Bridges to the Past: Orientation, Materiality, and Participatory Reading in Late Medieval England

by

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Dedication

For Milton, who could make any place feel like home.

-AG

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Table of Contents

Dedication ii

Acknowledgements iii

List of Figures v

Abstract vi

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: Coming to the Table: Orientation and Participatory Reading in Wynkyn De Worde's 1498 Sammelband of the *Assembly of Gods* and the *Canterbury Tales* 8

Chapter 2: Chaucer's Narrators, Dullness, and Complexion Theory 34

Chapter 3: Bridges to the Past: Noise, Materiality, and Performing Community in "The Bridges at Abingdon" 63

Conclusion: Returning to the Table: Medieval Materiality and Modern Orientation(s) 91

Bibliography 98

List of Figures

Fig. 1. Caxton's "Pilgrims at the Table" Woodcut 8

Fig. 2. BL G. 11587, the *Assembly of Gods* 23

Fig. 3. Final two pages of De Worde's *Canterbury Tales* in BL G. 11587, featuring Chaucer's "Retraction" (*left*) and Caxton's "Pilgrims at the Table" (*right*) 24

Fig. 4. BL G. 11587. Opening layout to the *Assembly of Gods* 25

Fig. 5. Monk's tonsure in Caxton's woodcut (STC 17005) 28

Fig. 6. Reader's edits to the monk's tonsure in STC 17007 28

Fig. 7. "The Boke of Kervyng," Sel. 5.19 (1508) 30

Fig. 8. Sideways orientation of Caxton's woodcut in De Worde's quarto edition 32

Fig. 9. The Formande table 68

Fig. 10. Formande table, five-panel illustration 72

Fig. 11. Cover of Patience Agbabi's *Telling Tales* 94

Abstract

Bridges to the Past: Orientation, Materiality, and Participatory Reading in Late Medieval England explores the value that Sara Ahmed's phenomenological theorization of "orientation" holds for thinking about the kinds of participatory, embodied, spatial, and temporal performances medieval texts invite through their material and textual appeals to embodied experience. Ahmed's use of orientation to explore how and why some bodies are able to inhabit the world more comfortably than others offers an original vantage point from which to consider how readers might experience material and literary forms differently based on their prior experiences in the world. Approaching medieval reading practices through the lens of orientation allows us to consider the significance of material and textual form(s) while at the same time attending to the diversity of readers and their bodies. Building on Ahmed's work, each of this dissertation's three central chapters consider a unique way in which the orientation(s) of medieval readers might have influenced their experience of a text.

The first chapter, "Coming to the Table: Orientation and Participatory Reading in Wynkyn De Worde's 1498 Sammelband of the *Assembly of Gods* and the *Canterbury Tales*" explores how Ahmed's discussion of orientation's relationship to comfort and "feeling at home" helps us to think about the reading experience suggested by British Library, BL G. 11587, a Wynkyn De Worde Sammelband in which Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is presented alongside the anonymous psychomachian dream vision the *Assembly of Gods*. De Worde's repeated use of William Caxton's "Pilgrims at the Table" woodcut throughout this Sammelband, I argue, facilitates a reading experience based on "(re-)orientation," in which readers are invited to

gradually habituate themselves to the codex over time, thus allowing the book to function as a "virtual" extension of domestic space.

The second chapter, "Chaucer's Narrators, Dullness, and Complexion Theory," takes up the question of orientation as it applies to Chaucer's embodied narrative personae, which a medieval audience would have likely recognized as humorally "phlegmatic." Tracing the evolution of Chaucer's embodied descriptions of his narrators from his early dream poems, *The House of Fame* and *The Parliament of Fowls* to later dated works like "Envoy to Scogan," "Complaint of Venus," and *Legend of Good Women*, it proposes that the phlegmatic body offered Chaucer an authoritative grounds for his vicarious poetry about love, in which the craft and deception of the prototypical young sanguine lover/poet is replaced by the straightforward craft of the phlegmatic poet, imagined as absent of deceit due to the dulling of the senses that went along with that humoral profile.

The third chapter, "Bridges to the Past: Noise, Materiality, and Performing Community in 'The Bridges at Abingdon'," considers the orienting potential of a literary "table" produced by a mercantile member of Abingdon's religious guild The Brotherhood of the Holy Cross to memorialize the guild's building of two bridges across the Thames. The table, which is sole witness to the fifteenth-century alliterative poem, "The Bridges at Abingdon," scripts a public performance that nuances our current understanding of religious guilds' relationship to discourses of "public voice" current in late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century England.

Introduction

"What does it mean to be orientated?" Sara Ahmed asks in the introduction to her 2006 book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. This question is central to Ahmed's project, which explores how phenomenology might offer a way of thinking about the "orientation" in "sexual orientation" as related to our embodied, spatial, and material experiences in the world.[1] Approaching sexuality through the spatial and temporal analytics of phenomenology allows Ahmed to consider how the world suggests and offers support for normative bodies via its spaces and objects, and in so doing to develop a theory of "queer phenomenology" which she claims "might start by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are 'less proximate' or even those that deviate or are deviant.[2] Ahmed's discussion of identity and its relation to space and materiality holds value for literary scholars as it allows us to consider not only what is at stake in the "orientations" readers bring to texts—which, "Reader-Response" criticism has long acknowledged as important—but also how our orientations are derived from and continually shaped by our engagements with spaces and material objects in the world. Orientation, thus, possesses a unique potential for bringing Reader-Response criticism into productive conversation with the traditionally more object-oriented approaches of "New Materialism" and "New Philology."[3]With the recent increased interest in

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[1] Ahmed's framing of orientation as a question of how different bodies come to "inhabit spaces" aligns her work with the recent "Spatial Turn" across many disciplines. See Barney Warf and Santa Arias, eds. *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Routledge, 2008).
[2] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), 3.
[3] For recent work on reading and phenomenology, see Rita Felski , *Uses of Literature* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Brian M. Reed, *Phenomenal Reading: Essays on Modern and Contemporary Poetics* (University of Alabama Press, 2012).

New Materialism and New Philology has arrived a multitude of critical approaches to reading practices, each recommending a different scholarly orientation to the nexus of author/editor, reader, environment and text/paratext. A multidirectional term like "orientation" offers one possibility for bringing these diverse approaches into conversation with one another and recognizing both the value and limitations of any single approach. Heather Blatt's concept of "participatory reading" for example, draws on modern media theory to highlight reader "agency" and "refram[e]" what she refers to as "traditional approaches" to the relationship between "writers and texts."[4] While Blatt's "participatory reading" valuably pushes back against author-centered approaches to textual analysis, it at the same time has the potential to simply reverse the direction of the "traditional" approaches she critiques by orienting conversations about interpretation around readers instead.[5] Blatt's approach likewise, and in contrast to recent work in New Materialism, imagines technology and materiality as serving a passive and/or intermediary role in a relationship predominantly between author/editors and readers. This is true even in her discussion of "extracodexical" texts (i.e. texts with material forms other than manuscripts) and her conclusion about "nonreading" (i.e. uses of books not involving reading). While it's possible to approach either of these subjects from the perspective of readerly "agency," such an approach would be further nuanced by considering how readers' agency is intimately related to the affordances invited by the materiality of such texts. Orientation and its opposite "disorientation" invite us to consider how readerly agency might be influenced by how a readers' identity or body conforms to or departs from the receptive body that the text's creator had in

[4] Heather Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England* (Manchester University Press, 2017), 4.
[5] Blatt explains that she chosethe term"participatory" over "interactive" to highlight that reading "develops through social relations" and is not simply a relationship between user and "technology." Blatt, *Participatory Reading*, 3.

mind, as well as how readers are influenced and shaped by their encounters with material texts, imagined as possessing a "vibrant" agency themselves.[6]

For medieval literary scholars practicing New Philology, orientation's foregrounding of the interrelationship between social identities, such as sexual orientation and race, and our material/spatial interactions in the world, offers a valuable reminder to consider the diversity of embodied experiences that medieval readers would have brought to the texts they encountered.[7] Approaching interactions between readers and material texts from the angle of orientation would have us pay attention to what sort of readerly orientation we are assuming when we suggest that a detail could have a "disorienting" effect on readers. The value that orientation's focus on embodied identities might hold for New Philology is suggested by Joseph Dane's critique of the way that some recent work in New Philology appears to both lose sight of medieval manuscripts as tangible physical objects and imagine medieval readers as possessing the same preoccupations that we as scholars possess speaks to the need for a concept like "orientation."[8] A New Philology grounded in "orientation" asks scholars to imagine reading and writing that begins not with "texts," but with books and the bodies of readers and writers. Orientation helpfully acknowledges that every textual encounter is the culmination of a readers' history of orientations: spatial, material, and cultural/social. The term thus has the potential to bring a more culturally and historically nuanced vision of "the reader" to the center of critical conversations around reception, while at the same time, not dictating that this scholarly "orientation" need be applied in every case.

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[6] On the "vibrant" vitality of matter, see Jane Bennett, *Vibrant matter* (Duke University Press, 2010).
[7] For important recent contributions to the field of "New Philology," see: Arthur Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages* (University of Chicago Press, 2013; Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Martha Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix.* (Springer, 2016).
[8] Joseph A. Dane, review of "Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London by Arthur Bahr," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 36, no. 1 (2014): 283.

A recent example of a book grounded in an attention to medieval bodily "orientation(s)" is Seeta Chaganti's *Strange Footing: Poetic Form and Dance in the Late Middle Ages,* in which she offers a theory of poetic form based on the perceptual practices particular to medieval dance. Like Chaganti, I am interested in formalist readings that do not simply "locate moments of disorientation" but respond to "the particularities of a medieval cultural situation."[9] Though she does not cite Ahmed, Chaganti's emphasis on "disorientation" as an embodied experience shared between dance spectatorship and reading speaks to an understanding of literary texts as a technology of orientation. The original readings of texts like Lydgate's *Dance of Death* and Chaucer's "To Rosemounde," that Chaganti arrives at via her attention to readers as embodied and habituated to the "strange forces" of dance speaks to the value of the approach to medieval texts that I endorse and pursue throughout this dissertation.

In tandem with thinking about reading as an embodied practice, "orientation" invites us to think about texts as physical objects that shape our relationship to the world. Chaganti's emphasis on dance and "virtuality," while deeply conscious of embodied experience often shies away from a consideration of a text's material form. Ahmed's concept of "orientation," by contrast, would have us think about "disorientation" as a force generated not only through interactions between bodies in space, but out of embodied actors interactions with objects, environments, and social conventions. Opening up "orientation" this broadly invites us to recognize that a text could facilitate multiple kinds of "disorientation" or "orientation" depending on the experiences readers brought to it—including their prior experiences with that text itself.

Finally, and significantly for my analysis throughout this dissertation, orientation offers a theory for attending to the interplay between imaginative and physical spaces scholars have

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[9] Seeta Chaganti, *Strange Footing: Poetic Form and Dance in the Late Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 15.

recently identified as part of medieval reading ("participatory" and otherwise).[10] Ahmed's tying of orientation to "inhabitance" and "feeling at home" allows us to think about reading in similar terms about readers' textual encounters over time offering a similar opportunity to feel oriented. Orientation's focus on space and "inhabitance" offers us a way of talking and thinking about/between the spatio-temporal experiences enjoined by both traditional manuscript/print texts and those "extracodexical" texts whose materiality could involve readers' relationships to built environments.

Chapter Outlines

The first chapter, "Coming to the Table: Orientation and Participatory Reading in De Worde's 1498 Sammelband of the *Assembly of Gods* and the *Canterbury Tales*," explores how Ahmed's discussion of orientation's relationship to "feeling at home" might help us to think about the experience that fifteenth-century readers would have had approaching paratextually dense works by early English printers like William Caxton and Wynkyn De Worde. My analysis in this chapter centers around a 1498 De Worde produced Sammelband (British Library, BL G. 11587) which juxtaposes his illustrated edition of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* with the an illustrated edition of the anonymous psychomachian dream vision the *Assembly of Gods*. In this Sammelband, De Worde uses the repetition of a domestically themed illustration Caxton had produced for his illustrated *Canterbury Tales* of the "Pilgrims at the Table" to facilitate a reading

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[10] See for example: Jeffrey Todd Knight, "'Furnished' for Action: Renaissance Books as Furniture," *Book History* 12, no. 1 (2009): 37-73; Hester Lees-Jeffries, "Pictures, places and spaces: Sidney, Wroth, Wilton House and the Songe de Poliphile." in *Renaissance Paratexts* (Cambridge 2010): 185-203; Wendy Wall, "Reading the Home: The Case of the English Housewife," in *Renaissance Paratexts* (Cambridge 2010): 165-184; Rust*, Imaginary Worlds;* Martha Rust's concept of the "manuscript matrix," which she describes as "a liminal dimension: one associated with books but constituted by a reader's cognitive realization of the interplay among diverse semiotic systems that is only *in potential* on the physical page" shares much in common with my approach based on orientation. "Orientation" offers a way of talking about the relationships between the "diverse semiotic systems" that Rust identifies and how the "involved reading" she describes might occur over time as readers are continually "re-orientated" by their engagements with the text (and the world beyond). Rust, *Imaginary Worlds*, 9.

experience based in "(re-)orientation," that invites readers' gradual habitatuation to a text over time and mirrors the performative reading lesson that concludes the *Assembly of Gods*. Drawing on Seeta Chaganti and Heather Blatt's work on "virtuality," I propose that De Worde's Sammelband and the *Assembly of Gods* speak to a fifteenth-century understanding of codexical reading as embodied and recursive practice which resulted in the generation of a kind of "virtual" domestic space.

The second chapter, "Chaucer's Narrators, Dullness, and Complexion Theory," takes up the question of orientation as it applies to Chaucer's embodied narrative *personae*, which a medieval audience would have likely recognized as humorally "phlegmatic." Tracing the evolution of Chaucer's embodied descriptions of his narrators from his early dream poems, *The House of Fame* and *The Parliament of Fowls* to later dated works like "Envoy to Scogan," "Complaint of Venus," and *Legend of Good Women*, reveals that the phlegmatic body offered Chaucer an authoritative grounds for his vicarious poetry about love, in which the craft and deception of the prototypical young sanguine lover/poet is replaced by the straightforward craft of the phlegmatic poet, imagined as absent of deceit due to the dulling of the senses that went along with that humoral profile. In his later works, this distancing involved a readers' apprehension of his individual *personae* in relation to his *corpus* as a whole, which produced a kind of "virtual" body reflective of his development from a young poet to an older and wiser one. Reading Chaucer's mode of embodied presentation in terms of complexion theory offers a new angle for appreciating the relationship between Chaucer's later self-consciously written/literary work and the milieux of oral courtly performance in which he developed as a writer.

The third chapter, "Bridges to the Past: Noise, Materiality, and Performing Community in 'The Bridges at Abingdon'," sheds light on the little studied genre of literary "table" by

considering the orienting potential of the "Formande monument," a church table produced in the fifteenth-century by a mercantile member of Abingdon's religious guild The Brotherhood of the Holy Cross.[11] The table, which is sole witness to the fifteenth-century alliterative poem "The Bridges at Abingdon," both memorializes the guild's construction of two bridges across the Thames and scripts a public performance that suggests a unique understanding of the concept of "public voice," inspired by a mid-fifteenth century religious guild understanding of community and its relationship to local space and materiality. My analysis of "The Bridges at Abingdon" follows three modes of performance invoked by its material and poetic form, beginning with its resonances with the illicit practice of "bill-casting," then analyzing its relationship to communal guild performances, and concluding with its relationship to the guild practice of accounting for prayers.

Thinking about how late medieval reading experiences resonate with "secular" performances like construction, accounting, or inhabitance offers a valuable counter-balance to scholarly approaches that view medieval affective/embodied reading practices as primarily devotional in nature.[12] By exploring the significance that non-devotional embodied experience(s) might have held for medieval readers, this dissertation seeks to expand our understanding of how embodied and/or worldly experience "mattered" to medieval readers and authors, and in so doing open up new avenues for engaging with medieval texts as scholars today.

[11]My use of the term "materiality," in this chapter title, and in the title of the project as a whole, highlights my interest in exploring what Daniel Miller, in his introduction to his essay collection *Materiality* calls the "nuances, relativism, and plural nature of both materiality and immateriality." Daniel Miller, ed., *Materiality*. (Duke University Press, 2005), 41.

[12] See for example, Sarah McNamer*, Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Chapter 1: Coming to the Table: Orientation and Participatory Reading in Wynkyn De Worde's 1498 Sammelband of the *Assembly of Gods* and the *Canterbury Tales*

This chapter takes Sara Ahmed's claim that the question of bodily "orientation" is "a question not only about how we 'find our way' but how we come to 'feel at home'" as an invitation to reconsider the function that illustrations served in early English print texts produced by printers like William Caxton and Wynkyn De Worde.[13] Taking up Ahmed's claim about orientation and its relationship to the feeling of familiarity often associated with domestic space, I trace the textual history of a thematically domestic woodcut illustration William Caxton had produced for his 1483 illustrated edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, often referred to as "Pilgrims at the Table."

Here folowyth the Interpretacōn of the n ames of goddis and goddessesof this
treatyse folowynge as poetes wryte.

Fig. 1. Caxton's "Pilgrims at the Table" Woodcut

Caxton's woodcut, with its depiction of 24 figures of various social classes seated around a large round table set for a meal, appears just once in Caxton's 1483 edition where it accompanies Chaucer's description of the pilgrims' communal meal prior to setting out on their

[13] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 7.

journey at the end of the *General Prologue*. Far from being the end of the woodcut's printing history, it appears once again in Wynkyn de Worde's 1498 edition of the *Tales*, where it appears three times (twice during the General Prologue and once at the poem's conclusion). De Worde's apparent fondness for the illustration reaches its apex in a "Sammelband" he creates of the *Canterbury Tales* and the anonymous dream vision the *Assembly of Gods* where, in addition to its three appearances in the *Canterbury Tales,* Caxton's woodcut appears a fourth time at the start of the *Assembly of Gods* alongside an index of the twenty-seven classical mythological figures who appear in that poem.[14]

While scholars have suggested that De Worde's repeated use of Caxton's illustration across multiple texts in a single Sammelband may have been intended to invite readers to read thematically across those texts, we might also think about the process of "orientation" and "re-orientation" that such reproduction suggests and the feelings that could have accompanied such a gradual process of familiarization.[15] The illustration's appearance in different contexts would have required readers to "re-orient" themselves to its figures and space and in so doing actively participate in a process of gradual familiarization. With each encounter, readers would have had to negotiate the uncanny sense of familiarity with the illustration—as an identical reproduction—with its new context and attendant meanings, calling attention to the fact that reading is always a spatio-temporal experience involving a negotiation between the immediate context of a particular page and a reader's prior experiences. Other kinds of paratexts that De Worde included in his

[14] The term "Sammelband" is used, in discussions of early English print culture, to describe composite volumes of two or more works that were bound together—often by a printer themselves—and marketed as a complete text. Alexandra Gillespie. *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books 1473-1557* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 46; For a recent discussion of the difference between English "incunabula" and "post-incunabula" Sammelband, see Alexandra Gillespie, "Poets, printers, and early English Sammelbände," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67 no. 2 (2004): 189-214.

[15] Martha Driver, for example, has argued that De Worde's re-use of illustrations could have also served a practical marketing purpose, connecting new texts he printed with prior editions that sold well, such as Caxton's illustrated *Canterbury Tales.* Martha W. Driver, "The Illustrated de Worde: An Overview," *Studies in Iconography* 17 (1996): 356.

editions, such as tables of contents and editor prologues, would have worked in conjunction with these illustrations to stage a reading experience that called attention to reading as a process gradually unfolding over time. The process of gradual familiarization that this series of encounters entails is not unlike the gradual process involved in coming to inhabit a space comfortably. Unlike the space of a physical structure, however, the inhabitable space of De Worde's Sammelaband is best understood as "virtual."[16]

In invoking "virtuality" this chapter builds on the work of Seeta Chaganti who has proposed that readers' experience of the interplay between multimedia in *Danse Macabre* murals invites an experience of virtuality that is mirrors the uncanny and disorienting experience of dance spectatorship ("Danse" 7). The ability for codices to facilitate an experience of virtuality has been suggested by Heather Blatt who proposes that Cambridge, Trinity College Library MS R.3.19 (2), through its coupling of a set of wall verses from the Percy family estate with "descriptions of architectural space" suggests that "architectural framing" alone may allow for a readers' apprehension of virtuality.[17] Blatt's claim that texts like the "Percy Estate Wall verses" suggest "that reading evokes both learning and inhabitation" offers a provocative way of thinking about reading in relation to Ahmed's concept of "orientation" as related to how we come to feel "at home" in a space.[18] It is thus perhaps no coincidence that Trinity College Library MS R.3.19 (2) is the earliest manuscript witness to the *Assembly of Gods*, a poem which endorses and facilitates a virtual experience of reading.

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[16] As Brian Massumi explains, the term "virtual" names "a dimension of reality, not its illusionary opponent or artificial overcoming." Brian Massumi, "Envisioning the Virtual," in *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality*, ed. Mark Grimshaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 55-56; In his *Parables for the Virtual*, Massumi helpfully describes the virtual as something "inaccessible to the senses," and capable of being figured only through "a multiplication of images. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Duke University Press, 2002), 133.

[17] The MS containing the "Percy Wall Verses" dates to the third quarter of the fifteenth-century (c. 1478-83); For an analysis of this text through the lens of "participatory reading," see Blatt, *Participatory reading*, 128-166.

[18] Blatt, *Participatory Reading*, 147.

BL G.11587, an early Sammbleband of De Worde's in which Caxton's "Pilgrims at the Table" woodcut appears a total of four times across two texts (Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and the anonymous work the *Assembly of Gods*), represents one of De Worde's early experiments in using print paratexts—and specifically illustrations—to invite readers to engage in a unique kind of virtual, multimedia, embodied participatory reading experience. While this form of participatory reading has parallels in manuscript culture (e.g. *compilatio*), De Worde's Sammelband's offers a novel textual experience through its sequences of mechanically replicated illustrations.[19] Noting the potential performative function of De Worde's series' of illustrations allows us to appreciate his editorial work as not simply economically minded, but utilitarian and even literary—facilitating his readers' use of his Sammelband as a means to contemplation. This chapter thus builds on the work of Martha Driver and others who have sought to shift long held opinions about the inferior quality and lack of thoughtfulness of late fifteenth-century English print texts in comparison to work printed at the same time on the Continent.[20]

Beginning with an overview of the *Assembly of Gods* and its thematic interest in (re)orientation and virtuality, this chapter then moves on to a discussion of Caxton's "Pilgrim's at the Table" woodcut's potential for generating virtual space, first considering its initial appearance in Caxton's second edition of *The Canterbury Tales* and second, its appearance in two of De Worde's Sammelband (BL G. 11587 and Digital Store C 13). This second Sammelband, in which the *Assembly of Gods* appears alongside Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* and *Temple of Glas*, the reader's marginalia and editorial interventions offer compelling evidence of how De Worde's illustrations facilitated a reader's experience of the text as a virtual space.

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[19] On De Worde's later experiments with *factotum* and *composite* illustrations see Martha Driver*, The Image in Print: Book Illustration in Late Medieval England and Its Sources* (London: British Library, 2004)*;* Driver, "The Illustrated de Worde."

[20] See, for example, William Kuskin, *Symbolic Caxton*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

Virtuality and Re-orientation in the *Assembly of Gods*

On its surface, the *Assembly of Gods* appears to be a rather conventional example of English dream-vision allegory of the sort developed by Gower and Chaucer and taken up by poets like Lydgate in the fifteenth-century. Indeed, the poem's attribution to John Lydgate in early manuscript and print witnesses speaks to its conventionality. While there are formal or generic explanations for this attribution to Lydgate, it could also be due to the poem's marked interest in multimedia and the "virtual" experience of negotiating space it required of readers. As a number of scholars have recently noted, John Lydgate's works frequently imagine reading as an embodied and participatory experience that takes place in space and across time.[21] Seeta Chaganti for example has compelling argued for the way that Lydgate's *Dance of Death* contains a similar virtuality to that contained in the *danse macabre* installation he records, via its invitations for readers to apprehend multiple forms of texts as "kinetic" and part of a poem's "formal identity."[22] Similarly Claire Sponsler has discussed Lydgate's soteltes, mummings, and tapestries, as works in which an audience's embodied, multimedia, experience would have played a significant role in their apprehension of the work's meaning and/or value.[23]

The Assembly of Gods speaks to a similar interest in the value that virtual and/or embodied experience holds for readers. This interest is evident from the poem's initial banquet scene in which the poet spends twenty stanzas describing the "dew ordre" of the seating arrangement Apollo (as "marchall" of the feast) dictates for the gods and goddesses (lines 246-392). To this orderly arrangement of the gods at the "table set rownde aboute" is added a description of classical poets and philosophers described as servants "awaytyng on the boorde"

[21]In addition to the works discussed below, see Maura Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[22] Seeta Chaganti, "Danse Macabre and the Virtual Churchyard." *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 3 no. 1 (2012): 22.

[23] Claire Sponsler, *The Queen's Dumbshows*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

(393). Though the banquet's power to orient the gods to one another through "dew ordre" appears to resolve the dispute amongst the gods that caused Apollo to stage the banquet in the first place, the entrance of "Discorde" soon destroys this harmony, leading to an all-out psychomachian war against "Attropos" (a.k.a. Death) who is also angered by not being invited to the feast. In the poem's conclusion, the feast as a spatial metaphor for the classical poetic tradition's relationship to mythology is debunked by "Doctrine" who "re-orients" the Dreamer both figuratively and literally through her authoritative interpretation of his vision, during which she repeatedly calls attention to the Dreamer's bodily orientation towards paintings on the four walls of her garden, which correlate to four periods of history. Throughout this final section, the poem emphasizes the spatial nature of Doctrine's lesson by repeatedly calling attention to how the Dreamer is situated with respect to the paintings Doctrine describes as "behynde thee," "of the lyft hande," and "on the right hande" and later, with respect to her own orientations towards them, as "at my bake," "directly ageyne my visage," "on my lyft hande," and "on my right hande" (1767-69 and 1905-15).

The emphatically spatio-temporal nature of Doctrine's instruction imagines a mode of reading that involves a series of mutually informative embodied and intellectual re-orientations. We see this, for example, in a passage where Morpheus criticizes the Dreamer for staring too long at one painting, which leads to the Dreamer's "turnyng [his] vysage" to the "fourth wall" where he sees "poetys and phylosophyrs sage. / Many oon mo then at the banket / Servyd the goddess, as I seyde before" (1890-1892). The comparative nature of the Dreamer's observation here suggests the re-orienting quality of his encounters with the paintings. While the banquet of gods with its cadre of poets and philosophers had initially impressed the Dreamer, his subsequent encounter with Doctrine's wall painting, which contains not just classical poets and philosophers

who praised the Greco-Roman gods, but *all* poets and philosophers who lived during the "Time of Deviation," tempers that initial reaction by showing him a "bigger picture." The Dreamer's description of the poets and philosophers depicted in the wall painting also takes on a different tenor from his initial non-descriptive list of classical figures who attended the gods at their banquet ("There was sad Sychero and Arystotyll olde / Tholome, Dorothe with Dyogenes / Plato, Messehala, and wyse Socrates") (lines 390-392). Unlike the initial description of philosophers and poets at the banquet who are described in bulk as "awaytyng on the boorde," the poets and philosophers he sees in this new context are engaged in a variety of embodied intellectual activities:

> Som were made standing and som in chayeres set;
> Som looking on books, as they had stodyed sore;
> Som drawing almenakes, and in her hands bore
> Astryrlabes, taking the altitude of the sonne,
> Among whom Dyogenes sate in a tonne (1893-1897).

In this revised picture of the classical past seen not in relation to mythology, but in relation to an eschatological history, the bodily orientations and activities of philosophers and poets takes center stage. Similar to these active unnamed scholars, "Dyogenes," seated in a "tonne" (barrel) as he was famously known to do, suggests the important role that a person's bodily orientation plays in generating their worldview.[24] Famous for his public performances, Diogenes stands for a kind of wisdom grounded in and communicated via his bodily approach to the world.[25]

The poem's suggestion that knowledge is generated out of embodied engagement with the world resonates with the kind of reading De Worde invited through the illustrations that

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[24] The Dreamer's claim that he is still pondering this image of Diogenes when Doctrine recalls his gaze to her suggests the philosopher's importance to the poem ("And as I was lokyng on that fourthe wall, / Of Dyogenes beholding the ymage, / Sodenly Doctryne began me to call" (1898-1900)).

[25] Indeed, Diogenes's well-known encounter with Alexander the Great, in which he responds to the Alexander's offer of whatever he desires with the request that Alexander stop blocking the sun, similarly speaks to the way that the philosopher allowed his body to both shape and convey his approach to the world.

accompany his version of *The Assembly of Gods*. Indeed, as Jane Chance observes, three of the four "times" depicted on the walls of Doctrine's garden (the "Time of Deviation," "Time of Revocation" and "Time of Reconciliation") correlate with the tripartite division of time found in late medieval and early modern *Biblia pauperum* or "paupers' Bible."[26] Appearing in manuscript and print, *Biblia pauperum* were illustrated volumes, with full page layouts "combining various kinds of biblical images and Latin texts, visually united by an architectonic frame."[27] Based on the complex juxtapositions of image and text that *Biblia pauperum* contained, Martha Driver has argued that their purpose was likely "primarily meditative," and the content meant to be "savored and contemplated rather than quickly perused."[28] Much like De Worde's illustrations, the illustrations in *Biblia pauperum* were not shorthand for or supplement to a text's meaning, but a crucial means for inviting readers' open-ended extended engagement with the codex.

By following up the Dreamer's experience "at the table," with an orienting experience amongst her "wall paintings," Doctrine importantly does not reject an understanding of knowledge acquisition as an embodied process, but asks that we become aware of a text's historical context, human creators, and the embodied orientation(s) to the world that inheres in their perspectives. The Dreamer's act of embodied, iterative, and comparative reading across Doctrine's wall paintings parallels not only the experience of reading across panels in a *Biblia pauperum*, but potentially the experience of reading across the different texts that one might encounter throughout their life. Doctrine's wall paintings, in depicting not only biblical events or

[26] *The Assembly of Gods- Le Assemble de Dyeus, or, Banquet of Gods and Goddesses, with the Discourse of Reason and Sensuality*, ed. Jane Chance. TEAMS Middle English Texts. (Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1999), 1. As Chance explains, a typical page from a *Biblia pauperum* consisted of a scene from the Gospels flanked by two smaller images of Old Testament events that might be understood as prefiguring that scene. These smaller images were often accompanied by explanatory text and each of the three scenes accompanied by Latin verse.

[27] Tobin Nellhaus, "10. Mementos of Things to Come: Orality, Literacy, and Typology in the *Biblia pauperum*," *Printing the Written Word*, edited by Sandra Hindman, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 294.

[28] Driver, *The Image in Print*, 19.

figures, but also figures of poetic or philosophical importance suggest a model of reading which is not only devotional, but more broadly literary and which highlights the challenge that non-Christian texts from the classical past would have posed for readers, as sources of wisdom grounded in non-Christian orientation to the world.

The Assembly of Gods not only depicts reading as a participatory process of embodied, spatial, (re-)orientation, but invites readers to experience the poem in that mode through the paratextual index of "gods and goddesses" that prefaces the poem in five of its six surviving witnesses—including the poem's earliest manuscript witness, Cambridge Trinity College Library MS R.3.19 (2). Though scholars have thus far viewed this list as providing a straightforward "gloss" for the poem's initial cast of characters, I propose that it should be read in terms of the narrative staging of an experience of correction that Theresa Tinkle has argued is implicit in the way that the poem introduces Doctrine's authoritative explication of the banquet scene and its gods and goddesses, "only after a delay that introduces a functional occasion of interpretive uncertainty."[29] Tinkle reads Doctrine's "deferred correction" as emphasizing the poem's apparent contrasting of "Doctrine" with literature or poetry which the dreamer suggests must always remain as "derke as a myste, or a feynyd fable."[30] Building on Tinkle's astute observation, I argue that the poem's performance of "correction" is facilitated not only by the ambiguity of the poem's initial portraits of the Olympian deities "appareled as medieval nobility," but, paradoxically by the index of gods and goddesses that prefaces the text.[31] As a result, we might view *The Assembly of Gods* as offering commentary on not just poetic ambiguity, but the

[29] Theresa Tinkle, *Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, and English Poetry.* (Stanford University Press, 1996), 132.
[30] Tinkle, 133.
[31] Tinkle, 132.

paradoxical heightening of ambiguity that the inclusion of reference materials, whose ostensible purpose is to clarify poetic ambiguity, could provoke.[32]

This indexical list, titled "Interpretacion of the names of goddys and goddesses," contains twenty-seven entries formatted into two columns, the first listing the name of a mythological figure and the second a brief description of their realm and/or natural referent. By offering readers a guide to the classical figures prior to the poem's initial feast scene the index appears to serve to prepare readers to view them correctly as symbols or natural phenomena as opposed to actual gods. At the same time, this list is in many ways also deceptive. Though its first two entries on Apollo (the banquet's marshal) appear to set up a format of debunking the gods, first explaining his epithet ("Phebus ys as moche to sey as the Sonne") and second his proper name ("Apollo ys the same, or ellys God of light"), this pattern does not hold true throughout the list (lines 3-4). Though a few other gods receive similar two part descriptions reflecting their double status as gods and personifications of natural phenomena, they appear as only single entries within the list.[33] Indeed, readers who approached the list sequentially would have soon discovered that gods with two-part descriptions constitute only a minority, with twenty-one of the twenty-seven entries simply describing the realm over which the gods were believed to rule (as in the description of Mars as "God of batayll" (23)). Potentially even more disorienting is the list's inclusion of figures such like "Cerberus" and "Minos" (described as "Porter of hell" and "Juge of helle") who are part of Greek mythology but neither gods or goddesses. The inconsistency of the poem's index both reflects and highlights the inconsistent signification that

[32] For a reflection on the kinds of "nonlinear" reading practices that indexes and tables facilitate, see Peter Stallybrass, "Books and scrolls: Navigating the Bible," in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*, eds. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 42-79; For an approach to "nonlinear" reading practices vis-à-vis "extracodexical" texts see Blatt, *Participatory Reading*, 1-27 and 62.

[33] "Phebe," for example is described as "the mone, or Goddes of watyres" (11), while Eolus is glossed as "the wynde, or God of the eyre" (9).

Tinkle has argued was inherent in medieval representations of the Romano-Greek gods.[34] Through the list of the gods, the author thus both attempts to contain their ambiguity and highlights the difficulty, or perhaps even impossibility, of that task. Thus, contrary to the usual function of reference tools to facilitate a work's fast and efficient use of a codex, the list of gods and goddesses invites readerly "disorientation"—which Doctrine in her final speech attempts to resolve.

Illustration and Typology: Caxton's Woodcut

Similar to Doctrine's wall paintings, which combine literary and biblical history and whose meaning depends on the Dreamer's embodied (re-)orientation towards their content, De Worde's repeated use of Caxton's illustration of the "Pilgrims at the Table," invites what we might call a "literary" typological reading. Here, the illustration's "meaning" is not primarily dependent on readers' prior knowledge of a conventional external, historical/biblical referent, but is approached through their analysis of it in relation to the immediate context of the page and their previous experiences with the illustration in other parts of the text and/or their previous readings of the text. In contrast to Avril Henry's claim that typological images "only instruct if you already know what they mean," the instructive potential of Caxton's illustration of the "Pilgrims at the Table" depends not on any single point of prior knowledge but could derive from any number of orientations towards its central "round table" that readers bring to the text.[35] Though the roundness of the table may indeed suggest symbolic or typological resonances with the Last Supper or Arthurian Round Table for some readers, its meaning is not determined by

[34] See Tinkle, *Medieval Venuses and Cupids*, 1-8.
[35] Avril Henry, *Biblia Pauperum: A Facsimile and Edition*. (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1987), 17.

those connotations due to its contextualization in relation to the fictional and literary *Canterbury Tales* (or in De Worde's case, *The Assembly of Gods*).[36]

We can see an example of one such interaction in Caxton's second edition of the *Canterbury Tales.* Here, the "Pilgrims at the Table" woodcut makes its initial appearance at the tail-end of the "General Prologue," following the pilgrims' portraits (which in this edition are accompanied by twenty-one woodcut illustrations of the pilgrims on horseback). The illustration, through its ambiguity, numerical specificity, and placement within Caxton's work, invites a sustained engagement with Chaucer's text. Ironically, the illustration's lack of detail, long cited as evidence of the inferior quality of Caxton's woodcuts, is part of what allows it to offer readers a more participatory experience. Unlike the equestrian portraits found in the famed Ellesmere Manuscript which, through multiple identifying details and clear placement alongside the tales of the pilgrims they represent, leave no room for ambiguity as to whom they represent, the "Pilgrims at the Table" illustration offers readers a chance to try to identify who is seated at the table. While this task would have proved difficult for an uninitiated reader who encountered the illustration at the start of the "General Prologue," it would have been significantly easier the second time the illustration appears, after all of the pilgrims have been introduced. This highlights one way in that the illustration and its significance could have evolved as a reader progressed through the Sammelband.

William Kuskin has suggested that Caxton's placement of the woodcut in his edition of the *Canterbury Tales* deliberately creates a "free standing unit" out of the narrator's famous speech about an author's duty to "reherce as ny as evere he kan" the speech of his fellow

[36] We might view this in contrast to the *Biblia pauperum*, in which illustrations were typically not reproduced identically across multiple pages.

pilgrims.[37] Kuskin sees this as Caxton attempting to emphasize and appropriate Chaucer's vision of a "literary epistemology" in which vernacular writing exists at a remove from the "allegorical" work of Plato (whom the narrator cites as a model) and at an even further remove from the transcendence of Christ's word (which the narrator also cites).[38] Within this context, Caxton's woodcut might be read as an attempt to supplement the deficiency Chaucer suggests when he apologizes for having "nat set folk in hir degree"(line 744).[39] As the earliest recorded illustration of the pilgrims as a group, Caxton's illustration could have easily provided a visual of the pilgrims set according to their "degree" as they would have been at a noble feast.[40] By placing the pilgrims at a *round* table, however, Caxton's illustration imagines "degre," not in terms of the conventional hierarchal positioning of the noble feast that one would expect, but in an a-hierarchical formation which suggests that Chaucer's claim to not set the pilgrims in their "degree" is not a deficiency of the poet's, but a reflection of the community that he describes. Because there is no "correct" way of reading this illustration, readers who encountered it would have faced the question of whether Caxton's illustration is intended to depict the actual community Chaucer's narrator interacted with in the text, or whether it is a typologically informed illustration of an ideal community. Seated at a "round" table, the imperfect community of pilgrims resonates typologically with the perfection of other famous tables, like Christ's Last Supper or Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.

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[37] William Kuskin, *Symbolic Caxton* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 140.

[38] Kuskin, 142; Indeed, my suggestion that readers could have experienced the codex as an "inhabitable" space challenges Kuskin's overarching claim that Caxton found Chaucer's courtly authorial persona to be "uninhabitable." Kuskin, *Symbolic Caxton*, 155-192.

[39] All quotations from Chaucer's works are copied from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson. (Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1987).

[40] As David Carlson notes, Caxton's "Pilgrims at the Table" woodcut first appears in his illustrated second edition of the *Canterbury Tales* and has no antecedent in illustrated manuscript versions of the *Tales.* David R. Carlson, "Woodcut Illustrations of the Canterbury Tales, 1483–1602," *The Library* 19, no. 1 (1997): 26.

Caxton's illustration also highlights the problem of spatializing an ideal community. Though not the same kind of "degre" we might see at the noble feast table, Caxton's image nevertheless suggests a hierarchy amongst the pilgrims through its perspective and the diners' orientations facing the table's central hooded figure. The figure's ambiguous appearance, however, precludes the possibility of identifying any clear hieararchy amongst the pilgrims. Instead, the figure seems to invite readers to consider who he (or she) might be. Could it be Harry Bailey? The narrator? The author? The Pardoner? Caxton? As with many of the other figures at the table, the figure's lack of detail makes it difficult to say. Yet, we are nevertheless invited to participate in a guessing game unlike any experience that Chaucer's text provides.

Caxton's illustration also invites reader participation via the gap between the twenty-four pilgrims depicted and the company of "nyne and twenty" pilgrims (thirty if we include the narrator), described in the General Prologue. A similar gap exists between the twenty-four diners of the illustration and the twenty-two pilgrims who receive individual illustrated portraits in Caxton's version. While readers may have found other ways of explaining this gap (perhaps several pilgrims got up to use the restroom?) perspicacious readers who had read and counted all of the tales included in Chaucer's work may have noticed that the twenty-four bodies at the table coincide exactly with the twenty-four tales told by the Canterbury pilgrims.[41] This parallel between number of stories and number of pilgrims suggests that Caxton may have imagined his

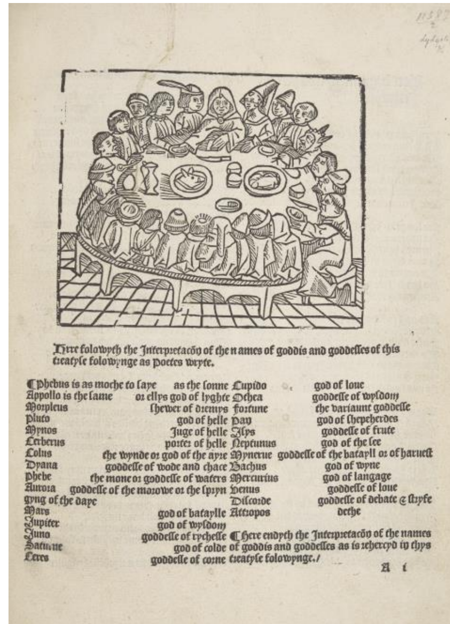
[41] The apocryphal "Tale of Beryn," in its description of a feast the pilgrims hold upon reaching Canterbury, addresses the problem of seating all twenty-nine pilgrims at a single table by imagining a sequence of two dinners. The Host, taking on the role of "marchall" prescribes that the Knight and clergy will eat first and the Host and the rest of the "officers" follow (lines 386-388); Citations of the "Tale of Beryn" from *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, edited by John M. Bowers. TEAMS Middle English Texts (Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1992).

illustration as a version of the “table of contents” he included with so many of his editions.[42] Like a table of contents, the illustration comes at the start of the text and offers a preview of what is to come. Through his illustration, Caxton imagines Chaucer’s a-hierarchical community without “degre,” as existing not in the world, nor in a typological referent, but in the collection of tales found between the covers of the book he has created.

Through this non-descript illustration, Caxton might be seen as inviting readers to experience the *Canterbury Tales* similarly to how he describes he experienced it himself in his “Prologue” to his second edition. Here, in his story of how the second edition came to be produced, he describes a mode of reading across versions that is consciously temporal, spatial, and social. His story, which begins with an encounter with a man who promises to provide him with a more true copy of Chaucer’s *Tales* and concludes with an apology his first edition, which he claims contributed to the proliferation of bad versions of Chaucer’s work, speaks to a vision of reading as a process of repeated returns to a text (in multiple forms if need be) in order to approach an understanding of it that is more true to the author’s intent. Caxton’s vision of reading as a process of gradually approaching a truer version of a text, through multiple encounters with it in different forms, suggests a reversal of the “literary epistemology” Kuskin identifies in Chaucer’s speech from the *General Prologue*. Read in relation to the process of gradual habituation I have suggested the “Pilgrims at the Table” woodcut invites, Caxton’s “Prologue” could be seen as a guide for readers approaching his illustrated text.

[42] On Caxton’s tables of contents, see James Wade, "The Chapter Headings of the Morte Darthur: Caxton and de Worde." *Modern Philology* 111 no. 4 (2014): 645-667; Alex da Costa, "’That ye mowe redely fynde... what ye desyre’: Printed Tables of Contents and Indices, 1476-1550," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 81 no. 3 (2018): 291-313.

BL G 11587: On Paratexts and Inhabiting the "Space" of the Codex



Here foloweth the Interpretacōn of the names of goddis and goddesses of this treatyse folowynge as poetes wryte.

¶ Phebus is as moche to saye	as the sonne	Cupido	god of loue
Appollo is the same	or ellys god of lyghte	Othea	goddesse of wysdom
Morpleus	shewer of dremys	Fortune	the variaunt goddesse
Pluto	god of helle	Pan	god of shepeherdes
Mynos	Juge of helle	Ysis	goddesse of frute
Cerberus	porter of helle	Neptunus	god of the see
Colus	the wynde or god of the ayre	Mynerue	goddesse of the batayll or of haruest
Dyana	goddesse of wode and chace	Bachus	god of wyne
Phebe	the mone or goddesse of waters	Mercurius	god of langage
Aurora	goddesse of the morowe or the spryngyng of the daye	Venus	goddesse of loue
		Discorde	goddesse of debate & stryfe
Mars	god of batayllе	Attropos	dethe
Jupiter	god of wysdom		
Juno	goddesse of rychesse		
Saturne	god of colde		
Ceres	goddesse of corne		

¶ Here endyth the Interpretacōn of the names of goddis and goddesses as is rehercyd in thys treatyse folowynge./

A i

Fig. 2. BL G. 11587, the Assembly of Gods

Readers of BL G. 11587 who turned to the *Assembly of Gods* after reading, or even simply perusing, the edition of the *Canterbury Tales* that precedes it in De Worde's Sammelband may have been surprised to see Caxton's woodcut appear again, here alongside an index of Gods and Goddesses that prefaces the *Assembly of Gods.*[43] For readers who approached the Sammelband linearly, this would constitute a *fourth* encounter with the image, with the most recent occurring just one page earlier along with Chaucer's "Retraction." While the woodcut's re-appearance on the initial page of the *Assembly of Gods* appears to invite readers to read the allegorical dream vision in terms of Chaucer's text, it does not specify how exactly to do this. De Worde's repeated use of Caxton's illustration across two texts thus amplifies the invitation to extended reading and interpretation that is inherent in Caxton's original illustration.

[43] The survival of this particular "Sammelband" in two witnesses (BL G 11587 and New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, 737.1-2) has been taken as evidence that De Worde either "promoted" the texts together or had them "ready-bound." Gillespie, *Print Culture,* 94; Martha Driver notes that four "separately bound" copies of this edition of the *Assembly of Gods* exist in addition to other fragmentary copies. Driver, "Woodcuts and Decorative Techniques," 117.

Indeed, De Worde's two-page layout of Caxton's "Pilgrims at the Table" woodcut alongside Caxton's textile-inspired printer's mark at the start of the *Assembly of Gods* bears an uncanny resemblance to the layout of that same illustration alongside Chaucer's "Retraction" that appears one page earlier (see figs. 3 and 4). Interestingly, in this mirrored layout, Chaucer's textual "Retraction" is replaced by Caxton's symbolic mark. As Kuskin notes, Caxton's decision to style his printer's mark after a textile likely reflects his status as a "Mercer," with that older and more established trade grounding serving to authorize printing business.[44] In this mise-en-page, however, the textile's resonance with the furnished environment of the Tabard Inn found in the "Pilgrims at the Table" woodcut strikingly recalls a domestic environment, creating something akin to the architectural title pages that would eventually become a mainstay of early print paratexts.[45]

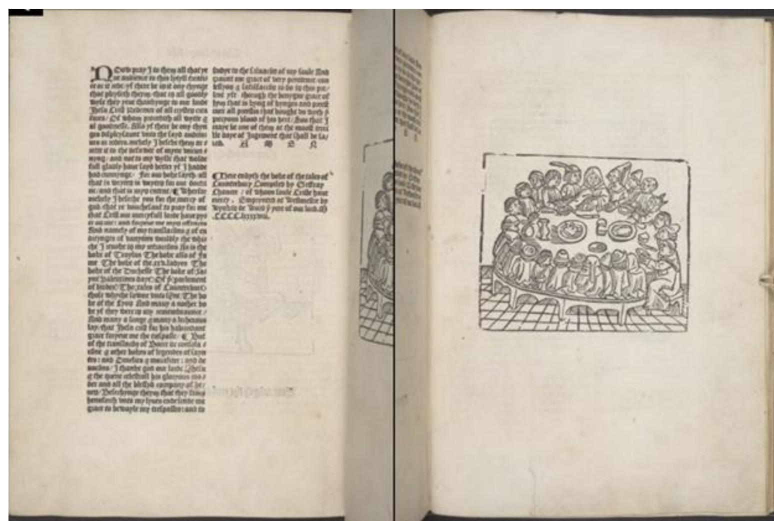
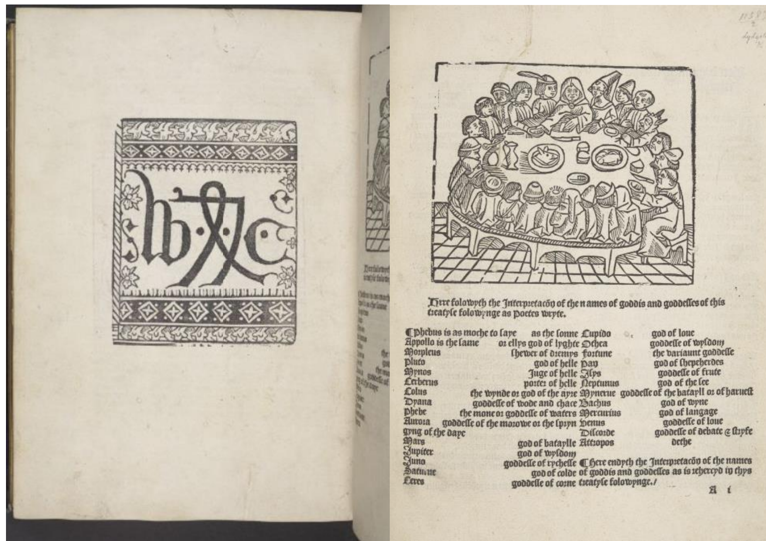


Fig. 3. Final two pages of De Worde's Canterbury Tales in BL G. 11587, featuring Chaucer's "Retraction" (left) and Caxton's "Pilgrims at the Table" (right)

[44] Kuskin, *Symbolic Caxton*, 77-78. As Kuskin explains, Caxton actually belonged to a guild of "Mercers" and a guild of "Staplers" (i.e. those concerned with shipments of raw wool to the English staple at Calais.

[45] On the use of textiles/cloth in medieval and early modern title pages, see Alastair Fowler, *The Mind of the Book: Pictorial Title Pages* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 17-18.



Here foloweth the Interpretacōn of the names of goddis and goddesses of this treatyse folowynge as Poetes wryte.

¶ Phebus is as moche to saye	as the sonne
Appollo is the same	or ellys god of lyghte
Morpleus	shewer of dremys
Pluto	god of helle
Mynos	Juge of helle
Cerberus	porter of helle
Colus	the wynde or god of the ayre
Dyana	goddesse of wode and chace
Phebe	the mone or goddesse of waters
Aurora	goddesse of the morowe or the spryngyng of the daye
Mars	god of bataylle
Jupiter	god of wysdom
Juno	goddesse of rychesse
Saturne	god of colde
Ceres	goddesse of corne
Cupido	god of loue
Othea	goddesse of wysdom
Fortune	the variaunt goddesse
Pan	god of shepeherdes
Ysys	goddesse of frute
Neptunus	god of the see
Mynerue	goddesse of the batayll or of haruest
Bachus	god of wyne
Mercurius	god of langage
Venus	goddesse of loue
Discorde	goddesse of debate & stryfe
Attropos	dethe

¶ Here endyth the Interpretacōn of the names of goddis and goddesses as is rehercyd in thys treatyse folowynge./

A i

Fig. 4. BL G. 11587. Opening layout to the Assembly of Gods

Through its resonances with domestic space, De Worde's presentation of the first page of the *Assembly of Gods* (where he places the "index" of gods and goddesses) raises interesting questions about the relationship between paratexts and the virtual experience of space that books facilitated. Styled after a piece of furniture (a tapestry), Caxton's printer's mark might be understood as functioning similarly to both the conventional architectural "frontispiece" style title pages which appeared in the mid-sixteenth-century (and which Alastair Fowler notes frequently included banners/tapestries) and the much earlier tradition of manuscript "carpet pages," found at the openings of early medieval insular manuscripts like the Lindisfarne Gospels—which Michelle Brown argues were modeled on devotional "prayer mats."[46] While neither prayer mats nor carpet pages were commonly by Christians in the fifteenth-century when Caxton and De Worde were using the mark, decorative tapestries played an important role in homes of all kinds throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth-centuries. As Claire Sponsler points out, the development of painted or "stained" cloths in the late fifteenth-century expanded

[46] Michelle Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe*. Vol. 1. (University of Toronto Press, 2003), 319.

illustrative textiles to a broader market.[47] The development of stained cloths suggests several interesting parallels the development of the printed book, as each used new technologies of printing to increase the accessibility of a commodity once reserved for a noble audience. In this context, it is notable that Caxton's printer's mark, through its remediation of textile in print form blurs any distinction between woven tapestry and stained cloth. Recognizing that textiles offered medieval people a way of defining the space of the home invites us to read Caxton's printer's mark not only as a mark of his work's quality, but as a potential commentary on the (printed) book as an extension of domestic space. Indeed, De Worde' combination of Caxton's textile-mark and his "Pilgrims at the Table" woodcut recalls a medieval dining hall, more so than it does the architectural entryway that would come to dominate print title pages in the decades that followed.[48]

De Worde's tableau resonates not only visually but also performatively with a domestic space like a dining hall, as readers are invited to repeatedly return to the two-page layout to consult the index of gods and goddesses as they read. De Worde's "title page," through its combination of two paratextual apparatuses (index and illustration) that invite return and a gradual apprehension of their meaning, offers readers additional opportunities for developing their relationship to the Sammelband as a particular kind of virtual, "familiar" place.

De Worde's paratextual apparatus, by inviting readers to draw links across texts and return to their space, resonates with recent scholarship on paratext, which attempts to replace the potentially problematic "unidirectionality" implicit in Gerard Genette's spatial metaphors of

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[47] Claire Sponsler, "Text and Textile: Lydgate's Tapestry Poems," in *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings,* ed. E. Jane Burns (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2004), 21.

[48] On the history of the architectural frontispiece, see Fowler, *The Mind of the Book,* 17-18; Deborah N. Losse, in her study of French Renaissance *conteurs* and their prologues, observes that later print editors in France imagined their books not only as buildings, but as a "table furnished with tasty morsels" as shops "offering new wares" or as orphans or "fledglings." Deborah N. Losse, *Sampling the Book: Renaissance Prologues and the French Conteurs* (Bucknell University Press, 1994), Chapter 3.

paratexts as “airlock,” “canal lock” or “threshold”—seen as deriving from his overemphasis on prefatory “peritexts”—with an understanding that paratexts “are in operation all the way through the reader’s experience of the text… and continuously inform the process of reading, offering multiple points of entry, interpretation, and contestation.”[49] In line with recent scholarly observations that paratexts are not limited to prefatory material, De Worde’s combination of multiple paratexts and repeated illustrations suggest that he understood readers’ interactions with paratexts as an important part of a readers’ experience of a text as both a unified whole and an inhabited space.

Coming to the Table: A Reader’s Editorial Renovations

A Sammelband copy of one of the quarto editions of the *Assembly of Gods* (STC 17007) that De Worde printed around 1500 interestingly attests to the effect that De Worde’s repeated use of Caxton’s woodcut had on one reader.[50] In this Sammelband, the *Assembly of Gods* appears between Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes* and his *Temple of Glas*. Despite the absence of the *Canterbury Tales,* Caxton’s illustration appears at the beginning of the *Assembly of Gods*, as in BL G. 11587. This time, however, it appears once again at the end of the text, facing-page from Lydgate’s *Temple of Glas*.[51] Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes* is, in a similar fashion, bookended by a repeated woodcut illustration of a knight on horseback. As Alexandra Gillespie notes, an “early owner” of this book has added the caption “(A)Edipus” to this woodblock illustration both times it appears.[52] In the place where this illustration appears as between the *Siege of Thebes* and the

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[49] Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, eds. *Renaissance Paratexts* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.
[50] Driver, “Woodcuts and Decorative Techniques,” 118.
[51] BL Catalogue Entry: [Here foloweth the Interpretacyon of the names of goddys and goddesses' as is rehersed in this treatyse folowyng as Poetes wryte. [Sig. f. 6 recto:] Here endeth a lytyll Tratyse named Le assemble de dyeus. [Westminster] : Wynkyn de Worde, [ca. 1494.] (a digital copy of the codex is available at BL Digital Store C.13.a.21.(2.).
[52] Gillespie, *Print Culture*, 87.

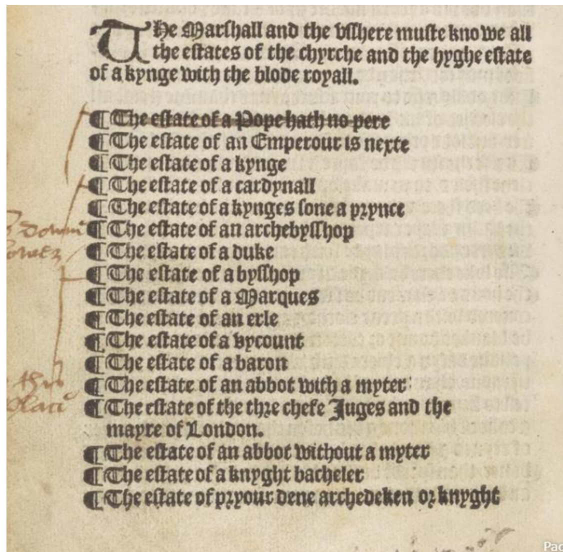
Assembly of Gods we might see this reader's attempt at finding a relationship between the two texts through their shared connection to the classical tradition. This reader has made a similarly interesting edit to Caxton's "Pilgrims at Table," filling in the scalps of the three tonsured figures of Caxton's woodcut with black ink (see Fig 3 below for a side-by-side comparison). The reader, apparently having sensed some incongruity between the monastic haircut and Greco-Roman deities supposedly represented in the illustration, took it upon themselves to transform the illustration in a way that they found acceptable. The strength of this reader/editor's conviction is evidenced by the fact that they made the same exact edit on the illustration the second time it appears in the text.

Fig. 5. Monk's tonsure in Caxton's woodcut (STC 17005)

Fig. 6. Reader's edits to the monk's tonsure in STC 17007

Both edits speak suggestively to what I have suggested about De Worde's illustrations as facilitating a reader's "inhabitance" of a codex. The tonsure edits are particularly interesting in this respect for their potential relationship to this reader's religious orientation. Though we do not know anything about the readers' social position or orientation (aside from a possible name), we might imagine at least two possible orientations that could have inspired their edit. For a Catholic reading approaching this text, these tonsured "gods" would have been not merely anachronistic but perhaps even somewhat blasphemous. We might imagine an early Protestant reader making the same edit in an attempt at removing a monastic figure from their text. We see a similar kind of "participatory" reading in a witness to De Worde's first edition of the "Boke of Kervyng" where a reader has stricken out several entries in a list describing the "estates of the chyrche and the hyghe estate of a kynge with the blode royall," including the very first which reads "The estate of a Pope hath no pere."[53] Both texts intriguingly suggest the way in which 'participatory' reading depended on a negotiation of textual spaces and real world social spaces and orders. That the stricken entry in the "Boke of Kervyng" is still legible highlights how the act of editing as a performance may have been more important to readers than the actual editing itself. By allowing the text to still be read, the reader makes the nature of their moral act legible for future readers.

[53] Cambridge University Library, MS Sel.5.19.



The Marſhall and the vſſhere muſte knowe all the eſtates of the chyrche and the hyghe eſtate of a kynge with the blode royall.

¶ The eſtate of a Pope hath no pere
¶ The eſtate of an Emperour is nexte
¶ The eſtate of a kynge
¶ The eſtate of a cardynall
¶ The eſtate of a kynges ſone a pꝛynce
¶ The eſtate of an archebyſſhop
¶ The eſtate of a duke
¶ The eſtate of a byſſhop
¶ The eſtate of a Marques
¶ The eſtate of an erle
¶ The eſtate of a vycount
¶ The eſtate of a baron
¶ The eſtate of an abbot with a myter
¶ The eſtate of the thꝛe chefe Juges and the mayre of London.
¶ The eſtate of an abbot without a myter
¶ The eſtate of a knyght bacheler
¶ The eſtate of pꝛyour dene archedeken oꝛ knyght

Fig. 7. "The Boke of Kervyng," Sel. 5.19 (1508)

While we cannot know at what point in their reading process, the reader decided to make the edits to the monks' tonsures, the fact that they apply their edits to the illustration both times it appears offers some hint as to how they understood their repeated encounter with De Worde's identical illustrations. By repeating their editorial intervention across both illustrations, the reader not only comments on the book's contents, but engages in a performance of following the "line" that they themselves have established for reading the illustration. I use the term "line" here in reference to Ahmed's discussion of "orientation" and "disorientation" in terms of the "lines" (or conventional narratives) that we follow and the role that they play in creating "proximities" to some bodies and objects and not others.[54] For Ahmed, "queer phenomenology" is a way of understanding, in spatial terms, the "lines" that queer people must construct for themselves, when such narratives fail, and when bodies try to "inhabit spaces that do not extend their shop, or use objects that do not extend their reach."[55] This reader's edits highlight the opportunity that De Worde's print texts offered readers to shape and inhabit the space of a book to conform to their

[54] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* 169.
[55] Ahmed, 160.

own bodies and beliefs. By removing a buyer's role in their production process, De Worde's pre-compiled Sammelband offer readers a chance to habituate themselves to a space not bespoke for their bodies. From the perspective of "orientation," this reader's edits thus speak to a process of habituation that would allow them to more comfortably "inhabit" the codex they owned by aligning its illustrations with their own understanding of the world.

The unusual sideways presentation of Caxton's woodcut in STC 17007 (a necessity owing to the print's quarto size) might be seen as presenting a similar invitation for readers to orient/habituate themselves to a codex not tailor made for their body's consumption. Readers of the text in this diminished form would have arrived at the image wrong side up. From this orientation, the tonsured monk occupies the top-center position of precedence, which is occupied by the "Host" when the illustration is viewed in its "correct" orientation. Whether this orientation, which highlights one of the illustration's monastic figures, could have played a role in inspiring the reader's editorial invention is impossible to tell. This example nevertheless highlights the ways that decisions book producers made, even out of printerly economy (in this case, the size of a book), could shape a readers' experience of its content, and facilitate a process of habitual (re-)orientation.

De Worde's invitation for readers to habituate themselves to his Sammelband through their repeated returns to Caxton's "table" speaks to what Gervase Rosser has written about the experience of the late medieval fraternal feast. As Rosser explains, though authorized by their formal similarities to institutional models based on "hierarchical values" like the Last Supper, Mass, and noble feast, fraternity banquets offered a forum for the diverse members of guilds to socialize and establish political and economic relations based on an "informing rhetoric of

community."[56] This combination of typological frame and contextual participatory openness resonates with my argument about how readers would have experienced Caxton's woodcut, both in his second edition of the *Canterbury Tales* and in De Worde's Sammelbands. Indeed, the company depicted in the "Pilgrims at Table," consisting of men and women, religious and lay, resonates with the diverse makeup that was a reality in medieval guilds. De Worde's repeated use of Caxton's woodcut across different contexts aligns with Rosser's claim that each medieval feast, though formally similar, would have been a functionally and socially different experience due to the different relationships each would require diners to negotiate. Through this comparison we are led to question whether readers would ever become comfortably "habituated" to a codex like BL G. 11587. Indeed, perhaps the very point of De Worde's proliferating paratextual apparatus was to prevent readers from becoming comfortable with a text to quickly, thus extending a book's longevity as source of entertainment and embodied knowledge by allowing that they would always have some new connection to find.

Fig. 8. Sideways orientation of Caxton's woodcut in De Worde's quarto edition

[56] Gervase Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250-1550*. (Oxford University Press, 2015), 444.

“Re-reading” the *Canterbury Tales* in BL G 11587

If the illustration of the “Pilgrims at the Table” represents, as I have suggested thus far, an invitation to an embodied, recursive, style of reading, we may thus consider how readers may have approached the illustration in the *Canterbury Tales* having read the *Assembly of Gods*. Having received, and performatively experienced, Doctrine’s lesson about the deceptive potential of poetry ungrounded from historical context, readers may have been more attuned to consider the potential significance of the prepared boars head set in the midst of the pilgrims’ table. By 1498, when De Worde’s edition was published, the boar would have been extinct in England for several-hundred years. In noticing a detail like this, readers might find themselves feeling a tiny bit more habituated to the illustration, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, and the codex that they possessed. Thinking about De Worde’s Sammelband in terms of orientation attunes us to the fact that the table readers approached when they encountered the “Pilgrims at the Table” wooduct for the fourth or fifth (or one-hundreth time) would not have been the same table they encountered on their first reading. The familiarity they developed with the illustration and the multiple contexts in which it appears throughout the codex would have changed their perception of it, as would have the experiences they had at the tables they encountered throughout their everyday lives.

Chapter 2: Chaucer's Narrators, Dullness, and Complexion Theory

Sluggy & slowe, in spetynge muiche,
Cold & moyst, my natur ys suche;
Dull of wit, & fatt, of contnaunc strange,
Fflewmatyke, þis complecion may not change.
—Anonymous lyric, Lambeth Palace MS. 523[57]

Scholars have often observed that Chaucer's narrators are "old," "dull," "fat," "bumbling," effeminate, and lacking in sexual appetite. Over the history of Chaucerian scholarship these characteristics have been interpreted variously as accurate autobiographical details about the author, comical exaggerations of Chaucer's actual traits, a stance representing an "implied relationship between himself and his audience."[58] In recent years, scholars have steered clear of the "autobiographical fallacy," following David Lawton's argument that Chaucer's narrators do not represent a "fully rounded character" but rather an "open persona" whose purpose is to "reflect[…] the scope and intensity of the poem for both writer and reader, and of the experience that is in and of the poem.[59]

We might find another possible answer to the significance of Chaucer's narrators' "embodied" descriptions by viewing them through the lens of medieval"complexion theory," which frequently associated "old age," "dullness," and lack of sexual appetite with a "phlegmatic"

[57] This lyric is transcribed in Rossell H. Robbins, *Secular Lyrics of the xivth and xvth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 71.
[58] For a comprehensive overview of the role that autobiography has played in Chaucerian scholarship, see Geoffrey Gust, *Constructing Chaucer: Author and Autofiction in the Critical Tradition* (Springer, 2009), 50-86.
[59] David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 47.

humoral balance. [60] Recognizing Chaucer's hints about his narrators' humoral makeup, I propose, offers valuable insights into how he understood the relationship between bodies, poetic authority, and the kind of reading experience that his works facilitate.[61]

This chapter begins with an analysis of the humorally implicated aged *persona* of the *Roman de la Rose* as possible grounds for Chaucer's phlegmatic narrator. I expand on this initial analysis through a series of readings of Chaucer's humorally suggestive embodied *personae* in his "Envoy to Scogan," "Complaint of Venus," *The Parliament of Fowls*, *The House of Fame*, *Legend of Good Women*, and "To Rosemounde," that suggests an evolving understanding of his narrative *personae*'s relationship to his contemporary society's ideal of a normative masculine humoral body.

In what follows, I argue that Chaucer consciously developed his humoral persona throughout his career, moving from a narrator/poet whose phlegmatic complexion is implied to be either "natural" or grounded in excessive study to an older narrator/poet whose phlegmatic complexion reflects the natural reduction of bodily heat that was understood to accompany aging. In both cases, the phlegmatic body provided Chaucer with an authoritative grounds for his vicarious poetry about love, in which the craft and deception of the prototypical young sanguine/melancholic lover/poet is replaced by the craft of the phlegmatic poet, imagined as absent of deceit due to the dulling of the senses commonly associated with that humoral profile.

Recent scholarship has intriguingly suggested that Chaucer's poetry speaks to a keen awareness of complexion theory and its implications for moral action. As Elspeth Whitney has

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[60] For a general overview of medieval complexion theory and its origins, see Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago, 1990).

[61] As scholars in the medieval "medical humanities" continue to illustrate, complexion theory played a central role in medieval and early modern authors' engagements with topics like gender, sexuality, and morality. See for example: Gail K. Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (University of Chicago Press, 2014); Judy Kem, *Pathologies of Love: Medicine and the Woman Question in Early Modern France.* (University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

recently noted, the sins of gluttony, sloth, and *acedia* (despair) which Chaucer's Pardoner appears guilty of, were according to complexion theory, linked to the phlegmatic's "cold" and "moist" humoral balance.[62] While according to both theology and physiological theory, the human will played an important role in taming the natural passions, complexion theory nevertheless posited the existence of a kind of natural baseline upon which the will worked. According to complexion theory, certain bodies are prone to certain types of sins more than others—with the body's natural inclinations serving as a kind of base for the operation of a moral agent's free will. Complexion theory's close relationship to humoral/dietary theory also meant that a person's bodily propensity towards certain sins was affected by their embodied physical actions, such as diet, and indeed even their environment, thus painting a picture of moral action that involves not only the individual human will but a constellation of material and ideal relations unfolding over time. As such, complexion theory offers a compelling medieval framework for modern scholarly conversations about the relationship between materiality, embodiment, and performance. Early Modern and Medieval scholars have both noted and capitalized on this parallel to various degrees.[63]

Reading Chaucer's narrators in terms of complexion theory offers a new way of thinking about the "effeminacy" scholars have often seen in the passive stances taken by Chaucer's narrators. As Whitney explains in her analysis of Chaucer's Pardoner, complexion theory was viewed as closely related to medieval understandings of gender and sexuality. The phlegmatic man's humoral disposition (cold and moist) was viewed as feminine gendered due to complexion theory's view that women were by nature more moist and cold than men, and thus inclined

[62] Elspeth Whitney, "What's Wrong with the Pardoner? Complexion Theory, the Phlegmatic Man, and Effeminacy," *The Chaucer Review* 45, no. 4 (2011): 357-89.
[63] For an overview of Galen's theory of the four humors as it relates to medieval medicine, see Siraisi, *Medieval & Early Renaissance Medicine,* 104-9.

towards being phlegmatic.[64] Medieval characterizations of women as “soft” and “unstable” and “inconstant” were explained, in part, as due to their phlegmatic nature, as phlegm was associated with “water” and “mobility.”[65] While such theories condemn women to a passive position and offer a natural explanation for patriarchy, they also suggest that gender (and perhaps even sexuality) exist on a sliding scale that could be affected by things like diet. The fact that the four humors applied equally to not only men and women but also animals led to some potentially boundary defying comparative claims, as in the fourteenth-century scholastic text *Tractatus de complexionibus*, where the author notes that: “All fish are of a phlegmatic complexion, as are women.”[66] Ultimately, this chapter suggests that Chaucer capitalized on a humoral understanding of the aging body as phlegmatic, and thus less active and more stable, as a way of not only humbling himself before his social betters, but of aligning himself physically and spiritually with the women he wrote for and about.

In my analysis of Chaucer’s narrators, I draw on Geoffrey Gust’s recent claim that the prevalence of *persona* theory throughout the Middle Ages means that audiences would have understood that both oral performances and written text “did not provide an ‘actual’ representation of the author and his world, but a mere playful persona loosely related to the poet and his surrounds in terms of a *persona* that does not necessarily coincide with the author themselves.”[67] Though scholars have long argued against readings of Chaucer’s personae as “autobiographical” in any sense, Gust’s theory of “autofiction” suggests there might be some value in attending to the gap that readers would have been attuned to notice between *persona* and

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[64] Whitney, "What's Wrong with the Pardoner," 373.

[65] Albertus Magnus, for example, writes that, “…a female’s complexion is moister than a male’s, but it belongs to a moist complexion to receive [impressions] easily but to retain them poorly. For moisture is easily mobile and this is why woman are inconstant and always seeking after new things.” Whitney, 373-4.

[66] Whitney, 373; A similar comparison may be implicit in Criseyde’s question in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*: “To what fyn sholde I lyve and sorwen thus? / How sholde a fish withouten water dure?” (Book IV, 764-5).

[67] Gust, *Constructing Chaucer*, 42.

author.[68] I take this up in my analysis of "To Rosemounde" where I explore how an audience's reception of the poem in both oral performance and its written form could have involved a similar negotiation of authorial body and the voice of a *persona*. Oral performances by Chaucer himself would have created a kind of virtual authorial "body" by their forcing audience members to reconcile the humorally suggestive bodies of his *personae* with the equally meaningful body they knew to belong to Chaucer himself.

Chaucer's depiction of a stable phlegmatic body across his poems, along with his self-canonization, could have had a similar effect of producing a virtual authorial "body." Such a virtual body would have been constituted between a combination of readers' encounters with Chaucer's humorally distinct narrators in individual poems and their prior and/or subsequent encounters with other works attached to his name. We see this primarily in late works like *Legend of Good Women*, "Envoy to Scogan," and "Complaint of Venus," where Chaucer makes references to his own oeuvre or *corpus*, though the regularity with which Chaucer's works were brought together in compilation makes it possible that readers would have perceived it in his early works as well.

Chaucer's Humoral French Sources

The most immediate and obvious source for the aging/aged humoral *persona* found in Chaucer's later work is that of Jean de Meun's narrator in his continuation of the *Roman de la Rose*. In his book *Chaucer's Narrators*, Lawton identifies Jean de Meun's novel use of doubled narrative voice, in which the narrator speaks by turns from the "present tense" of the Dreamer and the past tense of authorial reflection, as a key influence for Chaucer's own narrative

[68] As Gust explains, "Seen within the aegis of autofiction, the I-persona is best perceived as a consciously applied literary device that should remind the interpreter that the fiction is fiction, urging him/her to 'activate critical intelligence, while deactivating the affectations." Gust, 42.

persona.[69] Lawton claims that this double stance makes Jean de Meun's narrators the "embodiment of dramatic irony," as the narrator imagines himself as "consciously superior to his audience and to himself as dreamer."[70] Despite its suggestion of superiority, Lawton sees this combined narrative voice as ultimately undermining the narrator's "authority" because it is grounded in the "false experience" of an *insomnium* and "temporally unstable" nature, putting the audience in a position where "we can rarely be quite sure which of his ages is concealed behind the mask."[71] It is this "Ovidian plurality of tone" that Lawton argues Chaucer learns from Jean de Meun and develops throughout his career.[72]

As it stands, however, Lawton's argument depends on the paradoxical set of claims that Chaucer both misreads the intentionally unstable and questionable persona of the *Roman de la Rose* in his translation of the work *and* that adopts and develops that unstable voice in his own work.[73] Based on the similar humoral character of the aged narrators in the writing of both Jean de Meun and Chaucer, I argue instead that Chaucer accepted and imitated the inconsistencies of the narrator's voice in the *Roman de la Rose* because of its voice's resonance with actual oral speech (whose natural speech doesn't involve *epanorthosis*?) and the way that the Galenic theory of the humors imagined the continuity of an aged body.

As J.A. Burrow explains, medieval complexion theory understood a person's humoral makeup to be a composite of their "natural complexion," which remained stable throughout one's life, and their "accidental complexion" determined by disease ("unnatural" accident) and

[69] Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators*, 76.
[70] Lawton, 73.
[71] Lawton, 74; Lawton sees the narrator's episodes of epanorthosis (emphatic self-correction), as inviting additional skepticism about the authority of his claims.
[72] Lawton, 74.
[73] See for example, Lawton's claims that "these lines… show Chaucer reacting to a common temptation in reading the *Roman* to extend consciousness of the narratorial *persona* into our response to numerous rhetorical devices" and that in Chaucer's translation "The English mixing of the two voices is well done" both of which recognize that Chaucer saw the *persona* as a single unified voice." Lawton, 67-8.

one's age ("natural" accident).[74] The progression of a man through these "Four Ages" was imagined as accompanied by a shift in humoral balance due to the diminishing of "Natural Heat" as one aged. As a result, the traditional "four ages" of the life cycle were each linked to a particular humoral complexion. The first age "Youth" was typically viewed as sanguine (hot and moist), the second ("Maturity") was choleric (hot and dry), the third "Old age," melancholic (cold and dry), and the fourth "Decrepitude," phlegmatic (cold and moist).[75] Though it remained in use into the sixteenth-century, the "Four Ages" model suggests an oversimplified understanding of Complexion Theory, which, in practice, required physicians to consider the interactions between a patient's "natural" and "accidental" complexions. Burrows offers an example of this interaction, explaining that "An old person of a sanguine natural complexion might become quite skittish in the spring—especially in the small hours when, as Chaucer's Squire observes, 'blood was in his domynacioun.'"[76] Despite this, the model offered a convenient explanation for the differences in behavior seen across the ages of a person's life, with children being "merry, delightful, tender-hearted, and much given to talk," the young "lean (even though they eat heartily), swift-footed, bold, irritable and active;" the mature "solid, serious, settled in their ways, and guileful," and the old "sluggish, sleepy, and forgetful."[77] Due to the way that complexion theory imagined "accidental' and "natural" complexion, an aged person was in a real sense both the person they were when they were younger, due to the stability of their natural complexion, and someone completely new, due to the belief that a person's accidental complexion changes over time.

[74] J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 28-9.
[75] Burrow, 23.
[76] Burrow, 13.
[77] Burrow, 13.

We see a similar understanding of the humoral body in Chaucer's translation of a portion of the *Roman de la Rose* written by Jean de Meun, where Reason, speaking to the Dreamer, describes "Elde" as the remedy to the folly of "Youthe." (lines 4810-5025).[78] Here, Reason cites "Tullius" (aka Cicero) and a "boke he made of Age" in praise of "Elde," explaining that "Youthe" is full of folly and instability due to the influence of "Delyt" which "drawith hem therfro" in old age (4885-4941).[79] "Elde" is imagined as a time for men to "repente hem of her folye, / That Youthe hem putte in Iupardye" and to be set "in good reule and in governaunce (4949-58). Ironically, Reason recognizes that Elde is "hated" by men as "no man wolde bicomen olde, / ne dye, whan he is yong and bolde" (4965-4966). While neither Chaucer nor his source Jean de Meun explicitly invokes humoral theory in this passage, the role that the humors played in the inverse relationship between "Elde" and "Delyt" is well attested in treatises on complexion theory. As melancholic or phlegmatic, those who were in the third and fourth ages of man were understood to lack the heat that produced the sexual desire that fueled the "Younge" and their quest for love. The association of "Elde" with coldness can be seen in the *Roman de la Rose's* description of "Elde" in the portrait on the wall of the garden:

> A furred cope on had she nomen;
> Wel had she clad hir-self and warm,
> For cold mighte elles doon hir harm.
> These olde folk have alwey colde,
> Hir kinde is swiche, whan they ben olde (409-413).

The poem's portraits of "Elde" and "Youthe" and their relationship to love relate directly to the narrator's initial description of his dreaming *persona* who describes himself as "Within my

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[78] All citations of Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose* are taken from Walter W. Skeat, *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1894.

[79] R.C. Goffin points out that Chaucer may make a similar reference to Cicero's treatise on age, *De Senectate*, in his "Envoy to Scogan" where he writes, "Scogan, thenke on Tullius kindenesse, / Mine thy frend, ther it may fructifye!" (lines 47-49). R. C. Goffin, "Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan," *The Modern Language Review* 20 no. 3 (1925): 319-20.

twenty yere of age, / Whan that Love taketh his corage / Of yonge folk" (21-23). While the narrator never explicitly explains that his shift in perspective is due to a dwindling of natural heat in his body, the poem's references to "Elde" versus "Youthe" nevertheless implies a possible humoral explanation for that difference in tone which Lawton has identified in the narrator's voice. The poem's insistence on "Elde" as a cure for youthful folly makes the dreamer's claim to authority a bit more believable than Lawton has suggested by providing grounds for it in the speech of "Reason," which is itself supported by complexion theory. Here, the author's voice is authoritative not only because it comes from the future, looking back on the past, but because, according to complexion theory, the aged physical body that grounds that voice is less susceptible to being swayed by desire due to its lack of natural heat.

We can see evidence of Chaucer's experimentation with a similarly humorally-defined aged narrator in his "Envoy to Scogan," where he suggests a bodily similarity between himself and his poem's addressee, Henry Scogan, as "hoor and rounde of shap" (31). As Marion Polzella points out, Chaucer appears to refute this stance, to comedic effect, in his poem's final stanza, where he admits a distance between himself and Scogan, writing:

> Scogan, that knelest at the stremes hed
> Of grace, of alle honour and worthynesse,
> In th'ende of which strem I am dul as ded,
> Forgete in solytarie wildernesse (43-45).[80]

While Polzella notes that Chaucer's use of the word "ded" might suggest his age,[81] his metaphor of the stream also could be seen as speaking to a common association in moral literature of *acedia* (the sin most often attributed to phlegmatics) with swamps, or otherwise stagnant or "ded"

[80] Marion L. Polzella, "'The Craft so Long to Lerne': Poet and Lover in Chaucer's 'Envoy to Scogan' and 'Parliament of Fowls'," *The Chaucer Review* (1976): 284-86.
[81] Polzella, 284.

water.[82] That he is simultaneously described as "dul" likewise resonates with the common association of "dullness" with the slowed wit of the phlegmatic. Though claiming a "dul" wit might appear to be a strike against Chaucer's credibility, in the context of humorism's theory of the four ages of man, it implicitly works in favor of his credibility and the stability of his opinion on love. He emphasizes the embodied authority of his present voice through a reference to the poetic activity of his youth. Of his "muse," which now "sleeps," and "rusts" in its sheath, he tells the younger Scogan: "While I was yong, I put hir forth in prees; / But al shal passe that men prose or ryme; / Take every man hys turn, as for his tyme" (40-42). The somber aphoristic quality of this recollection suggests that the speaker's embodied wisdom as something to be taken seriously. Like Jean de Meun's narrator in the *Roman de la Rose*, Chaucer constructs a voice of authority by casting a backward glance at his younger self that suggests a graceful acceptance of old age derived from worldly experience.

Similar to the instability Lawton finds in the double voice of Jean de Meun's narrator, Chaucer's voice of aged authority is not without its complications. His claim to have given up poetic composition ("in no rym, dowteles, / Ne thynke I never of slep to wake my muse"), for example, appears to be curiously contradicted by the existence of the poem itself (37-38). Similarly, his emphatic rejection of the first half of the hypothetical accusation he poses to himself in mock imitation of Scogan ("Lo! olde Grisel list to ryme and pleye!"), but not the second, raises questions about whether or not he has actually given up his desire to "pleye" in his old age (34-35).[83] Here, as elsewhere in Chaucer's work, the art of poetry and the art of love are

[82] Elspeth Whitney, "Phlegmatic Landscapes: Perceptions of Wetlands, Acedia, and Complexion Theory in Selected Later Medieval Allegorical Pilgrim Narratives." *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture* 13, no. 2 (2019): 158-80.

[83] Cf. the Middle English dictionary's definition of "play" as "To play amorously; make love, engage in sexual intercourse."*Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "pleien v.(1)," accessed August 11, 2021,

blurred, to the point that it is unclear what exactly the poet means when he refers to his "muse" that "rusteth in my sheathe" (38-39). Through this skillful manipulation of the stance of an old poet, Chaucer manages to lay claim to the wisdom that belongs to the old man who has given up youthful folly, while remaining ambiguous about the exact status of his masculinity and sexuality in old age.[84]

We see a related though distinct use of the stance of the aged poet in Chaucer's "Complaint of Venus," where he refers to his old age and "dullness" as a way of distinguishing his poem from his source, the courtly French poet Oton de Graunson's "Cinq Balades." Chaucer makes two major changes to Graunson's original work: first, his distillation of Graunson's sequence of five ballades down to just three, and second, his reversal of the genders of addressee and speaker to produce a poem in which a female lover addresses a male beloved.[85] The narrator's reference to old age appears in a ten line "envoy" to the work that is also original to Chaucer's version. Here, Chaucer begs his audience to forgive his inability to "folowe word by word the curiosite / Of Graunson, flour of hem that make in Fraunce" (81-82). He accompanies this appeal by noting the limitations imposed on him by his advancing age, explaining that "elde , that in my spirit dulleth me, / Hath of endyting al the subtilte / Wel nygh bereft out of my remembraunce" (73-78). John Scattergood views this as an example of "*diminutio* or self-disparagement," which he claims Chaucer uses to highlight his poem's function as an "*abbreviatio*" of Graunson's work (185). This reading, however, overlooks the implications of

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https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED33654/track?counter=2&search_id=8857456

[84] Scholars' observation that this stream metaphor may have been influenced by Chaucer's actual move to a house downstream the Thames from Scogan in the later years of his life offers an interesting autobiographical detail that further emphasizes the poem's association with an aging Chaucer's physical body. Geoffrey Chaucer and Larry Dean Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1087.

[85] John Scattergood, "Chaucer's Complaint of Venus and the 'Curiosite'of Graunson." *Essays in Criticism* 44, no. 3 (1994): 178.

Chaucer's decision to swap the genders of the poem's speaker and addressee, and the potential bodily/embodied significance of the poet's close identification with "elde."

As I have already demonstrated, "Elde," owing to its associations with the "Four Ages of Man," constitutes a uniquely embodied sort of *diminutio*. With this reference to age, the poet suggests he is not simply naturally "dull," but dull due to the decline of natural heat that medieval scholars believed led men to become melancholy and eventually phlegmatic. Chaucer's description of Graunson as the "flour of hem that make in Fraunce," with its associations with of youthfulness and spring, highlights a central difference between the French poet and himself. As in the "Envoy to Scogan," the old "dull" poet positions himself as a foil to his younger counter-part. Here, however, as in the "Envoy to Scogan," we might understand his age and dullness not as wholly negative. Though it departs from the French tradition of poets as lovers themselves, the speaker's lack of "subtilte" could be understood as positively speaking to his honesty. This may be implicit in the poem's female speaker's description of "subtil Jelosie, the deceivable" (43). Indeed, Helen Phillips, noting the proliferation of references to "jealousy" in Chaucer's poem has suggested that "jealousy" might serve as a female equivalent to the "disdain and *danger*" which frustrate the male speaker of Graunson's poem.[86] Chaucer's self-depiction as phlegmatic might be thus read as working to distance himself bodily, and thus also rhetorically, from Graunson. By identifying as "elde" Chaucer's limited act of "remembraunce" suggests that his work is not simply an abbreviated version of Graunson's original poem, but a poem that has been processed by a more feminine and less "curious" body.[87] The poet's honesty here is linked not only to the vernacular or to "dullness" but to a particular kind of embodied dullness related to the "spirit" and its waning as a man reaches "elde." The phlegmatic body of the aged

[86] Helen Phillips, "Chaucer's French Translations," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 37 (1993): 70.
[87] In this context, the fact that the second excuse Chaucer offers for his poem's departure from the original is that "rym in Englissh hath such skarsete," suggests an interestingly gendered reading of English poetry (80).

narrator might be understood in terms of some scholars' suggestion that the poem's peculiar address to "Princes," may in fact mean "princess," suggesting a female audience.[88] In this reading, Chaucer's changing of the original poem's speaker's gender is mirrored in Chaucer's self-portrayal as an old and "dull," phlegmatic. Here, he distinguishes himself bodily from the "curious" and "subtle" French lover-poet Graunson, as he translates the poem with the aging, and humorally effeminized body he has to hand.

Chaucer's wise and/or innocent aged narrators in these two poems resonate not only with the depiction of "Elde" in *Roman de la Rose,* but with a general medieval understanding of the "natural" progression of male sexuality. A figure like Januarie of the "Merchant's Tale," whose attempts at changing his humoral balance through a litany of aphrodisiacs are portrayed as ridiculous and grotesque, attests to the prevailing attitude towards old lovers, whose desire is portrayed as out of sync with the natural order. As Shulamith Shahar explains, the medieval topos of the "hundred-year-old boy" (*puer centum annorum*) was used to ridicule old men who continued to pursue "amorous activities" that were seen as neither "natural nor fitting for his age."[89] The youthful behavior of the *puer centum annorum* was so despised because it challenged what was assumed to be the "natural" progression of man through the stages of life as determined by the diminishing of "Natural Heat" as one aged.[90] Chaucer's old narrators who are "dull" and thus unable to participate in the game of love authorize his poetic work by suggesting its lack of guile and aligning his body and desire with what was seen as "natural."

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[88] Robert Epstein, "Chaucer's Scogan and Scogan's Chaucer," *Studies in Philology* 96, no. 1 (1999): 5.
[89] Shulamith Shahar, "Old Age in the High and Late Middle Ages," in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, ed. Paul Johnson and Pat Thane (London: Routledge, 1998), 48; Shahar notes that this *topos* is often found in religious texts such as saints lives alongside its positive inversion, the *puer-senex* (boy-old man), who, on the model of Daniel and Jesus, display wisdom and piety in childhood.
[90] Shahar, 45.

“Drynking” Experience, Craft and the Male Author in *The House of Fame*

A different kind of phlegmatic body can be seen in Chaucer’s narrators in early poems *The House of Fame* and *The Parliament of Fowls*.[91] Similar to the narrators in his “Envoy to Scogan” and “Complaint of Venus,” Chaucer’s early dream poems feature narrators who are portrayed as “dull” spectators of the game of love. The notable difference in these narrators however is that their phlegmatic nature is imagined not as the result of old age, but either as a natural complexion or a complexion derived from their habits of over-reading. In *The House of Fame* for example, the narrator’s “dullness” and lack of desire are imagined as unrelated to age, as his Eagle guide tells him that he is being rewarded for his continued praise of love in his poetry despite the fact that he “haddest never part” in love itself (627). The word “never” here implies that this narrator, unlike the aged narrator in “Envoy to Scogan,” is inherently predisposed against being a lover, something a medieval audience would have associated with those who had a “natural” phlegmatic or melancholic complexion. Something similar is implied in *The Parliament of Fowls* when the narrator’s guide Scipio tells him that he has nothing to fear from the garden gate’s warning to lovers, remarking, “thow of love hast lost thy tast, I gesse, / As sek man hath of swete and bytternesse,” adding “But natheles, although that thow be dul, / Yit that thow canst not do, yit mayst thow se” (160-163). While Scipio’s medical analogy leaves open the possibility that the narrator could have once been a lover, his comparison of the condition to an illness suggests that his state is not explicable through a “natural” process like aging. His remarks about the narrator’s “dullness,” likewise, aligns with the common description of phlegmatics as “dull.”

[91] For a discussion of the narrator’s humoral resonances in Chaucer’s “Book of the Duchess,” see John M. Hill, "The ‘Book of the Duchess, Melancholy, and that Eight-Year Sickness," *The Chaucer Review* (1974): 35-50.

Interestingly, in these two early dream visions, Chaucer suggests that the "dullness" and non-lover status of his narrators'is not the result of aging but of their reading habits. In *The House of Fame*, for example, the Eagle critiques the narrator's lifestyle, by saying:

> ...when thy labour doon al ys
> In stede of reste and newe thynges
> Thou goost hom to thy hous anoon,
> And, also domb as any stoon,
> Thou sittest at another book
> Tyl fully daswed ys thy look (655-57).

The description of the "daswed" narrator, sitting "domb as any stoon," imagines reading as a sedentary and dulling practice that threatens to slow him both mentally and physically. The Eagle's suggestion that the narrator should instead be pursuing "reste and newe thynges" furthers this assessment by imagining reading in contrast to mentally stimulating or refreshing activities. The Eagle's final claim that the narrator "lyvest thus as an heremyte / Although thyn abstinence ys lyte," draws a comparison between his excessive reading and gluttony, emphasizing the embodied impact that reading has on the narrator (659-660). [92] Indeed, the Eagle' earlier complaint about the narrator's weight ("Seynte Marye, / thou art noyous for the carye!") suggests that Chaucer intended for readers to understand this narrative persona not just mentally but also physically phlegmatic.

It is notable that the suggestions of the narrator's phlegmatic character in *The House of Fame* and *The Parliament of Fowls* come primarily from outside observers, unlike his later poems in which the aged narrators profess their bodily status themselves. This small detail seems to support my suggestion that in his later works, Chaucer viewed the phlegmatic complexion, developed in accordance to the theory of the "Four Ages of Man," as a point of pride. In his early

[92] We see a similar connection drawn between reading and a reader's embodied state in the introduction to *The Parliament of Fowls*, where the narrator, after reading all day, describes himself as "fulfyld of thought and busy hevynesse," a description which suggests not just mental sluggishness but physical gluttony (89).

poems, by contrast, accusations that the narrator is phlegmatic are portrayed as an insult from those he encounters.[93]That Chaucer's youthful phlegmatic narrators would not boast of their complexion makes sense considering the largely negative picture complexion theory painted of men who were naturally phlegmatic as effeminate, dumb, and sexually deviant.

In *The House of Fame*, I propose, we might even see an attempt by the narrator to hide or obscure his phlegmatic body in his initial claim that the Eagle picks him up in his "clawes," carrying him "lyghtly as I were a larke" (545). While readers are initially led to see this comment as a follow up to the narrator's description of the Eagle's "grymme pawes stronge" or the narrator's expression of a spiritual experience of disembodiment, the Eagle's subsequent comment about Chaucer's weight not only brings him back to "earth," but highlights the narrator's potential to deceive us, or at best, offer us skewed account based on his embodied perception of the world (541). The narrator's description of the Eagle's insinuation about his weight, as "words to comforte" intended to amuse or entertain ("me to disporte"), however, downplays the comment in a way that suggests he may in fact be concerned with presenting himself (and his body) to readers in a positive light (571).

Reading Chaucer's narrator in *The House of Fame* as ashamed of his body offers a new way of interpreting the narrator's famous response to the question of whether or not he comes to "House" seeking "Fame." In this passage, he responds emphatically, "Nay, for sothe, frend… / by my hed!,"[94] adding:

> Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
> That no wight have my name in honde.
> I wot myself best how y stonde,
> For what I drye, or what I thynke,

[93] Noting the mocking criticism he receives from Harry Bailey, we might also add Chaucer's narrator in the *Canterbury Tales* to this list of embarrassed or shamed phlegmatic narrators.

[94] The emphatic nature of the narrator's claim to not desire fame might be seen as a further attempt at obscuring the truth through rhetorical deception.

I wil myselven al hyt drynke,
Certeyn, for the more part,
As fer forth as I kan myn art (1873-82).

John Burrow recently noted the "paradox" of this claim by the narrator, which he claims turns on a Boethian ideal of "self-sufficiency" and modesty that is contradicted by its being pronounced by a named persona of a poet known for inserting versions of himself into his works.[95] This paradox becomes even more interesting in the context of the narrator's earlier attempts at obscuring his overweight and potentially phlegmatic body. In this context, his claim that he will "drynke" his experience himself does not suggest Boethian self-sufficiency so much as it does a fear of allowing others to speak negatively about him—as the Eagle threatened to do. This fear resonates with the narrator's earlier discussion of Dido, who suggests that it is a woman's fate to be slandered in poetry ("red and songs / Over al thys lond, on every tonge" (348)) because they "konne no art" (347).[96] Within the context of Dido's suggestion that female artlessness dooms women to be written *about*, the narrator's reference to "myn art" in his claim that he will "drynke" his experience, seems to associate him not with "self-sufficiency" but with a masculine aptitude for rhetorical deception (1881-1882; emphasis my own). In stark opposition to Chaucer's aged narrators, the young phlegmatic narrator's authority is based on his ability to practice the "art" (i.e. craft and deception) of poetry that allows him to craft an image of himself as he would choose to appear.

At the same time as the narrator suggests that he is able to craft his own persona, and thus perform his masculinity, the poem's inclusion of unruly voices (like the Eagle) which threaten to betray his effeminate, "dull" body suggests that this posture might ultimately be unsustainable.

[95] John Burrow, "Geoffrey's Credo: House of Fame, Lines 1873–82," *The Chaucer Review* 48.3 (2014): 257.
[96] As Burrow notes, this line resonates with Criseyde's speech in *Troilus and Criseyde*, where she claims "we wrecched women nothing konne, / Whan us is wo, but wepe and sitte and thinke; / Oure wrecche is this, oure owen wo to drynke" (Book II, 782-784). Burrow, "Geoffrey's Credo," 254.

Though he imagines being carried "lightly" into the cosmos, he is nevertheless betrayed by his body, with its heaviness and associations with an effeminate artlessness. In this sense, Chaucer's young phlegmatic narrators might be seen as operating similarly to his aged narrators, both grounding their claims to truth in a phlegmatic body, associated in complexion theory with both women, and "dullness." In the gap between the narrator's self-presentation and the embodied description of him offered by the Eagle, we can begin to apprehend the sort of "virtual" body that I am arguing Chaucer facilitates in his later poems through references to his oeuvre.

"To Rosemounde" and the Virtual Author's Body

Often imagined as the script for an occasional performance by the author himself, Chaucer's twenty-four-line "ballade" "To Rosemounde" provides an opportunity for thinking about how the apprehension of a "virtual" authorial body I'm suggesting his written works facilitate may have derived from his experiences and experimentation with courtly performance. Scholars who have proposed occasional readings of "To Rosemounde" have suggested that an audience's appreciation of its "irony" would have depended on its live performance by an aging Chaucer to a young noble lady, sometimes identified as Isabella of Valois, Richard II's ten-year-old bride. The tradition of reading the poem occasionally began with George Cowling's proposal in 1927 that the poem "transposed" the "minor key" of love-longing into the "major scale of the playful affection of an old man for a little girl," which was taken up and given a specific occasion by Edith Rickert in 1928, and further elaborated on by Rossell Hope Robbins in 1971, and most recently by Jill Mann in her essay, "The Inescapability of Form."[97] The prevailing

[97] George H. Cowling, *Chaucer*. (London: Methuen & Co), 1927; Edith Rickert, "A Leaf from a Fourteenth-Century Letter Book," *Modern Philology* 25, no. 2 (1927): 249-255; Rossell Hope Robbins, "Chaucer's 'To Rosemounde'," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 4, no. 2 (1971): 73-81; Jill Mann, "The Inescapability of Form," in *Readings in Medieval Textuality: Essays in Honour of AC Spearing*, ed. Cristina Maria Cervone and D. Vance Smith (Boydell & Brewer, 2016), 119-134.

theory that “To Rosemounde,” was performed for Isabelle Valois in 1396 imagines a fifty-four-year-old Chaucer performing the poem.[98] In such occasional readings, the poem’s depiction of suffering desire, which other scholars have dubbed “grotesque,” becomes part of a “charming game” as it is rendered parodic via an incongruous performance context.[99] Similar to “Envoy to Scogan,” the humor and seriousness of this work depends on an audience’s perception of the narrator’s aged body.

While scholars have often taken an audience’s apprehension of the poem’s “dramatic irony” for granted, this apprehension would have actually involved a fairly sophisticated weighing of what the author said, against the convention(s) he was calling upon, against his speaking body and the body of his addressee.[100] Similar to *The House of Fame*, the poem’s intended humorous effect would have required viewers to hold at least two, and possibly three, seemingly contrary bodies in their mind at once.

The complexity of an audience’s reception of an oral “I” performance can be seen in the poem’s first stanza, which begins with the conventional claim: “Madame, ye ben of al beaute shrine” (1). In the proposed occasional context, an old speaker addressing a young girl, however, the conventionality and seriousness of this line and its address would likely be seen as ironic and comically inappropriate. After beginning with this humorous incongruity, the poem brings readers back to the literal physical body of a young addressee with his unconventional reference to her “chekes rounde” which he claims “lyke ruby ben.”[101] As Robbins notes, a woman’s cheeks,

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[98] Interestingly, this would make Chaucer the same age as scholars have imagined he was when revising the *Legend of Good Women*. See, Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 37.
[99] Mann, "The Inescapability of Form," 130.
[100] Robbins, “Chaucer’s ‘To Rosemounde,’” 78.
[101] Robbins, 76.

while sometimes described according to their color, are rarely described by their shape.[102] By adapting a trope of conventional love poetry to suit his addressee's pre-adult body, Chaucer highlights the gap between his poem's actual addressee and the ideal of a mature courtly beloved to which it corresponds in a way that suggests his poem's inextricability from an embodied performance.

In the proposed occasional context of an old Chaucer speaking to a young girl, the speaker's description of his passionate suffering would have worked similarly, with the speaker's grotesque descriptions of his body's heat and moisture—suggestive of an "ideal" lover's "Sanguine" complexion—seemingly in visible conflict with the performer's aged body. In the poem's final stanza, the number of bodies that the audience is asked to hold in mind proliferates as the narrator compares himself first to a "pyk walwed in galauntyne," and then to "trewe Tristram the secounde" (17 and 20).[103] That the speaker compares himself to a food and a literary figure here resonates with Chaucer's dream vision narrators, whose phlegmatic bodies, as I have shown, are often imagined as the result of eating and/or reading.

This balancing of multiple humoral bodies in a viewer's mind suggests a different "virtual" experience from that which Seeta Chaganti identifies in the poem's formal structure and invocation of dance. While Chaganti sees the poem's "misalignment" of grotesque images with its stable refrain encodes the "strange," "virtual" and "disorienting" forces of dance, I argue that its humoral references highlight another kind of

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[102] Robbins, 77.
[103] As Constance Hieatt explains, "Galentine" was a kind of "bread-sauce" which, when it included fish, was often allowed to cool and served as an aspic. Constance B. Hieatt, "Of Pike (and Pork) Wallowing in Galentine," in *Fish: Food from the Waters*, ed. Harlan Walker (Prospect Books, 1998), 152.

disorientation, which would have been perceptible in an oral performance of the poem by Chaucer himself.[104]

Like the "virtuality" Chaganti identifies, the humorally defined persona might be understood as "awaken[ing] an attunement to forces that hover between things visible and material."[105] The experience of virtuality, as Chaganti understands it, is produced through a spectator's perception of "forces that exist between and around embodied dancers" as they move through space.[106] Here, it is not the bodies themselves that are uncanny or disorienting, but the intangible forces they produce, which are felt by spectators, as Chaganti suggests is evidenced by the narrator's description of his beloved's dance as an "oynement unto my wounde."[107]

Through this poetic performance of irony grounded in an audience's understanding of his physical body's expected humoral balance, Chaucer banks on a dynamic that would have been involved in the reception of any oral performance of a first-person lyric. As A.C. Spearing notes, in pre-Chaucerian lyrics in Middle English, "The first-person pronoun... rarely refers to a specific individual or creates the illusion of a distinctive voice; it is a near but empty space, proximal but not personalized, waiting to be inhabited and adopted by any reader."[108] According to Spearing's view, a lyric is, in some sense, completed by a speaker's inhabitance of its voice in performance. The conventionality of many love lyrics means that this role need not have been inhabited by the poem's original author, but could have been occupied anyone willing to take on the lover's role. In cases where love lyrics served a functional purpose in the "game" of love, we might assume that part of the fun of being the recipient of a love lyric performance was in

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[104] Chaganti, *Strange Footing,* 21. Chaganti argues that the "the diction, rhythm, and repetition" of the poem's refrain ("Thogh ye to me ne do no daliaunce,") "emphasize[s] periodicity, proportion, and expectation fulfilled."
[105] Chaganti, 21.
[106] Chaganti, 19.
[107] Chaganti, 21.
[108] A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Autographies: The I of the Text* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 16.

assessing the relationship between the physical body of the lyric's speaker and the claims being made about their feelings and experiences. Indeed, the common claim that male and female lovers alike are deceptive or untrustworthy would have made this experience of assessment a crucial part of the experience of love poetry. It is in this uncertain and ambiguous space between embodied performance and claim that Chaucer may have got his first taste of the virtuality he would go on to exploit throughout this works.

The "dramatic irony" scholars have located in an oral performance of "To Rosemounde" is interestingly recreated in the poem's sole witness: the fifteenth-century Oxford, Bodleian MS Rawlinson Poet 163. Here, Chaucer's ballad appears on a flyleaf following his *Troilus and Criseyde*.[109] The ballad's juxtaposition with Chaucer's tragedy suggests the way in which a virtual *persona* could emerge through his work's gathering into compilations. The scribe who copied the manuscript seems to further invite readers to read across the two texts through their inclusion of a near-identical "colophon" at the end of both texts, in which the word "Chaucer" is linked to the word "tregentil" by an ellipsis (fol. 114r). If interpreted as *tres gentil* ("very noble"), as some scholars have suggested, this matching colophon heightens the suggestion that both texts originated from a single authorial body. [110]

Similar to an oral performance of the poem, the manuscript's mirrored colophons invite readers to consider the relationship between Chaucer the author and his *personae*--both the grotesquely embodied *persona* of "To Rosemounde" and the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Though the manuscript's colophons are likely a scribal invention, they work similar to Chaucer's lists of his past poetic compositions in works like *Legend of*

[109] Helge Kökeritz, "Chaucer's Rosemounde," *Modern Language Notes* 63, no. 5 (1948): 311.
[110] Kökeritz, "Chaucer's Rosemounde," 312.

Good Women or his “Retraction,” insofar as they invite readers to connect the voices found across both poems through the identity of a single author. As in the occasional performance context that scholars have proposed for “To Rosemounde,” in which the speaker’s bizarre claims are rendered humorous rather than pathetic in relation to Chaucer’s aged body, “To Rosemounde”’s juxtaposition with *Troilus and Criseyde* curbs the grotesqueness of the speaker’s bodily claims by preceding them with a work from Chaucer’s literary *corpus* that attests to the author’s “gentil” understanding of the conventions of courtly love. Through this, readers are invited to hold two incongruous images of Chaucer—as grotesque lover and noble author—together in their head, creating a similar experience to that which spectators of a live performance by the author himself would have experienced.

A Tale of Two Chaucers in *Legend of Good Women* (F and G versions)

Chaucer’s explicit facilitation of readers’ experience of his virtual body can be seen in the “G” version of Chaucer’s prologue to his *Legend of Good Women,* where the autofictional narrator, in a dream encounter with the god of Love, is accused of “dotage” and aligned with a female gendered treachery and somnolence. While the accusation of “dotage” is found in both “F” and “G” versions, it is emphasized and heightened in numerous ways in the “G” version I will outline here. These differences, I argue, are evidence of Chaucer’s conscious development of a humorally phlegmatic persona. My reading nuances Sheila Delaney’s argument against reading the “G” text’s references to Chaucer’s age as “autobiographical” by illustrating how both

versions might be understood as providing a variation on the phlegmatic persona found in his other works.[111]

Readers familiar with the "F" version of Chaucer's "Prologue" might wonder at its narrator's departure from the autofictional narrator's usual phlegmatic behavior. In this version, we see a Chaucerian narrator who at the first sign of spring abandons his books in favor of the "floures" of the field, with the "daysye" as the particular focus of his devotion. In this text, the daisy inspires a passion uncommon amongst Chaucer's narrators. In both versions of the "Prologue," he explains the "gret affeccioun" he has for the flowers and describes how he awakes early ("in my bed ther daweth me no day") (46). In the "F" Text, this "affeccioun" leads to a claim that would seem to conflict both his phlegmatic character and his claims elsewhere to have no knowledge of love:

> I love it, and ever ylike newe,
> And evere shal, til that myn herte dye.
> Al swere I nat, of this I wol nat lye;
> Ther loved no wight hotter in his lyve (56-9).

With this specific reference to the "heat" of his love, this passage presents a humorally different Chaucer than we've seen so far. These four lines are redacted in the "G" text—often imagined to be Chaucer's "final version"—suggesting that the author recognized their potential conflict with his typical autofictional portrayal. At the same time, the "F" text's suggestion of "heat" suggests that Chaucer may have been experimenting with his *persona* at this stage in his career. Indeed, the fact that he notes that this spring behavior is a departure from his usual scholastic enterprise suggests an effort to maintain some degree of consistency across poems. At the same time, the humoral "heat" of the "spring Chaucer" as it is presented in the "F" version, is not necessarily a negative suggestion of humoral instability. As it is described in the "Prologue," his persona's

[111] Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

humoral shift aligns with the seasons. Indeed, nature is described in explicitly humoral terms as he explains how the flowers and birds, previously "grieved" by Winter's "swerd of cold" (127), are in spring "releved" by "th'atempre sonne" (128). The word "'atempre" used here, imagines the sun as providing a kind of humoral restorative for the animals and plants of nature.[112] Indeed, the "accidental humors" were often aligned with the four seasons, suggesting that perhaps the narrator (though typically phlegmatic or melancholic) falls under spring's sanguine influence.[113]

The "G" text again addresses the narrator's humoral body when the God of Love, in accusing the narrator of "heresye" against love, explains his error thinking in terms of his "wit" being "full cold" claiming that he "begynnyst dote, / as olde foles whan here spirit faylth" (258 and 261).[114] Chaucer's "cold" wit is here contrasted with the devotees to love, whom the god of Love claims he derides, and who are described as they "that loveth paramours to harde and hot" (260).[115] The contrast between the god of love's criticism of the "hot" lovers and the narrator's "cold" wit resonates with Chaucer's phlegmatic autofiction I've outlined thus far. In this context, Chaucer's excision of the "F" text's reference to his love as "hotter" than anything anyone has ever experienced makes a great deal of sense.[116]

The "G" text returns to this connection between Chaucer's age/humoral character and his poetic output when Alceste introduces a list of his works as evidence of his commitment to the God of Love, saying: "Whil he was yong, he kepte youre estat," adding "I not wher he be now a

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[112] Chaucer explicitly links the word to the humors in his "The Nun's Priest's Tale," where he writes, of the poor woman, "Attempree diete was al hir phisyk" (4028).
[113] Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, 13.
[114] In the "G" text, the narrator is once again labeled an "old fool" when the god of Love threatens him saying: "Althogh thow reneyed hast my lay. / As othere olde foles many a day, / Thow shalt repente it…" (315)
[115] Translation (my own): "That loves, by way of romantic love, too hard and hot"
[116] We see a related use of the word "dote" vis-a-vis old lovers in the "Wife of Bath's Prologue," where she remarks:

> The clerk, whan he is old, and may noght do
> Of Venus werkes worth his olde sho,
> Than sit he doun, and writ in his dotage
> That wommen can nat kepe hir marriage! (707-10).

renegat" (400-1). While the first half of Alceste's comment suggests that "yong" Chaucer may have been a lover himself, her claim to not know "wher he be now a renegat" interestingly challenges that interpretation. Alceste's claim to be perplexed about the cause of Chaucer's estrangement from the work of love, seems to recognize, as those familiar with the poems she lists would have, that "yong" Chaucer possessed the same humoral "coldness" that Cupid tries to ascribe to his old age. Indeed, as Delaney notes, the Chaucer who wrote the "Prologue" and its revision was not "old" according to a medieval understanding of the ages of man's life.[117] Through her reference to Chaucer's catalogue, Alceste thus emphasizes Chaucer's inherent phlegmatic nature, while implicitly denying the impact that it had on the poetry he produced. If Chaucer's phlegmatic nature did not stop him from writing about love as a young man, why should it stop him now in old age?

The "G" text contains a final comment from the God of Love, further hinting at the phlegmatic character of the narrator's wit. In assigning the narrator his task of writing *Legend of Good Women*, he says "Why noldest thow han written of Alceste, / And laten Criseide ben aslepe and reste?" (530-31). This modifies his question in the "F" text, which instead of *Troilus and Criseide,* refers to the narrator's ballad "Hyd, Absolon, thy tresses," spoken earlier in the "Prologue." In that version, the narrator omits any mention of Alceste, directing his praise to a woman referred to throughout the text only as "my lady" (255, 262, 269). The "G" version replaces these three references with "Alceste," thus necessitating a revision of the god of love's criticism. This revision shifts the god's criticism of the narrator's wit from the near past of a song he has just sung to a more distant past in which he wrote *Troilus and Criseyde* and translated the *Roman de la Rose.* The love god's claim, in the "G" version, that he should have "laten Criseide ben aslepe and reste" resonates with his claim (six lines later) that "Thy litel wit was thilke tyme

[117] Delaney, *The Naked Text*, 38.

aslepe" (537). The use of "sleep" to connect the narrator's "wit" and the status of Criseyde's story, suggests a gendered valence to his error. The fact that a relationship between phlegmatics and oversleeping was widely promulgated during the Middle Ages, makes this not only gendered, but potentially humoral, and in line with the god's early critique of his wit as the "cold" doting of an old man. Here, it is implied that the narrator's "wit" somehow matched or was influenced by the female subject that he drew upon. That Criseyde is taken as synonymous with inconsistency means that her being "aslepe" could likewise be seen as a sign of her body's natural phlegmatic complexion as a woman. The narrator, in other words, by taking up Criseyde's story is seen as betraying a masculine, active, style of authorship for one linked with female treachery and somnolence.

This misogynistic humoral view of women implied is somewhat mitigated by the Love God's suggestion that the narrator might redeem himself—and his wit--by writing about another woman, "Alceste," whom he calls a "calendier… / of Goodnesse" (G 533-34). Here, as with his earlier recognition of the difference between his poetic creations and his body, Chaucer challenges a deterministic use of complexion theory—regarding men and women-- and in so doing, he illustrates the redemptive potential in his authoring the *Legend*, and sets the stage for the stories of patient women he is about to tell.[118]

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[118] Elaine Tuttle Hansen argues that the "only partially concealed antipathy towards woman" she identifies in the legends themselves, is rooted in the narrator, whose "indifference" to women she argues "can turn into active antipathy" when "treated like a woman himself" and "blocked from proving his manhood. Indeed, recognizing the potentially phlegmatic character of Chaucer's narrative *personae* invites us to consider them alongside Chaucer's other depictions of patient and fortitudinous women, such as Constance in "The Man of Law's Tale" and Griselda in "The Clerk's Tale." Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*. (University of California Press, 1992), 9; For a summary of medieval discourse surrounding "patience" see Ralph Hanna, "Some Commonplaces of Late Medieval Patience," in *The Triumph of Patience: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, edited by Gerald J. Schiffhorst, (University Press of Florida, 1978), 65-87; Ralph Hanna, *Patient Reading/Reading Patience: Oxford Essays on Medieval English Literature*. (Liverpool University Press, 2017).

Conclusion

Whether grounded in autobiographical reality or not, Chaucer's phlegmatic narrators, young and old alike, speak to an understanding of the body as a grounds for a writer's authority. Reading humorally across Chaucer's narrator's bodies as I've suggested his works invite readers to do allows us to experience the phlegmatic "virtual" body. That this body has been overlooked for so long speaks to our modern orientation to the body, no longer grounded in a humoral view of the world. Chaucer's poetry, in highlighting the potential positive aspects of being phlegmatic (often seen as the "worst" of the four complexions), offers a hopeful message of what the phlegmatic body can do that contrasts with the largely pathological mode of many medieval texts on complexion theory. Though they may be an "autofiction," the consistently phlegmatic bodies of Chaucer's narrators nevertheless suggest that an author's success is not determined by their natural or accidental complexion, but what they do with it. Indeed, this could be one reason why poets like Thomas Hoccleve—whose works are intimately tied up with his own "autobiographical" battle against his melancholy complexion—found his work so inspirational.[119]

Reading and writing are, for Chaucer's narrators, bodily performances. When Chaucer's narrators read, they are physically changed, becoming "dull," and "dazed"; writing, his work suggests, poses a similar risk of becoming more like the people about which one writes. Indeed, a complexion theory that viewed "the body" as an assemblage of humors in constant flux due to its interactions with the world, texts possessed a potential to change the body similar to medicine or food. As Glending Olson explains in his *Literature and Recreation in the Middle Ages*, the use

[119] As A.C. Spearing has observed, "[Hoccleve's] *Series* seems to show autography evolving into autobiography—or better, into what one scholar calls 'autobiographical fiction,' or better still, what others call 'pseudo-autobiography,' since we have no reason to believe that the specific events narrated in the *Series* either did or did not occur in reality." Spearing, *Medieval Autographies*, 173.

of emotions as part of allopathic medicine meant that literature and indeed "anything that produces temperate cheerfulness" could serve as part of a medical treatment. [120] The potential that texts held for shaping mind and body offers an alternate way of understanding why Chaucer's narrators are so consistently and emphatically embodied. For those early readers, the age and humoral makeup of Chaucer's narrators would have been essential information for determining not only the nutritional value of his work, but how they might profitably adopt and adapt his model of reading and writing as a moral/healthy practice for themselves. Observing the humoral orientation of Chaucer's narrators as it shifts across his works in relation to age, natural disposition, and reading practices offers a new lens through which to view his poetry's refusal of closure and singular meaning.

[120] Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 49.

Chapter 3: Bridges to the Past: Noise, Materiality, and Performing Community in "The Bridges at Abingdon"

I conclude my investigation of the ways that late-medieval literary texts interacted with the spatial and social orientations of readers by considering a different sort of "table" than that discussed in Chapter 1: the publicly displayed text.[121] More specifically, I analyze a fifteenth-century poetic table known as the "Formande monument" for what it can tell us about what role public display might play in "orienting" a poem's audience in space and time. The "Formande monument" is a 36" x 25.5" illuminated broadside and is the sole witness to the fifteenth-century alliterative poem, "The Bridges at Abingdon." Produced by an Abingdon ironmonger named Richard Formande, the table commemorates the founding and construction of two bridges across the Thames in 1416 by the local religious guild, the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross, to which Formande belonged. [122] The poem concludes with an acrostic riddle and dedicatory statement, in which its "maker" memorializes the table's installation in an unspecified location ("heere") in 1458.[123] Despite the singularity of the poem's surviving witness and its provocative suggestions of public display and performance, the Formande table has received surprisingly little attention

[121] The term "table" (and its Latin equivalent "tabula") was in Middle English used to describe flat text/inscription supporting surfaces of all kinds. For an overview of the table as a textual form, see Michael Van Dussen, "Tourists and Tabulae in Late-Medieval England," in *Truth and Tales: Cultural Mobility and Medieval Media*, eds. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 238-54.

[122] Religious guilds, like the Brotherhood, offered an important forum for the people of an "abbey town" like Abingdon, who were otherwise "subject to the jurisdiction and the taxes of the Benedictine abbey" and "enjoyed no rights of self-government." Gervase Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250-1550* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 194.

[123] "Richard 'Fannande' Ironmonger hathe made this tabul and set it here in the yere of Kyng Herry the sextet xxxvi^{te}." (101-102); All quotations of the poem taken from Ralph Hanna, "The Bridges at Abingdon: An Unnoticed Alliterative Poem," in *Ye? Baw for Bokes: Essays on Medieval Manuscripts and Poetics in Honor of Hoyt N. Duggan*, eds. Michael Calabrese and Stephen H. A. Shepherd (Los Angeles: Marymount Institute Press, 2012), 31-44.

from literary scholars. Ralph Hanna, in the most significant analysis of the poem to date, identifies the poem's formal and thematic resonances with *Piers Plowman* and English alliterative "liberation narratives" like *Awntyrs of Arthur*.[124] Though Hanna notes the likelihood of the poem's public display—and even offers two possible locations (the guild's aisle in St. Helen's church and the "Exchequer" where they held meetings and kept their records)—he does not consider how such display would have contributed to the message of "cooperative labor" or spirit of liberation he finds in its text.[125] The present chapter extends Hanna's work by exploring what the table's material form and performance elements suggest about its dual alignment with the tradition of "public poetry" and the performative and material acts by which medieval religious guilds maintained and defined their communities.[126] Recognizing the poem's performative elements allows us to expand Hanna's keen observations about the poem's "liberatory" character vis-a-vis the tradition of heroic alliterative narratives and his analysis of its alliterative form by illustrating that the poem's adherence to and departures from traditional elements of alliterative verse form are crucial to the table's ability to facilitate an embodied and performative transhistorical re-enactment of history that could itself be understood as "liberatory."[127]

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[124] Hanna, 35; Another notable recent analysis of the poem can be found in Gervase Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages*, 193-202.

[125] Hanna, 36.

[126] The earliest record attesting to the guild outlines their duty as "the structure and repair of a stately and sumptuous cross or rood in St. Helen's Church, and in founding masses for the souls of deceased members of the Guild." Cox, Mieneke. *The Story of Abingdon Part II: Medieval Abingdon, 1186-1556*. (Abingdon: Leach's the Printer's. 1990), 76; As with most guilds dedicated to a particular saint, the guild held their annual feast on the Feast of the Discovery each year in honor of St. Helen. Records for this yearly feast show that the guild hired "12 minstrels" and "12 priests" to perform, suggesting the dramatic nature of the event. Cox, 83.

[127] My approach to the "Formande monument" is aligned with what Marjorie Levinson calls "activist formalism," reading its form as a reflection of both events in Abingdon's history and the social practices that parish religious guilds used to define their communities. See Marjorie Levinson, "What is New Formalism?" *PMLA* 122, no. 2 (2007): 558-69.

The Formande table's material form and performance elements attest to the "commingling of different modes of apprehension" (i.e. visual, physical, aural, gestural) that Heather Blatt associates with "extracodexical texts."[128] Such "commingling" is apparent in the table's size, lavish program of illumination and gilding, Latin introduction, alliterative patterning and onomatopoeia, numeric reckoning, and concluding participatory riddle. These details allowed the Formande table to facilitate a communal poetic experience of transhistorical "re-enactment." Similar to the Corpus Christi pageants sponsored by craft guilds across England, the Formande table speaks to a late medieval lay belief in embodied performance as a proper and effective medium for communicating history. Through the singularity of its witness and its emphasis on the re-enactive potential of alliterative sound, "The Bridges at Abingdon" stands as compelling evidence for the argument that poetic "form" is inseparable from a poem's embodied performance at a particular time and within a particular environment, highlighting "orientations" value as a critical concept. The Formande table's installation in St. Helen's Church, Abingdon is critical to the experience of local community that the table facilitated. "Orientation" allows us to consider the role that readers' bodily experiences would have played in their engagement with textual objects like the Formande table that sought to orient them spatially, temporally, and socially to communities, past, present, and future.

As "The Bridges at Abingdon" is both thematically and performatively tied to oral performance, this chapter engages with the vibrant field of literary sound studies. My understanding of the poem's oral performance as embodied and spatial is especially inspired by Bruce Smith's foundational work on the history of sound in England and recent work by literary

[128] Blatt, *Participatory Reading,* 15. An "extracodexical text," as Blatt describes it, is "a written work that circulates outside the boundaries of the familiar codex, whether manuscript or print book." Blatt, 106.

scholars on the relationship between "noise," oral performance, and affect.[129] The Formande table speaks to the importance that the sound of oral performances held not only as an aid-to-memory or inciter of emotions, but as a means of communicating and preserving affective experiences of the past. The degree to which the poem's communication of affective experience relies on alliterative sound suggests its participation in late medieval English debates on the relationship between poetic sound and extralinguistic noise.[130]

More specifically, this chapter builds on recent work by Adin Lears and Katherine Jager that interrogates the significance that the sound of poetic verse held for publicly posted bills, such as the "Letters of John Ball."[131] While not a bill itself, the Formande table's public display, encoding of performance, and co-existence with political bills makes it similar to them in many ways. Unlike the ephemeral bills and broadsides that circulated throughout England, however, the Formande table's local sited-ness and mode of affective re-enactment suggest a more conservative approach to public textuality and oral performance. In light of the table's singularity and static placement, its public display appears to have been intended not as a way of spreading the guild's message far and wide, as is thought to have been the case with most bills and broadsides, but of creating a local curated experience of social and spatial orientation.

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[129] Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor*. (University of Chicago Press, 1999); Emma Dillon, *The Sense of Sound: Musical Meaning in France, 1260-1330*. (Oxford University Press, 2012); Clare Wright, "Acoustic Tyranny: Metre, Alliteration and Voice in York's Christ before Herod'," *Medieval English Theatre* 34 (2012): 3-29; Adin E. Lears, *World of Echo: Noise and Knowing in Late Medieval England* (Cornell University Press, 2020).

[130] My use of the term "extralinguistic" coincides with its use by Bruce Smith who, discussing the "broad function of human vocality," writes: "Whoops, clucks, tsks, moans, cries of [o:]—my voice can produce these and scores of other extralinguistic sounds." Smith, *The Acoustic* World, 11.

[131] Adin E. Lears, "Noise, Soundplay, and Langland's Poetics of Lolling in the Time of Wyclif." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 38, no. 1 (2016): 165-200; Adin E. Lears, "On Bells and Rebellion: The Auditory Imagination and Social Reform, Medieval and Modern," in *Vernacular Aesthetics in the Later Middle Ages* ed. Katherine Jager (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 87-115; Katharine W. Jager, "'Stonde Manlyche Togedyr in Trewthe': Lyric and Rebellion Among Late Medieval Men," in *Vernacular Aesthetics in the Later Middle Ages* ed. Katherine Jager (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 47-86.

The Formande table, through its stable context, offers us an opportunity to think about the role that place and materiality played in readers' oral experience of bills and broadsides. In one of the "Letters of John Ball," for example, Ball famously states: "Jon Balle gretyth yow wele alle and doth yowe to understande, he hath rungen youre bell."[132] Adin Lears reads Ball's analogy of his call in terms of a "bell" being rung as a suggestion that his warning—i.e. the oral recitation of his bill—took place at the "somatic level of the language rather than at the semantic level."[133] While this is likely true, Ball's reference to not just any bell, but "*youre* belle" (emphasis mine) points to the importance that local materiality played in the late-medieval imagination of community connected via sound. As John H. Arnold and Caroline Goodson note, in urban settings where multiple bells were nearly always present, disputes could arise over the "liturgical priority" of bells maintained by different communities.[134] Ball's metaphor thus highlights the importance that a local material setting likely would have played in an audience's appreciation of his letter's oral performance. Bills, often posted on the doors and windows of churches and manors, would have spoken to the communities to which they were addressed, in part by being performed in spaces their recipients were familiar with, much like the Formande table would have appealed to the guild via its connections to the space of St. Helen's Church.[135] Similar to pageants, whose meaning was predicated in part on their performance in the streets of a particular town, the monument's installation in the guild's aisle in St. Helen's church would have facilitated a uniquely locally-oriented and situated experience of community.

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[132] "Addresses to the Commons," line 27. All quotations taken from *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. James M. Dean. TEAMS Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 1996).
[133] Lears, "On Bells and Rebellion," 94.
[134] John H. Arnold and Caroline Goodson, "Resounding Community: The History and Meaning of Medieval Church Bells," *Viator* 43, no. 1 (2012): 125.
[135] Wendy Scase, "'Strange and Wonderful Bills': Bill-Casting and Political Discourse in Late Medieval England," *New Medieval Literatures* (Clarendon Press, 1998), 225-47.

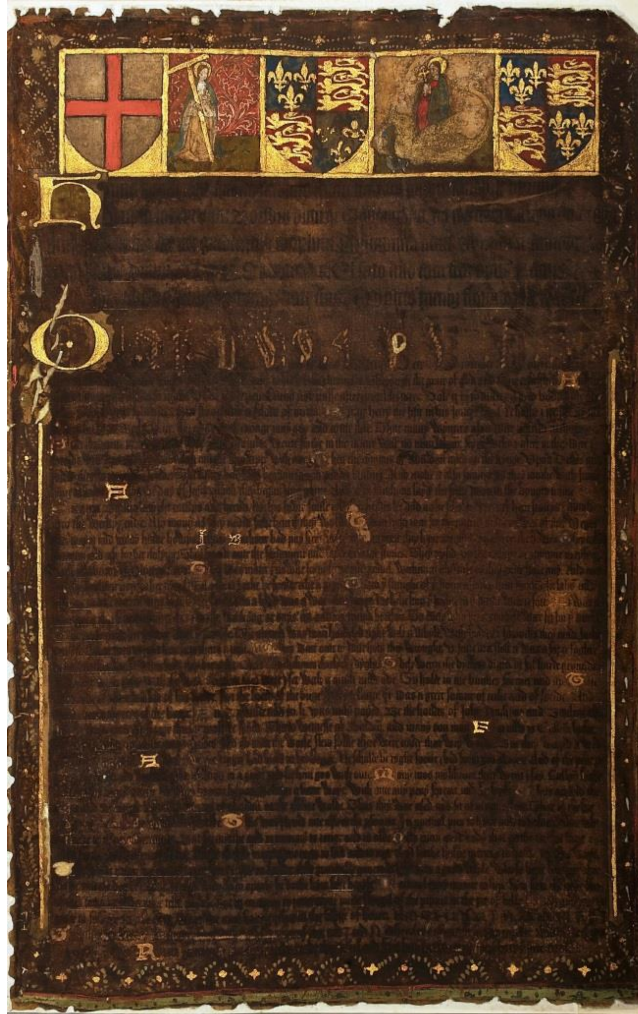

Fig. 9. The Formande table

The Formande table's mode of public display suggests that we might understand its "liberatory" message as not just thematic, but performatively enacted through the way that it makes history and legal record available to the general public. By making the historical and documentary record publicly visible and available, the monument suggests transparency between the Brotherhood and the parishioners of St. Helen's Church. Similar to legal documents, which Emily Steiner has suggested were influential to the development of late medieval English literature, Formande's table exhibits "an idea of publicness indebted to the materialities rather

than to the legalities of disclosure."[136] Like those royal proclamations or papal indulgences recited and posted publicly throughout England, the Formande table constitutes "public poetry" not simply through its claim to "represent the political interests of the community at large" but because its "rhetoric of universal notification and… open presentation established a reciprocal relation between the proclamation and the reception of a text that was nothing less than contractual." [137] The table however not only takes on the public "form" of the late medieval document, as in Steiner's central examples of Charters of Christ and the "Letters of John Ball," but also potentially its function, via multiple references to the documents and legal charters that brought the bridges into being. One section of the poem, for example, records the particularities of the agreement between the abbot and the guild, noting, with precision, that "The god Lorde of Abendon left of his londe / For the breed of the brige iiii.^{xx} fote large" (58-59). By making the specifics of this legal agreement accessible to any who visited St. Helen's church, the poem might be seen as performatively responding to concerns that the lay commons raised about the relationship between documentation and institutional authority during the 1381 rebellion.[138]

While Abingdon was generally quiet during the 1381 rebellion itself, the importance of documents to the people of Abingdon specifically could be seen in 1327 when rebels destroyed a market hall the abbey had recently erected to police the market, burned the legal records of the monastery, and called representatives of the church to a parley in Bagley Wood where the monks were forced to make "great concessions."[139] Even more relevant for Formande and the Brotherhood would have been the "Jack Sharpe Rebellion" in 1431, in which the town bailiff, a

[136] Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature*, Vol. 50 (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 157.
[137] Steiner, 158.
[138] For an overview of the role that literacy and documents played in the uprising, see Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion* (University of California Press, 1994).
[139] Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity*, 195.

member of the Brotherhood named William Mandeville (who took the alias Jack Sharp), led a "rebellious mob of lollards" in an attack against the Abbey.[140] Contemporary chronicles report that 20,000 "rysers" gathered "at Abyngton" on May 22nd "against men of holy chirche."[141] The monks were able to bar the doors and prevent any deaths and the rising was put down by the Duke of Gloucester; ultimately, Sharp was condemned to death, not only for the rising itself, but for his circulation of defamatory handbills across England. As a nationally significant event rooted in Abingdon just twenty-seven years before Formande produced his public monument, Sharp's bills and the tradition of bill casting offers a valuable context for thinking about the Formande table's mode of public display.

The table also resonates with the tradition of rebel literature via its reference to the "right trewe men" whom the author notes have carefully managed the "rentes" that support repairs to the bridge since they were established (91). As James M. Dean explains, "In the fifteenth-century the terms "true men" and "true preachers" become code words for Lollards."[142] The term's association with Lollardy and rebellion is tied to its use in the "Letters of John Ball," which tells its audience to "taketh with yow Johan Trewman and alle hiis felawes" (line 5). Though the phrase might suggest Lollard sympathies, its context in "The Bridges at Abingdon" suggests a different vision of community. While "trewman" was used by Lollards to refer to anyone who viewed themselves as part of the chosen elect, it is used here to refer to a highly specific and local group bound by a legal arrangement to a particular place and material assemblage—namely, the bridges and causeway. The designation of these men as "trewe" is likewise imagined not as self-conferred but as dependent on the judgment of the community. As the poem explains: "Whoso have hem hereafter, with trewthe but he stonde, / It schal be knowen openly he

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[140] On the Jack Sharp Rebellion's relation to Abingdon, see Cox, *The Story of Abingdon*, 89-90.
[141] Cox, *The Story of Abingdon*, 90.
[142] Dean, Medieval *English Political Writings,* 243.

dothe hymselfe begyle" (93-4). It is this vision of a community of "trewe men" grounded in local materiality, performance, and accountability, that the Formande table both endorses and facilitates through its open "table" form and affordances for performative re-enactment.

The Formande table's illustrative visual program constitutes another facet of its potentially "liberatory" performance of openness and accessibility. The illuminated pentatych running across the top of the monument suggests that its content is not solely intended for a literate audience—as is implicit in other public church tables like the "Magna Tabula" of Glastonbury Abbey, whose Latin text and lack of illustration suggests either an audience literate in Latin or an audience who accessed the table via clerical mediation.[143] Through the five-panel sequence of images that appears at its top, the table communicates, in abridged form, the relationship between the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross, their patron saint (St. Helen), St. Margaret, Henry V, and England as a nation; this is a set of relationships that the poem itself records. Read from left to right, the sequence includes a St. George's Cross, St. Helen with the True Cross, a Lancastrian coat of arms, St. Margaret and the dragon, and a second Lancastrian coat of arms. The sequence's placement of the two saints depicted (St. Helen on the left and St. Margaret on the right) facing one of the sequence's two depictions of the Royal Lancastrian coat of arms, suggests that they are following the poem's Latin directive to pray for Henry V.[144] The sequencing of a depiction of St. George's cross, St. Helen's discovery of the True Cross, and St. Margaret's using the sign of the cross as protection against the dragon, highlight's the cross's value as an object around which beneficial forms of re-enactment could take place; the Brotherhood's politically suggestive installation of a fifty foot cross in the center of the town's

[143] Van Dussen, "Tourists and Tabulae," 239.
[144] "Vos qui transitis huius memores bene sitis / Et vestris precibus fundator sit relevatus." Translation "You who pass this way, be mindful of him and may this founder [i.e. Henry V] be raised up by your prayers." Hanna, "The Bridges at Abingdon," 40.

market attests to the guild's recognition of this power. The two Lancastrian Royal Coats of Arms offer a similar image of continuity across time, referencing Henry V—who gave royal license to the bridge project—and Henry VI, who was king when the table was produced in 1458.[145] Such a gesture towards continuity might be seen as particularly relevant in light of the struggle between York and Lancaster (the War of Roses) that was taking place in 1458 when the table was created. Abingdon was in fact imbricated in this struggle in fairly significant ways, as in 1458 Margaret (Henry VI's queen) and Thomas Courtenay, Earl of Devon visited the town to seek the support of its people.[146] Given this context, it doesn't seem all that farfetched to imagine that the instability of national politics may have played some role in motivating the table's production, nostalgic orientation to the past, and call for civic unification.

Fig. 10. Formande table, five-panel illustration

Jill Stevenson's concept of "performance literacy" is helpful for thinking about Formande's table as an object that invites performance even prior to its oral performance through its physical and visual form.[147] For Stevenson, performance literacy describes a "devotional tactic" which involves "seeing and relating to images and objects as if they are live performance

[145] The table highlights this continuity through its initial praise for Henry V as "fundator" of the bridge project and its final reference to "Henry VI" as a means of dating its installation.
[146] Cox, *The Story of Abingdon*, 101.
[147] Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (Springer, 2010).

events."[148] For Stevenson, the "material texture" of medieval objects and performances was not incidental nor merely visually communicative, but a way of creating "highly sensual mnemonic experiences" and "conveyed rhythms that impacted how spectators experienced, and, therefore, understood" such events."[149] Stevenson draws on the medieval understanding of seeing as an "active" and "kinesthetic" interaction between viewer and object.[150] While Stevenson applies this theory to suggest that the materiality of stage props worked on stage to "draw attention to the bodied similarity between actor/character and spectator, and consequently reinforce the humanity of the cycle's characters," it might be applied equally well to thinking about the materiality of the Formande table, both in terms of its material form and the ways in which its sonic performance makes the past available to listeners.[151]

Through its public display and thematic interest in sound and performance of bridge building, Formande's table in turn invites us to think about the charitable construction it commemorates as a kind of multimedia, embodied, public performance. Indeed, the poem's observation that the construction of the two bridges was initiated "Apon the day of Seynt Albon"[152] provocatively suggests that they imagined their act of construction as a kind of dramatic re-enactment as contemporary *vita* of St. Alban all associate Saint's central miracle as occurring around a bridge.[153] The poet's use of the word "game" to describe the guild's work

[148] Stevenson, 45.
[149] Stevenson, 53-4.
[150] Stevenson, 45-6.
[151] Stevenson, 54.
[152] The significance that St. Alban's Day held for the guild's understanding of the bridge project is further suggested by a transcription made of a text once inscribed in the "West window" of the guild's St. Katharine aisle in St. Helen's Church, which reads: "On the day of St. Albone, one Howchum layd the first stone/and never fayled to the end, to heaven mot his soul wend." Sir Egerton Brydges, *The Topographer for the Year 1790*, Vol. 2. (London, 1790), 156.
[153] According to the legend, St. Alban—on the way to his execution--is stopped at a bridge execution crowded by onlookers. The tumult of the crowd combined with the narrowness of the bridge results in a number of them falling in and drowning. Having pity on their plight, a weeping Alban kneels down and prays that God restore their lives. As a result, the river miraculously dries up and provides passage for the company, revealing those thought

("Apon the day of Seynt Albon they bigan this *game*") additionally suggests that they viewed their work as performative (21).[154] Such a performance, occurring by the waters of Thames at the edge of the town's boundary resonates with what Catherine Sanok has suggested about saints' plays' frustration of "official efforts to limit lay devotion to private space."[155] The act of "laying the first stone" by a senior guild member similarly speaks to the "mark[ing] the performances as theatrical, and so distinct from contemporary social life" that Sanok suggests framed and contributed to the orthodoxy of such performances.[156] At the same time, the poem itself suggests that, in the case of the bridge project, the re-enactment of St. Alban's *vita* in their bridge building would have not just invite an audience to feel with the saint analogically, but through their own personal embodied experiences in that local space, and the tragedies that rendered their charitable performance an urgent necessity.[157]

Unlike more ephemeral forms of performance medieval literary scholars often think about (e.g. the Corpus Christi pageants) the building of a church aisle or bridge could take weeks, months, or potentially even years and left an indelible mark on communal space. Additionally, construction projects were *loud*, as the poet's remark that the "noyse" made by the

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drowned unharmed. William Caxton, Frederick S. Ellis, William Morris, and Bruce Rogers, *The Golden Legend.* (London: Kelmscott Press, 1892).

[154] According to Lawrence Clopper, the terms "game," *ludus,* and "play" appear interchangeably in medieval guild feast records to refer to a "civic, or more likely, parish entertainment, a *spectaculum,* whose purpose is to raise funds." Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 129; By referring to the laying of the first stone as "game" rather than "work" or "labor" the poet also potentially avoids insinuating that the guild was breaking religious law by working on a day that was designated among the 43 English *festa ferianda*. Christopher R. Cheney, "Rules for the Observance of Feast-Days in medieval England." *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 34, no. 90 (1961): 117-29.

[155] Catherine Sanok, "Performing Feminine Sanctity in Late Medieval England: Parish Guilds, Saints' Plays, and the Second Nun's Tale," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32, no. 2 (2002): 286.

[156] Sanok, 162.

[157] We might view the Brotherhood's fifteenth-century construction of an enormous "Market Cross" in the historically contested space of Abingdon's town Market as a similar kind of material re-enactment of their dedication to the cross. Constructed in the interim between the building of the bridges and the authorship of "The Bridges at Abingdon," the Market Cross offers a compelling example for understanding how the guild used mimetic performance of religious history as a means of claiming civic space. Cox, *The Story of Abingdon*, 84.

builders could be heard “thens a myle” attests to (50). The poem’s keen awareness to a number of sounds associated with the foundational act of bridge building it records offers an avenue for understanding the sound that would have been produced through an oral performance of “The Bridges at Abingdon” itself. The poem highlights this awareness in the moments where the sound of alliteration onomatopoetically reflects the sound of building being described, as in the line “The peple preved her power with the pecoyse,” where the popping of the alliterating “p” sound mimics the sound of chipping away at stone with a “pickaxe” (47).

The poem’s first instance of alliterative re-enactment appears early on, in a stanza explaining the tragic circumstances which spurred the guild to action:

> And som oute of her sadels flette to the grounde,
> Went forthe in the Water; wist no man whare
> Fyve Wekys after or they were ifounde
> Her kyn and her knowlech caught hem uppe with care (13-16).

From the perspective of the “rules” of alliterative poetry, the first line of this stanza is “deficient.” In fact, Hanna cites it as one of three examples of the poem’s “erratic” departure from alliterative rhyme, noting that “the rhyme includes only the two stresses of the *a*-verse.”[158] While this may be true, I wish to suggest that the line nevertheless displays a careful attention to alliteration’s power to capture motion and imitate extra-linguistic sounds. The line’s movement from the lightweight voiceless sibilance of “som,” “sadels” and “flette,” to the hard, guttural stop in “grounde” vividly captures the act of falling it describes (12). Hanna’s term “erratic” captures the jarring nature of this line within the poem’s overall rhythm, with the reader, like the rider, being sonically “thrown” from their saddle. This line’s privileging of language’s power to communicate via its ”sound” as opposed to its semantics resonates with what Lears has called

[158] Hanna, “The Bridges,” 33.

Langland's "poetics of lolling." Lears uses the term to refer to Langland's act of "manipulate[ing] and play[ing] with the aural texture of language so that sound sometimes overtakes sense, deferring comprehension and rendering interpretation into an experiential physical and mental process."[159] Here however, the author uses sound's ability to appeal to the body not simply to produce a disorienting effect, but to sonically re-enact a tragic experience.

In the two lines that follow, the poet similarly capitalizes on sound's ability to capture experience through a line of semivowels ("w") that sonically re-enact the disturbingly ambiguous experience of absent presence they describe ("Went forthe into the Water; wist no man whare / Fyve Wekys after or they were ifounde" (13-14)). Following this soft sonic interlude, the stanza's hard consonant cluttered alternation between throat-articulated glottal fricatives (/h/) and palatals (/k/ and /ç/) ("*H*er *k*yn" "*h*er *k*nowle*ch*", "*c*au*gh*t", "*h*em" "*c*are") are a striking reprisal of the first line's dynamic shift from soft to hard and recall nothing so much as the sound of sobbing and feeling of *globus pharyngis* (aka having a "lump in your throat") that one would imagine might accompany the act of drawing the body of a loved one from a lake. In Middle English, the noun "care" which modifies the act of retrieving their loved one from the water English could refer to "Sorrow, sadness, grief" but also "lamentation, wailing."[160] As such, the combined community of "kyn" and "knowlech" (which Hanna translates as "Familiars, i.e. friends or relations") described in this stanza are linked not only by their shared act of drawing their loved one from the lake ("caught hem up") but by also by the affect/sound of grief that accompanies that act ("with care").[161] The poem's sonic re-enactment of the experience of loss and communal grieving it records creates a link across time between Abingdon's community of

[159] Lears, "Noise, Soundplay," 196.
[160] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "cāre n.(1)," accessed August 11, 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED6789/track?counter=17&search_id=8862258
[161] Hanna, "The Bridges," 40.

the past and the poem's present audience, inviting them not only to intellectually recall but to feel with those who lost people they cared about to the former precarious river-crossing.

In its translation of grieving sound into poetic verse, "The Bridges" might also be seen as performatively engaging with medieval philosophical discussions about the relationship between deliberative and non-deliberative types of vocal productions. Roger Bacon, a 13th century Franciscan Friar and Oxford philosopher, in his work "De Signis" ("On Signs") discusses the relationship between linguistic and extralinguistic sounds, using the involuntary sound produced by a body in pain as his central example.[162] Bacon explains that there are three types of *voces* (the first two of which are most relevant here).[163] The first type of vocal sound is nondeliberative and occurs when a person experiences pain and "suddenly, without deliberation, groans." Such sounds, Bacon argues are produced without reason or choice of will and derive from what Bacon calls "the movement of the sensitive soul" (*ad motum animae sensitivae*). Bacon defines this kind of utterance by its temporal immediacy to pain, occurring "suddenly without detectable delay" and "by a kind of natural instinct." Included in this category, are other sounds produced without rational thought such as "the groans of the sick, sighs, and many expressions of wonder and the like" as well as places the cries of animals (*voces brutorum*).[164] By contrast, the second type of vocal sound is that produced by one who "freely, deliberately, and purposefully" decides to talk about pain in general or one's own pain."[165] This category includes language, dialects, and

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[162] All modern English translations are from Thomas S. Moloney, "The Semiotics of Roger Bacon," *Mediaeval Studies* 45 (1983): 120-154.
[163] The third type of *voce* Bacon describes is the "interjection" which he situates between the other two as "*voces mediae quodamoddo*" ("voices of an intermediate manner") that are imperfect in both concept and deliberation ("inperfectus est conceptus, et inperfecta deliberacio)." Moloney, 148.
[164] Moloney, 141.
[165] Moloney, 147-8.

signs advertising goods, and other signs which are derived from the soul and constituted through reasoned choice (*ab anima cum deliberatione rationis et electione voluntatis*).[166]

For Bacon, the difference between these two types of vocal sounds is understood in temporal terms, with the latter being distinguished by its occurring "suddenly without detectable delay" and "by a kind of natural instinct."[167] His explanation of the third category of sound ("interjection,") highlights this temporal relationship, as he explains that interjections (like "oh") are produced when the rational part of the soul has begun to but not yet fully process an event, rendering expression that is "lacking in construction, perfection, and form."[168] By translating the affective noise of grief into the ordered sound of alliterative poetry, "The Bridges" allows for a sonic performance that speaks to the immediacy of Bacon's "nondeliberative" sounds generated from pain, and retains the positive connotation of "reasoned choice" he ascribes to the second type of voice.

The stanza that follows the poem's sonic re-enactment of communal grief is equally invested in communal sound:

> Then the commons of Abendon cryed on the Kynge,
> Upon Dukes and Lords that were in this londe.
> The Kynge bad hem begynne apon goddes blissing
> And make it al so strong as they couthe with stone, lyme, or sonde (17-20).

The word "Then" which links the stanzas appears to suggest a causative relationship between the grieving of the bereaved and the action of the commons. However, the stanzas are also linked sonically, via the concatenation of the glottal "k" of the previous stanza. Through this repetition of the previous stanza's alliteration (the only example of alliterative stanza-linking in the poem), the sound of grief is transmuted into the "cry" of the "commons of Abendon" in petition to the

[166] Moloney, 148.
[167] Moloney, 140.
[168] Moloney, 148.

King on behalf of the town's citizens for the right to build a bridge.[169] While the phrase "to cry on the King" was a fairly commonplace way of describing a petitionary act, the context in which the phrase appears here—and its concatenation with the previous stanza about the noise of affective community—seems to invite the poem's audience to consider how the act of "petition" by the "commons," which in some cases also relied on communal noise, might relate to the extralinguistic expression of affect that the term "cry" could likewise describe. [170] Indeed, the concatenated line might be seen as not only transmuting affective "care" into political "cry," but also streamlining the two communities brought together in grief ("kyn" and "knowlech") into a single unified and politically legitimate body: "the commons of Abendon." (16-17). We might additionally recognize something of the temporal immediacy Bacon assigns to affective utterance in the poem's positioning of the Abingdon commons' concatenated "cry" just one line after its description of grieving "care" (16-17). The fact that the lines describing the commons' "cry" (17-18) are similarly followed up just one line later by the response of Henry V who " bad hem begynne apon goddess blissing," implies a similar immediacy to their affectively grounded noise (19).

The poem's equation of affective utterance with political petition makes sense if we consider that many members of the Brotherhood of the Holy were also members of Abingdon's "commons." "John Houchons and John Bret" who are listed on the royal license Henry V granted for the building of the bridges and causeway were both citizens of the town and members

[169] See Margaret P. Medary, "Stanza-Linking in Middle English Verse," *Romanic Review* 7 (1916): 243-270.
[170] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "crīen v.," accessed August 11, 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED10316/track?counter=1&search_id=8862258; On the relationship between "clamour" and late medieval definitions of "commonalty" see Emily Steiner, "Commonalty and Literary Form in the 1370s and 1380s," *New Medieval Literatures* 6 (2003): 199-221.

of the guild.[171] Like so many of the poem's details, the fact that this license was granted not only to Houchons and Bret, but to "the commonalty of the said town of Abingdon," makes the poem's reference to the "commons of Abendon," not only an affective fiction, but potentially also a legally legitimate claim.

The poem, through its comparison between "care" and "cry," legitimizes the guild's act of petition by characterizing it as an affectively generated echo of the sound of communal grief undertaken by "the commons of Abendon."[172] Similarly, the poem itself, by translating the sound of grieving into alliterative verse, creates a form of extralinguistic response that is both rational and affective. With its specific references to the time at which the bridges were produced and the time of its own production, the poem highlights its temporal separation from the past events it records. Thus, while the poem preserves the immediate extralinguistic responses of past community, it is not an immediate response to that pain itself. Rather, it is a reasoned response to the pain of the past.

The three stanzas following Henry V's approval of the project, are relatively "quiet" in terms of onomatopoeia and/or extralinguistic sounds, describing John Huchyon's dedicatory act of laying"the firste stoon in the Kynges name" (22), the generous donation of "stonys" and "mony" of "Sir Peris Besilllis knyght" (23-26), and the production of tools by "crafti men for the querry" at the behest and sponsorship of the renowned guild donor "Ieffrey Barbour" (27-29). The noise of community returns in the following stanza however, as we are told that the

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[171] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office, Henry V. A.D. 1416-1422* (London: H.M.S.O., 1911), 33.

[172] The reference to dredging up the "dead body" of a "fellow" here could have also recalled a conflict the town had with the abbot over the burial of the dead. This resulted in a lengthy legal battle that ended up favoring the Abbot. As a result, the people were required to exhume a number of bodies they had buried and move them to the Abbey churchyard. Interestingly, records show that the people had begun burying their dead at St. Helen's because the Abbey had refused to allow them to perform their service for the dead in the Abbey due to the funeral procession making too much "noise." The petition attesting to this debacle can be found in William Henry Bliss and J. A. Twemlow, eds. *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters, 1198-*. Volume 4, (London: H.M.S.O., 1893), 371.

"crafti men," "cokid for cartes and cast for her clusyng" (31). Hanna reads the author's use of "cokid," which derived from the verb *cokken* "to quarrel over" as suggesting the "zeal" of the workmen who "vie to be first to get materials to the building site."[173] While this seems to be an accurate interpretation, the verb also has interesting connotations vis-a-vis the poem's early depictions of extra-linguistic sound. As the MED explains, the word *cokken* likely derives from the Middle English word for rooster ("cok")—an animal known both for its ferocity and its noise.[174] Here the palatal /k/ of "cry" and "care" resurfaces once again, now in the context of physical labor. These "crafti men," the poem suggests, are not only producers of "crowes" (crowbars), but also communal noise. Noting the barnyard associations of "cokken," the poem's depiction of laboring "zeal" might rather echo the notably less noble depiction of bird-squabbling in Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls,* where the unruly avian community's alliterative shouts of "Kek kek! kokkow ! quek quek!'" famously parody the Parliamentary Commons' practice of *clamour* (499).[175] By suggesting a connection the "crafti men" and animal noise, the poem appears to briefly acknowledge the risk that contemporary authors associated with the commons and their modes of political representation grounded in noise.

The potential implications of sound as productive of animal-like disorder are quickly countered however, as we are told, in the line's second half, that the laborers "cast" for the "clusyng" ("diversion") of the river in preparation for their construction work (32). [176] The verb "casten," ("To take thought, deliberate, reflect; think about (sth.)") suggests that their quarreling,

[173] Hanna, "The Bridges," 41.
[174] The word's relationship to the rooster can be gleaned from its use in a 1350 book on dream interpretation, which explains: "Mon þat syþ briddes cokkynde, of wraþþe þat is toknynge." *Middle English Dictionary,* s.v. "cokken v.(1)," accessed, August 11th, 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED8347/track?counter=2&search_id=8862258
[175] We might similarly point to John Gower's famous description of the 1381 rebels as noisy animals in his *Vox Clamantis*, itself often seen as an inspiration for Chaucer's animal-laden "The Nun's Priest's Tale."
[176] I defer to Ralph Hanna on the translation of "clusying" as a variant of the noun "clouse" ("floodgate, sluice,") though he notes that earlier transcribers (Hearne and Cubham) took "clusyng was to be an erroneous spelling of "chusyng" (i.e. choosing). Hanna, "The Bridges," 41.

though possibly noisy, was nonetheless governed by reason.[177] The orderliness of their noise is further emphasized in stanza's subsequent claim that "They reysid up the archeys be ge[ome]tre in rysyng, / With xi. Laborers lavyng at onys." (32-34). This reference to "ge[ome]tre," one of the seven liberal arts associated with masonry and measured order, here sanctions this community of "crafti men" and "laborers" as governed by measure and reason. Here, the poem's alliterative description of the orderly arrangement of "xi. Laborers lavyng at onys," seems to suggest that the stability that geometry is able to confer to bridges through numeric reasoning applies also to human communities (34).

This logic is taken to the extreme in the visual overview of the project provided in the following stanza:

> It was a solace to see in a somer seson
> CCC. Iwysse workynge at onys
> iiii. and iiii. reuled by reson
> To wete who wrought best were set for the nonce (43-46).

As in the earlier nuancing of the workers' quarrelling with their "casting" and "geometre," the competitive energy of the laborers is here contained by their numeric arrangement. Though their competitive zeal is still apparent in the claim that they worked "To wete who wrought best," the spectator's description of their work as "iiii. and iiii. reuled by reson" speaks to their work's measured harmony (45).

The poem's focus on sound makes it tempting to read the poem's emphasis on whole and balanced numbers here as related to the significance numbers held for medieval musical theory, but the poem's use of numbers elsewhere as a means of accounting suggests a more likely answer. While it may seem strange to view the poem's depiction of the bridge labor in relation to

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[177] *Middle English Dictionary,* s.v. "casten v.," accessed, August 11th, 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED6914/track?counter=1&search_id=8862258

accounting, considering the poem's interest in affective re-enactment I've charted thus far, counting and accounting in fact played an important role in devotional practices, as Thomas Lentes's work on "counting piety" illustrates.[178] Counting, Lentes explains, was important for devotion due to its relationship to both prayers and indulgences and meditation on the life of Christ.[179] Lentes suggests that confraternities were particularly involved in this "arithmetic of salvation," noting that confraternities, like that of St. Ursula in Strasbourg, kept accounts of services performed that list the numbers of prayers performed in the name of the guild by both monastic and lay participants[180] The Brotherhood of the Holy Cross appears to have kept similar records as can be seen in a surviving "minutes" of a meeting where they stating that they would in the future refuse to enter the names of members into their (now lost) "Mortilake" book until full payment was received, highlights.[181] This accounting, Lentes suggests, was part of confraternities imagining their institution as a "treasure-house" of prayers, through the theological concept of *thesaurus ecclesia*.[182] Through written accounting of prayers and indulgences, he proposes "merchant bookkeeping and celestial bookkeeping entered into a fruitful alliance" during the Late Middle Ages[183]

The poem's numeracy thus resonates with the fact that accounting was, for medieval guilds, integral to their commitment to facilitating charitable performances.[184] Written accounts like the "Mortilake" book allowed the charitable acts of individuals to be repayed with prayers.

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[178] Thomas Lentes, "Counting Piety in the Late Middle Ages," in *Ordering Medieval Society: Perspectives on Intellectual and Practical Modes of Shaping Social Relations*, ed. Bernhard Jussen, trans. Pamela Selwyn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 55-91.
[179] Lentes, 55.
[180] Lentes, 63.
[181] Cox, *The Story of Abingdon*, 80.
[182] Lentes, 63.
[183] Lentes, 67.
[184] The fact that the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross held meetings in a room dubbed the "Exchequer" attests to their sensitivity to just this sort of bureaucratic performance. The term "exchequer" derives from the material object on which accounting took place: a table overlayed with a cloth featuring a checkered pattern. Michael John Jones, "Origins of medieval Exchequer accounting," *Accounting, Business & Financial History* 19, no. 3 (2009): 276.

Formande's table works similar in its request for prayers for the bridge's benefactors. The poem, by presenting the bridge laborers in numeric terms highlights the way that guild accounting both literally and performatively constituted its community by recording and scripting live performances of prayer. By characterizing the bridge building as constituted by *ordered* labor, the poem reflects the role that guilds played as facilitators of performance.

Thus, while the Formande monument's public display speaks to the kind of referential "openness" of address and public availability Emily Steiner has argued is central to some forms of late medieval "documentary poetics," its performative mode speaks to a desire to control/script the performance(s) of those being addressed. In the monument's version of documentary poetics, poetry's ability to transmit bodily understanding and memory becomes a way of ensuring the proper remembering of and confirmation of the past.

The guild understanding of their role as a sponsor for/of performances can be seen in the poem's final example of onomatopoetic noise, where the quarelling voices of the "crafti men" are subsumed by the onomatopoetic harmony of their tools:

> The peple preved her power with the pecoyse;
> The mattok was manhandeled right wele a whyle.
> With spades and schovelis they made suche a noyse,
> That men myght here hem thens a myle (47-50).

In the first line of this passage the aspirated popping of "p"s ("The peple preved her power with the pecoyse,") recalls the sound of a pickaxe chipping away at stone (47). This is followed by the combination of "w" and "gh" sounds in the second half of the second line, which mimic the sound of air whipping past a *mattok* (another type of pickaxe) handled well. And finally, the sibilant "s"s in the phrase "spades and schovelis," similarly mimic the scraping sounds that those excavating tools make as they scoop and deposit soil (49).

Unlike the poem's earlier depictions of vocal extra-linguistic sound however, this communicative and performance inspiring "noyse" is emphatically produced by the worker's tools. The poem's tracing of these tools's production by "crafti men" (27) whose labor was financed by merchants like "Geoffrey Barbour" (29), to their usage by laborers, makes the sound they produced a symbol of the community's combined charitable and physical effort. Like the earlier transformation of "kin" and "knowlech" into "Commons," the multifarious types of workers described in the preceding stanzas is unified into a sound produced by "the peple" (47). With its final line ("That men might here hem thens a myle") the poem suggests a recognition of the "power" that noisy performances like construction held to communicate the guild's powerful ability to shape the town's landscape.[185] At the same time, the democratizing term "the peple," legitimizes this "strategic" act of shaping civic-space by depicting it not as a performance by wealthy merchants, but an act by the town. The sound's resonating from the tools illustrate that this was, in some ways, a reality, by pointing to the communal effort that the project required to be realized.

The kind of participation through material charity this scene depicts resonates with the guilds' role as an intermediary between material charity and the ecclesiastical performance of prayer. We might see this as also similar to what Katherine French has written about parish devotional bequests, and the ways that they allowed parishioners to participate, via the objects they donated, in liturgical ceremonies like the Mass.[186] A similar logic applies here as the "noyse" generated by the tools as physical objects speaks

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[185] The distance between Burford Bridge (the more distant of the two bridges the guild constructed) and the center of Abingdon, where St. Helen's Church is located is approximately 1.1 miles.

[186] Katherine L French, "The Seat under Our Lady: Gender and Seating in Late Medieval English Parish Churches," in *Women's Space: Patronage, Place and Gender in the Medieval Church*, eds. Virginia Chieffo Raguin and Sarah Stanbury, (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2005), 160-184.

to the history of affective grief, charity, and labor that brought them into existence. It is in this sense that this sound is able to represent the power" of "the peple."

The word "noyse" that appears in this stanza for the first and only time in the poem is particularly interesting in light of its resonance with fourteenth and fifteenth-century depictions of labor and rebellion. Medieval authors, including Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower, used the term "noyse" to suggest "chaos" or "disorder." In Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, for example, the "noyse" of the people is used to equate their speech and actions with that of mindless animals. With these ignoble associations it might appear strange that "noyse" appears to stand here as the ultimate example of guild community. At the same time, within the context of the poem's depictions of affective grief and political action as extra-linguistic means of transferring affect, this makes a great deal of sense. "Noyse," the poem suggests is a powerful affective force, but one which requires shaping by reason and order to be effective. Poetry, in "The Bridges," serves as a tangible illustration of this theory at work, as the past is able to be encountered performatively only through the carefully ordered poetry and material form of the Formande table. The order of poetic form, like the order of political petition, or the order of accounting, renders "noyse" safe and beneficial to the community.

The Formande table's ability to not only imagine but performatively re-enact its vision of community as grounded in affective, embodied, experience/re-enactment and response is ultimately realized through the acrostic riddle that follows the poem. Here the table asks its audience to "Take the first letter of youre fourefader with A, the worker of wex, and I and N, the colore of an asse; set them togeder, and tel me yf you can what it is than. (101-102). The riddle's final line, "Tel me yf you can what it is than," invites readers to shift from a passive mode of

empathetic listening to a more active, collaborative, and constructive role of generating a solution to the puzzle. The riddle's simplicity and reliance on "phonetic literacy" suggests that its function was not to perplex, exclude, or create competition—as scholars have noted is common of literary riddles—but to unite its audience in a shared act of building in which all could partake.[187] If we imagine an audience of varying levels of literacy, as one would expect in the fifteenth-century, the table might be seen as inviting a particular kind of collaborative performance. While a basic "phonetic" literacy would have been required to arrive at its solution, anyone, literate or not, would have been provide guesses as to the answers to the acrostic's hints about individual letters (e.g. "worker of wex" ("bee") or "the colore of an asse" ("don" i.e. brownish gray)). The poem thus invites us to imagine a performance in which people with different skill sets, knowledge, and/or abilities collaborated together to achieve a common goal, not dissimilar from the poem's depiction of bridge building. Such collaboration would have, like the bridge project, produced a kind of "noyse," as the poem's audience "quarreled" over the solutions to each individual riddle, before arriving at the acrostic's ultimate solution. The "noyse" here however is of a uniquely literate sort. If the "power of the peple" was, in 1416, made apprehensible through the "noise" of labor, it is in 1458 re-imagined as the noise of literate collaboration that the Formande table facilitates.[188]

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[187] Paul Saenger distinguishes "phonetic literacy," or the ability to sound out words and pronounce them orally, from "comprehension literacy," the silent apprehension of texts and their full meaning. Paul Saenger, "Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages,"in *The Culture of Print*, ed. Roger Chartier (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2014, 141-173; As Curtis Gruenler explains, "literary riddling" of the kind found in Piers Plowman constituted a tradition separate from that of "oral riddling." While the former was generally thought of "more as a win-or-lose contest than as a means to knowledge," the latter invited "harmonious participation in a game of interpretation." Curtis A. Gruenler, *Piers Plowman and the Poetics of Enigma: Riddles, Rhetoric, and Theology* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 87.

[188] As a script for a kind of communal reading lesson, the riddle suggests that the table might be understood as participating in debates about literacy and its accessibility to the commons. In that context, the table's combination of Latin prose introduction, Middle English poetry, and documentary accounting would have provided readers with ready open-access to a diverse and relevant selection of material for practicing reading.

The verb “set” that defines the audience’s central participatory act in the riddle (“set them togeder”) is provocatively repeated in the dedicatory note that immediately follows, which reads: “Richard ‘Fannande’ Ironmonger hathe made this tabul and set it here in the yere of Kyng Herry the sexte…” (101-102). The word “set” repeated twice here in the table’s final two textual acts resonates with the poem’s description of the bridge laborers as “iiii. And iiii. Reulyd be reson / … were *set* for the nonce,” its description of the environs around the bridge as “i-*set* with a quyk mounde / to holde in the bunkes for ever and ay” (57; emphasis mine) and its account of the agreement reached between the “commones of Abendon” and the “Abbot,” as “cesed and *set,* al in oon assent” (81; emphasis mine). In each of these examples, to “set” something means to establish permanence and order of form—whether material or ideal. The word appears one final time immediately following the riddle, this time, as part of Formande’s dedication to his work: Richard ‘Fannande’ Ironmonger hathe made this tabul and set it here in the yere of Kyng Herry the sexte…” (101-102). Similar to the poem’s various sonic communities, these various acts of “setting,” suggest a relationship between material and social stability and continuity. At the same time, the poem’s act of memorializing, its re-enactive potential, and calls for prayers suggests that material stability is not enough. Indeed, the bridges, though they provide a stable way for travelers, are ultimately defined by their “brekynges” which “the towne bere schulde” (81). Indeed, despite the importance of sound and place, the only stable place the poem describes is that it looks toward in its final lines: “Now god geve us grace to folowe treuthe even / That we may have a place in the blysse of Heven. AMEN” (99-100). Composed of an ideal one-hundred lines, the poem’s form appears to aspire towards numeric perfection. Its final participatory riddle however appears to accept that this ideal depens on the noisy, imperfect iterative performances of devotional communities.

Conclusion

Richard Formande's table, through its use of poetry to re-enact the noise made by the communities involved in the Brotherhood's bridge project, suggests a belief in poetry's power not only to "speak from and appeal to the body and senses of lay listeners," but also to inculcate bodies with the wisdom of the past through its ability to preserve and communicate affective and embodied experience.[189] Just as Rogation tide processions were used to mark the bounds of a medieval community in the minds of townspeople though physical movement through space, so does Formande's table use poetry and sited-performance to inscribe physical memories of community in the bodies of its audience. Communicating those memories, which range from the suffering of grief-stricken families to the feeling of physical labor performed in harmony with others of diverse backgrounds, ensures that the guild's present and future members will not forget the pain of those who need their charity, nor the positive feeling of solving a problem through collaboration. It is this emphasis on preserving and communicating particular feelings from the past that sets the Formande monument apart from the sonic appeal to the body that scholars like Lears and Jager have identified in the Ball letters' use of verse as an open rhythmic appeal to the bodies of a lay audience.

In the spirit of "orientation," we might recognize that the communal experience the Formande table facilitates would have likely been experienced differently even amongst members of the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross. The identification of two groups in the poem's claim to have been written "But for myrthe and in memory to yonge and to olde" suggests one avenue for thinking about such variation the poem's reception. The parallel alignment of "myrthe" with "yonge" and "memory" with "olde," highlights that for those who were old

[189] Jager, "Stonde Manlyche Togedyr," 95.

enough to be touched by the drownings that occurred prior to the bridge, the experience that the table facilitates may have been of a more somber and reflective sort. We might similarly ask how an audience who lived through the 1431 “Jack Sharpe Rebellion,” mentioned above, and witnessed the public display of the drawn and quartered body of a fellow guild member would have affected their experience and understanding of the poem’s memorialization of the guild’s charitable act of 1416. Considering the effects that bodily orientation would have had on readers’ experience of the Formande table reveals that the instability of textual meaning applies here even in the most thoroughly contextualized and local of texts. “Memory” and “myrthe,” the monument suggests, are ultimately not static experiences a text confers, but unique experiences generated through interactions between texts and the particularly oriented bodies of readers.

Conclusion: Returning to the Table: Medieval Materiality and Modern Orientation(s)

In my introduction I proposed that Sara Ahmed's theorization of queer identity in terms of a phenomenological understanding of "orientation" could point the way towards a more culturally and historically nuanced vision of readers and a more open and multi-directional understanding of reading as a negotiation between authorial/scribal intention, reader participation, and material text. I have attempted to illustrate this dual potential "orientation" holds in each of the preceding chapters, starting with my opening chapter, "Coming to the Table: Orientation and Participatory Reading in Wynkyn De Worde's 1498 Sammelband of the *Assembly of Gods* and the *Canterbury Tales*," which discusses how Ahmed's description of "orientation" as process of coming to feel "at home" allows us to conceptualize the reader experience that Wynkyn De Worde's combination of repeated illustration and indexical paratext would have facilitated a similar kind of process of habituation. The route I take to arrive at this argument, through a combination of readings of the paratextual, textual, and spatial elements of De Worde's Sammelband from the multiple perspectives of De Worde, William Caxton, and a fifteenth-century reader, attempts to demonstrate the value of the perspective of multi-directional distributed "agency" that orientation encourages and facilitates as a critical term.

By contrast, my second chapter, "Chaucer's Narrators, Dullness, and Complexion Theory," considers how orientation's emphasis on reading as a spatio-temporal phenomenon might help us to think about the progression of humorally embodied narrators that appear throughout Chaucer's oeuvre. Chaucer, my analysis in this chapter suggests, takes an "oblique" path by crafting his early dream poem narrators not as "ideal" sanguine lovers (or former

lovers), but as phlegmatics who delight in books rather than women. While scholars have often observed a passiveness or effeminacy in Chaucer's narrator, complexion theory allows us to orient ourselves towards that identity in the more historically specific terms of complexion theory. This in turn reveals that Chaucer's later narrators, though similar in character to his earlier ones, use references to their age to suggest their coming into alignment with the conventional trajectory complexion theory imagined for the male body. This raises questions about the degree to which Chaucer's posthumous success and canonization may have been dependent on his conscious reimagining (or re-orientation) of readers towards one or both of these two embodied personae.

Finally, in my third and final chapter, "Bridges to the Past: Noise, Materiality, and Performing Community in "The Bridges at Abingdon," I explore how the orienting potential of an "extracodexical text" like the Formande table would have been dependent on a combination of readers' participatory engagement with its material and poetic form and the embodied experiences they brought with them. Through my reading of the poem's sonic profile and resonances with the tradition of bill-casting, I explore how the Formande table's obstrusive materiality and hyper-local contextualization facilitates a performance of transhistorical community quite different from that facilitated by rebel bills (like the "Letters of John Ball") which circulated during this time, despite sharing a seemingly similar grounding in public display and oral performance. Unlike bills, the Formande table functioned as a material "bridge" to the past because of its direct physical relationship to Abingdon—where the bridges were built—and the Brotherhood's aisle in St. Helen's Church, and its suggestion that poetic sound could facilitate a shared affective experience between communities across time.

As a whole, these chapters illustrate the potential that my re-formulation of orientation as a tool for literary analysis has to destabilize a view of medieval reading as a primarily intellectual or generalized act rather than an embodied performance. Orientation, as I understand it, asks us to approach reading as an indeterminate interaction between bodies and material texts in space. Because we cannot account for all of the possible bodily orientations readers might have brought to a text, the readings provided in each chapter represent only a small sub-section of the potential interactions that the texts could have invited. Thinking in terms of orientation(s), this dissertation suggests, involves considering both conventional readings of texts as well as the more eccentric readings that could have emerged from interactions with readers who were either unfamiliar with or who chose to flaunt the conventions of reading we assume medieval readers would have followed. Unconventional readings can be recovered by analyzing evidence of individual reader interactions with material texts (as with the Sammelband edits I analyze in Chapter One) or by thinking about the bodily habits that readers would have brought to reading from other areas of their life (as with the Formande table and the religious guild practices I discuss in Chapter Three). Orientation calls attention to the fact that as modern literary scholars, our interpretations of medieval literature depend on generalized understandings about how certain groups would have read certain kinds of texts. By remaining open to the possibility that individual readers or groups might have read in ways contrary to our expectations due to their unique experiences in the world, we acknowledge and honor medieval readers as diverse individuals with embodied histories. In this way, reading in terms of orientation might be seen as possessing ethical stakes in addition to any potential it has for moving us towards a more accurate and nuanced understanding of medieval reading.

In bringing this work to a close I wish to briefly consider the value that orientation might hold for thinking about the significance that embodied performance and space plays in *Telling Tales*, Patience Agbabi's 2014 modern re-telling/performance of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the cover of which features an edited version of Caxton's famous woodcut of the "Pilgrims at the Table." In Agbabi's updated version, the central figure is not passing a plate, as in Caxton's version, but dealing playing cards onto a table littered with pizza, aluminum cans, and an ashtray.

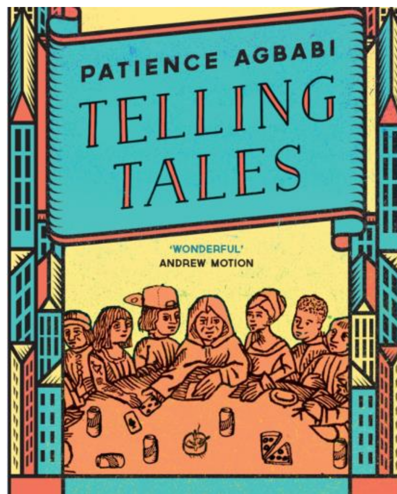

Fig. 11. Cover of Patience Agbabi's Telling Tales

In addition to these added objects, two women now appear at the table (as opposed to the original one) with this new addition receiving the playing card that the table's central figure is dealing. Equally significantly, Agbabi has had another new pilgrim whose hairstyle suggests African heritage. Similar to the fifteenth-century reader who filled in the monk's tonsures in their copy of the illustration accompanying the *Assembly of Gods*, Agbabi has edited those at the table to suit the matter of *her* re-telling of the *Canterbury Tales* through the voices of a diverse cast of modern tellers. For Agbabi, Caxton's table provides a material and spatial locus for bringing modern diversity into contact with Chaucer's Middle Ages. The fact that the book cover cuts off Caxton's round table to make a semi-circle changes our viewing perspective significantly. Here,

we do not see the backs of any pilgrims' heads as in the original version, but are instead "facing" the pilgrims as if seated "at the table" ourselves.

Agbabi's *Telling Tales* likewise opens up questions of embodiment's relationship to poetry via her frequent performances of the work. Interestingly, when asked in an interview about the relationship between the "lyric I" and the "flesh-and-blood speaker, Patience Agbabi," the author was hesitant to speculate about how her personal/embodied identity as British woman of Nigerian origin might affect audiences' interpretation of her remixed versions of Chaucer's *Tales*, instead telling the interviewer: "I've never been interested, really, in it being just *my* interpretation… with this book in particular, I remember thinking, actually I really want other people to perform it, I really, really do."[190] This claim resonates with Agbabi's decision not to include herself as a pilgrim as Chaucer did and suggests an interesting vision of writing and reading that seeks to remove the author from the reading experience.

Instead of focusing on the author or her experience, *Telling Tales* appears to ask modern readers to observe their own orientations vis-a-vis the work's characters and, by analogy, to Chaucer's pilgrims. Agbabi speaks interestingly to the work that inhabiting her characters entails in a discussion of how her performance of the "Wife of Bafa" has evolved over time, in which she says:

> What was hard for me was to really take that Nigerian accent on in my performance. It is hard; I mean, I've been performing that for a long time, and first I was very, very self-conscious about that, because I'm very English in my normal voice, I don't have any Nigerian in my voice at all. It was just over time that I was able to take on the character, because it became very popular and this gave me confidence to do that.[191]

[190] Julia Novak and Pascal Fischer, "On the Interface between Page and Stage: Interview with Patience Agbabi," *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 64, no. 3 (2016): 360.
[191] Novak and Fischer, 356.

Agbabi here suggests that inhabiting another's voice involves a conscious apprehension of one's own history of orientation. Indeed, her observation that she was able to "take on" the character "over time" speaks a similar sort of gradual habituation that I suggested readers would have experienced through their repeated encounter with illustrations in BL G. 11587. Agbabi's habituation to the "Wife of Bafa" is similarly iterative, but seems less about inhabiting a space than about inhabiting a different identity/body.

While most readers of Agbabi's *Telling Tales* are unlikely to perform the work in such a public setting, the diverse voices and subject positions her work includes means that her work nevertheless involves a kind of performance. As Agbabi says in the interview referenced above, her tales are "in a way they are quite demanding of the reader," in that they require one to "perform in his or her head or even aloud."[192] The challenge of this sort of performance or internal voicing invites readers to recognize that orientations vary widely, even amongst people with whom we share temporal, cultural, sexual, or racial affinities. This speaks to the fact that a phenomenological approach to orientation is, at its core, about an individual's experience of the world, what is brought to the foreground, what falls from our view, and the sense of "proximity" this creates to some things and not others. When we try to occupy the voice of one of Agbabi's pilgrims', the "background" of things we take for granted is brought forward, as we see with Agbabi's remark: "I don't have any Nigerian in my voice at all."[193]

Agbabi's *Telling Tales* thus asks us to reconsider our relationship to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* by paying attention to our modern social orientations. This represents a novel strategy for making Chaucer's poetry and the Middle Ages accessible and/or more

[192] Novak and Fischer, 361.
[193] Novak and Fischer, 356.

proximal to a wider and more diverse audience by emphasizing how different each of our life worlds is even amongst our contemporary companions, thereby relationally decreasing our sense of our distance from the past. Asking readers to inhabit modern analogues to Chaucer's pilgrims whose voices/bodies are difficult to inhabit thus suggests an interesting strategy for opening up the Middle Ages to a broader and more diverse audience. *Telling Tales* suggests that instead of seeking common orientations between ourselves and the people of the Middle Ages, we might instead seek out and embrace the differences between our orientations, and in so doing, paradoxically find something we all share: an identity phenomenologically grounded in our uniquely oriented bodies.

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