '*The Squire's Tale*', in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'*, ed. by W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1958), pp. 357-76. For the view that *Meliacin* provides a closer analogue, see Vincent DiMarco, '*The Squire's Tale*', in *Sources and Analogues of 'The Canterbury Tales' I*, ed. by Robert M. Correale (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 169-209.

[72] Jones, '*The Squire's Tale*', ll. 2372-73, 2376, 2388-89.

[73] Girard d'Amiens, *Le Roman du Cheval de Fust, ou de Meliacin* (Genève: Comité de Publication des *Textes Littéraires Français*, 1974), ll. 492-93.

[74] Girard d'Amiens, *Le Roman du Cheval de Fust*, ll. 494-95, 497, 500.

power of the horse to be demonstrated visibly, and the stranger is either compelled or bribed shortly after entering the court into demonstrating the horse's power.

By contrast, Cambyuskan demonstrates no enthusiasm for the gift, nor does he explicitly request its power be demonstrated. Instead, he asks the emissary for more speech: he wants him to 'telle his governaunce'. It is at this point that the emissary reveals the information he previously withheld: beginning with the somewhat comical 'ther is namoore to seyn,/But' (V.314-15), the emissary proceeds to deliver a twenty-line speech describing the need to 'trille' various pins to make the horse move. The king is satisfied that he has been '[e]nformed' of '[t]he manere and the forme of al this thyng' (V.335-36) and returns to his dance. But crucially the king's satisfaction is misplaced; this time the emissary admits he has withheld information, for he tells the king that the horse shall 'come agayn [...] Whan that yow list to clepen hym ageyn/In swich a gyse as I shal to yow seyn/Bitwixe yow and me' (V.330-333). The true workings of the horse have still not been revealed, while speech has moved from the public domain to the private domain, as only Cambyuskan will learn its secrets. It is at this point that 'the hors vanysshed' (V.342) never to reappear. While Cambyuskan seems eminently relaxed about it, the wonderings of the 'diverse folk' have not been answered, and the complex workings of the horse still remain a mystery.

This is not to suggest that Chaucer writes a thorough critique of Cambyuskan. He is not presented contemptuously in the *Squire's Tale*. However, nor is he presented as an 'ideal' king. Chaucer presents an image of an apathetic king, and the marginalisation of Cambyuskan is solidified in the poem's concluding summary of how the narrative will progress. Chaucer evidently thought the *Squire's Tale* would progress by tracing the careers of Cambyuskan's children, rather than of

Cambyuskan himself. Whereas the narrator will 'speke of [...] How that this faucon gat hire love' (V.652-654), will 'speken of aventures' (V.659), will 'speke of Algarsyf,/How that he wan Theodora' (V.663-64) and will 'speke of Cambalo/That faught in lystes' (V.666-67), he will only 'telle yow of Cambyuskan,/That in his time many a citee wan' (V.661-62). When mentioning Cambyuskan, the narrator distances him from the audience by using 'in his time', while he also switches verb – from 'speke' to 'telle' – which lexically distinguishes Cambyuskan from his family. There is also a degree of ambiguity to the line: is the narrator going to tell about how Cambyuskan won many a city, or is he going to tell about Cambyuskan, a man who has already won many a city? The implication of this passage is that the subsidiary characters – Algarsif, the falcon, and Cambalo – will assume a more dominant role in the ensuing narrative than Cambyuskan.[75]

'[W]hat may been youre help?' (V.459): Supplanting Monarchs

The regal figures in both poems are thus marginalised; while neither is malevolent or irredeemably flawed, both are presented as unable or unwilling to control speech or to judge the matters each poem raises. However, in both poems attempts are made to supplant the regal figure's voice: through the parliament in the *Boke of Cupide* and

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[75] As an aside, it is interesting to note that the various continuations of the *Squire's Tale* fall into two distinct categories. John Lane's continuation focuses solely on Cambyuskan who dominates the subsequent narrative: he rides the flying horse; he leads his men into battle; and he determines the arrangements for his children's marriage. In Canto Nono Cambyuskan is finally 'stabb'd' (426), dies, and there is a funeral held 'with simple solmne obsequies royal' (484). However, any hopes on the reader's part that other characters could begin to flourish are soon dashed when Cambyuskan is miraculously brought back to life. The other category is represented by the work of Boyse, Ogle and Sterling. This text sidelines Cambyuskan and narrates instead the military adventures of Triamond, Cambina, Camballo, and Canacee; Algarsif's use of the magic horse to rescue Theodora; and Camballo tracking down the tercelet and persuading him to return to the falcon. The narrative even concludes with the line 'Cambyuscan saw his noble offspring shine' (stanza 97). While individual tastes may vary, I would argue that Lane's poem – introduced by Furnivall as a 'miserable continuation' with 'no merit' (pp.xi-xii) – is a deeply unsatisfying narrative due to its focus on Cambyuskan, while Boyse, Ogle, and Sterling manage to produce an invigorating narrative which benefits from having a diversity of narrative strands.

through Canacee in the *Squire's Tale*. It has long been recognised that a shift takes place between part one and part two of the *Squire's Tale*. For example, Lesley Kordecki suggests that 'the tale shifts from masculine speech to feminine, from romance to lament', while Davenport argues that there is a shift from 'narrative' to 'complaint'.[76] The existence of this shift is most clearly seen in the opposing characters of Canacee – who dominates the second part – and Cambyuskan – who dominates the first part. At the beginning of part two, Canacee 'cleped on hir maistresse [...] And seyde that hire liste for to ryse [...] "I wol [...] arise for me leste/Ne lenger for to slepe, and walke aboute"' (V.374-81). These lines emphasise Canacee's willingness to act: her words are reported directly, unlike Cambyuskan's; the verbs 'liste' and 'ryse' are repeated for emphasis; and the modal of power, 'wol', is used by Canacee to affirm her right to act according to her 'leste'. Canacee then does act: she 'walketh esily a pas' (V.388) into a garden and makes use of her magic ring to listen to the lament of the falcon. Canacee's actions here contrast unfavourably with Cambyuskan's treatment of the 'hors of bras'. The horse could 'esily [...] Wher-so yow lyst [...] Beren youre body into every place/To which youre herte wilneth for to pace' (V.115-20), but no-one in part one 'lyst' to test the horse. The horse was stripped of its significance and became a debating point, rather than a flying contraption. Canacee, by contrast, is able to utilise her ring's ability to remove linguistic difference as a barrier to understanding.

Present in Kordecki's work, and also mentioned by Kathryn L. Lynch, Angela Jane Weisl, and Heffernan, amongst other critics, is the assumption that the shift between the two parts of the *Squire's Tale* is based around gender: a movement

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[76] Lesley Kordecki, 'Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*: Animal Discourse, Women, and Subjectivity', *Chaucer Review*, 36, 3 (2002), 277-97 (p. 285); W. A. Davenport, *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988), pp. 49-50.

from the masculine first part to the feminine second.[77] There is certainly evidence to support this thesis; Canacee and Elpheta, Cambyuskan's wife, are mentioned briefly in part one of the *Squire's Tale*, but every other character is male. By contrast, with the exception of the summary at the end, part two is dominated by women: Canacee, the female falcon, and Canacee's serving girls are the only characters who feature. However, such an interpretation of the shift is somewhat reductive, as it relies on Canacee and Cambyuskan standing as the archetypal man and woman. This seems unsustainable when set alongside the shift from passivity to activity outlined above, as there is nothing archetypically passive about men, nor archetypically active about women (indeed, the stereotype is the exact opposite). That the shift is a movement from passivity to activity, rather than masculinity to femininity, is supported by how figurative language is redeployed in the poem's second part. While there are several examples of this redeployment, one particularly revealing instance of it is the stone simile, which appears in both parts of the poem: the horse stands in the court 'stille as any stoon' (V.171), and the falcon falls to the ground '[a]nd lyth aswowne, deed and lyk a stoon' (V.474). The force of these similes is, however, significantly different: the horse is like a stone because it is inanimate and lifeless, but the falcon is like a stone because she has collapsed due to 'lak of blood' (V.430) and from an excess of activity – she has beaten herself 'til the red blode/Ran endelong the tree' (V.415-16), and 'she shrighte alwey so loude' (V.422). The two uses of the simile speak to the overall difference between the two parts of the poem: the first part is static and set in the court of the passive Cambyuskan, while the second part is dynamic and involves the active Canacee.

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[77] Lynch, 'East Meets West', p. 530; Heffernan, *Orient in Chaucer*, p. 73; Angela Jane Weisl, *Conquering the Realm of Femeny: Gender and Genre in Chaucer's Romances* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 50-69.

Canacee comes to supplant Cambyuskan not only through assuming the active role in the narrative, but also through assuming the regal role in protecting the falcon. Canacee and Cambyuskan are described in similar terms: 'faire Canacee' (V.485) and 'fressh Canacee' (V.384) echo descriptions of Cambyuskan as being 'fair' (V.25) and 'fressh' (V.23), while Canacee's acting 'piteously' (V.440) echoes the description of the 'pitous' Cambyuskan (V.20). Canacee, unlike Cambyuskan, get to prove her piteous nature in demonstrating pity for the falcon. Canacee assumes the role of lordship in a more significant respect by showing some understanding of the etiquette of gift-giving. Cambyuskan's treatment of the emissary fractures conventional gift exchange. As Marcel Mauss famously noted, gifts are not 'voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous'; they are 'obligatory and interested'.[78] They are associated with three particular social obligations: the giving of a gift; the receiving of a gift; and the reciprocation of a gift. All three create a 'pattern of reciprocal and symmetrical rights' which function as a social bond.[79] Cambyuskan fails as a receiver and reciprocator of gifts; he evidently does not understand the value of the horse – hence his request for its 'vertu' to be repeated – and so he cannot formally receive it, while he also shows little interest in reciprocating the gifts. Canacee, by contrast, is given the gift of the ring and uses it successfully, both to speak to the falcon and to provide herbs to help heal the bird. There is also the implication that Canacee is able to reciprocate the gift; the narrator mentions in passing that the emissary 'on the daunce [...] gooth with Canacee' (V.277), possibly implying a future romance between the two,[80] marriage alliances being a common

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[78] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by Ian Cunnison (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 1.
[79] Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 11.
[80] This romance is played out in Wharton's continuation.

way to cement the obligations inherent in gift-giving.[81] Canacee thus performs

functions that Cambyuskan fails to do: she is an active presence in the poem who can

realise the potential of the gift, help individuals in need, and establish social bonds.

In the *Boke of Cupide*, the regal figure is supplanted by a parliament of birds.

After the debate, the nightingale asks the birds that 'yow alle [...] do me ryght' (269)

and in response

> Then spake oon brid for alle by assent:
> "This mater asketh good avysement,
> ffor we be fewe briddes her in fere,
> And soth hit it is the cukkow is not here,
> And therefore we wol haue a parlement". (271-77)

This initial description seems promising; a formal structure is decided upon – the

parliament – within which multiple voices can be heard. The *Boke of Cupide* mirrors

here contemporary parliamentary practice: the 'oon brid' who speaks 'for alle by

assent' could be seen to be modelled on the role of the speaker as he or she is a

representative voice for the 'fewe briddes' gathered there. Parliament in the 1380s

was 'a forum that tried to reach communicative resolution in place of blows',[82] and

so the audience of the *Boke of Cupide* could readily hope that the parliament at the

poem's end would resolve the debate and propound a single authoritative 'iugement'

(279) superseding the flawed judgements of the cuckoo, the nightingale, and the

narrator. Clanvowe even provides a substantial amount of authenticating detail to

impress upon the reader the possibility that the parliament will actually happen. So,

it will be convened on:

> The morowe of Seynt Valentynes Day
> Vnder the maple that is feire and grene,
> Before the chambre wyndow of the Quene
> At Wodestok, vpon the grene lay. (282-85)

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[81] Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 11.
[82] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 132.

This passage provides for the audience a specific date for the parliament, a specific location with its own specific topography, and a specific royal audience who will observe the parliament.

However, the specificity which appears to be offered in this paragraph proves to be illusory. Partly, the specificity is illusory because it occurs within a dream, and we are reminded of this with the sudden termination of the poem five lines after this passage when the nightingale sings 'so lovde, that with that song I awoke' (290). But beyond the illusory nature of the dreamscape, the specific features Clanvowe offers in this description are rendered problematic. For example, although the line 'the morowe of Seynt Valentynes Day' ostensibly provides a specific date for the parliament, the line in fact is ambiguous.[83] The 'morowe of' in Middle English could mean either 'morning of' or 'day after'.[84] Two of the four manuscripts which preserve these lines, Tanner 346 and the Findern Manuscript, emend the line to read the 'the morowe aft*er* Seynt Valentyns day'[85] which, while unambiguous, does not scan and so is probably not authorial. The day is further obfuscated by the problematic dating of Valentine's Day itself. The historical evidence suggests it fell in the medieval period on the 14th of February,[86] but literary works by poets such as Chaucer, Oton de Graunson, and Pardo (all contemporaries of Clanvowe) imply through their descriptions of the natural world that Valentine's Day falls in late April

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[83] The problematic nature of the line has not always been noted by critics; Chamberlain, for example, confidently declares that the 'judgement will be given on Saint Valentine's Day'. See Chamberlain, 'Chaucer's Cuckoo', p. 57.

[84] s.v. 'morwe', *MED*.

[85] Quoted from *The Findern Manuscript: Cambridge University Library, MS. Ff.1.6*, intro. by Richard Beadle and A. E. B. Owen (London: Scolar Press, 1978), f. 28.

[86] *A Handbook of Dates: For Students of British History*, ed. by C. R. Cheney, rev. by Michael Jones, new edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 86.

or early May.[87] To complicate matters further, Clanvowe suggests earlier in the *Boke of Cupide* that the birds find their partners 'in Marche, vponn Seynt Valentynes day' (80). This is again emended in Tanner 346 to read in 'Feviryere', but again this disrupts the scansion.[88] Henry Ansgar Kelly only briefly addresses the problematic date of March in Clanvowe's poem, and argues that Clanvowe assigns Saint Valentine's to March either because he misread the date '*(xvi) kl MARTII*' or because he 'simply assumed' from reading Chaucer's work that the feast 'occurred around [...] the beginning of spring'.[89]

However, Kelly's argument about the *Boke of Cupide* is not convincing, because it does not allow for the possibility that Clanvowe was deliberately attempting to unsettle his audience by incorporating ambiguity into his description. For, Clanvowe's seemingly specific date, 'the morowe of Seynt Valentynes day', could be interpreted as the 14th or 15th of February, as some unspecified point in March, or even as a date in late-April, early-May. And, presumably, considering that the commonest varieties of maple are deciduous and don't come into leaf until April,[90] only on the last of these date ranges could the parliament be held under a maple 'that is feire and grene'. As well as undermining the specificity of the date and topography, the identity of the audience at the parliament is also problematic. Barr states that at the parliament 'Queen Anne is chosen to arbitrate',[91] but this is an evident misreading of the passage as the queen is either a passive observer or even absent entirely as there is no necessity for her to be occupying her chamber. I quote

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[87] For a discussion of these works and Valentine's Day, see Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Chaucer and the Cult of Saint Valentine* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1986).
[88] Surveying the MS evidence, Skeat concludes 'It looks as if the author really *did* write *Marche*!'. *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), p. 527, note to l. 80.
[89] Kelly, *Chaucer and the Cult of Saint Valentine*, pp. 129-30.
[90] Keith Rushforth, *The Mitchell Beazley Pocket Guide to Trees* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 1980), p. 156. I am assuming it would be a field maple, as that is apparently the 'only maple native to Britain'.
[91] Barr, *Socioliterary Practice*, p. 186.

this not to cast aspersions on Barr's critical ability, but rather because it exposes Clanvowe's method. Clanvowe attempts to mislead the audience into thinking that they are being offered a specific image – a Valentine's Day parliament, under the green maple, arbitrated by the Queen – which turns out to be illusory.

As well as revealing its specificity to be illusory, Clanvowe goes further in undermining the authority of this parliament by questioning whether it has the necessary mandate. Giancarlo has shown that as the English parliament developed over the course of the fourteenth-century 'the appearance of unity and unanimous assent was expressly sought' and came to be crucial in legitimising the judgements that the body made.[92] This unity was figured in the single, representative voice of the speaker of the commons. An emphasis on representativeness and unanimity does appear in the *Boke of Cupide*: having heard the nightingale's words, 'oon brid' speaks 'for alle by assent' (271). However, this bird begins by undermining his own authority to speak:

> 'ffor we be fewe briddes her in fere,
> And soth hit is the cukkow is not here,
> And therfore we wol haue a parlement.
>
> And ther at shal the egle be our lorde,
> And other perys that ben of recorde,
> And the cukkow shal be after sent,
> And ther shal be yeven iugement,
> Or elles we shul make summe acorde.' (273-80)

The bird who speaks 'for alle' acknowledges that actually he only has the assent of 'fewe briddes', and does not have the support of the cuckoo. The fact that the cuckoo is not present is particularly problematic as typically in the debate poem tradition both debaters agree on their judge. So in *Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne* both the knight and the lady agree that the 'king of Bohemia' should be their judge; in *Le*

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[92] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 55.

Jugement du Roi de Navarre, both Guillaume and the lady agree that the king of

Navarre will be a 'powerful judge'; and in the *Owl and the Nightingale* both birds

agree to be judged by 'Maister Nichole of Guildeforde'.[93] The phrase 'for alle by

assent' is devalued in this section; 'alle' here is shown to be a limited sample which

fails to represent the view of the cuckoo.

The bird also seems unconvinced as to the efficacy of the parliament itself.

His description that at the parliament 'ther shal be yeven iugement' seems

unequivocal, but it is immediately modified by the next line which raises that

possibility that only 'summe acorde' will be made, a less specific aim for the

parliament. Equally, the bird is uncertain whether the necessary unanimity will be

present at the parliament. There is, for example, no guarantee in the bird's words that

the cuckoo will be present; he will 'be after sent', but if he does not appear then the

parliament's authority as a representative body is fatally compromised. Moreover,

while in the ideal conception of a parliament an elected figure should function as 'a

representative with mediatory authority between sovereign and subjects',[94] as the

tercelet is in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, this bird in Clanvowe's poem is

concerned solely with appointing noble birds – 'the egle' and 'other perys that ben of

recorde' – to oversee the parliament. There is no indication given as to how the

common birds will be represented, or whether there will be any mediating presence

at the parliament at all. Overall, therefore, this concluding description of the

parliament serves to extend Clanvowe's earlier exploration of the problems of

judgement. Whereas previously he had questioned the authority, independence and

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[93] Machaut, 'Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne', p. 19; Guillaume de Machaut, *The Judgement of the King of Navarre*, ed. and trans. by R. Barton Palmer (London: Garland Publishing, 1988), p. 49; *Owl and the Nightingale*, l. 191.
[94] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 159.

competency of specific individuals, in this description he suggests that the ability of official bodies to produce judgements is similarly impaired.

Canacee similarly fails to ultimately supplant Cambyuskan. While this chapter has previously explored Canacee's realisation of the gift's potential, it should be stressed that she fails to realise its full potential. The *Squire's Tale* is about, in Fyler's words, 'domesticating the exotic',[95] and the ring offers one possibility of such domestication as it allows foreign languages to be incorporated into Tsarev. To an extent, Canacee is able to overcome the barrier of linguistic difference with the ring and she thus, as Susan Crane argues, 'makes the exotic available in a series of metaphorical shifts from animal to human and from species to species'.[96] While Crane's argument is compelling, the extent to which Canacee makes the exotic available is debatable. At the end of the second part, the narrator describes how Canacee brings the bird home:

> And by hire beddes heed she made a mewe
> And covered it with veluettes blewe,
> In signe of trouthe that is in wommen sene.
> And al withoute, the mewe is peynted grene,
> In which were peynted alle thise false fowles. (V.643-47)

In these lines, rather than bringing the bird to court and integrating it into society, Canacee constructs new barriers to separate the bird from her world: the 'mewe' is a physical barrier between the bird and Canacee's bed chamber; the green colour defines it as a space of nature, thus distinguishing it from the court; the space is defined as feminine through the 'veluettes blewe'; while the depictions of 'false fowles' reaffirms the falcon's animalistic roots. In her detailed commentary on the 'mewe', Weisl has argued that it 'keeps the faithful women and faithless men

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[95] John M. Fyler, 'Domesticating the Exotic in the *Squire's Tale'*, *ELH*, 55 (1988), 1-26.
[96] Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 144.

separated' and that it prevents the 'public, masculine world' from uniting with 'the feminine, interior one'.[97] While I broadly agree with Weisl's argument, the emphasis on gender is too limiting. For, as well as reinforcing gender difference, the mewe also enforces social difference and species difference. Canacee's attempts to make 'the exotic available' ultimately fail; just as Cambyuskan's passivity failed to integrate the horse into court life, Canacee's active construction of the mewe segregates the bird from the court, preventing the realisation of the gift's potential to produce a cohesive society.

Canacee can also be argued to possess a significant character flaw: her attitude to speech borders on the naively trusting. Canacee trusts both the emissary – whom she accepts gifts from and dances with – and the falcon – whose story she reacts to piteously. However, the text problematises Canacee's trust as it elides the characters of the emissary and the unfaithful tercelet. A series of verbal echoes encourages the audience of the *Squire's Tale* to associate the two characters. So, the emissary 'cam thus sodeynly' (V.86) and acts '[w]ith so heigh reverence and obeisance' (V.93), while the narrator describes how '[a]cordaunt to his wordes was his cheere' (V.103). Moreover, in attempting to reproduce his words, the narrator says '[y]et seye I this, as to commune entente:/Thus much amounteth al that evere he mente' (V.107-08). Similarly, the tercelet, who 'sodeynly' loved a kite, is 'loved' by the falcon 'for his obeisance' (V.562), and she describes how he is 'as by his cheere,/So lyke a gentil lovere' (V.546-7). In addition, the falcon says of their wooing that 'And in this wise he served his entente/That, save the feend, noon wiste what he mente' (521-22). Both characters, therefore, are described as acting

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[97] Weisl, *Conquering the Realm of Femeny*, p. 68.

'sodeynly', both are praised for their ability to adopt the proper 'cheere' and humility, while also what both of them 'mente' is obscured.

These verbal parallels are significant as they force the audience to re-evaluate the character of the emissary. While the audience has already noted the selectivity of his speech, the parallels imply that he, like the tercelet, is a deliberate dissimulator. This has the unnerving effect of forcing the audience to reflect on the courtier who feared that the 'hors of bras' was 'the Grekes hors Synon'. While he initially seemed to be a paranoid delusional, the latter part of the tale comes to offers a tacit sanctioning of this paranoia. Through the rather clumsy syntax of the line prominence is given to Sinon,[98] who elsewhere in Chaucer's corpus is described as the 'dissymulour' (VII.3228), whose 'feynynge' (LGW 934) and whose 'chere' (HF 1.154) was employed to destroy Troy. Sinon mirrors the tercelet – whose 'feynyng' (V.556) and 'chere' (V.546) destroy the falcon – and, perhaps, foreshadows the emissary's 'cheere' (V.103) destroying the city of Tsarev. We, as an audience, become suspicious of the emissary's intentions, and we are thus likened to the courtier whose paranoia we formerly judged to be ridiculous.

Canacee's position also becomes problematic as her responses to the knight and the falcon can be read as mutually incompatible. On the one hand, by accepting the advances of the emissary, Canacee accepts the established notions behind literary courtship: that appearance and attractive rhetoric are needed to initiate a relationship. On the other hand, by sheltering the falcon in a 'mewe' with images of 'false fowles', Canacee gives tacit assent to the falcon's account of her destructive relationship, a relationship which is destructive precisely because the female accepts that the male is '[s]o lyk a gentil lovere' (V.546) and fails to recognise his

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[98] The figure of Sinon is explored in depth in Craig A. Berry, 'Flying Horses: Classical Authority in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*', *ELH*, 68, 2 (2001), 287-313 (esp. pp. 297-305).

underlying 'doubleness' (V.543). It could be argued that the structure of the poem is designed so that the falcon's complaint functions as a corrective to Canacee's attitude serving to caution her from embracing the exotic. However, there is little evidence that Canacee is changed by the falcon's words; there is no indication that she is going to repel the knight, while it is also clear from the poem's end that Canacee is going to keep the ring. The ring, like the emissary and the tercelet, is another foreign and disruptive element within the narrative, and the reader is reminded of this when the poem echoes for a third time the 'mente'/'entente' rhyme: Canacee hears the birds singing and 'right anon she wiste what they mente/Right by hir song, and knew al hire entente' (V.399-400). By retaining the ring, Canacee continues to owe a debt to the emissary and continues to embrace the exotic, despite the falcon's cautionary tale.

This is not, however, to argue that Canacee is an hypocrite for embracing the falcon and the knight. For she is constrained by social and generic expectations. Kordecki has argued that Canacee and the falcon are relegated to 'the passive marginality of the lady of romance' in a work which is ultimately defined by the male subjectivity of its writer and narrator.[99] Kordecki's argument is plausible; the conventions of courtly romance require Canacee to accept the advances of the knight, while forbidding her the autonomy to reject the ring. However, it is not merely generic constraints that impinge upon Canacee. For, if Canacee were to reject the ring, or accept it but not reciprocate it, she would be guilty of breaking the social bond established through gift exchange. Moreover, if she were to reject the ring she would sever herself from the falcon. This is unthinkable as she has already promised the falcon that 'as I am a kynges doghter trewe', she 'wolde amenden' the falcon's

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[99] Kordecki, 'Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*', p. 295.

'disese' (V.465-68). Canacee feels that as a royal daughter there is a social obligation on her to care for those in distress and be sympathetic to their plight.[100] Canacee thus contrasts with the cuckoo and the nightingale. The birds are autonomous individuals; they are not under the control of the God of Love and they can be judged solely on their actions. Canacee is not an autonomous individual, as various generic and social obligations impinge on her. She is consequently unable to avoid the mutually incompatible roles she is assigned: the object of the emissary's wooing, and the carer for the distraught falcon.

'[W]ith that song I awoke' (*Boke of Cupide*, 290): Revisiting the Aesthetics of Irresolution

The *Boke of Cupide* and the *Squire's Tale* thus both lack any authoritative, powerful voice. Both depict problematic speech, but neither poem allows any character to authoritatively judge that speech. In the *Squire's Tale*, we are left unsure of the truthfulness and transparency of the emissary's speech, while we are also made aware of the dangers of unrestrained speech leading to paranoia. In the *Boke of Cupide*, we come to understand that truth is a subjective concept, and speech is inherently subject to attack and deconstruction. Through their exploration of speech, along with other features of the narrative, both poems problematise the process of forming judgements. Each poem is littered with judgements which while seemingly appealing and definitive, are eventually contradicted, questioned and dismantled. And the audience is implicated in this process of judging: the audience mocks the courtier in the *Squire's Tale* and initially reacts positively to the *Boke of Cupide's*

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[100] Canacee could be usefully read alongside Queen Anne, another royal female who carved out for herself a role as intercessor and carer for those in jeopardy. See Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, pp. 95-119.

parliament, but in both cases the audience is made to reflect on and reassess their judgements. The audience is thus made self-conscious about the difficulties inherent in producing judgements and in seeking resolutions. Both poems thus not only end with unanswered questions, but they caution us from thinking those questions can be easily resolved.

The topic of irresolution has been of constant interest to critics during the last century.[101] As early as the 1920s, Robert Kilburn Root suggested that Chaucer's decision to retain the 'half told' *Squire's Tale* was because he recognised 'the power of the incomplete'.[102] Subsequent critics have expanded the term 'incomplete' to analyse not only texts where the narrative is unfinished, but also texts which are thematically unresolved. Works by Rosemarie P. McGerr, Larry Sklute and Paul Strohm have focused on Chaucer's corpus, arguing respectively that 'Chaucer's poems inscribe the problems of reading comprehensively', that Chaucer was dissatisfied with how 'his inherited narrative forms embodied human experience', and that Chaucer uses 'separate and distinctive voices as a means of asserting social difference'.[103] Other works have focused on individual genres; Thomas L. Reed, Jr, has focused on the debate genre, and argued that the debate form's 'aesthetics of irresolution' is 'founded on an appreciation of worldly variety and individuality and buttressed by certain recreational needs', while F. Anne Payne has suggested that the

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[101] The following studies deploy a range of synonyms for 'irresolute', including: incomplete, open-ended, unfinished, inconclusive, and resistant to closure. For the purposes of this overview I am conflating these terms; see each cited work for an account of each term's specific nuances.
[102] Robert Kilburn Root, *The Poetry of Chaucer: A Guide to its Study and Appreciation*, rev. edn (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1922), p. 269.
[103] Rosemarie P. McGerr, *Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), p. 1; Larry Sklute, *Virtue of Necessity: Inconclusiveness and Narrative Form in Chaucer's Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), p. 3.

Menippean Satire directs the reader's attention to 'intellectual confrontations' and 'multivoiced conflicts'.[104]

Both the *Squire's Tale* and the *Boke of Cupide* are irresolute works.[105] But what I want to explore in the final sections of this project is the extent to which their irresolution can be read as encoding a response to the socio-political climate of the day. The influential study of Reed argues that irresolution transcends specific historical moments, and is linked instead to specific forms and genres. Reed argues that debate poems produced between 1200 and 1450 are characterised by a 'formal and ideological irresolution' which reproduces 'the experiential complexity of the human condition'.[106] For Reed, this 'aesthetics of irresolution' has a ludic function, as irresolute poems turn 'difficulty into relief'.[107] The argument that irresolution was a playful device existing in literary and scholastic works prior to Richard II's reign is impossible to dispute, and it is certainly true that the traditions to which the *Boke of Cupide* and the *Squire's Tale* belong incorporate irresolution. For example, in the *Owl and the Nightingale*, the choice of the ambiguous 'Maister Nichole of Guldeforde'[108] to judge the debate hints to the reader that closure will not be achieved and, indeed, as the two birds head to Portesham the lack of closure is realised, as the narrator states playfully:

Ne can ic eu no more telle -

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[104] Thomas L. Reed, Jr, *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), p. 22; F. Anne Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 209; Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, p. 168.

[105] The irresolute nature of both of these texts has been previously noted. Seth Lerer, for example, notes that the *Boke of Cupide* is 'truly an open-ended poem', while Strohm similar argues that the poem 'leaves us with multiple voices which it refuses to subordinate one to another'. Equally, Weisl suggests that '[t]he impulse against conclusion runs rampant in the *Squire's Tale*'. See Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 81; Strohm, 'Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Writers', p. 93; Weisl, *Conquering the Realm of Femenye*, p. 50.

[106] Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, p. 2, 19.

[107] Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, p. 19.

[108] *Owl and the Nightingale*, l. 191.

Her nis na more of þis spelle.[109]

Additionally, Machaut's pair of poems *Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne* and *Le Jugement du Roi de Navarre* undermine the notion of closure. The earlier poem ostensibly reaches a resolution as the king of Bohemia declares that the knight, whose lady love has left him, has greater sorrow than the lady, whose faithful lover has died. However, the latter poem rescinds this judgement by having the king of Navarre rule against 'Guillaume', who has 'sinned against women' by composing the earlier work.[110]

The composite romance genre is similarly open-ended; it has in Jennifer R. Goodman's words 'an inexhaustible appetite for marvels',[111] although this inexhaustibility could also be applied to the genre's appetite for new characters, new locations, and new narrative strands as well as new 'marvels'. The composite romance genre's need for a proliferation of multiple stories is perhaps best exemplified by the Arabian *One Thousand and One Nights*, a work not known in medieval England, but which seems to have been the distant source for romances such as *Cléomadès* and *Meliacin*.[112] In the *One Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade's continued existence depends upon her being able to tell part of a new story every day in order to keep her violent husband in perpetual suspense. Each day's story ends without a conclusion, while the cycle of stories threatens to continue until either Scheherazade or her husband dies.

The manuscript evidence also provides support for the idea that readers – particularly in the fifteenth century – recognised irresolution and appreciated it as a

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[109] *Owl and the Nightingale*, ll. 1793-94.
[110] Machaut, *The Judgement of the King of Navarre*, p. 37.
[111] Jennifer R. Goodman, 'Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the Rise of Chivalry', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 5 (1983), 127-36 (p. 129).
[112] Jones, '*The Squire's Tale*', esp. p. 365, fn. 1.

timeless literary device to promote debate. Julia Boffey has argued that manuscripts of 'Chauceriana' frequently preserve dream visions together and these collections create 'a kind of textual dialogue in which certain themes are debated and certain forms are subjected to interpretation', and this dialogue 'invited readers outside the primary audience to enter into and perhaps extend the debates which were presumably of moment at first only for limited coteries'.[113] The individual dream visions themselves frequently lack resolution, while their association in manuscripts with other related works serves to open up novel avenues of interpretation. This encourages further debates about the poem's meanings, rather than foreclosing that debate. This is certainly apparent in the manuscript tradition of the *Boke of Cupide*. This essay has already discussed how the *Boke of Cupide* can be seen to influence the *Parliament of Love* from Fairfax 16, and if these two poems are read together they provide divergent views on where authority lies and how it should be practised. Moreover, in Arch. Selden B. 24 and the Findern Manuscript, the *Boke of Cupide* is followed by Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, a poem which also considers questions about love and the make-up and jurisdiction of representative bodies.[114] The three other manuscripts in which the *Boke of Cupide* survives – Bodley 638, Fairfax 16, and Tanner 346[115] – also contain the *Parliament of Fowls*, although while the *Boke of Cupide* always precedes it, the two poems are not presented consecutively.[116]

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[113] Boffey, 'English Dream Poems' p. 115, 121.

[114] In the Findern Manuscript the two poems are separated by a short poem on f. 28v, although this could have been added later. Chaucer's and Clanvowe's poems also look like they were written in different hands, although this is typical of the Findern Manuscript which has a range of scribes. The two poems appear next to each other in the same hand in Arch. Selden B. 24, although there is a leaf missing which would presumably have the final lines of *Boke of Cupide* and the opening lines of *Parliament of Fowls*. See *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and 'The Kingis Quair': A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Arch. Selden B. 24*, intro by Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997); *The Findern Manuscript*, ff. 22-42v.

[115] For a discussion of Tanner 346, see Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers*, pp. 57-84.

[116] See *Manuscript Bodley 638: A Facsimile*, intro. by Pamela Robinson (Suffolk: Boydell-Brewer, 1982); *Bodleian Library: MS Fairfax 16*; *Manuscript Tanner 346: A Facsimile*, intro. by Pamela Robinson (Suffolk: Boydell-Brewer, 1980).

There is no equivalent evidence for the manuscript context of the *Squire's Tale*, as it does not exist independently of the *Canterbury Tales*. However, two of Chaucer's works closely related to it – the *Legend of Good Women* and *Anelida and Arcite*,[117] which are both unfinished – can also be found in manuscripts alongside the *Boke of Cupide*. MS Arch. Selden B. 24 has the *Legend* following the *Parliament of Fowls*, Bodley 638 and Fairfax 16 have it preceding the *Parliament of Fowls*,[118] Tanner 346 has it at the beginning of the collection, while the Findern Manuscript contains only an extract from the work – namely, the tale of Thisbe. Findern also contains only a part of *Anelida and Arcite* preceding the tale of Thisbe, Bodley 638 and Fairfax 16 have *Anelida and Arcite* preceding the *Boke of Cupide*, while Tanner 346 has it between Lydgate's 'Complaynt of a Loveres lyf' and Chaucer's 'Complaint of Mars'.[119] If the *Squire's Tale* had circulated independently, these are the sort of manuscripts it may have appeared in.

Works by Chaucer and Clanvowe, therefore, along with related fifteenth-century works by Lydgate, Hoccleve, James I and others, appear alongside each other in manuscripts drawing attention to their shared stylistic features, and allowing them to speak to each other concerning a number of shared themes, including: love and courtly etiquette; governance and forms of representative authority; and authorial identity and literary creation. The plurality of judgements already contained in a work like the *Boke of Cupide* is thus multiplied further in its manuscript context: in a collection such as Fairfax 16, the poem exists alongside other poems which contain: chaotic accounts of bird parliaments; depictions of the God of Love as either

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[117] I argue below that the *Squire's Tale* and the *Legend* may have been produced contemporaneously. For the parallels between the *Squire's Tale* and *Anelida and Arcite*, see Alfred David, 'Recycling *Anelida and Arcite*: Chaucer as a Source for Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 1 (1984), 105-15.
[118] There are evident connections between these collections of Chauceriana, and it it is likely that Bodley 638 and Fairfax 16 derive from a common ancestor.
[119] The poem is absent from MS Arch. Selden B. 24.

an authoritative ruler or a tyrannical figure; complaints about women or Love; and intextextual references to the works of other poets, typically Chaucer. This suggests that fifteenth-century readers were attracted to poems which explored complex cultural, social and political issues, but which did not necessarily resolve them.

'I can for tene sey not oon worde more' (209): The *Boke of Cupide* and the Politics of Irresolution

I would not, therefore, seek to downplay the extent to which the irresolution present in the *Squire's Tale* and the *Boke of Cupide* is inherited from the poems' generic tradition. Clearly, a text like the *Boke of Cupide* has an universal appeal in its account of whether love is empowering or constraining. However, that the poems are indebted to a broader generic tradition and that they were enjoyed by audiences beyond the 'limited coteries' that Boffey describes as responding to the poems at their original production,[120] does not preclude them from also having historical resonances and from being of particular significance to their original coterie audience. The *Boke of Cupide* was composed 'between 1386-91', and this was a period when parliaments – and representative bodies – had assumed a particular prominence in the popular imagination.[121] This was the period in which a new principle was established: 'an act of parliament, with the assent of the commonalty, was stronger and carried more weight than the wishes of a king who was divinely

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[120] Boffey, 'English Dream Poems', p. 121.
[121] On dating, see V. J. Scattergood, 'The Authorship of *The Boke of Cupide*', *Anglia*, 82 (1964), 137-49 (p. 149).

appointed'.[122] Given this new principle, it is tempting to read Clanvowe's parliament within the context of the parliamentary sessions of the late 1380s.

This project has already summarised the Merciless Parliament of 1388, and explored some of the issues surrounding it.[123] This period was marked out by the fear of foreign invasion, the arrogance and impulsiveness of the king, questions about the nature of good counsel, and the emerging power of parliament and other representative bodies. But, it was also a period in which the benefits of moderation came to the fore. In the aftermath of the 1388 parliament, the lords appellant were in the ascendant; they had the public onside, and they had weakened the king. However, a mixture of military defeat and poor financial planning lead to public disillusionment with them. More significantly, Richard wisely sought to address the issue of social unrest, and his active and thoughtful intervention on the issue of livery badges gained him renewed support, support that was enhanced by his acting with, in Saul's words, 'stability and moderation'.[124] Had Richard not taken this more moderate and thoughtful posture, his reign may have been brought to a premature conclusion. As it was, Richard was able to declare on the 3rd of May 1389 that his minority was over and that he would henceforth take control of the country. It is certainly unthinkable that Clanvowe would have been unaware of these issues. Clanvowe, as one of Richard II's chamber knights, 'was certainly in attendance on the king at Westminster [...] when Gloucester, Arundel and Warwick made their submission' in November 1387 and it is probable that he was with the king at other points between 1386 and 1389.[125] Moreover, four of Clanvowe's fellow chamber

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[122] Dodd, 'Crown, Magnates and Gentry', p. 261.
[123] See chapter 2, pp. 99-102.
[124] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 203.
[125] Seymour, 'Sir John Clanvowe', p. 46.

knights were executed in 1388, although there is no evidence that he himself was ever at risk, possibly because his Lollard leanings spared him from the lords' rage.[126]

In his *Boke of Cupide*, Clanvowe seems to be closely aware of the contemporary political context within which he was writing, and the underlying structure of his poem appears to reflect that context. For, in the poem the regal figure's silence leads to confrontations between his supporter, the nightingale, and his opponent, the cuckoo, who fail to reach a compromise. As a consequence of this lack of resolution, a representative body is convened in an attempt to judge the issues raised by the two birds. Bowers has suggested in an aside that the parliament 'can be read as a reference to the Merciless Parliament of 1388'.[127] There are some interesting parallels, most notably the emphasis on the 'lordes' in Clanvowe's work, and the potential non-appearance of the cuckoo, which matches the non-appearance of Neville, de la Pole, de Vere and (initially) Tresilian at the Merciless Parliament. However, the resonances are not overwhelming; Clanvowe's parliament could equally be said to represent the 1386 assembly – at which the lords similarly dominated – or it could more broadly reflect the 'great council' that was established, as this was presided over by lords 'drawn from all parts of the political spectrum'.[128] Clanvowe's parliament does not, however, have to reflect any specific assembly; what is significant is that it reflects a moment when representative bodies were functioning independently of monarchical control: the 'egle' is the new 'lorde' and the queen as the representative of regal authority is either sidelined or is absent entirely. Of course, as this chapter has already argued, Clanvowe does not have faith

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[126] Seymour notes that all the Lollard knights were spared and suggests '[t]heir more sober lifestyles and reputations deflected criticism'. Seymour, 'Sir John Clanvowe', p. 46.
[127] John M. Bowers, 'Three Readings of *The Knight's Tale*: Sir John Clanvowe, Geoffrey Chaucer, and James I of Scotland', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 34, 2 (2004), 279-307 (p. 281).
[128] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 162.

in this parliament; he questions whether it will ever happen, while he also undermines its legitimacy by implying that it lacks the necessary mandate and has no representative authority. For Clanvowe, therefore, a parliament independent of the king will not be able to prosper successfully and will not resolve the central issues of the period.

By associating his parliament with the poem's unresolved status, Clanvowe is no longer merely documenting his contemporary political climate, he is actively responding to it by discounting parliament as an effective body in resolving social tension. Patterson has argued that the silence at the poem's end – both of the cuckoo and the parliament – derives from Clanvowe's ambivalent political view: he did not find Richard's court an 'entirely congenial environment', but he equally could not turn to the Appellants because it would be an 'act of betrayal'.[129] However, I would argue that the poem's silence speaks to a more proactive aim and that Clanvowe was not situating himself as equidistant between the king and the Appellants. Rather, Clanvowe in his *Boke of Cupide* is actively seeking intervention from Richard. Throughout the poem, the descriptions of the God of Love imply that he has great power, whether that power manifests itself in a positive way – the narrator says Love 'can make of lowe hertys hie' (3) and the nightingale says he can defend his supporters 'fro al euel tachches' (192) – or in a negative way – the cuckoo says he can afflict people with 'disese and heuynesse' (171). However, as this chapter has argued, he never demonstrates this power; he remains a marginalised, passive figure, similar in this respect to the depiction of Richard II in the lords' accusations at the Merciless Parliament that he had neglected the realm's defence and allowed misguided counsellors to accroach his power to themselves. So, while the God of

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[129] Patterson, 'Court Politics', p. 25.

Love never realises his potential in the narrative, all the poems' characters agree on one thing: that Love has the power to dominate society and to prevent the stream of partisan and problematic judgements spoken by the cuckoo and the nightingale, and destined to be repeated by the parliament. This supports Staley's argument that what the *Boke of Cupide*, along with contemporary works, 'urge on any kingly "listener"' is 'more authority, not less'.[130] Clanvowe's work criticises Love for his passivity, while emphasising that he has the power to intervene effectively, and that such intervention is necessary.

The poem cannot, however, be reduced merely to a plea for the king to assert more authority. For Clanvowe also uses the voice of the cuckoo to define the terms within which the king should intervene. The cuckoo constructs a picture of the kind of totalitarian monarch which would prove as problematic to social cohesion as a passive one: a king who engenders 'debate' and 'vntrust', and a king who is '[s]o dyuerse' (205) and who 'hath no reson but his wille' (197). These accusations certainly could have been applied to Richard in 1385/86, for the few instances when he did become active, he acted in a rash, wilful manner which served to inflame rather than defuse tensions, such as his promoting of de Vere to Duke of Ireland or his refusal to attend parliament in 1386. Clanvowe is stressing Richard should forego passivity, but not in favour of becoming a totalitarian and wilful king. Rather, Clanvowe is seeking an interventionist, but moderate and non-judgmental, monarch. The poem appeals for a non-judgmental monarch through the problematising of judgements that this chapter has already considered; by exposing judgements to be provisional and partisan, the poem cautions its audience against rushing to judgement or only relying on one's own judgement. The poem stresses moderation

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[130] Staley, *Languages of Power*, p. 22.

through the conflicting voices of the immoderate cuckoo and nightingale, who are given equal weight in the narrative but are shown to be either too quick to attack dissenters or too cynical and partisan in their attempts to attack the establishment. The *Boke of Cupide* seeks, therefore, an interventionist king to prevent the lack of resolution provided by parliaments, but it also seeks to constrain that king to play a moderate and non-judgmental role.

Having arrived at this interpretation of the poem, it is now possible to say a little more about its context. The poem would work most effectively if produced between the parliament of 1386 and Richard's declaration that his minority was over in May 1389.[131] Throughout this period, representative bodies were closely involved in the running of the country, Richard himself was marginalised, while supporters and opponents of the king debated amongst themselves how the country should be governed. What is particularly notable is that Clanvowe appears to have achieved the form of kingship he desired. The monarch who arrived in 1389 is described by Saul as displaying 'moderation' and 'assuming the character of a mature and reasonable young ruler'.[132] He also is said to have 'decisively intervened' on the issue of liveries by offering to stand as an example to others.[133] While Clanvowe's poem is irresolute, the social turbulence of the period did reach a temporary resolution through the king intervening in a calm and moderate way. While Richard did not remain a moderate monarch, it is likely that Clanvowe would have been able to go to his death in 1391 with a broadly positive view of Richard. All this is not to say that Richard II read the *Boke of Cupide*; rather it is plausible to see the *Boke of Cupide* as being read in a

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[131] Patterson has argued that the poem could not have been composed before 1389 because of its reference to retaining, which would narrow the poem's composition down to January to May 1389. This would fit my argument very well, although I am not entirely convinced by Patterson's argument that the poem references retaining. See Patterson, 'Court Politics', p. 10.
[132] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 201.
[133] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 203.

coterie setting along with works such as *Legend*, which similarly urges the king that '[y]ow oghte to ben the lyghter merciable' (F.410) and has been argued by Astell to be anxious about 'a possible vengeful Richard' following the parliament of 1388.[134] Richard himself may, of course, have read the poem, or he may have been counselled by Clanvowe in a more official setting, for part of Clanvowe's role as a chamber knight was to provide 'service and advice' to the king.[135] Or, Richard and Clanvowe may have arrived independently at the same conclusion: that social harmony could be restored in the kingdom through a strong, interventionist monarch who was nevertheless moderate and non-judgmental.

'[Y]e get namoore of me' (V.343): Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the Politics of Irresolution

Discussing the politics of Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* is more problematic, partly because of the uncertainty surrounding the date of the poem, and partly because of the uncertainty surrounding whether Chaucer intentionally left the poem unfinished or not. While I cannot offer definitive responses to either of these topics, I want to sketch in here a possible narrative concerning the composition of the *Squire's Tale*, a narrative which accounts for several of the text's problematic features. The *Squire's Tale* is commonly assumed to have been produced as part of the *Canterbury Tales* scheme.[136] This assumption can be seen in the pervasive dramatic readings of the tale. Many critics view the *Squire's Tale* as a flawed work, but argue that the flaws are deliberately introduced to mock the Squire whose 'youthful ineptitude' is

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[134] Astell, *Political Allegory*, p. 99.
[135] Seymour, 'Sir John Clanvowe', p. 43.
[136] A point echoed by Baker, who states 'nearly all commentators have been content to assume that *SqT* was composed within the overall period of the composition of *CT*'. *Squire's Tale*, ed. by Baker, p. 37.

foreshadowed in the *General Prologue's* description of him as being 'twenty yeer of age' (I.82) and 'fressh as is the month of May' (I.92).[137] Other dramatic readings have focused on the relationship between the Squire and his father the Knight, and have drawn comparisons – usually unfavourable – between the *Knight's Tale* and the *Squire's Tale*.[138] Alongside these dramatic readings, other critics argue that the *Squire's Tale* and the *Franklin's Tale* were produced together and complement each other through their shared explorations of themes such as closure, the gift, or Eastern female power.[139] If we assume that the *Squire's Tale* was produced as part of the *Canterbury Tales* sequence, this has consequences for how we view the *Tale's* unfinished status. For the Squire's proposed tale would stretch to many thousands of lines and would far outweigh every other poetic text in the collection. Consequently, Goodman suggests that the Squire could not have continued his tale without 'distending the frame' of the *Canterbury Tales* which could never 'swallow' such a lengthy imagined story.[140] As such, if we firmly place the *Squire's Tale* within the *Canterbury Tales* scheme, the view that Chaucer intentionally set out to produce an unfinished tale becomes compelling.

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[137] The description is Barney's, though his youthfulness is also particularly stressed by Robert P. Miller and John M. Hill. See Barney, 'Suddenness and Process', p. 25; Miller, 'Chaucer's Rhetorical Rendition', p. 219; John M. Hill, *Chaucerian Belief: The Poetics of Reverence and Delight* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 83. These sort of ironical readings have receded in modern scholarship. For an interesting account of their flaws, see Pearsall's recanting of his previous 'ironical' reading of the tale, arguing that the '"ironising"' of a narrator 'to make a tale conform to modern tastes' is unwise. Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 142.

[138] This is mentioned in passing in several essays, but gets its fullest airing by Lerer, who suggests that '[t]he Squire provided a new generation of Chaucer's readers with a way of conceiving literary history as genealogical, that is a relationship between father and son analogous to the Knight's fatherhood of the Squire'. See Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers*, esp. p. 58.

[139] See, respectively, Brian S. Lee, 'The Question of Closure in Fragment V of *The Canterbury Tales*', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 22 (1992), 190-200; Britton J. Harwood, 'Chaucer and the Gift (If There is Any)', *Studies in Philology*, 103 (2006), 26-46; Lynch, 'East Meets West', pp. 530-51. Robert J. Meyer-Lee has recently attempted to dismantle Fragment V of the *Canterbury Tales* and bring the tales of the Squire and Franklin together with the tales of the Clerk and Merchant from Fragment IV. Meyer-Lee only briefly considers the implications of this shift, but notes that the four tales produce a 'dramatic sequence' exploring issues of fatherhood and mercantilism. See Robert J. Meyer-Lee, 'Fragments IV and V of the *Canterbury Tales* do not Exist', *Chaucer Review*, 45, 1 (2010), 1-31 (pp. 27-28).

[140] Goodman, 'Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*', p. 36. Heffernan makes a similar point; see Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer*, p. 76.

The assumption that the tale was produced as part of the *Canterbury Tales* sequence is entirely natural. The *Squire's Tale's* only manuscript presence is as part of the *Canterbury Tales* while it is not listed as a free-standing narrative along with 'the love of Palamon and Arcite' (F.420) and 'the lyf also of Seynt Cecile' (F.426) in the *Legend*. However, there are certain features of the text itself that suggest the possibility that it was composed earlier. While I agree with Goodman that the completed tale would distend the frame of the *Canterbury Tales*, it does not by necessity follow that Chaucer intentionally set out to produce an unfinished work. For, another possible corollary is that the *Squire's Tale* was originally produced as an independent work, where its length would be unproblematic, and was subsequently incorporated into the body of the *Canterbury Tales* either by Chaucer or an early scribe.[141] And notably, the *Squire's Tale* exists relatively loosely within the *Canterbury Scales* theme: if we accept David M. Seaman's compelling argument that the words of the Franklin are not an interruption, then the *Squire's Tale* exists entirely independently of the surrounding tales.[142]

If we disassociate the *Squire's Tale* from the *Canterbury Tales* project, we immediately notice the many similarities that the tale shares with Chaucer's early dream poetry.[143] These similarities are apparent in the content of the poem: Canacee's walking out on an early morning and overhearing a complaining figure mirrors the *Book of the Duchess*; comprehensible birds are redolent of the *Parliament of Fowls*; and the descriptions of nature in springtime (V.393-400) are a feature of the majority of Chaucer's dream visions. Equally, the works share a

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[141] Lawton argues that 'early editors found themselves faced with the need to find a tale for the Squire, and matched him up with a fragment of a romance set aside by Chaucer'. See his *Chaucer's Narrators*, p. 126.

[142] David M. Seaman, '"The wordes of the frankleyn to the squier": An Interruption?', *ELN*, 24 (1986-87), 12-18.

[143] This is a point which has been made previously by Charles Larson, amongst others. See Larson, '*The Squire's Tale*', pp. 598-607.

similar narrative voice, with Chaucer adopting in each the 'persona of the nervous narrator', a persona borrowed from earlier French dream visions.[144] So, when the court goes to dance, the narrator of the *Squire's Tale* declares '[t]hat is nat able a dul man to devyse./He moste han knowen love and his servyse [...] Therfore I passe of al this lustiheed' (V.279-88). The narrator's depiction of himself as a dull man unfamiliar with love is redolent of the descriptions by (and of) the narrators of his other dream visions: in the *Parliament of Fowls* the narrator is told 'thow be dul' (162) and he admits that 'I knowe nat Love' (8); in the *Book of the Duchess* the narrator declares 'I have lost al lustyhede' (27); and in the *Legend of Good Women*, the narrator 'konne but lyte' of love (F.29). There exist, therefore, these general parallels between the *Squire's Tale* and Chaucer's early dream visions, and due to these parallels Charles Larson has posited a date of 1380 for the poem.[145] These parallels are, however, rather general, and may suggest nothing more than the fact that in composing his *Squire's Tale*, Chaucer was returning to the generic traditions of his earlier dream poems. Yet, more sustained and more specific linguistic, stylistic and structural parallels can be detected between the *Squire's Tale* and one specific dream vision: Chaucer's F-Prologue to the *Legend* (produced in the late 1380s).[146]

The structure of the F-Prologue to the *Legend* is reflected in part two of the *Squire's Tale*. In the *Legend*, the narrator goes out to see his flower opening '[a]gayn

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[144] Windeatt suggests that while Chaucer borrows this stance from Machaut, he is 'much bolder an artist' in developing it. See Windeatt, 'Introduction', in *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, ed. by Windeatt, p. xvi.

[145] Larson, '*The Squire's Tale*', p. 604.

[146] Dating the *Legend* is problematic, there being two versions of the Prologue (F and G) and no clear evidence whether the legends were written before, after, or at the same time as the F Prologue. Boffey and Edwards note that the question of dating 'remains unresolvable in any final way', although they reflect the modern critical consensus in giving precedence to the F-version of the prologue, and dating it to between Chaucer's completion of *Troilus* (c.1386) and the death of Queen Anne in 1394. Two more recent studies have attempted to give specific dates based on perceived political references in the poem: Astell argues the case for 1388, while Staley places it in 1386. See Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, 'The Legend of Good Women', in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 112-126 (pp. 112-13); Astell, *Political Allegory*, p. 99; Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power*, esp. p. 16.

the sonne, that roos as red as rose' (F.112), he notes how nature is recovering as the 'swerd of cold' has been 'releved' by 'th'atempre sonne' (F.127-28), and he overhears the 'smale foules' who sing against 'the foweler' (F.130-32) who tricked them through 'sophistrye' (F.137). Similarly, in the *Squire's Tale*, the poem begins as 'the foweles, agayn the sonne sheen' (V.53) sing their 'affecciouns' as they have 'proteccilouns/Agayn the swerd of wynter' (V.55-57). Later, Canacee goes out in the morning under the 'rody and brood' sun (V.394), hears birds singing and listens to the lament of one falcon who complains against the tercelet who deceived her through 'the sophymes of his art' (V.554). The two tales also share additional linguistic and rhythmic features. Two lexical items appear in the *Squire's Tale*, the *Legend* and either the *Knight's Tale* or *Troilus and Criseyde* (both produced in the early- to mid-1380s) but nowhere else in Chaucer's work: 'parementz' (V.269, F.1106, I.2501, ii.248) and 'fremde' (V.429, F.1046, iii.529). Another term, 'newefangelnesse', appears in the *Squire's Tale*, the *Legend*, the early *Anelida and Arcite* and the undateable *Against Women Unconstant* (V.610, F.154).[147] Moreover, there are three rhyme-combinations that appear solely in the *Squire's Tale* and the *Legend of Good Women* – renoun/regyoun (V.13-14, F.2444-45), hye/mynstralcye (V.267-68, F.2614-15), obeisaunces/observaunces (V.515-16, F.149-50) – and another five which Chaucer only uses in one additional text, either *Troilus and Criseyde* – hyde/tyde (V.141-42, F.2010-11, i.954, 957), awake/take (V.475-76, F.2182-83, ii.69-70 iii.1121, 1123), nyce/malice (V.525-26, F.362-63, iii.324, 326) – or the *House of Fame* – riche/yliche (V.19-20, V.61-62, F.388-89, *Fame* 1327-28), Synon/destruccion (V.209-10, F.930-31, *Fame* 151-52).

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[147] 'Anelida and Arcite', l. 141; 'Against Women Unconstant', l. 1. The poem 'Against Women Unconstant' is potentially based on a work by Machaut, which might suggest that it is an early Chaucer work. See the explanatory note in the *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 1090.

Attempting to date Chaucer's works is, of course, perilous.[148] However, it is apparent that a shared lexis exists between the *Squire's Tale* and the F-Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* (along with a couple of Chaucer's other poems produced in the 1380s). The *Squire's Tale* contains no such close lexical parallels with any other text. The verbal correspondences, along with structural and thematic correspondences, raise the possibility that the *Squire's Tale* and the *Legend* were being worked on by Chaucer simultaneously. This was a time when certain words, phrases, and rhyme combinations were at the forefront of Chaucer's lexicon, that receded later in his career. I am by no means the first to associate the *Squire's Tale* and the *Legend*.[149] Especially worthy of note is Alfred David's nuanced essay which traces the use of the line '[t]hat pitee renneth soone in gentil herte' which Chaucer's uses four times (I.1761, IV.1986, V.479, F.503). David argues that its appearance in the *Squire's Tale* is 'closest in language and tone' to the *Legend*, and he thus concludes that the *Squire's Tale* was produced 'somewhere near the period of the legends and before the conception of the *Canterbury Tales*'.[150] With the absence of any mention by Chaucer of an independent existence for the *Squire's Tale*, this argument cannot be proven.[151] However, the stylistic and linguistic evidence is

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[148] For a recent account of some of the problems, see Lynch, 'Dating Chaucer', pp. 1-22. Lynch calls for 'a moratorium on dating Chaucer' (p. 17) which, while understandable, seems problematic to me when so many existing critical accounts depend upon assumptions about dating.

[149] One of the earliest accounts of their similarities is by John L. Lowes, although he argues for a connection between the *Squire's Tale* and the G-Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women*. Lowes notes the repeated image of the 'swerd of cold' (F.127, G.115, V.57), but argues that the unique reference to 'grene' in line 117 of the G-Prologue matches a reference to 'grene' at line 54 in the *Squire's Tale*. However, 'grene' appears in very different contexts here, and I see no reason for presuming the *Squire's Tale* is closer to the G-Prologue than the F-Prologue. See John Livingston Lowes, 'The Prologue to the Legend of Good Women Considered in its Chronological Relations', *PMLA*, 20, 4 (1905), 749-864 (fn. 1, pp. 796-97).

[150] David, 'Recycling *Anelida and Arcite*', pp. 108-9.

[151] Interestingly, in the *Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale*, the Man of Law names 'Ceys and Alcione' (II.57) and the 'Seintes Legende of Cupide' (II.61), before affirming that Chaucer never wrote of the 'wikke ensample of Canacee' (II.78). Critics are not entirely sure what to do with these lines, with Alfred David likening the reader here to someone 'being excluded from a private joke'. However, the association of 'Canacee' and the 'Legende' is intriguing. If we follow Maura Nolan as viewing the Man of Law as a 'careless reader', the private joke might involve his ignorance about the

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compelling, and viewing the *Squire's Tale* as an independent composition can also usefully explain its detached position within the *Canterbury Tales* frame.

David develops his analysis further to produce the argument that with both the *Legend* and the *Squire's Tale*, Chaucer was experimenting with how to produce tale collections. David's argument has not received the attention that it deserves, and the idea that in the late 1380s Chaucer was experimenting with different frameworks within which to produce a tale collection is an intriguing one. Certainly, the *Squire's Tale* resembles a compilation: as noted above, a significant shift occurs between part one, a court narrative, and part two, a complaint narrative, and we could envisage further such generic shifts happening in the subsequent sections of the tale. It is also worth noting at this point certain parallels between the *Canterbury Tales'* frame and the *Squire's Tale*. In both cases, Chaucer appears to have invented an overall frame (the court at Tsarev, the pilgrimage) without working from a direct source. In both cases, the first 'tale' sees Chaucer adapting one of his previous poems to a greater or lesser extent ('the love of Palamon and Arcite' (F.420) and *Anelida and Arcite*). And in both cases, Chaucer deploys similar astrological phrases: people long to go on pilgrimages when 'the yonge sonne/Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne' (I.7-8) and Canacee rises like 'the yonge sonne,/That in the Ram is foure degrees up ronne' (V.385-86). Developing suggestions in David's work, I would hypothesise that Chaucer spent the late 1380s experimenting with frameworks within which to produce a tale collection. He devised at least three such frameworks,[152] of which Chaucer found the pilgrimage to be the most successful. He continued revising the

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fact that Chaucer had written about Canacee already. See Alfred David, 'The Man of Law vs. Chaucer: A Cases in Poetics', *PMLA*, 82, 2 (1967), 217-225 (p. 217); Maura Nolan, '"Acquiteth yow now": Textual Contradiction and Legal Discourse in the Man of Law's Introduction', in *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England*, ed. by Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 136-53 (p. 149).

[152] It could also be argued that the idea behind the unfinished *Monk's Tale* also derived from this period, although an exploration of this tale is beyond the current project's scope.

framework to the *Legend*, while the court at Tsarev proved unsuccessful and was abandoned.

If this argument is accepted, the tale's unresolved ending was thus not pre-planned, and so Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* is not an agitating text in the way that Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide* is. However, it is useful to consider why Chaucer was either unwilling or unable to finish his text. Chaucer, like Clanvowe, would have been familiar with the crises afflicting the king in this period. He was present at the parliament of 1386, possibly summoned by the king to provide support for his cause. In addition, he was certainly familiar with the executed Brembre, if only in a professional capacity,[153] while it is also possible that he knew Thomas Usk, who was one of the earliest readers of *Troilus and Criseyde*. In this uncertain period between 1386-89, there appeared to be two extreme directions in which the country's governance could go: Richard II could remain a peripheral presence while the country was governed by a series of committees which lacked the representative force of the parliamentary commons, or Richard could reject these committees, continue wilfully appointing his own close aids to positions of authority, and become a rash and tyrannical monarch. Notably, it is these two extremes of monarchy which can be seen to be refracted in the two major poems that Chaucer composed in this period. In the *Legend*, Richard is allegorised as the God of Love, a figure who 'singles out the poet's persona for his special displeasure and censure',[154] castigating him and claiming that he 'reneyed hast my lay' and that '[i]f thou lyve, thou shalt repenten this/So cruelly that it shal wel be sene!' (F.336-340). The God of Love is presented as an aggressive monarch, who is only pacified by the words of his wife.

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[153] See Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, p. 29.
[154] Robert R. Edwards, 'Ricardian Dreamworks: Chaucer, Cupid and Loyal Lovers', in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, ed. by Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 59-82 (p. 60).

By contrast, Cambyuskan is a passive monarch; he does not involve himself in the governance of his court, refusing to make any decisions and allowing the '[d]iverse folk' around him to freely 'jangle and trete' (V.220), regardless of the paranoia and discontent that they are causing.

Ultimately, neither of these models of kingship appears to have appealed to Chaucer; both works were left unfinished in part because of the problematic roles which the regal figures had within the narrative. Critical studies of the *Legend* have noted the 'signs of hastiness' and lack of 'rhetorical language' pointing to the fact that Chaucer 'seems to have lost interest' in some of the stories.[155] James Simpson argues that the God of Love's overdominance in the *Legend of Good Women* prevents Chaucer's completion of the work: Cupid assumes a 'tyrannical control of an imagined textual community' which prevents authorial 'entente' from being detected.[156] Regardless of whether the commission existed in reality or whether it was a literary device invented by Chaucer,[157] the active, interventionist monarch pictured in the *Legend* proved unable to sustain a tale collection. With the single desire of Love – that the narrator should make a legend about the 'good wommen alle' who are 'trewe of love for oght that may byfalle' (F.560-61) – hanging over the entire collection, Chaucer is unable to produce the varied collection of tales he sought to write.

The *Squire's Tale* is not as overtly self-reflexive as the *Legend*, and it contains no reference to Chaucer's previous literary endeavours. However, it is conscious of the poetic arts, and this is partially seen in the narrator's anxieties about

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[155] S. S. Hussey, *Chaucer: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 52-53.

[156] James Simpson, 'Ethics and Interpretation: Reading Wills in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 20 (1998), 73-100 (pp. 79-82).

[157] For a useful critical of the question of commission, particularly female commission, see: Joyce Coleman, 'The Flower, the Leaf, and Philippa of Lancaster', in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, ed. by Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 33-58 (p. 50).

his manner of writing: he is concerned with his 'stile' (V.105), and of the need to 'the knotte condescende' (V.407). This consciousness can also be seen in the horse of brass and the other gifts, which some critics have read as being analogous to fiction in their ability to dissolve temporal and geographical boundaries.[158] If we view the horse as an analogy for the tale itself, then Cambyuskan becomes directly linked with the incomplete tale: just as he was unable to realise the potential of the horse, so too he is unable to realise the potential of the poem. Cambyuskan's passivity makes him unsuitable to be the figurehead for the tale to revolve around. While he ostensibly has the power and authority to determine others' actions by virtue of his regal standing, his role in the narrative is negligible and he lacks the inquisitiveness necessary to realise the potential of the gifts or of his children. Chaucer turns to other figures in the hope that they might engage with the gifts and progress the tale's narrative. However, while Canacee and the '[d]iverse folk' have the inquisitiveness missing in Cambyuskan, they lack the power and autonomy necessary to realise the gifts' potential. Canacee is constrained by her femininity and by social and generic expectation, while the '[d]iverse folk' are constrained by their competitiveness and their failure to assemble themselves into a representative body which could reconcile the divergent approaches to the gifts that they espouse. Arguably, this was the reason that Chaucer left the *Squire's Tale* unfinished: he was evidently not interested in relating stories about Cambyuskan, but he could also foresee no way to grant the power to Canacee and the '[d]iverse folk' that would allow them to seize the narrative drive. Neither strong, interventionist monarchs nor passive, marginalised ones provided the suitable frame around which Chaucer could produce his eclectic range of tales.

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[158] The most prominent examples of this are Berry, 'Flying Horses', pp. 287-313 and Shirley Sharon-Zisser, 'The *Squire's Tale* and the Limits of non-Mimetic Fiction', *Chaucer Review*, 26, 4 (1997), 377-94 (esp. p. 387).

In his study of parliament and literature, Giancarlo has argued that in the latter decades of the fourteenth century

> The salient issue is representation, the question of who can "stand" or speak, who can represent, in the artistic and social communities, and for that matter what *can* count as a community.[159]

Giancarlo has also argued that one of the key features of Chaucer's use of parliaments was 'the figuring of unity in a single, representative, and prudential voice' who would perform a mediating role.[160] While there is no parliament in the *Squire's Tale*, these issues of voice, mediation and representation are still central to the poem. Cambyuskan lacks any form of representative status; his power derives from the fortune of his birth, not from his actions or from any proto-democratic mandate. Equally, the '[d]iverse folk' lack a single, representative voice and are instead a body of conflicting voices. Additionally, Canacee is unable to mediate between the court and the 'mewe' and her failure to do so ensures the ring's full potential is not realised. Without this mediation and representation, the *Squire's Tale* was ultimately a failed experiment.

However, Chaucer evidently learnt from the failures of the *Squire's Tale* and the *Legend*. In his third attempt at creating a tale collection – the *Canterbury Tales* – Chaucer rejected either a forceful monarch commissioning a tale collection, or a passive, indifferent monarch. Rather, he produced a tale collection mediated by the Host, a non-noble figure who is appointed 'governour' by the explicit election of the other pilgrims: the narrator declares 'by oon assent/We been acorded to his juggement' (I.817-18). The significance of the Host's appointment by 'oon assent' has received previous critical attention: Wallace notes that the passage 'is dense with

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[159] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 15.
[160] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 151.

the terminology and symbolic action of political life' and has argued that 'the *compagnye'* becomes 'formally constituted as a *communitas*' along a similar model to the guilds,[161] while Giancarlo suggests that the Host 'offers himself, and is accepted and ratified, as a speaker of these commons'.[162] Both of these arguments seem to have merit; issues of representation and unanimity were not solely the preserve of either parliament or the city's associational forms, and Chaucer may have been influenced by either, or both, models in constructing the character of the Host.

Regardless of which institution the Host was modelled on, what is significant is that he is granted a representative and mediating status denied to the God of Love and Cambyuskan. In his *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer still maintains his interest in the opinions of '[d]iverse folk', as at the end of the *Miller's Tale* '[d]iverse folk diversely they seyde,/But for the moore part they loughe and pleyde' (I.3857-58). Chaucer also remains aware of how social tensions emerge. In Fragment I, for instance, the Reeve and Miller clash after the Miller is perceived to have slighted the Reeve. However, the frame of the *Canterbury Tales* proves effective in combating such tensions. In part, this is because the Host has the elected authority to intervene. But it is also because each pilgrim is an autonomous figure who has been granted the right to speak and so, to return to the case of the Reeve, he can 'quite' (I.3916) the Miller.

Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* is not primarily about the socio-political context in which it was written. However, reading it alongside the *Legend of Good Women* provides an interesting account of how Chaucer's approach to literary creation may have changed as a response to the political uncertainty witnessed between 1386 and

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[161] Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, p. 70.
[162] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 174.

1389. Whereas Clanvowe took the opportunity provided by this uncertainty to petition for the model of kingship he desired, Chaucer initially responded to this anxiety by incorporating two different models of kingship into his work. Neither model provided Chaucer with a suitable frame within which to compose his tale collection, and so Chaucer moved away from the regal figures of the court and from courtly modes of writing to write about a socially heterogeneous group meeting in Southwark who elected a single, representative figure to mediate the proceedings. In engaging with the city of Tsarev's social turbulence, Chaucer is unconvinced by the court's ability to maintain harmony riven as it is by hierarchical divisions. The court at Tsarev fails to grant autonomy to Canacee, while the falcon and the '[d]iverse folk' remain unintegrated. It is only with his *Canterbury Tales* that Chaucer found a way to achieve a plurality of integrated and autonomous voices.

Conclusion

I conclude this project by returning to the poem that has served as the inspiration and structuring principle behind my thesis. The *Stores of the Cities* remains a poem of incongruities: as previous critics have noted, it depicts space as being 'indeterminate' and containing 'discontinuities', and this thesis has not sought to resolve such incongruities.[1] Indeed, such incongruities should not be resolved, as it is in its fragments and discontinuities that the *Stores* manages so effectively to capture the lived experience of the city. As de Certeau has famously argued, to navigate the streets of a city by foot was to confront an enigmatic and fragmentary space, a space devoid of any organising principle or signs of 'panoptic power'.[2] The *Stores*-poet's recreation of this experience of navigating a city is rendered most powerfully in his account of Lincoln:

> Hec su*n*t lincolne, bow, bolt, & bellia bolne
> Ad monstru*m* scala, rosa bryghta, nobilis ala
> Et bubulus flatus hec su*n*t staura ciuitatis. (1a.7-9)

> [*These are Lincoln's: Stonebow, bolt, and large bell,*
> *Steps to the cathedral, bright rose window, noble aisle,*
> *And bovine wind. These are the stores of the city*].

While there are ambiguous and uncertain terms in this passage, I would argue that these lines can be read as offering a walking tour of the city. The stanza leads the reader from the Stonebow at the city's southern entrance, through the street markets, and up the hill to the cathedral and the panoramic view of neighbouring pasture lands.[3] This stanza, like the space of the city itself, is devoid of any controlling perspective. Instead, it confronts the reader with incongruous elements: with fish

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[1] Turner, 'Urban Chaucer', p. 35; Clarke, *Literary Landscapes*, p. 127.
[2] de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 95.
[3] I expand on this point, with illustrations, in Appendix 1c.

markets, stained-glass windows, guildhalls, and flatulent cows. The stanza on London does not recreate this experience of navigating the spatial city, as it is not structured by the city's physical pathways. However, it does capture the experience of navigating the conceptual city. Through the association of various terms, the stanza presents the reader with thematic pathways through London. Themes of deviant sexuality, judicial punishments, tavern life, power hierarchies, and urban violence are deployed by the *Stores*-poet to mark out the contours of London.

As de Certeau reminds us, the activity of navigating the city by foot is not a passive one. Through their urban navigations, walkers give 'shape to spaces' as they 'privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements' to construct their own personal urban landscape.[4] As is indicated by the preceding paragraph, de Certeau's comments on walkers can equally be applied to the readers of the *Stores*. Unequipped with any organising principle, readers of the poem are left to navigate around its fragments, to privilege individual meanings and images, and to construct their own vision of the cities out of the textual discontinuities. My arguments about the poem, while analytical and supported by detailed engagement with each city's spaces and practices, are ultimately speculative and subjective engagements with a text. Just as the walker in the city 'mak[es] choices among the signifiers of the spatial language', I take a polyseme such as 'leo' and privilege one of its significations: that it refers to the Lion on Cheapside.[5]

This process of 'making choices' and making 'a selection'[6] was foreshadowed in the concluding chapter of this thesis which ended by suggesting that in the late-1380s Chaucer made a choice: he decided to privilege the urban over

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[4] de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 97-98.
[5] de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 98-99. On the 'leo', see above, pp. 95-97, and Appendix 1b, pp. 309.
[6] de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 98.

the regal, and the Host over the king. Chaucer's choice is noteworthy as it serves as a reminder that it is not only walkers and readers who make selections, but also writers. The *Stores* presents an image of the integral and notorious features of civic life, but writers were not constrained in any specific way by these features. As Chaucer demonstrates, it was possible to write about London without writing about the 'regia thron*us*'. Similarly, as the diverse body of writers surveyed in this project show, it was possible to write about London without being constrained to discussing tavern life, deviant sexuality, or violence.

London's *verba vana*, however, prove more challenging. As the various texts explored in this thesis demonstrate, it was difficult to write about London – or to write from within a London context – without reflecting on the city's empty words. For words are the medium, and so to verbalise – in either written or spoken form – is to become implicated in a process of assigning value to words.[7] This thesis has sought to argue that an awareness of, and anxieties about, empty words can be detected in a wide range of texts produced in London during the 1380s and 1390s. These texts share an interest in exploring what words can and cannot do, and taken together they reveal the paradoxical potency of words. Words can heal and they can harm. Words can propound authoritative judgements and they can be overwritten and contradicted. Words uttered together can represent unanimity and discordancy.

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[7] While it is a topic beyond the scope of the present project, it would be interesting to consider discussions of empty words in other media. Wall paintings and misericords, for instance, were used to depict the recording demon, Tutivillus. Equally, the demon appears in *Mankind* a play which, while reliant on dialogue, also complements its dialogue with visual and performance elements. On the visual tradition of Tutivillus, see Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues*, pp. 53-56; Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, pp. 21-23; M. D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), esp. pp. 173-77. On Tutivillus's appearance in sermons, literary works and dramatic texts such as *Mankind*, see Margaret Jennings, 'The Literary Career of the Recording Demon', *Studies in Philology*, 74 (1977), 1-95. On *Mankind's* exploration of language, see Paula Neuss, 'Active and Idle Language: Dramatic Images in *Mankind*', in *Medieval Drama*, ed. by Neville Denny (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), pp. 41-67.

Words can inscribe power and they can challenge that power. Words can spread empty tales and they can convict someone of treason

But beyond demonstrating texts' awareness of the problematic potency of words, this thesis has also suggested that the prevalence of *verba vana* provides a productive context within which to read the textual endeavours of this period. In 1391, Adam Bamme famously issued a proclamation commanding that 'no man [...] shall speak' about recent political controversies.[8] As Turner notes, this text suggests '[i]mposing silence' was seen as one way of resolving the period's discursive turbulence.[9] But what emerges in Ricardian London is not a silence but a cacophony. There is a profusion of texts, many of which are characterised by their innovative textual strategies.[10] The literary sphere sees Gower experimenting by multiplying the authorial voices and introducing *fama* into his Trojan sources. It also sees Clanvowe re-focusing the debate poem and using it to dissect language, reflect on the meaning of truth, and interrogate the effectiveness of parliamentary assemblies. And finally, it sees Chaucer adapting his Ovidian materials to problematise their anti-language tenor, inventing an account of London life which emphasises conflict, and trialling different frameworks for tale collections. The historical sphere sees the Monk of Westminster experimenting with incorporating a plurality of voices to stress the benefits of shunning factionalism. The political sphere sees the textual innovations of Nicholas Brembre, who recognised the power conferred by words and sought to control documentary discourses in the city through his anti-associational rhetoric, his harnessing of the king's voice, and his manipulation of *Letter-Book H*. And the

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[8] *Memorials*, p. 526; *CLBH*, p. 364. The proclamation is discussed in Wallace, 'Absent City', p. 85; Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 194; Bird, *Turbulent London*, p. 99, fn. 3;

[9] Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 194.

[10] I am echoing here Lindenbaum, who has previously noted the 'remarkable body of civic writing' produced in this period and has argued that these texts are characterised by their 'crossing discursive boundaries [...] and using discursive conventions in markedly improvisatory and tactical ways'. Lindenbaum, 'London Texts', p. 286.

judicial sphere sees the London guilds experimenting with language, rhetoric, and the petitionary form to create an anonymous and unanimous series of petitions which together powerfully indict Brembre.

What is notable about several of these innovations is that they revolve around words and texts. Writers either seek to empower words or to exploit their emptiness for dramatic effect. These writers do not, therefore, simply encode an awareness of the prevalence of *verba vana* into their texts. Rather, through this awareness – as well as through the recognition that words are the medium in which they are working – these writers become self-conscious of their own textual endeavours. This, perhaps, is then the ultimate consequence of living and writing in an urban space notorious for the vacuity of its words. Londoners are not reduced to silence. Instead, written materials proliferate on an unprecedented level, and in both documentary and literary spheres a new body of creative writers, politicians, chroniclers, and guildsmen become actively engaged in the processes of textual construction.

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