Elegy in Crisis: Experimental Forms and the Influence of the Cult of the Dead in Middle-English Dream-Vision Elegies

Giacomo Valeri

PhD

University of York

English

September 2019

Abstract

This doctoral dissertation is a study of two late Middle-English dream-vision poems that demonstrates the utility of the generic category of elegy in reading *Pearl* and the *Book of the Duchess*. It is my argument that elegy is a form that offers a literary context to the pathological nature of grief in these poems that is otherwise illegible in their historical context. In the study, I define elegy as a mode that resists the consolation, a textual form that tends towards a completed mourning. Ultimately the thesis demonstrates that we can perceive an acute generic difference between the representations of mourning in consolation and elegy in these two poems. In the first chapter I demonstrate that the ubiquity of socio-religious forms of morally corrective mourning in the fourteenth century was conducive to the consolation form. Following on from this, I show how the period's strong preference for a consolatory approach to mourning through a popular belief in Purgatory occasions new literary experimentations in vernacular languages that sought to subvert and redefine the consolation tradition. This experimentation in forms of textual mourning is epitomised by the elegiac qualities of *Pearl* and the *Book of the Duchess*, making them excellent subjects for the study of elegiac genre given their obvious resistance to the pervasive consolatory ideology of their time. In chapter two, I argue that Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* stands as a resistant and secularising monument to suffering that avoids Christian consolation and explores the ambivalence of mourning. In chapter three, I read the recursive poetic structure of *Pearl* as a similar resistance to the definitive resolutions of the consolation. I conclude the dissertation by reflecting on the similarities between these two poems in their vernacular and oneiric forms and posit the ways in which the reading of these poems as elegy sharpens our definition of the genre more generally.

List of Contents

Abstract 2

Acknowledgements 4

Declaration 5

Introduction: Elegy in Crisis in the Later Middle Ages 6

- **Writing Loss in the Middle Ages** 12
- **Defining Elegy: The Work of Mourning** 18
- **Fourteenth-Century Dream-Visions: Experimenting with Elegy** 32
- **Structure of the Dissertation** 36

I: Mourning, Purgatory, and Melancholia in the Later Middle Ages 40

- **The Office of the Dead** 41
- ***Acedia* as a Moral Rationale for Mourning** 47
- **The Mourning and the Work of Penance** 54
- **The Theology of Purgatory** 58
- **The Purgatorial Mindset of the Late-Medieval Liturgy** 66
- **Conclusion** 77

II: The *Book of the Duchess*: Beyond Consolation 80

- **The Refusal of Consolation** 87
- **The Vernacular Secularity of *BD*** 93
- **A "Kinde" Consolation** 97
- **Writing the Body: "Rowthe" and "Trowthe"** 103
- **Presenting Blanche as "White": The Fantasy of Incorporation** 108
- **The Unseen Blanche: Disclosing the Truth about White** 114
- **Encrypting Blanche** 120
- **Conclusion** 129

III: The Language of Christian Mourning: *Pearl* and the End of the Poem 135

- **Mourning and Penitence in *Pearl*** 147
- ***Wanhope* and the Forms of Work** 150
- **Metaphor as a Mimesis of Mourning** 160
- **Confession and Structures of Continuity/Division** 168
- ***Pearl*'s Stanzaic Form** 177
- **The End of the Poem** 180
- **Conclusion** 190

Conclusion: Elegy, Melancholia, and Dreaming 195

Bibliography of Works Cited 205

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted with the support of a White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities studentship. I am very grateful to WRoCAH. My only regret in submitting this dissertation is knowing that it will bring an end to an enjoyable and productive time at the University of York. I wish to thank all those that have made this project such a pleasant and stimulating experience. In no small part, this is thanks to the wonderful supervision of Kenneth Clarke, Brian Cummings, and, until the time of her retirement, Linne Mooney. This dissertation, and my growth as an intellectual, owes a huge debt to these mentors, and I am glad to have had the chance to work with them. I am also indebted to those with whom I have discussed the material herein. Those at York include Alastair Minnis, Adam Phillips, Richard Walsh, and Elizabeth Tyler, whose conversations helped to shape the project. Beyond my home institution, I was glad to be able to share conversations with Marco Nievergelt, Phillip Knox, and Anthony Bale. I am grateful to Benjamin Barootes, who organised a panel in which I delivered a paper based on chapter three of my dissertation at the 53rd International Congress of Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo in 2018. Similarly, I would like to thank the organisers of the York Death and Culture Conference in 2016 at which I presented a paper based on part of chapter one of this project. I was also pleased to be able to collaborate with York Minster's Collections Officers on a short Research Exchange Project funded by WRoCAH in 2017, for which Rachel Bowers was an excellent project supervisor. I would also like to give thanks to those in the Centre for Medieval Studies who supported, read, and critiqued my work, namely: Becca Drake, Luke Giraudet, Robert Smith, Robert Grout, and those who attended SCRAMS sessions in which I presented various pieces of work in progress.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction: Elegy in Crisis in the Later Middle Ages

The elegy was in crisis in fourteenth-century England. So much so that it is difficult to say what is meant by late Middle English elegy. Chaucer uses the term "drery vers of wretchidnesse" to translate the Latin *elegi* in his English translation of the *Boece*:[1]

> Allas! I wepynge, am constreyned to bygynnen vers of sorwful matere, that whilom in florysschyng studie made delitable ditees. For lo, rendynge muses of poetes enditen to me thynges to ben writen, and drery vers of wretchidnesse weten my face with verray teres.[2]

Chaucer's translation highlights the fact that in this period elegy was understood in the terms of Boethius' own dichotomy between the melancholic act of lamentation and the comparatively healthy work of consolation. "Elegy as a 'pure' or self-articulated form did not exist in medieval England" and, as Jamie C. Fumo argues, "when employed by modern critics with reference to poems such as *Pearl* or *Book of the Duchess*, the term is no more than a matter of critical convenience."[3] Fumo's recent work has spearheaded the revival of interest in the *Book of the Duchess* in particular and here she highlights it alongside the other late Middle English text around which this study was conceived, *Pearl*. Her essay locates a suitable place for these texts in the broader context of 'elegy.' She attends to the different forms of poetic lament that might correspond to a modern definition of elegy, writing that "when occasional lyric poems of mourning were composed in Medieval Britain… they were most likely to be labelled 'complaint,' 'lament,' or *planctus*."[4] Borrowing a term from Anne Chalmers Watts' important essay on *Pearl*, Fumo argues that, collectively, these poems might be more safely termed "poems of human loss."[5] However, Fumo recognises that *Pearl*

---

[1] Cf. Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae; Opuscula Theologia*, ed. Claudio Moreschini, 2nd ed. (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2005), I, metrum I, 4.

[2] Geoffrey Chaucer, *Boece*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), I, metrum I, 1-6. All citations of Chaucer's work will be in reference to this edition unless otherwise stated, with references made in parentheses in the text.

[3] Jamie C. Fumo, "The Consolations of Philosophy: Later Medieval Elegy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, ed. Karen A. Weisman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 120.

[4] Ibid., 121.

[5] Ann Chalmers Watts, "*Pearl*, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss," *PMLA* 99 (1984): 26–40.

and *the Book of the Duchess* contain the same creative urges to express loss that we might find in modern elegy, and shows that they refuse to remain as consolations despite their Boethian structures. This study will attempt to take these conclusions further and determine how the category of 'elegy' shapes and is shaped by our readings of these difficult and unique poems, written at a time when cultures of death and dying circumscribed melancholic explorations of mourning.

The *Book of the Duchess* (hereafter *BD*) is a poem about an insomnolent and depressed poet whose spirits are revived by reading and then dreaming.[6] In it, the poet reads an Ovidian story to put himself to sleep and in his ensuing dream he encounters a hunting party and a nobleman in mourning. The narrator pities the nobleman dressed "al in blak" (457) after overhearing his lament for his lost wife. This nobleman, as it is revealed later in the poem, stands for John of Gaunt and the woman he mourns is the recently deceased Duchess of Lancaster, Gaunt's first wife. After a long dialogue in which the narrator forces the Man in Black to admit his loss for a second time but fails to convince him to leave off his mourning, the dream ends with the blowing of the hunting horns and the narrator awakens, keen to commit "so queynt a sweven" (1330) to verse.

Whether read as heartfelt or conventional, the Man in Black's overheard lament gives the reader illicit access to a private expression of grief, and the poem concludes without an obvious consolation. The poem is both "a poetic monument to his grief" and a "study in melancholy," opening up a poetic space in which mourning remains not only unresolved, but is recognised as an intellectually and artistically valuable mode.[7] The miscommunications or misinterpretations that arise from the narrator's responses to the lament eventually drive the Man in Black back to an interior space of private grief, located within the white walls of a

[6] Chaucer, *The Book of the Duchess*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Benson.
[7] David A. Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 56; and Jamie C. Fumo, *Making Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess: *Textuality and Reception* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), 1.

"long castel… on a ryche hil" (1318-19) – a pun on Gaunt's dukedom of Lancaster and Earldom of Richmond. The creative play of a dreamed landscape suffused with literary allusions is at odds with the Man in Black's monodic and inward grief and, though the narrator seemingly begins the poem in a similarly despondent state, his mood is buoyed by the creative activity of the dream.

The resistance to consolation in the poem is a mark of the elegiac desire to express the inexpressibility of grief and, "working *with* the grain of a larger vernacular poetic enterprise," to do so in a novel English literary mode.[8] As is made clear by the poem's indebtedness to French sources, Chaucer continues the literary experiments in consolation, irony, and poetic form that are the mark of poets like Machaut and Froissart.[9] In doing so in English, Chaucer proposes a vernacular space in which English might join French as a poetic, courtly language. This interplay between public and private, fiction and reality, and mourning and melancholia places a value on the communication of sorrow through vernacular, elegiac rhetoric rather than consolatory forms.

Like *BD*, *Pearl* is a poem with a Boethian structure, though it differs from Chaucer's poem in important ways. Key to both poems is the indeterminacy of their central figures, who are couched within the fictionality of the dream form while suggesting the occasion of a personal loss. In the case of the *Pearl*-Mourner, that figure is a mourned child whose death is euphemistically referred to in the opening frame of the poem as the loss of a pearl.[10] In place

---

[8] Ardis Butterfield, "Chaucer's French Inheritance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 65–75; emphasis in original.
[9] James I. Wimsatt was the first scholar to recognise the true extent of Chaucer's borrowings form French poets. See James Wimsatt, *Chaucer and the French Love Poets* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968). For subsequent studies of French influences on *BD*, see Ardis Butterfield, "Pastoral and the Politics of Plague in Machaut and Chaucer", *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 (1994): 3–27; William Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); B. A. Windeatt, ed., *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982); Marc M. Pelen, "Machaut's Court of Love Narratives and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," *Chaucer Review* 11, no. 2 (1976): 128–55.
[10] Most modern readers have left behind the strictly biographical interpretation of the poem, but still interpret the poem as an elegy without definite occasion. Early editors read the poem as an elegy for the author's

of the young girl, the Mourner transposes the qualities of the deceased on to this "Perle," "so rounde … so smal, so smoþe."[11] In the dream, the pearl/girl is transfigured into the Pearl-Maiden, who inhabits heaven as a beatified Christ-bride beyond a river which the Mourner cannot ford. The Boethianism of *Pearl*'s structure is more immediately evident than the digressionary form of *BD*, and the process of consolation more closely linked to the dialogue. *Pearl* underwrites consolation with an overt concern for the persistence of worldly love, not so much a resistance to consolation as an attempt at an impossible reconciliation. If dreams and poetry are "kinde" (*BD*, 56) cures in *BD*, in *Pearl* these imaginative forms are overtly moralised. From her privileged position beyond death, the Pearl-Maiden upbraids the Mourner for the spiritual lassitude caused by his grief. Rather than perpetuate his melancholia, the Mourner is told to mourn through penance and to shrive his soul through liturgical activity. It is not the Maiden who requires the benefits of memory-work but the Mourner, whose elegy becomes a kind of confession.

As the culmination of his consolatory dream, the Mourner is given a vision of the heavenly city, where he sees the Maiden beside the Lamb of God, producing in him an overwhelming ecstasy. The dream ends, like *BD*, on an uncertain note, as the Mourner is driven by his overwhelming desire to cross the river. The Mourner says that "Delyt me drof in yȝe and ere" (1153), though the proper object of his desire remains unclear: is he attempting to join the superlative liturgical performance in the city, or has he failed to grasp his incommensurable difference from the dead girl with whom he still identifies? In either

---

daughter and the generic framework of these elegiac interpretations remain important to modern scholarship, cf. Richard Morris, ed., *Early English Alliterative Poems in the West-Midland Dialect of the Fourteenth Century*, Early English Text Society, o.s. 1 (London, 1864); Israel Gollancz, ed. and trans., Pearl: *An English Poem of the Fourteenth Century with a Modern Rendering* (London, 1891); and Charles G. Osgood, ed., *The Pearl: A Middle English Poem* (Boston: Heath, 1906). See also Paul F. Reichardt, "Sir Israel Gollancz and the Editorial History of the *Pearl* Manuscript," *Papers on Language and Literature* 31, no. 2 (1995): 145–63.
[11] E. V. Gordon, ed., *Pearl* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), lines 5-6. All citations hereafter will refer to this edition unless otherwise stated and be made in parentheses in the text.

reading, it is the Mourner's desire, and not the pearl as love-object that is under scrutiny at the end of the poem as he is returned to this terrestrial "doel-doungoun" (1187).

The extent to which the poem can be said to offer a consolation is limited, and the circular structure betrays a melancholic and enduring concern over loss. Though a poem which offers a spiritual guide for mourning, it does not pretend to offer the fullness of experience that the Pearl-Maiden enjoys. This inability to escape loss is cast as a defining human attribute, one that also extends to the Mourner's loss of his divine vision at the end of the poem. In *Pearl*, as with *BD*, human loss cannot be sublimated entirely into cultural, memorial, or religious forms. Accordingly, the recognition of a persistent loss in these poems upsets the totality with which we might understand contextual religious or social ideologies of the period. This dissertation will explore the prevailing social and literary discourses of mourning in this period to better understand why the elegiac expressions of these poems are out of joint with their cultural and religious context, and to ask what these melancholic and uncertain poems can therefore tell us about the generic form of the elegy.

These two poems, both with long and overlapping critical traditions, are crucial to any discussion of elegy in the medieval period. Because of their tendency to resist consolatory interpretation and present themselves as elegy, *BD* and *Pearl* are works that are often discussed in tandem, and in contrast to other contemporary laments.[12] Elizabeth Kirk claims that the poems are "rare if not unique in the history of elegy in their recognition that mourning is not so much about what has happened to the dead person as about what happens

[12] For works that treat to the two in tandem, see Jane Gilbert, *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jamie C. Fumo, "The Consolations of Philosophy"; Seeta Chaganti, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription, Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Emily Huber, "'For Y Am Sorwe, and Sorwe ys Y': Melancholy, Despair, and Pathology in Middle English Literature" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2008); Peter W. Travis, "White," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000): 1–66; Elizabeth D. Kirk, "The Anatomy of a Mourning: Reflections on the *Pearl* Dreamer," in *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, ed. by M. Teresa Tavormina and Robert F. Yeager (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 215–26; J. Stephen Russell, *English Dream Visions: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988); and A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

to the living, what the survivor must do."[13] Kirk's claim for these poems' exceptional status draws attention to the difficulty of reading them as overt expressions of grief when the contemporary conceptualisation of the relationship between the living and the dead had been so completely consolidated into religious forms. As I discuss at length in the first chapter of this dissertation, the consolation was a mode that comfortably aligned with the socio-religious culture of penitential mourning of the fourteenth century and in both poems there is little question as to the spiritual status of those being mourned: their practical and spiritual needs have been met. Instead, as the later chapters of the study will examine, these poems create a vernacular, secular space in which an individual's grief is not sublimated into a collective and religious work but rather, is left as an unfinished, oblique expression of mourning. Despite their awareness of spiritual consolation, these poems seek to respect the urgency of mournful expression in an elegiac mode. What this means is that these poems are not only a literary expression of grief but are expressions of grief as implicit acts of ideological resistance, and I intend to explore this resistance to consolation as a generic mark of elegy.

In this introduction, then, I will not only define elegy as a literary genre, but also attempt to situate these poems within their cultural oeuvre as melancholic acts of implicit resistance to the pervasive repatriating ideology of the period. In doing so, I hope to establish a methodology that allows me to interpret these texts as both responses to their historical and literary context, and also as self-articulated works of mourning that inform and even broaden our definition of elegy.

---

[13] Elizabeth D. Kirk, "The Anatomy of a Mourning," 217.

Writing Loss in the Middle Ages

While it is the purpose of this dissertation to think through the elegiac qualities of these poems, it was the Boethian mode of consolation that predominated in medieval writing about loss. Tellingly, the word "elegy" doesn't appear to have been used regularly in English until the popular uptake of the form in the sixteenth century.[14] We can see in these two earlier "poems of human loss" clear examples of an elegiac subject concerned with the interdependence of loss, language, and individualism, but the Boethian framing of these poems should not be dismissed when reading late-medieval elegy.[15] Rather, it is the tension that is produced by these competing elegiac and consolatory forms that demands critical attention. The persistent elegiac character of these poems within otherwise ideologically consonant and generically conventional (though imaginative) dream-visions establishes a kind of resistance to the dominant forms of the period. Describing *Pearl*, Elizabeth Kirk writes:

> It thus catches modern readers at an especially vulnerable point, where we have least certainty about how to reconcile empathetic and historicist imperatives. The poem sets side by side, in all their apparently non-negotiable authority, orthodox dogma and aesthetic and emotional intensity, the rock of what human beings ought to think and the hard place of what they actually feel.[16]

The "aesthetic and emotional intensity" of *Pearl* is synonymous with elegiac address and, as Kirk argues, this intensity presents a resistance to the Boethian philosophy that influences the

---

[14] OED cites the first usage in English as 1514. The popularization of the graveyard elegy in this later period owes much to the flourishing of Petrarchan Ovidianism through writers like Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard's adoption of the sonnet form. Most discussions of the English elegy begin with the sixteenth-century funeral elegy. See: Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy*; Dennis Kay, Dennis Kay, *Melodious Tears: The English Funeral Elegy from Spenser to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); and G. W. Pigman, *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985).

[15] While I will not dispute that the sixteenth-century graveyard elegy represents a popular adoption of the elegiac poetic subject, examples are by no means rare in the preceding centuries. For studies that question the coherent division between late medieval and early modern elegiac subjectivities, see Fumo, "Consolations of Philosophy"; James Simpson, "Breaking the Vacuum: Ricardian and Henrician Ovidianism," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29 (1999), 325–55; and Helen Cooper, "Chaucer and Ovid: A Question of Authority," in *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Charles Martindale (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 71–81.

[16] Elizabeth D. Kirk, "The Anatomy of a Mourning," 215.

structure of the poem. The melancholic and intense sentimental response typified by elegy is at odds with the rationalism of orthodox dogma as presented in Boethius's foundational work. In other words, there is an "empathetic" imperative that sets *Pearl* and *BD* apart from otherwise conventional forms of complaint and consolation of the period and aligns these poems with modern conceptions of elegy. In this way, the genre of "elegy" is not as much a category into which I wish to fit these poems as it is a body of texts that help to draw out what is otherwise inexplicable about them in their context.[17] To begin with, then, I will explore how elegy was juxtaposed with and eclipsed by consolation in the time of these poets.

In the Greek and Latin traditions, elegy referred to the metrical form of the poem rather than its subject, occasion, or tone. Elegiac metre is defined by the combination of two particular verses in the form of couplets: dactylic hexameter and pentameter. In the classical era a poem composed of these couplets was an elegy, though the verse form was considered more appropriate for some subjects than others. In the first lines of book one of Ovid's *Amores*, one of the defining collections of pastoral elegies, he jests that he *meant* to write an epic, but that Cupid stole part of his verse:

> Arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam
> edere, materia conveniente modis.
> par erat inferior versus—risisse Cupido
> dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.[18]
>
> [I was preparing to tell about weapons and violent wars in serious
> meter, with the subject being suitable for the meter.
> The lower line was equal: Cupid is said to have
> laughed and to have stolen away one foot.][19]

---

[17] "The genre is the critic's heuristic tool, his chosen or defined way of persuading his audience to see the literary text in all its previously inexplicable and 'literary' fullness and then to relate this text to those that are similar or, more precisely, to those that may be similarly explained." Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 25.
[18] Ovid, *Ovid, Amores: Text, Prolegomena, and Commentary*, ed. J. C. McKeown (Liverpool: F. Cairns, 1987), I, I, 1-4.
[19] Ovid, *The Love Poems*, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: OUP, 1990), 3.

Homeric and Virgillian epics announced their subject in their first word – a practice that Ovid would continue in *Metamorphoses* – and the pretence that the *Amores* will be an epic is suggested in the opening of the poem through the word "arma," also the first word of the *Aeneid*.[20] However, the unequal number of feet in the lines of each couplet makes Ovid's verse more suitable for pastoral poems, as though Cupid has turned the poet's head from weighty subjects to matters of love and lament. Ovid's metrical pun is a reflection on the aesthetic formalism of the genre and introduces its readers to the introspective, lyric voice of the elegy. Implicit in the turn away from epic towards elegy is a self-consciousness, compounded by Cupid's laughter. The cruelty of love is inscribed in the self-defeating and self-aware form of the lines, and this moment foreshadows the melancholic ruminations on love and loss that recur throughout the work. Elegy, more so than most genres, is shaped by pretensions of style and expression, and in the modern definition this is evident in elegy's creative urge to articulate the inexpressibility of loss.

If the Ovidian elegy is characterised by its metrical formality, languid melancholy, and playful lyricism, the *Consolation of Philosophy* points to a higher moral purpose for lamentation. Boethius' *Consolation* is a text whose influence on medieval literature is well-documented.[21] It offered a sophisticated literary model for medieval texts that dealt with loss as an introspective and spiritual process. In the *Consolation*, one man's loss is rationalised as

---

[20] For a discussion of poetic allusion in classical epics, see Gian Biago Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, ed. Charles Segal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), especially 70-73.

[21] Studies of this nature are too numerous to cite in their totality, but for key works that have informed my reading, see Elizabeth Elliott, *Remembering Boethius: Writing Aristocratic Identity in Late Medieval French and English Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2012); Eleanor Johnson, *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Ian Johnson, "Making the *Consolatio* in Middle English," in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 413–46; Michael D. Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry* (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1987); A. J. Minnis, ed., *The Medieval Boethius: Studies in the Vernacular Translations of 'De Consolatione Philosophiae'* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987); Seth Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in The Consolation of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); Michael H. Means, *The Consolatio Genre in Medieval English Literature*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972); and Howard Rollin Patch, *The Tradition of Boethius: A Study of His Importance in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935).

a spiritual theodicy, in which philosophical reason triumphs over emotional attachment. In this prosimetric work, elegiac verse stands for the individual, dejected expressions of the imprisoned man who has lost everything, while prose is the medium of the constructive philosophical debate that will draw him out of this depressive lethargy. This Boethian perspective of elegy contributed to the movement away from a concept of elegy as a strict indicator of form (e.g. elegiac verse) to a generic category of lament, cast in opposition to rational and spiritual concerns. When Lady Philosophy first approaches the lamenting man, she berates the muses of song and music that preoccupy him with elegiac expressions:

> 'Who,' quat sche, 'hath suffred aprochen to this sike man thise comune strompettis of swich a place that men clepen the theatre? The whiche nat oonly ne asswagen noght his sorwes with none remedies, but thei wolden fedyn and noryssen hym with sweete venym. Forsothe thise ben tho that with thornes and prikkynges of talentz or affeccions, whiche that ne bien nothyng fructifyenge nor profitable, destroyen the corn plentyvous of fruytes of resoun.'
>
> (*Boece*, I, pr. I, 47-57)

The self-conscious and self-indulgent preoccupation with grief that the opening elegy of the *Consolation* presents is met with disdain by Lady Philosophy, who compares the muses to prostitutes that indulge the emotional distress of the narrator without offering a means for remedy. Lady Philosophy draws the mourning poet out of his spiral of self-pity and into a constructive rhetorical debate. The aesthetic qualities of Ovidian elegy are observed by Boethius in his metrical passages, though the positioning of Lady Philosophy as an authority figure opposed to the interiority of lyric lament asserts a division between, on the one hand, a consolation that is productive and spiritually beneficial and, on the other, a lamentation that is alienating and ruminating. For Boethius, consolation is a mourning that processes loss and elegy is an avoidance of that work, keeping open the wound of loss.

The *Consolation*, as a text that encouraged a stoic piety, would seem to be ideologically opposed to elegy, but the metrical sections of Boethius' *Consolation*

demonstrate the power of elegiac expression. Though the *Consolation* is ultimately a text that reasserts the stability of spiritual life, it only does so by bearing witness to the inherent suffering and instability of mortal life.[22] Written when Boethius was himself languishing in prison, the text is a contemplation of the changeability of worldly fortunes, as well as a rational guide to accepting the seemingly cruel turns of fate, as delivered by Philosophy herself.[23] Perhaps counterintuitively, it would be the inclusion of elegiac verse in the *Consolation* that took primacy in some select but influential vernacular poetry in the Middle Ages. As we will see in chapter two, rather than simply erasing elegy, elegy survives to some extent *through* the *Consolation*, as the metrical sections were the guiding influence for poets seeking to explore the secular expressions of grief therein. The *Consolation* is a work fuelled by crisis, and its consolation is only possible through a recognition of the profound effect that loss has on a person.

Part of the enduring appeal of the *Consolation* was that it offered solace from the torments of fortune, perceived not only in Boethius' own lifetime, but throughout its long textual afterlife. Boethius distinguishes between the remedies for this tumultuous earthly existence, calling one kind "fastere remedies" (I, pr. VI, 95) and the other "lyghte and meneliche remedies" (I, pr. VI, 102-3). First Philosophy administers the soft remedy, "the suasyoun of swetnesse rethorien" (II, pr. I, 42), before applying the hard remedy of reason. In this way, Philosophy is not unsympathetic to the difficulties of grief, but seeks to rationalise the human experience of grief as transitory in relation to the stable truths of religious belief.[24]

---

[22] For studies of the lyrics of the *Consolation*, see Gerard O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); and *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Catherine Léglu and Stephen J. Milner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[23] Boethius was imprisoned in Pavia for a dubious charge of treason in 523 under the rule of King Theodoric and was executed in 524. For an account of Boethius' life and imprisonment, see John Marenbon, *Boethius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[24] Dante discusses the *Consolation*, II, prosa I, 3 in the second book of the *Convivio* as an example of the compassion afforded the narrator by Philosophy when affecting such a great change in his mind. See *Convivio: A Dual-Language Critical Edition*, trans. Andrew Frisardi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), II, 10.

Ultimately, consolation poses the potential for mourning to become a conversion event. If elegy confesses a pathological element to mourning that forecloses radical self-redefinition (as we will see shortly), consolation attempts to induce this redefinition by reorganising desire as a *spiritual* mechanism.

The *Consolation* chimed with the intensely spiritual regard for death that took hold in the minds of Western Europe at this time. Once the doctrine of purgatory was ratified, and the cult of the dead had initiated a regulated spiritual exchange between this life and the next, death was less a passage into the unknown than a translation into a spiritual economy.[25] Elegy is a kind of literature fraught with the urgency of making sense of death and loss, both in language and in society. In the wake of these theological developments, then, the extraordinary groundswell of popular belief in the efficacy of post-mortem prayers and the subsequent organisation of memorial activities through communal initiatives and votive masses left elegy in an awkward place. The expansion of the liturgy to include a variety of commemorative activities meant that elegy was often surplus to demand: death was given distinct purpose in this new theology because mourning had been sublimated into a purgatorial process.

Elegy, with its charged expression of the vexing, self-reflexive course of loss, was largely displaced by parochial systems of religious remembrance and spiritual communion that demystified death. This is not to say that people stopped mourning in the later Middle Ages, but that contemporary, Boethian discourses of mourning reflected the consolatory ideology of the popular beliefs of the time, circumscribing rather than accommodating

[25] "Intimacy between the living and the dead was possible because death was not envisaged as a full extinguishing of either body or spirit. In doctrinal terms, the body awaited resurrection even as it decayed, while the soul entered the realm of a tripartite afterlife." Nancy Caciola, "Wraiths, Revenants, and Rituals in Medieval Culture," *Past and Present* 152 (1996): 7.

explorations of the persistent effects of grief. It is in this context that we find our two poems, and it is to this context that we must therefore adapt our definition of elegy.

Defining Elegy: The Work of Mourning

In its current definition, elegy, as a lyric-poetic form of lamentation distinguished from threnody or dirge by its elaborate or ritualistic form, is inevitably something of a modern projection on to the late Middle Ages.[26] Before I venture any further, then, it will be necessary to establish a rigorous definition of elegy that can accommodate these texts. Differentiated from the metrical exactitude of the Ovidian definition of elegy, many modern definitions take on a more encompassing view of elegy as a reflection on loss, a contemplation of passing time, or a mournful introspection.[27] In this section of the introduction I will sharpen this loose definition so that it speaks more acutely to the resistance to consolation that *Pearl* and *BD* demonstrate.

In possibly the most influential study of the English elegy, Peter M. Sacks argues that "elegy should be seen as a working through of experience and as a symbolic action."[28] I will challenge this definition in the course of my argument, but Sacks' work remains a valuable conceptual starting point. For Sacks, elegy is a psychological language game akin to Freud's account of the *fort/da* game, in which a child obsessively reclaims the lost object by naming it and repossessing its imitation as a way of compensating for the loss of his mother, saying

---

[26] For studies on the form of elegy that have informed my definition of elegy, see David Kennedy, *Elegy* (London: Routledge, 2007); Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy*; W. David Shaw, *Elegy & Paradox: Testing the Conventions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Celeste Marguerite Schenck, *Mourning and Panegyric: The Poetics of Pastoral Ceremony* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988); *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. by Chaviva Hošek and Patricia A. Parker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Eric Smith, *By Mourning Tongues: Studies in English Elegy* (Ipswich: Boydell Press, 1977); and Abbie Findlay Potts, *The Elegiac Mode: Poetic Form in Wordsworth and Other Elegists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).
[27] For a discussion of the broader perspectives of elegy as a genre, see William Watkin, *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).
[28] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 1.

"there" and "gone" repeatedly.[29] The trauma of loss that is replayed in the textual sphere of the elegy is marked by repetition, relating each subsequent loss back to the original separation from the mother, much like the child.[30] In this definition, the elegy derives from such an experience, and acts as a means for compensatory psychological work, which mitigates the more harmful effects of the trauma of mourning.[31]

Sacks' study establishes the ritualistic and monodic form of elegy as driven by an impulse to articulate grief through language, and therein organise our mourning as a kind of textual *work*: both in the sense of producing a commemorative textual product that gives haunting presence to the absent object, and also in the sense of a labour of detachment from that object.[32] However, the duality of *work* as both an aesthetic artefact and as a textual process needs to be refined further with regards to how the 'work of mourning' in elegy differs from 'mourning' as a self-coherent psychic process.

Sacks' work is useful in that it uncovers the 'process' that elegy embodies; it is problematic in that it too readily elides 'mourning' and 'elegy.' Any definition of elegy is reliant on a definition of mourning, which is most often figured in psychoanalytic terms. As David Kennedy puts it, "it is easy to see the attractions of a psychoanalytic approach to elegy. Many elegies, canonical and otherwise, are founded on the historical reconstruction of the relationship between elegist and elegised subject."[33] Kennedy uses the phrase "historical

[29] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (hereafter *SE*), trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1957), vol. 18, 1-64.
[30] This case has been central to subsequent discussions of the infantile pose of mourning and the development of play techniques and mental life. In particular, the works of Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicot take a keen interest in Freud's account in their development of a psychoanalytic theory of 'attachment'. See Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," in *Love, Guilt, and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945: The Writings of Melanie Klein: Volume 1* (New York: Free Press, 1975), 344-69; and Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971).
[31] See Sacks, 22: "by elegiac questions which often impugn others, the mourner may stave off that self-directed anger."
[32] Freud characterises mourning by this dual definition of work in "Mourning and Melancholia," in *SE*, 14, 243–58. In Latin the distinction is recognised by the distinction between *opus* and *labor*: a piece of work or product, and labour as an activity in itself.
[33] Kennedy, *Elegy*, 49.

reconstruction" in conjunction with the definition of psychoanalysis as "a discipline which explains mental phenomena in terms of historical reconstruction."[34] To read elegy *as* mourning is to read elegy as a faithful representation of a psychic phenomenon and to foreclose the potential for language itself to affect the expression (and experience) of loss. While it is true that "beginning with the assumption that an essential lack is already inscribed within language… risks abandoning a true sense of the experience of loss," the assumption that all elegy is "true" to the experience of loss misapprehends Lacan's statement that the unconscious is "structured like a language."[35] As Emile Beneviste shows, "it is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject."[36] For this reason, the unconscious must be "apprehended in its experience of rupture, between perception and consciousness, in that nontemporal locus... Freud calls another scene."[37] It follows, then, that though elegy represents the *process* of mourning, the unconscious cannot be apprehended directly in language, but only at the point of failure in language. This is to say that the process of mourning manifests in elegy not in the conscious expression of grief, but in the failure of language to properly voice grief: elegy always gestures towards "another scene."

Mournful language, then, is language poised for failure: a form of language aware of its profound task, and successful only if it fails to say what it *really* means. Elegiac language is marked by pretensions of self-expression. Karen Weisman speaks to this when she explains that,

> more than any other literary kind, elegy pushes against the limits of our expressive resources precisely at the very moment in which we confront our

[34] Anthony Storr, *The Dynamics of Creation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 68.
[35] Sacks, xiii; and Lacan, *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book III*, trans. Russell Grigg (Hove: Routledge, 1993), 167.
[36] Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: University of Florida, 1971), 224.
[37] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), 56. The original French reads "il nous faut bien une fois de plus le saisir dans son expérience de rupture entre perception et conscience, vous ai-je dit, dans ce lieu, ce lieu intemporel et qui force à ce que Freud appelle… une 'autre scene'." Lacan, *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse: Le Séminaire livre XI*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 66.

> mortality, which is as much to say that it throws into relief the inefficacy of language precisely when we need it most… Where elegy marks a passage from the inchoate gasp to the formalised utterance, from the chaos of the mind to the ordered presentation of a publicly available expression, an implicit self-relativity is inevitable.[38]

Although elegy remains a genre with permeable borders (notice how Weisman tactically uses the word "kind" rather than 'genre' or 'mode'), Weisman's comments get at the essence of elegy. Elegiac language is binding by nature, born out of a pressure to express ourselves, but intensifying our awareness of the limits of expression. The ineffability of mortality magnifies our pre-existing anxieties about the potential for failure in language and with this comes an "implicit self-relativity," as the only way to articulate the profundity of the subject matter is to frame our articulations of grief through their shortcomings. The idea that 'words cannot say' is a formal acceptance that we are gesturing to a range of meaning beyond language, a comprehension of the limits of language shared by speaker and audience.[39] Within this gesture lies the elaborate formalisms that are central to the genre of elegy: attempting to impose a coherent, even beautiful order on the disruptive and chaotic experience of loss.

To return to Sacks' definition of elegy *as* mourning, we must be prepared to recognise that while the elegy embodies a process of mourning, it is only in the failure of language that we can apprehend it. For this reason, W. David Shaw writes that "every elegy sooner or later reaches the limits of language."[40] He continues,

> when we try and remove one of the contradictory elements – the consolation from the inconsolability; the remembering from the forgetting; the certainty from the uncertainty – we are in danger of making death non contradictory or devoid of strangeness, which is the one thing it never really is.[41]

Death is inherently contradictory, so to voice it is always to try in some way to diminish or negate the sublime and unknowable nature of death: to make sense of loss. In other words, to

[38] Karen Weisman, "Introduction," *The Oxford Handbook of Elegy*, 1.
[39] Ann Chalmers Watts frames the genre of elegy around this rhetorical gesture towards inexpressibility. Chamlers Watts, "*Pearl*, Inexpressibility," 26.
[40] Shaw, *Elegy and Paradox*, 5.
[41] Ibid., 6.

assume that elegy is always produced in good faith, as Sacks argues, is to dismiss the complex unconscious and unproductive responses to death that are radically incommensurable with language.

As R. Clifton Spargo argues, to be 'successful,' elegy must necessarily contend with the unresolvable tension between the unfigurable nature of death and the ethical duty to uphold the implicit promise to commemorate the dead that drives elegiac expression. He writes that "there is an ethical crux to all mourning, according to which the injustice potentially perpetrated by the mourner against the dead as a failure of memory stands for the injustice that may be done to the living other at any given moment."[42] Mourning will always contain an element of dissent against symbolic systems of meaning (language, ritual, art) shared by the living, precisely because death is not symbolic. The ethical imperative of mourning interrogates our responsibility to the absent other through the inevitable shortcomings of how that mourning takes place. To act in good faith is to deny the capacity for social or cultural models to absorb the singularity of death, because "if an act of faith is authentic, it is not subject to empirical verification. And if it can be empirically verified, it is not an act of faith."[43] On the one hand, elegy is always made in antithesis to the forms of society that would rehabilitate the individual by erasing the difference of death. The monodic instinct of elegy to protect the dead, to give oneself to death on their behalf is radically antisocial and, in this way, elegy is "a self-isolating meditation, not a socially responsible act": an inherently melancholic pose.[44] On the other hand, the "verbal magic" (in Shaw's words) of elegy is what Sacks identifies as the ritualistic process of language, a kind of compensatory performance that enacts the recuperation of the self into society by divesting

---

[42] *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 4.
[43] Shaw, 5.
[44] Ibid., 15.

oneself of the ethical responsibility of mourning.[45] Elegy is dyadic, then, in that it performs the act of mourning both as a recuperative symbolic act, and as a melancholic and isolating rejection of our ability to enact that recuperation.

To think back to Lady Philosophy's reprimand of the Muses, it is tempting to see elegy as a kind of idle aestheticizing of loss, as opposed to the operative working-through of loss represented by consolation. Ultimately, I think the difference is not as extreme as that and depends on how exactly we are defining the 'work' of elegy. Elegy cannot be directly equated with mourning because the aesthetic imperative that loss places on the elegist emphasises an intractable pretension with self-expression that is unproductive and obstinate. At the same time, it is the *work* of mourning that drives elegy: the need to express grief despite its inexpressibility. The elegiac text is a product of the commemoration of that which has been lost, but it is at the same time highly aestheticised by way of gesturing towards the profound inexpressibility of that loss. This means that we should characterise elegy as a kind of inoperative or self-negating work that manifests as an aesthetic object. The aesthetic impetus of the text keeps open the literary work of self-expression, which is by nature self-defeating and unfinished, while the communicative and communal process of mourning that underwrites the elegy as a literary performance strives for an end to mourning, a repatriating expression of the self as part of symbolic community. The elegiac text resists closure while being driven by a desperate need to pronounce it and, as my analysis will show, endings are the crux of any elegiac text by virtue of this resistance to closure.[46] In order to define elegy, then, we cannot simply speak of mourning as a process of working-through or severance, but we must recognise the interminable quality of this work. When discussing the form of elegy, we can distinguish mourning, which finds its end in the recuperating form of the consolation,

[45] Ibid., 13.
[46] See my discussion of the end of the poem in *Pearl* in chapter three.

from the ‘work of mourning,’ which is a textual ‘working-at’ mourning that can never be satisfied. In the definition of the ‘work of mourning,’ then, we can turn to Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia.

While the elegiac text engages in the ‘work’ of mourning, loosely defined, the refusal to satisfy this work is in fact *melancholic* in that it represents an interminable and pathological sadness. Traditionally, mourning and melancholia have been considered as two different psychological processes, though the two are undoubtedly similar. Freud contrasts mourning and melancholia in his foundational essay, *Mourning and Melancholia*, and his work has undoubtedly shaped the way that we read elegy.[47] In this essay Freud characterises the work of mourning as a process in which “the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object are brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it.”[48] This enables the “withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one” and “when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.”[49] For Freud, melancholia is the result of a refusal to detach oneself from the lost object, and this exhibits itself as a diminution of self-esteem because “an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss,” resulting in a pathological depression.[50] Freud’s essay makes it clear that mourning is a healthy process of severing the ties to the lost object, while melancholia is an unhealthy pathology characterised by the capitulation of the impossible desire to maintain that object. It is my argument that elegy is pitched somewhere between mourning and melancholia, and in this sense, we should challenge Freud’s claim that the ‘work of mourning’ is teleological.

[47] Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 243–58.
[48] Ibid., 245.
[49] Ibid., 249, 245.
[50] Ibid., 249.

Though he defined the two processes as separate, Freud's essay recognises that pathological behaviour can also attend and obstruct so-called 'normal' mourning, and would later suggest that the division between 'healthy' mourning and pathological melancholia was not, in reality, as clear-cut as he had originally stated.[51] Subsequent clinicians and psychoanalysts have elided Freud's original dichotomy further, with figures like John Bowlby emphasising that "what is impressive about mourning is not only the number and variety of response systems that are engaged but the way in which they tend to conflict with one another."[52] Bowlby's work in particular confirms the destructive and melancholic tendencies of 'normal' mourning, demonstrating the capacity for pathological feelings of guilt, anger, and resentment to be redirected to the mourner even in 'normal' mourning.[53] The pose of the mourner is depressive and infantile, and the assumption that "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" after the course of mourning dismisses the regressive and transformative effects that mourning has on a person. This is to say that rather than categorising the psychic process of grief as a 'successful' mourning or an 'unsuccessful' melancholia, we should instead look at the transformations of mourning as meaningful in themselves when attempting to define the 'work of mourning.'

Elegy is not dependent on the success of mourning, not least because claiming success would suggest a radical break in the continuity of subjectivity – this is, instead, the remit of the consolation. Rather, elegy concerns itself more usefully with how language elicits and affects these transformations. In attempting to delineate mourning and melancholia along these lines, Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok propose to speak of mourning and

---

[51] "Although we know that after such loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute. No matter what may fill the gap, even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else. And actually, this is how it should be, it is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish." Sigmund Freud, *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, ed. Ernst L. Freud, trans. Tania Stern and James Stern (Courier Corporation, 1992), 386.
[52] John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, vol. 3 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 31.
[53] "Loss of a loved person gives rise not only to an intense desire for reunion but sometimes also to some degree of detachment; it gives rise not only to a cry for help, but sometimes also to a rejection of those who respond. No wonder it is painful to experience and difficult to understand." Ibid.

melancholia in terms of metaphor as a cognitive and linguistic vehicle for change. For Abraham and Torok, mourning is a process of uninhibited psychic transformation, of allowing oneself to be changed by a loss in a process they term “introjection.”[54] The root of melancholia, then is the obstruction of this transformation, an obstruction that is sustained by the fantasy of possessing the lost object despite its absence. Abraham and Torok argue that these are fantasies associated with incorporation, typified by images of “introducing all or part of a love object or a thing into one's own body, possessing, expelling, or alternately acquiring, keeping, losing it.”[55] Though symbolic, the fantasy of incorporation prevents the realisation of the change to the psyche that loss would bring. The ego does this in melancholia by annulling the operation of “introjection”—the process in which the psyche recognises loss as an asymbolic event that demands change and reorganises itself accordingly. For Abraham and Torok, mourning is fundamentally an ability to differentiate between the fantasy of incorporation that sustains a melancholic attachment to the object, and the reality that the object is lost and does not exist in a symbolic form—a stance that is further elaborated by Julia Kristeva in *Black Sun*.[56]

Elegy shares many of the qualities of incorporation, entertaining the fantasy that we can evoke the dead through the text, and dismissing the asymbolic nature of death by suggesting their survival. The iterative form of the text voids the possibility of a *real* confrontation with loss and commits the relationship with the object to a symbolic realm. This is to say that the rhetorical convention of inexpressibility that lies at the heart of elegy contributes to the melancholic pretence of possession: the longer one works at mourning, the longer one can sustain the fantasy that the love object is ours to mourn. To say ‘words cannot

---

[54] Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, “Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation,” in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 125–38.
[55] Ibid., 126.
[56] See my discussions of incorporation in chapter two, as well as Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1989).

say' is to defer the traumatic moment when loss becomes real and when the conceit of symbolising death collapses in on itself completely. The textual form of the elegy 'works' to avoid the recognition of the foundational fact of loss by incorporating the loss into the symbolic realm of the text. The elegy offers a 'melancholic mourning' in which the transformations of the text are driven by a desire to process the unpredictable experience of loss, but these transformations serve to keep alive a mourning pose that defers the manifestation of the paradox at the heart of elegy; these are textual deferrals that continually reaffirm the symbolic nature of the incorporated object. Ultimately, the elegy performs a concatenation of symbolic transformations that gesture towards, but can never meaningfully acknowledge, the asymbolic nature of death.

If mourning is a psychic process that has an end, we should consider whether it is the semiotic quality of the aesthetic text that gives over elegy to an inconclusive 'work of mourning.' Jacques Derrida writes that we should think of mourning as an interminable "work of mourning" in the sense that all mourning is in some way pathological, by virtue of the endless dissemination of all meaning.[57] Derrida's critical elegy for Louis Marin engages with the conventional inexpressibility of loss to pose the question of whether mourning has an end. Derrida's deconstructive approach lends us a framework through which we might think of the elegy as a form that is by nature a testament to the interminable 'work of mourning.' Derrida writes that "all work is also the work of mourning. All work in general works *at mourning*."[58] For Derrida, all discourse is marked by loss because of the *différance* that governs the endless iteration of chains of symbolic meaning.[59] The work of mourning is

---

[57] Jacques Derrida, "By Force of Mourning," trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, *Critical Enquiry* 22, no. 2 (1996): 171-92. This essay was later republished as part of a larger collection entitled *The Work of Mourning*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
[58] Derrida, "By Force of Mourning," 172.
[59] Derrida first uses the term *différance* in "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 75. It designates the differences and deferrals of language in the creation of meaning as 'the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other'. Jacques Derrida, "Interview with Julia Kristeva" in *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 21.

indissociable from work as a whole, or as *oeuvre*: “the work or labour of the *oeuvre* insofar as it engenders, produces, and brings to light, but also labour or travail as suffering, as the enduring of force, as the pain of one who gives.”[60] Although Derrida is here eliding mourning as a psychic process and the ‘work of mourning’ as a textual expression, his essay marks the way that elegy as a textual work keeps alive the suffering inherent in the psychic work of mourning. The endless *opening* that the work of mourning entails (signified by Derrida’s “*oeuvre*”) is engendered by the fact that the work of mourning is always a work of production, of creating a *work*: “both their object and their resource, working *at mourning* as one would speak of a painter working *at a painting*.”[61] As an elegy itself, Derrida’s essay is predisposed to the refusal to pronounce an end to mourning necessitated by elegy, so at times Derrida’s theory of an interminable mourning would seem to conflate loss with being at a loss for words, two categories that interact in varying ways in all elegies. We can qualify this by saying that while the ‘work of mourning’ with which elegy engages is interminable, mourning itself has its own ends. Elegy can work *at* mourning, but it is dissociated from the end of mourning by virtue of its aesthetic openness.

Elegy engages with mourning as a *textual* performance, keeping alive the experience of mourning through the perpetual reinterpretation of the text as an aesthetic object. Derrida’s conceptualisation of the work of mourning as a continuous ‘opening’ chimes with Umberto Eco’s description of the work of art as an “open work” which “gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood.”[62] Eco demonstrates that the semiotic variety of the “open work” acts as an invitation to engage in the interpretation of a work of art as an ongoing and collaborative effort. Open works are “in movement” and “though organically completed, are ‘open’ to a

[60] Derrida, “By Force of Mourning,” 171. Emphasis in original.
[61] Ibid., 172.
[62] Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3.

continuous generation of internal relations which the addressee must uncover and select in his act of perceiving the totality of incoming stimuli."[63] Elegiac texts especially – as works whose semiotic qualities gesture towards inexpressible concepts and experiences – engage their reader self-reflexively in the act of interpretation. In reading elegy, interpretation is an act that embodies mourning as a psychic work of ordering and understanding experiences in the terms of "historical reconstruction," but also one that denies the closure of that work through the endless potential for alternate readings. The work of art,

> even though it is produced following an explicit or implicit poetics of necessity, is effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings, each of which causes the work to acquire new vitality in terms of one particular taste, or perspective, or personal *performance*.[64]

Here, then, we find an effective solution to the problem of an endless work that stems from a discrete historical event. Even if the lived experience of mourning has a discrete end, an elegy is marked by its generative quality as an aesthetic object, in effect perpetuating mourning as an effect of reading. Elegy is more than simply an aesthetic representation of a mourning. Rather, it represents mourning as an aesthetic performance, sustaining the work of mourning as a dialectically open work of art. In short, elegy does not *recapitulate* mourning, it *capitulates* mourning.

Elegy *as* the 'work of mourning' keeps alive the transformations and identifications of mourning through the work of the text, which is itself involved in a process of perpetual revolution.[65] The semiotic play of the aesthetic text serves to gesture to the inexpressibility of grief, but in doing so denies the possibility for an end to mourning. This understanding of the capitulative quality of elegy offers further insight into Lady Philosophy's harsh dismissal of

[63] Ibid., 21.
[64] Ibid.
[65] The perpetual interpretation of texts is characterised by Paul de Man as a simultaneous insight into one facet of a work and blindness to another. See Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1983).

the muses in the *Consolation*. As Philosophy conveys in her anger, there is a clear difference between the work of consolation and the work of elegy: while both order the inchoate experience of grief into communicative language acts, the former seeks to label and circumscribe that experience within an ideologically coherent system of meaning, and the latter conversely resists this circumscription of meaning and keeps open the work of reconstructing and ordering loss as an aesthetic performance. To put it another way, the consolation depicts its textual work as consonant with Freud's original conception of mourning as a discrete course of severance and psychic reorganisation. In contrast, elegy resists the closure that consolation proposes, keeping open the work of mourning so as to sustain the attachment to the object within the perdurable but changeable form of the text. It is fair to say that, quite simply, *elegy resists consolation* and, in doing so, is marked as isolating and anarchic but also as humanistic and personal.

We can summarise the findings of this section with three key points. First, mourning is foremost a process of transformation rather than severance. This means that we can avoid reading elegies in terms of their successful substitution of the love object, a process that is more appropriate to the consolation. Second, and related to the first, feelings of anger and resentment are part of the course of mourning and, thus, melancholic tendencies should be viewed as normal rather than aberrant. For this reason, elegy should not be treated as exclusively restitutive, as this imposes a normative sense of what 'mourning' is and avoids the contradictory nature of the 'work of mourning.' Third, elegy is melancholic because the convention of inexpressibility works to defer the confrontation with the reality of loss that would *totally* void the work's claim to the original scene of mourning. Elegy is reliant on the fantasy of incorporation as a means of authenticating the profundity of its sentiment without recognising the banal nature of its form. It follows, then, that the inexpressibility of loss is a means by which the elegy perpetuates a fantasy of possession. This is to say that the self-

negating language of elegy works to void the transcendent effect of a psychic mourning: as an aesthetic work, the elegy keeps open the wound of grief so as to mark the experience of suffering. The transformations of mourning as an ego-modification are limited with respect to the aesthetic object, which is a “mimesis of mourning” rather than a consolatory guide to mourning.[66] Elegy *works at* mourning but can never achieve the transformation it is working at, a transformation that is psychic rather than textual. We should therefore define elegy as a textual process of melancholic iteration, working at textual transformations that demonstrate the contiguous nature of mourning while voiding the possibility that a complete severance is possible, or preferable.

Considered in the light of this mourning/melancholia composite, elegy is neither mourning or melancholia completely, but instead is a negotiation of the inherent difficultly and ambivalence of this process. The result is neither nihilistic lethargy nor transcendent conversion but is manifested in the work of art: an aesthetic ‘work’ of mourning that is not mourning in the sense of a labour tending towards consolation, nor melancholia in the sense of an idle despair. The elegy is circuitous but urgent, profound but obscure, typified by the urge to renew or perpetuate the expression of grief. For this reason, I believe that Jahan Ramazani’s definition of the *modern* elegy serves as a good model for how to read elegy more generally:

> At its best, the modern elegy offers not a guide to ‘successful’ mourning but a spur to rethinking the vexed experience of grief in the modern world. We should turn to it expecting not as much solace as fractured speech, not so much answers as memorable puzzlings.[67]

As my discussion below will demonstrate, to read the *Book of the Duchess* and *Pearl* as elegy does not mean to classify them as ‘successful’ presentations of mourning, but as reflections on “the vexed experience of grief.” To elegise is to recognise that the interminable work of

[66] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 28.
[67] Ibid., 9.

reading and interpretation is in some sense a manifestation of the "vexed experience of grief" as an interminable work in itself. To recognise the pathology in 'normal mourning' is to recognise elegy as not only recuperative, but ambivalent, challenging, and even disconsolate.

To complete our definition of elegy, then, we should consider how this resistance to consolation is apparent in the elegy as a work of art. My definition is necessarily qualitative, recognising only works that sustain an engagement with their aesthetic form. In this sense, the elegy relies on formal experimentation as a means to avoid or subvert the banality, familiarity, and comfort of consolatory language, which tends to gesture towards universal acceptance or accessibility. Ramazani's acknowledgment of a kind of melancholic mourning in "modern" elegy is indicative of the attempt to challenge traditional elegiac forms in the work of modern elegists – especially that of Early-Modern elegy – in a way that resists a generic acceptance of consolation that comes with the typical or everyday expressions of grief. In other words, elegy is not comforting, it is evocative, *modernizing*. As a melancholic mourning-form, elegy engages with the resistance to the recuperating impetus of mourning as a socially rehabilitative act, typified by the consolation, and thus lends itself to a kind of literary dissent from established forms. To this end, we can test the ways in which medieval elegy is 'modern,' or at least 'modernizing,' in its exploration of experimental forms. In *Pearl* and *BD*, this experimental, modernising impetus takes the form of the dream-vision.

Fourteenth-Century Dream-Visions: Experimenting with Elegy

Identifying elegy in Middle English poetry means identifying texts that resist consolation by testing the limits of the consolation genre. Fumo shows that the generic complexity of poems like *Pearl* and the *Book of the Duchess* witness a "late-medieval tension between the trajectory of consolation, which denies grief a voice, and the recuperative function of literary art as a self-conscious medium of creation that facilitates differently authorised forms of

consolation."[68] Though the *Consolation* remained at the heart of literary writing in the fourteenth century, the creative reimagining of consolation was tied up with a desire to explore the philosophical and aesthetic potential of vernacular forms, a desire that we can mark out in *Pearl* and *BD* as explicitly elegiac. At the heart of this process was the ambiguity, bookishness, and philosophical curiosity of the dream-vision.

The dream-vision was the most overtly experimental textual form of the later Middle Ages. Blending lyric and narrative forms, as well as classical, scriptural and vernacular sources, dream-visions explore the philosophical questions raised by the indeterminacy of dreams and reading as phenomenological experiences. The dream form of these poems could quite easily go unmentioned given the prevalence of the form in the wake of the wildly popular *Roman de la Rose*, behind which "lay the enduring effects of Macrobius and the Bible," but Peter Brown argues that this phenomenal outburst is not just a coincidence of literary history.[69]As Brown observes, "of the thirty or so major poems composed in Middle English between 1350 and 1400, no fewer than a third are dream visions, while others… have strong links to the genre."[70] Benjamin Barootes' doctoral dissertation demonstrates that the main appeal of the dream-vision form for these elegiac texts was the potential for formal experimentation that the literary dream offered.[71] On this point I agree with Barootes in seeing the dream-vision form as more than an arbitrary indicator of a kind of literary text, and follow Brown in appreciating the full accounts and reasons for the explosion of the genre in this period put forth by J. Stephen Russell, Stephen F. Kruger, and Kathryn Lynch, among others.[72] A full and satisfying discussion of the literary category of the dream-vision can be

[68] Fumo, "Consolations of Philosophy," 123.
[69] Peter Brown, "On the Borders of Middle English Dream Visions" in *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, ed. Brown (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 22.
[70] Ibid.
[71] B. S. W. Barootes, "The Poetics of the Elegiac Dream Vision in Middle English Literature" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, McGill University, 2014).
[72] For important studies on the form and literary tradition of the Middle English dream vision, see B. S. W. Barootes, "The Poetics of the Elegiac Dream Vision"; Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and*

found in these works and others, so I will focus here more closely on the importance of dreams to the work of mourning.

It is the "middleness" of the dream-vision that makes it such a fertile genre for literary innovation. Stephen Kruger draws a pertinent link between poetry and dreams: "involved in the middleness of imagination, the poetic, like the oneiric, dwells in a region between body and intellect, wedding ideas to a sensible and pleasurable form."[73] The work of dreams is comingled with poetry in a fundamental way in this period but acts as a discourse that draws in other somatic and intellectual forces related to textual and bodily forms. As Megan G. Leitch writes, "sleep was something that required a great deal of thought and care."[74] Sleep was a contested social and theological zone in the Middle Ages and "courtly persons needed to be conscientious about how they performed their loss of consciousness."[75] Sleep is recuperative and life-giving, but it is also aligned with death as a retreat from the waking world. In *Pearl* when the Mourner says "I slode vpon a slepyng-slaȝte" (59) on the grave of the pearl, he points to the way that his mournful sleep implicitly mimics that death. This is also expressed in humoral theory, as too much sleep is aligned with a sinful melancholia, the 'black bile' that produces torpor and idleness.[76] Sleep is a necessity, but it is also a danger, for when the mind is at ease, false images of the imagination threaten to influence it.[77] In

---

Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010); Brown, ed., *Reading Dreams*; Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992); Kathryn Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), J. Stephen Russell, *English Dream Visions: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988); and A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[73] Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 131.

[74] "'Grete Luste to Slepe': Somatic Ethics and the Sleep of Romance from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to Shakespeare," *Parergon* 32, no. 1 (2015): 56. See also Rebecca Davis, "'Noon Other Werke': The Work of Sleep in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*: Contexts and Interpretations, 51–69; and Kiser, Lisa J. "Sleep, Dreams, and Poetry in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 19 (1983): 3–12.

[75] Leitch, "Somatic Ethics," 56.

[76] For a full discussion of the humoral theory of dreaming and melancholia, see Steven F. Kruger, "Medical and Moral Authority in the Medieval Dream," in *Reading Dreams*, 51–83.

[77] For discussions of the Medieval theories of the imagination, see Nicolette Zeeman, "Imaginative Theory," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 222–40; Alastair J. Minnis, "'Langland's Ymaginatyf' and Late-Medieval Theories of

sleep, we find the imagination unbridled by waking inhibitions. Sleep allows for a psychic work that is generative and transformative, but at the same time inconclusive and ambivalent.

For this reason, dream interpretation lends itself to the engagement with self-reflexivity that is key to elegiac expression. The 'open' nature of these dream-visions offers a vehicle for the psychic work of processing and reconfiguring symbols in the melancholic imagination.[78] To the same end, the dream form lends itself to the ambiguity of meaning cultivated by vernacular writers, keen on adapting philosophical and moral Latin authorities to their aesthetic purposes. The melancholic pose of the writer lying awake in bed became a common trope, and the world-weary restlessness of the Boethian narrator was a typical poetic pose. The elaborate dreamscapes conjured by poets interpolate consolatory process into an intellectual exercise: correctly interpreting these images would offer the poet (and, by extension, the reader) a truth that would quiet the mind and allow for a restful sleep. Often, though, the stable truths of Boethius's *Consolation* recede into interpretative obscurity in the dream-vision, replaced only by further philosophical and moral quandaries.[79]

It is fair to say that most English dream-visions of the later Middle Ages resist the rational consolations of Boethius' seminal text while relying on the analytical form of the Boethian dialogue to pose as a platform for oneiric interpretation and intellectual judgement. What this offers to Chaucer and the *Pearl*-poet is a mode in which poets can explore with philosophical and moral rigour the difficulties of the human experience of loss while resisting the obvious solace posed by the dominant ideology of Christian rationalism. Above all, then, the dream-vision is a form that prises the rich vagaries of human experience as a dual

Imagination," *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook* 3 (1981), 71–103; and M. W. Bundy, *The Theory of the Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought* (Urbana, Ill., 1927).

[78] For a discussion of the 'open' nature of Chaucer's work, see Rosemarie McGerr, *Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

[79] For a discussion of philosophical tenor of the dream vision form, see Kathryn Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision*.

intellectual and somatic process over the pious rationalisation of that experience. As I will demonstrate in the subsequent chapters, the dream-vision elegy is a secularising mode that resists the consolations of Christian theology and, in doing so, offers a fertile platform for the elaboration of elegiac expression in a period of medieval literary history where the elegy had been rendered obsolete.

Structure of the Dissertation

In essence, this study demonstrates that these dream-vision-elegies are defined by their pathological representation of mourning within an aesthetic process. I read the persistence of melancholia in these texts as a resistance to consolation as a socially and culturally recuperative act, drawing more from the narrator of the *Consolation* than from the teachings Lady Philosophy. The interpretative plurality of these poems, in the way that they exist across overlapping discursive realms, complicates the certitude of spiritual consolation implicit to the historical religious context in which they were written. The oblique resistance to consolation, without expressing a disdain for the spiritual and liturgical mourning of the period, creates a space for an unresolved, if not incurable, melancholia that stems from grief. The richness of these poems lies in the discontinuity that melancholia produces within a given cultural oeuvre, standing as disruptive expressions of a secular angst about cultures of mourning and remembrance that evidences a dialectic between mourning and melancholia. It is my hope that in reading these poems as elegy, I can offer a new understanding of the elegy more generally.

My aims in writing this dissertation, then, have been multiple. First, and perhaps most generally, I ask how and why *these* elegies were produced under such historical circumstances, offering an in-depth analysis of contemporary literary and mourning culture. Second, I question what the term ‘elegy’ can mean with regards to these generically

ambiguous (and ambitious) poems and seek to calibrate my definition of the genre accordingly. Third, I posit that close critical attention to the melancholic aspects of these texts (rather than just their mournful qualities) sheds light on the specific moral rationale that lies behind them. Finally, I hope to reconcile the elegiac and oneiric qualities of these texts through an understanding of the inherently melancholic operation of the dream-vision text, making sense of the unwieldy label of 'dream-vision elegy.' I hope that by reading these poems in relation to both contemporary theological and literary theories as well as modern critical theory, I have established how these texts sought to innovate the literary work of mourning by reworking and reaching beyond the conventions of their time. In this way, it is my goal not only to dislocate these texts from a totalising historical moment, but to broaden the cultural and philosophical boundaries of that moment to show its continuities with our own.

Chapter one is a social-historical analysis of the contemporary attitudes and practices surrounding death and dying in the late medieval period, especially with regards to the popularity of purgatory and the cult of the dead. The sense of process inherent in the idea of purgatory as a realm that drew the dead closer to the living, while speeding them away from those who worked on their behalf, demystifies death as a semi-corporeal realm rather than a singularly incorporeal one. The proliferation of visionary literature, as well as the material culture of commemoration for the dead, draws the work of memory into an uncomfortably physical realm that is juxtaposed with the transcendent form of the liturgy. The theological ambiguity surrounding purgatory gives rise to a scepticism legible in a resistance to traditional consolation in many vernacular works of the period. By establishing the widespread fervour for purgatory as the underpinning theological concept that influenced discourses of mourning in the period, I demonstrate how these cultural conditions cast elegiac expressions of grief as morally dubious or potentially sinful. I argue that this energised

experimentation with textual forms of mourning that attempt to deal with the moral conundrum that this ideology poses for expressions of grief. Indeed, this corporeality of penitential work offers a foundation for the reading of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*.

Chapter two, then, is a reading of the *Book of the Duchess* as an anti-consolatory poem that explores the materiality of commemoration in the period. Enlarging a space of emergent literary vernacularity, the *Book of the Duchess*'s repression of Christian forms of consolation divests the work of memory of its mystical function, and lays bare the material representation of suffering and sacrifice that are at its heart. Chaucer's poem is a testament to the endurance of worldly forms through the identifications of suffering. The poem internalises the absence of secular mourning in an overtly religious cultural and memorial landscape as a meditation upon the suffering body. The combinatory forms of the dream, the text, and the body serve as an imaginative matrix for the presentation of a persistent, melancholic mourning, attended by patterns of incorporation and displacement. When the oneiric reimagining of the dead Blanche as the icon-like "White" is read alongside the provision of a lavish monument tomb for the deceased, Chaucer's poem bears witness to the historical function of grief as that which cannot be sublimated into sacred forms.

Pearl on the other hand is a poem that attempts a reconciliation of grief with divine forms. Chapter three is devoted to the complex sentimental and moral dialectic of mourning as presented through the work of poetry. If the *Book of the Duchess* is a poem that refuses consolation so as to perform the work of elegy as a validation of suffering, *Pearl* attempts to validate suffering by enfolding it into a moral rationale for mourning as the repudiation of *acedia*. The ritualistic metrical patterning of *Pearl* and its rational design speak to the power of human works to effect a spiritual change. However, the imperfections of the poem point to the inherent risk of the failure of mourning that constitutes human experience: inasmuch as the circular form of the poem imitates the perfect form of the pearl, the penny of price, and

New Jerusalem, it also constitutes a recapitulation of mourning, always regressing back to the poem's melancholic opening. In this way, I hope to show that each poem deals with the ambitious religious systematisation of mourning in their time in different ways. However, the poems are similar in that they both seek to validate the experience of grief as a kind of perpetual mourning, testaments to the work of mourning as a melancholic resistance to the erasures of consolation.

Though the term 'elegy' energises the work of mourning in *Pearl* and *BD* as mimetic texts about individual suffering, the fact remains that these poems are shaped by this *Consolation* tradition. In my interpretation, the juxtaposition of these poem's elegiac form against their overwhelmingly consolatory cultural context makes them the ideal subjects for a generic study of elegy. What makes *Pearl* and the *Book of the Duchess* "unique" in the sense that Kirk uses the word, is their elegiac subjectivity in the context of a consolatory tradition.[80] These experiments in elegiac form produce a resistive force that Fumo calls "the creative *excess* of loss," and it is this capitulative quality that defines elegy.[81] These texts seek a secular space to express grief within a textual form, co-opting suffering as a validation of human experience rather than a procedural rejection of it in favour of a spiritual and ideological solace. It is my argument that, for this reason, a study of these two poems can tell us a lot about the literary mode of elegy, as well as the cultural moment of their composition.

[80] This "Ovidianism" is stressed by James Simpson, who argues that the elegiac subjectivity of Chaucer's early poetry in particular should be recognised as preceding the early modern emergence of elegy as a popular form. See James Simpson, "Breaking the Vacuum."
[81] Fumo, "Consolations of Philosophy," 122; emphasis in original.

I: Mourning, Purgatory, and Melancholia in the Later Middle Ages

The preferred discourse of mourning in the fourteenth century was consolatory rather than elegiac and this stems from a popular belief in purgatory, a relatively new invention born out of contested theological dogma. This chapter seeks to plot the cultural and social landscape of death and mourning in the period, emphasising a common acceptance of the possibility of post-mortem penance that reshaped the relationship between the living and the dead. In doing so, it is the aim of this chapter to explore the social and religious culture of mourning in the later Middle Ages and meditate on the role that literature might play in this landscape. Put broadly, it is my argument that the increasing systemisation of penance and purgation from the late twelfth century up until the Reformation displaced elegy, because a recognition of the efficacy of prayers for purgatorial souls was more conducive to consolatory writing. The contemplation of death that we traditionally associate with elegy took on a more spiritual and penitential character in this period. Patience became the virtue most closely associated with mourning, while its counter-vice *acedia* was associated with the persistent grief appropriate to elegy. At the same time, the memorial function of elegy would be sublimated into a increasingly rigorous system of indulgences and religious commemoration. The fraught and sometimes contradictory pressure placed on the late-medieval mourner as a penitent *and* a griever offers a consolatory trajectory to late-medieval mourning texts. However, the obviously material economy of spiritual exchange that underpinned this new system of purgation, as well as its quickly expanding commemorative culture, led writers to explore the material afterlives of mourning, and forced them to ask whether it was truly as transitory as doctrine made out.

This chapter will explore the cultural discourse of mourning that dominated this period, arguing that the prevalence of a penitential discourse of death and dying displaced elegy as a form associated with the melancholia admitted by work of mourning. As this

chapter will show, in the wake of the scholastic systematisation of sin and penance, the doctrine of purgatory became the typical expression of anagogical process, offering distinct ends to mourning and dispelling the mystical quality of death. The intensification of material and textual rituals in the service of the liturgy sublimated the artefactual work of elegy into a codified and consolatory system of mourning, in which spiritual communion with the lost object was possible, and even quantifiable.

I will begin the chapter by examining the Office of the Dead, a ubiquitous mourning text in the Middle Ages that demonstrates the high regard with which the Jobian virtue of patience was held. In contrast, the sin of *acedia* was associated with the torpor and prolonged grief aligned with the work of mourning. Next, I will examine how the systematisation of sins by the scholastics offered a moral rationale for mourning as a penitential act, and one that was sublimated into the broader discourse of sacramental penance with the popularisation of the doctrine of purgatory. I finish this chapter with an account of the way that purgatory typified a spiritual, consolatory approach to mourning that stood in ideological opposition to elegy as the expression of a non-productive, non-penitential melancholic mourning. Mourning in the Middle Ages was coterminous with penance, despite the uneasy dogmatic indistinction of its theological premise and the corporeal nature of its memorial process – tensions we see arise in the performance of the Office of the Dead.

The Office of the Dead

Arguably the lamentations found in the works of Virgil and Ovid held more influence in poetic texts, but the most important mourning text in the period was indisputably the Office of the Dead.[1] The Office of the Dead is a prayer cycle of the canonical hours found in the

[1] Though the Office was by no means standardised in the Middle Ages, an attempt to produce a modern edition of a lay prayer book was made in the late nineteenth century by the Early English Text Society, and the result is widely used today as the standard source for the Medieval Office, despite noted inconsistencies and

Roman Breviary composed of psalms, antiphons, collects, and responses.[2] Interwoven into these sung prayers are lessons taken from the book of Job which teach the virtue of patience to grieving mourners. The Office is designed to be performed throughout the day alongside a vigil as part of a funerary ceremony, with different sections corresponding to significant parts of the day. The Office of the Dead provides the most explicit evidence of the integration of mourning into the liturgy. Although the laity were under no obligation to perform the Office, it is found in numerous surviving breviaries and primers that saw lay usage in the later Middle-Ages.[3] It was acknowledged as one of the most effective prayers for souls in purgatory, and therefore would have been performed in a clerical and lay capacity in the period.

In the *Gast of Gy*, a didactic text translated and adapted for verse from a letter describing the interrogation of a spirit in fourteenth-century France, a penitential spirit claims that the most effective masses that "Haly men" can recite are a Requiem Mass, a Mass of the Holy Spirit, or a Marian Mass.[4] Robert W. Shaffern writes that "the *Gast of Guy* serves as a veritable catalogue" of the benefits available to the dead.[5] According to Gy (the spirit), the benefits of the Requiem Mass are immediately obvious, with its emphasis on the *requiem aeternum* of the dead, and the promise to thank the Lord for the eventual *redditus*. However, later in the poem Gy's ghost also confirms that the Office of the Dead is especially beneficial to souls in purgatory because,

---

compromises in the creation of such a text. See Henry Littlehales, *The Prymer; or Lay Folks' Prayer Book*, Early English Text Society, o. s. 105, 109 (London, 1895).

[2] For a discussion of the limitations of early editions of liturgical 'texts,' see Matthew Cheung Salisbury, *The Secular Liturgical Office in Late Medieval England* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

[3] Amy Appleford discusses the centrality of the Office to *ars moriendi* culture in the fourteenth century. Appleford, *Learning to Die in London, 1380-1540* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). See also Sarah Schell, "The Office of the Dead in England: Image and Music in the Book of Hours and Related Texts, c. 1250-c. 1500" (PhD diss,, University of St Andrews, 2011).

[4] Edward E. Foster, ed., *Gast of Gy*, in *Three Purgatory Poems*, (Kalamazoo, Mich: Published for TEAMS by Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), lines 817-902.

[5] Shaffern, "Death and the Afterlife in the Middle Ages," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Christianity, 1050-1500*, ed. R. N. editor Swanson and Alixe Bovey, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 180.

'Full mykell avail it may,
When any men for all will pray;
And, for that lawed men here in land
Kan noght graythely understand,
That saules has nede of other messe,
Tharfor that Offyce ordaind es.'[6]

The continual recitation and the specific attention to penitential themes makes the Office an ideal prayer for the dead in Gy's analysis, detailing that each of the seven penitential psalms that conclude the Office correspond to a specific sin:

'Ilk ane a syn oway will draw
Thurgh help of halows in fere,
That ordaind er in that prayere.'[7]

The ghost does not dwell on the specifics of the benefits of penitential prayers for the dead, but the explanation of the Office of the Dead is the longest of all the possible prayers for the dead in the poem, creating a strong link between penitential liturgical performance and merits for the dead.

The explicit abnegation of the self in the penitential psalms and lessons of the Office of the Dead draws its participant into an act of sacrifice in the Mass that benefits the dead. The matin prayers that form the second movement of the Office's prayer cycle are interspersed with the nine lessons of Job, which are more dramatic ascetic tools used for this kind of reflexive contemplation. The lessons are deeply emotive examples of maintaining faith in times of hardship. Positioned as they are in the matins cycle, the lessons are interlaced with prayers that were to be performed in the darkness of the night, when the world was at its coldest and bleakest. Job's laments, taken out of their scriptural context, encapsulate what

[6] *Gast of Gy*, 1035-40.
[7] Ibid., 1088-90.

Gregory the Great describes as the "unalterable state which [Job] might have kept in paradise, and in what a miserable light he beheld the fallen condition of our mortal state of being, so chequered with adversity and prosperity."[8] Maintaining a bleak perspective on corporeal life, the lessons encourage a contemplation of the sheer inadequacy of humanity before God.

Of the lessons, one of the most affecting, and most influential to ascetic writers, is lesson 7, which combines Job 17:1-3 and 17:11-15:

> Mi spirit schal be maad feble, my daies schulen be maad schort & oneli þe sepulchre is left to me. Y have not synned; and ȝit myn iȝe dwelliþ in bittirnessis. Lord, deliuere þou me, and sette þou me bisides þee; and þe hond of whom euere þou wolt, fiȝte aȝenes me! Mi daies ben passed, my þouþtis ben scaterid, turmentynge myn herte. Þei han turned þe niȝt in-to dai; and eft aftir derknessis, y hope liȝt. If y susteyne, helle is myn hous & y have araied my bed in derknessis. I seide to rotenesse: 'þou art my fadir' & to wormes, 'ȝe ben my modir & my sister'. Þerfore, where is now myn abidyng, & my patience? My lord god, þou it ert![9]

The dramatic imagery of despair and decomposition intensifies the pathos of the lesson's revelatory conclusion, mirroring the movement from earthly affliction to the salvation of the psalms. However, the graphic and unrelenting power of the language places a much greater emphasis on the living subject, re-establishing the individual pain of suffering. The autumnal imagery of decay and the natural world envisages a perverse deathbed scene, as though the suffering of earthly existence is already a death in itself. The human body is imagined as already dead, aspiring to a complete abnegation of the worldly. The lesson therefore forces a perverse sharpening of the perception of self as fundamentally impoverished in relation to the eternal benevolence of the afterlife.[10]

The lessons are most effective when considered as a textual form, used in the contemplation of individual piety. In this way the lessons broach the subject of the individual

[8] Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, trans. James Bliss, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1844), I, IV, 200.
[9] Littlehale, ed., *The Prymer*, 68, Lesson VII.
[10] "As the greatest, most Christ-like gift God can bestow, tribulation belongs to the highest form of spiritual life. To embrace tribulation is to turn from the imperfections of the world and the active life to the way of perfection." Appleford, *Learning to Die in London*, 102.

within the liturgy in a similar fashion to the extraliturgical activity of secular commemoration. Although the lessons evoke a sense of worldly experience only to enact the turn away from worldliness, the concept of selfhood is still integral to the ascetic process. The material form of the body is productive in that it enables the subject to experience the tribulations of earthly life, which is itself a punishment for the original sin of humanity. In a key passage in lesson 8 of the Office, Job describes being on the cusp of death and calls for someone to make record of his experience:

> Whanne my fleisch was wasted, my boon cleuyde to my skyn, & oneli lippis ben lefte aboute my teeþ, have ȝe merci on me, have ȝe merci on me, namely, ȝe my frendis! For þe hond of þe lord haþ touchid me. Whi pursue ȝe me as god doiþ, & ben fillid wiþ my fleschis? Who mai graunte me þat my wordis be writun? Who mai graunte me þat þei be writun in a bok, wiþ an yrun poyntel, eþer wiþ a plate of leed, eþer wiþ a chisel be grauun in a flynt?[11]

The afflicted body becomes a transcendental text, a self-righteous example of the salvific power of God. The marking of the corporeal body and the textual form of the lesson are concomitant in Job's triumphant renewal. Although the body is ephemeral, the lamentations and productiveness of the body are themselves lessons worthy of a monumental, everlasting form. Through the gift of tribulation, the self is reconceived and self-fashioned into a more pious subject. Suffering offers a kind of self-knowledge to the penitent mourner, one that can be wielded as an ascetic tool. Having turned away from worldliness, the Christian subject is better equipped to participate in the self-sacrificial language of the liturgy. And yet, the insistence on marking this experience of mourning as valuable and edifying reminds us of the artefactual aims of elegy, keeping open the wound of loss through the material form of the text. The lessons of the Office posit a concept of embodied selfhood which purports to achieve self-knowledge, highlighting the underlying tension between material and spiritual commemoration in the penitential performance of mourning.

[11] *The Prymer*, 68-69, Lesson VIII.

The lessons deal explicitly with the subject of this life, rather than the next. In this way, they share the trace of the self with other material and extraliturgical forms, such as the monument tomb or the bederoll. As we will see later in the chapter, the Office of the Dead fits into the same programme of individual piety as the pre-emptive cultivation of one's earthly legacy ahead of the entry into purgatory. The phenomenological experience of suffering is sublimated into a contemplation of divine worth that serves as an example of piety.[12] In pious suffering, the changeable experience of selfhood is shaped into something "self-aware, structured, knowable, and valuable."[13] Within the liturgy of the dead, the lessons represent the desire for transcendence into material forms of memory, a lasting monument to selfhood in this world. The increased lay interest in penitential texts in this period demonstrates the popularity of this extraliturgical governance of the self, acting as an individualistic supplement to the communal work of the liturgy.[14] The Office of the Dead frames individual penance as a close identification with the dead, inviting the mourner to demonstrate their virtuous patience in enduring worldly hardship.

Rather than being specifically elegiac, these lamentations attempt to instrumentalise suffering as an ascetic device, exemplifying the impoverished nature of our transient corporeal form. For Job the grief of mourning is a tool for the contemplation of our melancholic state in relation to God, exemplifying the importance of patience. The desire to have his pain "writun in a bok" reflects the therapeutic alignment of text and corporeal subjectivity, though only because it is a didactic example of his good works. Within the context of the Office of the Dead, the psalms are part of a liturgical programme that aids the passing of the dead, while the lessons recognise the difficulty of mourning for those left

---

[12] Simone Weil articulates the centrality of suffering to religious experience with striking clarity throughout her work, but much of her thought on the matter is collected in a short essay. Weil, "Affliction," *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge, 1972), 72-76.

[13] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xiv.

[14] Appleford, *Learning to Die*.

behind as a penitential, productive process. In these two forms we can perceive the vacillation between the material and spiritual performances of selfhood that typified late-medieval mourning, as well as the emphasis placed on the virtue of patience above all else. The Office is an affirmation of the belief mourning will eventually end in salvation, despite the enduring materiality of its expression.

***Acedia* as a Moral Rationale for Mourning**

Job's patience, then, offers an effective example of how mourning can be turned into a spiritual activity, and of how faith in God must always displace a despairing worldliness. By denying his will to die and by recognising his suffering as a gift rather than a punishment, the figure of Job offers a dialectic between patience and its counter vice, *acedia*, which makes mourning a spiritual endeavour. This dialectic portrays the body as inevitably prone to suffering given its imperfect nature and, thus, instrumentalises suffering as a measure of endurance. If patience was the key to pious mourning, then *acedia* was the result of melancholic grief, offering a clear moral rationale for discourses of mourning.

Acedia, which corresponds roughly to the modern-day conception of sloth, is the sin, then, that offers a spiritual impetus to mourn. Chaucer neatly encapsulates late-medieval perspectives on *acedia* in the *Parson's Tale*, explaining that "Envye blyndeth the herte of a man, and Ire troubleth a man, and Accidie maketh him hevy, thoghtful, and wraw."[15] This concatenation of sins, in that one sin will breed another, is typical to schemas of the seven deadly sins that Chaucer would have known and from which he drew in writing the *Parson's Tale.* The Parson continues:

> Thanne is Accidie the angwissh of troubled herte; and Seint Augustyn seyth, 'It is anoy of goodnesse and joye of harm.' | Certes, this is a dampnable synne, for

[15] The *Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), X, 676.

> it dooth wrong to Jhesu Crist, in as muche as it bynymeth the service that men oghte doon to Crist with alle diligence, as seyth Salomon.[16]

Written using a range of materials from earlier penitential handbooks, the section on "Accidie" in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* is thought to be a translation of English versions of a popular Latin treatise on the seven deadly sins.[17] Chaucer's description typifies the definition of *acedia* in England in the fourteenth century, offering an insight into the somnolent and aggrieved characters in both the *Book of the Duchess* and *Pearl*. In subsequent chapters of the dissertation, I will explore how both Chaucer and the poet of *Pearl* engage with the sin of *acedia* as a kind of torpor, a sadness that prevents spiritual action. However, first I wish to establish the specific character of *acedia* as a sin that energises the moral dialectic between mourning and melancholia, and then examine its literary applications more carefully through the work of Dante.

In his study on the history of *acedia*, Siegfried Wenzel traces the sin back to its roots in the Egyptian monastic culture of the 6th century as a form of tiredness and torpor that affected eremitic religious men's duties to God.[18] Wenzel outlines the history and development of *acedia* as a word and as a religious concept in a thoroughly detailed study that renders a full account here superfluous. I will give a brief outline of the development of the sin and focus more closely on the impact of late-medieval descriptions of *acedia* with which the *Pearl*-poet and Chaucer would have been familiar. Wenzel explores the development and popularisation of the concept primarily through the works of Evagrius

---

16 Ibid., X, 678-79.

17 The section on "accidie" in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* diverges from its primary source for the rest of the tale, William Peraldus' *Summa de vitiis*. Siegfried Wenzel discusses the complex dissemination and copying of Peraldus' text arguing that two Latin redactions of Peraldus' work "made in England in the third quarter of the thirteenth century" are closer to Chaucer's text than Peraldus' original. Wenzel, "The Source of Chaucer's Seven Deadly Sins," *Traditio* 30 (1974): 351. See also Nicole D. Smith, "Love, Peraldus, and the *Parson's Tale*," *Notes and Queries* 60, no. 4 (2013): 498–502.

18 Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

Ponticus and Cassian.[19] M.W. Bloomfield describes Evagrius as "the father of the seven cardinal sins," as his writings are the earliest-known texts which discuss a series of vices.[20] For Cassian, *acedia* was associated with monastic settings exclusively, a result of the solitude of asceticism.[21] In addition to prayer and recitation of the psalms, Cassian writes that physical labour should be assigned to those afflicted by *acedia* as a cure, influencing later penitentials that recommend physical labour as penance for lay Christians confessing to *acedia*.[22] Later Gregory the Great would adopt a similar schema that labelled the sin corresponding to excessive sadness as *tristitia*, properly distinguished from a pious sadness.[23] In these two concepts of torpor and excessive sadness we find the foundations for the later definition of *acedia*.

The combination of Cassian's *acedia* and Gregory's similar concept of *tristitia* became standard among the scholastics in the twelfth century.[24] The vague concatenating systems established by Cassian and Gregory lost popularity among the scholastics, whose Aristotelian logic led them to generate a more precise rationale for the origins and causes of sins. Hugh of St Victor identified *acedia* and *tristitia* as a single vice, describing "acidia" as "a sadness [*tristitia*] born of a confusion of the mind, or, weariness [*taedium*] and immoderate bitterness of the mind; through it spiritual joy is quenched and the mind is overthrown in

---

[19] Ibid., 3-23.
[20] M.W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lancing: Michigan, 1952), 57.
[21] John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York: Newman Press, 2000), X, viii.
[22] The *Penitential of Cummean*, composed in the second half of the seventh century gives an example of this:

> Of Languor (*accidia*):
> 1. The idler shall be taxed with an extraordinary work, and the slothful (*somnolentus*) with a lengthened [?] vigil; that is, he shall be occupied with three or [seven?] psalms.
> 2. Any wandering and unstable man shall be healed by permanent residence in one place and by application to work.

J. McNeill and H. Gamer, ed., *Penitential of Cummean*, in *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 128.
[23] Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job,* trans. Brain Kerns (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), XXXI, 45.
[24] For a full discussion of this development see Wenzel, 3-23.

itself, as it were by the beginning of despair."[25] The emphasis on *acedia* as a type of inappetence is typical of the scholastics, who in seeking a precise moral definition for *acedia* transformed it into a more generalised spiritual torpor that prevents the proper joys of a spiritual life. The sophisticated psychological rationale of the scholastics was based on creating a logical system of relation between sins and mapping their influence on different parts of the soul in an Aristotelian fashion.[26] The psychological model replaced the concatenating model in the scholastic tradition, and the categorisation and identification of moral behaviour became more precise. With the conception of vices as "corruptions of the soul, from which, unless they are restrained by reason, sins (that is, acts of unrighteousness) arise," the traditional vices become defined as negative behavioural habits to be corrected, rather than specific incidents of sin.[27] An acute definition of *acedia* as a sin arising out of specific events (monastic tedium), or as produced by a specific set of moral circumstances (the concatenating series of vices), gave way to the scholastics' *acedia* as an aversion to spiritual goodness.

Where before the sin only affected monks unable to work attentively, in the High Middle Ages, *acedia* is a sin opposed to the service of Christ through religious works. For Aquinas, *acedia* is a sloth or idleness that prevents men from attending Mass or saying prayers, and is therefore "a special sin":

> When carnal desire rules in man, it is disguised by spiritual good as by something contrary to itself, just as a man who has a corrupted sense of taste loathes wholesome food and feels sorrowful about it when he ought to take such food. Such sorrow and loathing or disgust of the spiritual and divine good is *accidia*, which is a special sin.[28]

---

[25] Hugh of St Victor, *Summa de sacramentis fidei*, in *Patrologia Latina,* ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: 1854), 176, 525, II, xiii, 1. Translated by Wenzel in *The Sin of Sloth*, 52.
[26] Wenzel, *Sin of Sloth*, 41-42.
[27] Hugh of St Victor, *Summa de sacramentis fidei*, II, xiii, 1.
[28] St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil* (*Quaestiones disputatae De Malo*), trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), qu.11, a.2.

Accidia is a universal form of moral transgression for Aquinas, in which the body resists the nourishment of spiritual good because it despises the struggle or work required to attain that good. Aquinas goes as far as to say that *acedia* is the chief of the seven sins, in that it prevents men from performing their duties to the Lord, and therefore stands in the way of *caritas* itself. For the scholastics, *acedia* is a form of melancholic weariness that prohibits participation in the divine good. Aquinas' discussion of whether *acedia* was a mortal sin therefore emphasises that *acedia* refers only to a sorrow that affects the divine good, and not temporal sorrow (which Aquinas refers to as *tristitia*).[29] Those affected by it are confused, weary, introverted, and, crucially, unable to participate in the divine good.

To this end, *acedia* was often related to an inability to take part in communal prayer, specifically, an inability to sing. Albertus Magnus, in defining the species of *tristitia*, cites a Latin translation of John of Damascus which says that "acedia est tristitia vocem auferens" ["*Acedia* is sadness that steals the voice"].[30] Similarly, Aquinas, drawing from the work of another early Greek theologian, equates *acedia* not with *tristitia aggravans* – a common definition – but instead with "tristitia vocem amputans."[31] The stolen or amputated voice of the depressed is in part a psychological effect of torpor and confusion, but it also resonates with the spiritual inappetence described by Aquinas.[32] An inability to speak is, fundamentally, an inability to sing, to pray, or to participate in the Mass. Notably, Aquinas responds to the special effect that *acedia* has on the voice by explaining that "the reason why

---

[29] St Thomas Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Summa Theologiæ*, ed. and trans. Thomas Gilby and T. C. O'Brien (London: Blackfriars, 1966). I-II, qu.35, a.3. Aquinas treats *acedia* as a mortal sin but notes that not all sins are complete or perfect sins and that it is sin-in-action that is more harmful than the sin-in-thought that is common to *acedia*.
[30] Albertus Magnus, *Summa theologica*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Auguste and Emil Borgnet (Paris, 1890-99), Part II, tract. XVIII, qu. 118.
[31] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae,* I-II, qu. 35, a.8, arg. 3, and resp.
[32] In Thomas' work the definition is derived from the work of "Gregorius Nyssenus," identified as Gregory Nemesius by Wenzel in *Sin of Sloth* (52-54). Nemesius was a direct source for John of Damascus, whose work served as the touchstone for scholastic definitions of the sin and from whom Albertus finds his definition. Wenzel considers the definition of *acedia* as *tristitia vocem auferens* to be an inconsistency, owing to the loose definition of the term, yet it seems to have taken hold in the works of some key thinkers.

special mention is made of torpor's depriving one of speech is that, of all outward movements, the voice best expresses inward thought and feeling." ["Ideo autem specialiter acedia dicitur vocem amputare, quia vox inter omnes exteriores motus magis exprimit interiorem conceptum et affectum"].[33] The performative aspect of worship hinged on the articulation of spiritual desire through signifying acts, making the body a conduit of mystical action. It is easy to see how the debilitating sadness of *acedia* came to be known through its effect on the voice, that which enables spiritual communion.

The idea that grief causes a mutism is not confined to scholastic thought. In her psychoanalysis of depression and speech, Julia Kristeva argues that "if in the nondepressive state one has the ability to concatenate, depressive persons, in contrast, riveted to their pain, no longer concatenate and, consequently, neither act nor speak."[34] For Kristeva, grief suppresses the ability to transpose meaning. Especially in mourning, depressive persons are unable to commit inchoate thought to language. There is a break between the reality of loss on the level of the psyche and the symbolic realm of language, as the depressed is unable to exchange their individual bond with the lost object for the symbolic compensation.[35] Thus, Kristeva writes,

> with melancholy persons, meaning appears to be arbitrary, or else it is elaborated with the help of much knowledge and will to mastery, but seems secondary, frozen, somewhat removed from the head and body of the person who is speaking. Or else it is from the very beginning evasive, uncertain, deficient, quasi mutistic: 'one' speaks to you already convinced that the words

[33] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, qu. 35, a.8, resp.
[34] Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 34.
[35] As Ewa Ziarek puts it, "According to Kristeva, the task of mourning involves a *negation* of the fundamental loss of the other and an acceptance of the arbitrary linguistic totality as an adequate compensation. In Kristeva's discussion, mourning functions as an economy of losses and compensations, an economy which underlies every order of representation... If mourning is a 'normal', or normative, stage in learning language, melancholia registers a certain crisis in symbolic mediation". Ewa Ziarek, "Kristeva and Levinas: Mourning, Ethics, and the Feminine," in *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writings*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Routledge, 1993), 72.

> are wrong and therefore 'one' speaks carelessly, 'one' speaks without believing in it.[36]

The emphasis on a lack of faith in melancholia moves Kristeva to write that "the depressed person is a radical, sullen atheist."[37] Unable to believe in what they say, the depressive person experiences no continuity between thought and word and is unable to invest in the symbolic meaning of language.

Kristeva's concern for the way that melancholia disrupts acts of signification that would enable mourning offers a way to perceive the dialectic of mourning and melancholia in the scholastic treatment of *acedia* and voice. If *acedia* is typical of a melancholic mourning that avoids repatriation into symbolic systems of meaning (prayer, liturgy, social activity), then we can align mourning with sacramental, spiritual participation. To this end, Ewa Ziarek elaborates on the salvific nature of Kristeva's conception of mourning:

> The signification of melancholia discloses, first of all, an acute awareness of disinheritance, accompanied by a lack of faith in any restoration or recompense for the suffered loss. In this sense, a melancholy person is an atheist, without recourse to a secular or religious economy of salvation. Mourning on the other hand, provides a way for 'disposing' of a loss through an acceptance of the symbolic means of compensation.[38]

It is a faith in symbolic systems to compensate for a loss that enables mourning, manifested in the voice as an instrument for spiritual participation. On this point, Kristeva agrees with the scholastic definition of *acedia* as a mutistic sadness, as participation in the spiritual community is hindered by an inability to invest in the symbolic language of worship. Because we can define *acedia* according to these terms, it is equivalent to melancholia because it engenders a lack of faith, a scepticism or resistance to governing ideologies of religion, society, and community.

---

[36] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 43.
[37] Ibid., 5.
[38] Ziarek, "Kristeva and Levinas," 71.

We can discern from this discussion of *acedia* and patience a moral rationale for mourning as an act of recuperation, conceived of in religious terms through the liturgy. We can certainly align the conventions of inexpressibility germane to elegy with this kind of melancholic mutism and see how the disconsolate pose of elegy demonstrates a lack of faith in language that challenges the belief in the transcendent power of the Word. Elegy was perceived as an expression of a morally dubious resistance to spiritual participation in the Middle Ages, whereas the finite and repatriating work of the consolation was conducive to the dominant spiritual beliefs of the time. To speak of work and mourning in this time, then, was to speak of a penitential work juxtaposed with the elegiac 'work of mourning' conceived of as an indulgence of melancholic tendencies. The clearest expression of this dichotomy is found in the work of Dante, who elucidated the key aspect of work in penitential mourning through his representations of hell and purgatory.

Mourning and the Work of Penance

In understanding how mourning and melancholia might be used as concepts through which we can define *acedia* in literary texts, Dante's *Commedia* offers a coherent division between the two. As Jennifer Rushworth shows, *Inferno*, in contrast to *Purgatorio*, is a place without song.[39] Though in *Purgatorio* hymns are often sung and speech can have an antiphonal quality, in "La citta' dolente" ["the grieving city"] the air is filled with the broken, incomprehensible laments of the eternally damned:[40]

> Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,
> parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,
> voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle
> facevano un tumulto, il qual s'aggira

[39] Jennifer Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust*, (Oxford: New York: OUP, 2016).
[40] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling (Oxford: OUP, 1996), III, 1. All citations refer to this edition hereafter and will be made in parentheses in the text.

sempre in quell'aura sanza tempo tinta,

come la rena quando turbo spira.

[Strange languages, horrible tongues, words of pain, accents of anger, voices loud and hoarse, and sounds of blows with them,

made a tumult that turns forever in that air darkened without time, like the sand when a whirlwind blows.]

(*Inf.* III, 25-30)

Contrast this with *Purgatorio* II, in which the souls sing in unison "*In exitu Israel de Aegypto*" as their boat reaches the shore.[41] Rushworth argues that "in contrast to the melancholic, broken, self-centred language of characters in *Inferno*, in *Purgatorio* speech is recuperated and made whole through its collective, public, musical, and liturgical nature."[42] Liturgical language is curative for Dante, especially in purgatory. It is an emancipatory form of expression that combats *acedia*.[43] In this way, Rushworth's analysis agrees with Henry Staten's view that "the Dantean ascent is a form of the [Freudian] work of mourning."[44] The spiritual language of the liturgy available to the mourners of *Purgatorio* demonstrates the role of symbolic language in curing *acedia*, as it interpellates the speaker into a spiritual community, where before they were alone.[45] The division between *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* can thus be interpreted as a division between those disabled by their melancholia and those able to undertake mourning, respectively. In one realm there is no hope for new love after the

[41] Dante, *Purgatorio*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling (Oxford: OUP, 2004), II, 46-48. All citations refer to this edition hereafter and will be made in parentheses in the text. For further discussion of liturgical song in *Purgatorio* see Ronald L. Martinez, "'L'amoroso Canto': Liturgy and Vernacular Lyric in Dante's *Purgatorio*," *Dante Studies* 127 (2009), 93–127.
[42] Jennifer Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning*, 40.
[43] Peter S. Hawkins summarises the difference between the two *cantiche*: 'Gone are the operatic soloists of *Inferno*, each singing the words of his or her own song, and nobody listening to anyone else. In their place are individuals discovering what it means to be members of a choir, to make music together. Communion becomes a way of life'. Hawkins, *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 8.
[44] Henry Staten, *Eros in Mourning: Homer to Lacan* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 75.
[45] I use the term "interpolate" in the Althusserian sense, referring to the linguistic process through which language can be used to draw subjects into an ideological framework. See Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), 261-66 especially.

loss of life, but in the other, it is the enduring love of and for God that inculcates the penitential purgatorial ascent.

To this end, the fourth cornice of sloth in *Purgatorio* is a scene that demands close attention. Jeremy Tambling observes that on the cornice of sloth "mourning corrects melancholia."[46] This is to say that the cornice activates the sadness of the melancholic and puts it to work. In contrast to the those that suffer in *Inferno* in the "aura sanza tempo tinta" ["air darkened without time"], the "accidiosi" of *Purgatorio* exist in a hyper-temporal mode, unable to cease their work. As a remedy for their torpor in their earthly lives, they weep constantly, speeding round the cornice at night while others are unable to move:

> Tosto fur sovr' a noi, perché correndo
> si movea tutta quella turba magna,
> e due dinanzi gridavan piangendo
> 'Maria corse con fretta a la montagna!'
> e: 'Caesare, per soggiogare Ilerda,
> punse Marsilia e poi corse in Ispagna!'
>
> [Suddenly they were upon us, for all that great crowd was running, and two in front cried, weeping:
>
> 'Mary ran with haste to the mountain!' and: 'Caesar, to subdue Lerida, struck Marseilles and then hastened to Spain!']
>
> (*Purg.* XVIII, 97-102)

The constant motion (and emotion) of this crowd is indicative of their urgent work. The two historical events that they describe, besides being occasions of great haste, reflect the fervor of the crowd.[47] Their proclivity for work is a form of exaggerated mourning, an urgent desire for physical and spiritual labour:

> Ratto, ratto, che 'l tempo non si perda
> per poco amor', gridavan li altri appresso,

[46] Jeremy Tambling, *Dante in Purgatory* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 153.
[47] Wenzel believes Dante's use of these images is entirely original. See Wenzel, *Sin of Sloth,* 130-31.

> ‘che studio di ben far grazia rinverda!’
>
> [‘Quickly, quickly, that time not be lost through lack of love,’ cried the others following, ‘let eagerness to do well make grace grow green.’]
>
> (*Purg*. XVIII, 103-5)

Contrasted with those in trapped in perpetuity in *Inferno*, the time-sensitive nature of this purgatorial mourning underlines the most basic definition of work as energy spent over time.[48] The sadness here is productive rather than lethargic, an investment of energy into labour for recompense. In that *acedia* is that which prevents love, the *accidiosi* can be said to produce love through their fervour. Indeed, time is directly equated with love and it is the urgency of their work that reinvigorates their grace.

The engagement of body and mind in the service of God is a traditional remedy for *acedia*, but Dante’s mournful runners nuance this cure. The mourners are engaged in a process of symbolic recompense for erasing their sloth, a vision of *acedia* that Tambling describes as “becoming a modern, proto-capitalist concept.”[49] It follows that the runners remain anonymous, defined only by their past sins: through the labour of penance the slothful reproach that which defines them. Their eagerness to erase their sin is evident as they “come scourging sloth” [“venir dando a l’accidia di morso”] (132) up to Virgil and the Dante-pilgrim. The slothful are consumed by their work, erasing their very selfhood so that they may be instrumentalised as conduits of religious fervour. They are engaged in the type of mourning that Kristeva describes, relinquishing their grief for symbolic recompense, one that will be manifested in heaven. The melancholia that defined them on earth as slothful is

[48] “Unlike the endless melancholic repetition of infernal eternity, purgatorial time allows each soul to change and progress, in a process that has a definite start and end point, from death and the passage of the soul to the foot of the mountain to the gradual purification and liberation from sin that is celebrated by reaching the Earthly Paradise at the mountain’s summit. While infernal melancholia is a static, unchanging state, the purgatorial work of mourning relies upon and ensures productive progression.” Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning*, 40.
[49] Tambling, “Dreaming the Siren: Dante and Melancholy,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 40, no. 1 (2004): 61.

translated into the labour of mourning, earning the runners the reward that eventually comes to all those who mourn their sins.

In the process of satisfying one's Christian obligations, mourning is not directly opposed to melancholia but is a transformation of that sadness into a type of work. Dante's poem expresses the strong preference for consolatory discourses of mourning in the period and shows how a purgatorial understanding of anagogical progression was leveraged to supress elegiac, monodic expressions of grief. Purgatory was the supreme illustration of this process was and the final sections of this chapter will show how it became the theological foundation for the consolatory culture of death and dying in the later Middle Ages, despite its evident flaws.

The Theology of Purgatory

Dante's depiction of purgatory was the most coherent representation of the middle realm, artistically or otherwise.[50] The doctrine of purgatory was at the centre of the burgeoning cult of the dead in the fourteenth century and married the moral rationale for mourning outlined above into a practical programme of penance. It was a realm of doctrinal indistinction, a source of hope for the everyman, and, most importantly, the manifestation of a belief in the spiritual benefits afforded by penitential mourning. Purgatory, as seen in the brief discussion of Dante's depiction the previous section, confirmed the belief in the efficacy of mourning, placing it in stark contrast to the melancholic elegy. If elegy relies on the aesthetic and ethical principle that loyalty to the dead demands an interminable mourning, purgatory instead evidences the equivalence of mourning to eschatological process, declaring a definite end to mourning that is authorised by spiritual belief. This section of the chapter will explain the theological concepts that lay behind the popularisation of purgatory, showing how purgatory

[50] Le Goff calls it the "triumph" of purgatory, the apex of its history. Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: Scolar Press, 1984).

sublimated contemporary theories of penance, the avoidance of *acedia*, and mourning into an effective model for anagogical progression.

In the words of Edward E. Foster, "the history of purgatory is a concatenation of questions."[51] Any study of purgatory must acknowledge the unavoidable fact that theologians' dogmatic conception of a new system of penance was not only theoretical, but far-removed from a lay understanding and experience of purgation. We can turn again to *The Gast of Gy* for a description of the role that purgatory fulfilled in late-medieval theology:

> For I was schryven in erth full clene,
> And I am evell, this es certaine,
> Till I have sufferd sertaine payne.
> For, als men may in bokes rede,
> Clerkes sais that it es nede
> That penance alls fer pas,
> Als lykyng here in the syn was.
> Tharfor I say it suffyce noght
> To schryve a man in will and thoght,
> Bot if he may in dede fullfyll
> The penaunce that es gyfen him tyll.
> For that at we do noght or we dy,
> Sall be fullfyld in purgatory.[52]

Spoken by a spirit returned temporarily to earth from purgatory, this passage outlines the need for "penance alls fer pas,| Als lykyng here in the syn was"—penitential punishment in proportion to the sins committed in life. Very few Christians were able to achieve satisfaction during their lifetime, and so were unfit for heaven or "evell" [evil] upon their death. As a theological space between earth and heaven, purgatory offered a location where these people could suffer for their sins before their admission into heaven. Purgatory represented the

---

[51] Foster, "General Introduction," in *Three Purgatory Poems*, ed. Foster (Kalamazoo, Mich: Published for TEAMS by Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), paragraph 3.
[52] *Gast of Gy*, 396-408.

dogmatic expansion of the time and space of death to accommodate these penitential but imperfect sinners. Rather than accepting the mystical boundary between life and the religious death as an ineffable divide, the doctrine of purgatory demystified the theological process of death by stating that "at we do noght or we dy, | Sall be fullfyled in purgatory."

The *Gast of Gy* reveals a lot to us about the nature of purgatory. Based on a letter written by friar Jean Gobi to the Pope about the events in the French town of Alès, the widespread translation, transmission, and versification of the text evidences its popularity. The text offers an explanation of purgatory based on Aquinas' writings – perhaps unsurprising given that Gobi was also a Dominican friar himself. The text deals as much with the nature of ghosts as it does with the nature of purgatory, meditating on the incorporeal nature of this in-between realm. Gy's visitation emphasises the liminality of purgatory, affected by and affecting change in the terrestrial sphere. He pleads desperately for prayers to speed his passage through the pains of purgatory, but also offers guidance, wisdom, and an opportunity for contemplation to those that he petitions. The reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead is key to the *Gast of Gy*'s depiction of purgatory, as is the emphasis on corporeal identification and suffering. Purgatory is underwritten by a need for penance above all else. The process of identification that mourning constitutes is sublimated into a kind of intercessory penance on behalf of the deceased. In other words, purgatory encapsulates the productivity expected of Christian mourners.

The doctrine of purgatory was born out of two related theological principles: the belief in the efficacy of prayers for the dead, and the potential for the purgation of sins after death.[53] In the fourth century, Augustine wrote that "we should not think that any aid comes to the dead for whom we are providing care, except what we solemnly pray for on their

[53] See Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 62.

behalf at the altars, either by sacrifices of prayers or of alms."[54] Augustine's establishment of the efficacy of prayers for the dead ratified a practice which belongs to a wider spiritual tradition of seeking safe passage for the dead in the afterlife.[55] The other key theological underpinning for the doctrine was his interpretation of lines from the first epistle of Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 3 tells of the spiritual and physical nature of man and gives instruction on how best to cultivate one's earthly life in order to prepare for the joining with the divine in the afterlife:

> Now if any man build upon this foundation of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.
>
> 1 Cor 3: 12-15

Augustine took the structure being described here to be a statement of the value of man's earthly works.[56] God created the foundation of this structure in the form of Jesus Christ, and in order to honour and preserve that structure, man should build upon it with precious and lasting materials such as gold and silver. Sins detracted from the structure, represented by materials such as wood and hay.[57] The final judgement of a man's structure would therefore be in fire, which would burn away the flammable material of sin and leave only his good works. Augustine posited that as the soul passed through these purgatorial flames, venial sins would burn up like straw whilst the eternal soul would proceed unscathed. Although the word "purgatorio" does not appear in the Vulgate Bible, the passage establishes that burning away

[54] St. Augustine, *The Care to be Taken for the Dead* in, *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari, trans. John A. Lacy, (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 383. See Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 79-85.
[55] See Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings and Jeanine Routier-Pucci (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).
[56] Augustine, *City of God*, trans. by Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), Book 21, Chapter 26, 1010-1014.
[57] Cf. "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:10-1.

sin involves suffering.[58] Augustine interprets this as a purgative experience, emphasising the curative rather than penal nature of purgation. Extricating one's self from the earthly world is a painful but necessary experience in preparation for the divine kingdom. The nascent concept of expiating minor sins in purgatorial flames would develop alongside the belief in efficacy of prayers for the dead, a dogmatic evolution that would eventually culminate in the doctrine of purgatory.

The development of purgatory has been comprehensively charted by Jacques Le Goff in his seminal study, *The Birth of Purgatory*, to which any study of purgatory is greatly indebted. The crux of his history is the titular "birth of purgatory," which he argues occured in the intellectual community of Paris in the late twelfth century. In his analysis of the work of Peter Comestor, Le Goff finds that "as his ideas developed between 1170 and his death in 1178 or 1179, he used the neologism *purgatorium*."[59] Le Goff concludes that this neologism "must have been introduced in the decade 1170-80," signalling its recognition not only as a conceptual space, but also as a geographical one. [60] Although scholars have disputed the methods of Le Goff's exact dating, this date and location is certainly significant in terms of the broader development of the Christian subject in the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century.[61] The work of Parisian academics in the late twelfth century would be central to the formulation of an academic programme for the exploration and analysis of purgatory.[62]

---

[58] See Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 77-80. Le Goff's close attention to the shifting vocabulary of purgatorial fire in Augustine's work is indispensable here.
[59] Ibid., 157.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Most notably, cf. Brian Patrick McGuire, "Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and Medieval Change," *Viator* 20 (1989): 61–84; and Graham Robert Edwards, "Purgatory: 'Birth' or Evolution?," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36, no. 4 (1985): 634–46.
[62] For a recent study of twelfth-century Parisian intellectual culture see: Ian P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University, c.1100-1330* (Cambridge: University Press, 2012). For a broader, but still eminently useful study of intellectual university culture in the Middle Ages, see Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993). For a study on England's relation to this intellectual revolution, see Rodney M. Thomson, *England and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998).

Indeed, the twelfth century saw a conceptual reformation of the Christian subject through new modes of Aristotelian-influenced thinking.[63] John Bossy contends that Anselm's configuration of the theory of salvation precipitated a significant reimagining of the position and role of the Christian subject.[64] These advances in theological thinking recognised a more sophisticated relationship between man and God, and conceptualised new ways of negotiating time and space. In the wake of these changes, it was undoubtedly the work of Thomas Aquinas that did the most to create a coherent theological picture of purgatory before its ratification in the Second Council of Lyons in 1274.[65] The importance of contrition, a sadness or grief caused by the recognition of one's sins, in monastic writings of the Early Middle Ages formed the basis for Aquinas' position that, given that the penitent was genuine in his desire to repent, a priest was able to absolve the *culpa* of sin and the *poena* (either pain or punishment) could be satisfied in the afterlife.[66] Though Aquinas never finished his treatise on penance, supplements to the *Summa Theologicae* were compiled from his writings on Peter Lombard, and this is where purgatory is addressed in detail.[67]

---

[63] For a survey of scholarship on this subject and a detailed discussion of the key figures see the recent work of John Marenbon: *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006), especially 131-171; and Marenbon, "Philosophy and Theology," in *European Transformations: The Long Twelfth Century*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and John Van Engen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 403–25. See also the essays in Peter Dronke, ed., *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1992).

[64] See Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400-1700*, 1-12; Giles E. M. Gasper, *Anselm of Canterbury and His Theological Inheritance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, *Anselm* (Oxford: OUP, 2009); Charlotte Gross, "Twelfth-Century Concepts of Time: Three Reinterpretations of Augustine's Doctrine of Creation Simul," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23, no. 3 (1985): 325–338.

[65] The direct influence of Aquinas' work on the Doctrine is understood by Le Goff in *Birth of Purgatory* (283-86) to be the pressure that it placed on uncooperative Greek scholars in the second half of the thirteenth century, who were the main opponents to the ratification of Purgatory at the Second Council of Lyons. Purgatory is addressed as an addendum to the Decrees that came out of the Council at Lyons, drawn up from a letter conversation between Pope Gregory X and Emperor Michael VIII.

[66] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, III, qu. 84-90.

[67] Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica,* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1911), supplemental, appendices I, II. Supplemental questions 69-74 address the destination and state of souls after death before the resurrection and two further appendices address the question of purgatory directly and form the basis of the Dominican theology of purgatory. Aquinas died before completing his treatise on penance, so the remainder, known as the Supplement, was compiled after his death. The Blackfriars edition of the *Summa* does not extend to this supplemental material, so I have consulted an alternate edition.

On the subject of the 'place' of purgatory, Aquinas' thoughts turn towards the incorporeal nature of the soul as understood by Boethius and Augustine. That is to say, he believes the abode of the soul to be an abstract location, "as in a place" ("quasi in loco"), echoing Augustine's interpretation of "quasi per ignem" in 1 Corinthians 3:15 when describing the location of purgation.[68] Thomist thinking on the fitness of the punishment for the sin draws heavily from a sense of legal justice.[69] He places emphasis on the suitability of the punishment for the status of the soul and argues for a detailed correspondence between the status of the soul and the receptacle. He outlines four primary destinations for the soul: hell for the damned; the limbo of children for those with only the burden of original sin; purgatory for those that have not completed their salvation; and heaven for those that have.[70] The result of Aquinas' perceived duty to clarify the terms of purgatory was not to resolve all disputes, but to firm up the ground upon which the doctrine of purgatory would be laid in 1274 at the Second Council of Lyons.[71]

The most striking thing about Aquinas' purgatory is its corporeal indeterminacy. To quote his meditation on the corporeal nature of purgatory in full:

> Nothing is clearly stated in Scripture about the situation of purgatory, nor is it possible to offer convincing arguments on this question. It is probable, however, and more in keeping with the statements of holy men and the revelations made to many, that there is a twofold place of purgatory.[72]

[68] "Incorporeal things are not in place after a manner known and familiar to us, in which way we say that bodies are properly in place; but they are in place after a manner befitting spiritual substances, a manner that cannot be fully manifest to us." Aquinas, *Summa*, Supplemental, appendix I, article 1.

[69] "[B]y the same principle of justice, punishments are assigned to wrongdoings and rewards to good acts… This view seemed persuasive on the basis of human custom. Indeed, the punishments under human law are applied for the remedy of vices, and so they are like medicines… So, it seems that all punishments may fittingly be said to be purgatorial and, consequently, requiring termination at some time, since what can be purged out is accidental to a rational creature and may be removed without consuming the substance." Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Three: Providence: Part II*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke, Reprint edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), III, 144, articles 6-9.

[70] *Summa*, Suppl., question 69. See Le Goff's discussion, *Birth of Purgatory*, 268-278.

[71] Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 268.

[72] *Summa*, Suppl., app. II, art. 2.

Gesturing to popular visionary accounts of purgatory, Aquinas notes the lack of concrete evidence for purgatory.[73] Indeed, the "twofold place of purgatory" would be used just fifty years later to validate Gy's visitation of his wife in Gobi's account.[74] Here, then, purgatory is most significant as a place of intercession, as Aquinas confirms that though purgatorial souls are separated from their bodies, their quasi-corporeal nature allows them to communicate their suffering to the living.[75] Dreams, ghosts, and visions all lend an uncomfortable credence to what is essentially an unproved theological necessity.[76] He states elsewhere that:

> It is sufficiently clear that there is a purgatory after this life. For if the debt of punishment is not paid in full after the stain of sin has been washed away by contrition, nor again are venial sins always removed when mortal sins are remitted, and if justice demands that sin be set in order by due punishment, it follows that one who after contrition for his fault and after being absolved, dies before making due satisfaction, is punished after this life.[77]

The theological problem that purgatory represents is significant and would remain largely unresolved in subsequent years. Yet, this awkward theological confirmation of a quasi-corporeal place of penance after death chimed with the popular sense of a cosmic union between the living and the dead.[78] In short, purgatory made sense as a dogmatic invention because it *needed* to make sense in the cosmic scheme of satisfaction, and not least because of its wide acceptance by the laity and the priesthood alike. The truth of the matter was that purgatory existed on shaky grounds.

---

[73] On visions of purgatory, see: Shaffern, "Death and Afterlife"; C. S. Watkins, "Sin, Penance and Purgatory in the Anglo-Norman Realm: The Evidence of Visions and Ghost Stories," *Past & Present* 175, (2002): 3–33; and Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 181-201. On visions of the afterlife in the medieval period more generally, see Aisling Byrne, *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 68-106; and Eileen Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante* (New York: Italica Press, 1989).

[74] *Gast of Gy*, 536-39.

[75] "Some are punished in various places, either that the living may learn, or that the dead may be succoured, seeing that their punishment being made known to the living may be mitigated through the prayers of the Church." Aquinas, *Summa*, Suppl., app. II, art. 2.

[76] Takami Matsuda demonstrates the didactic nature of bodily suffering in these visions of purgatory. Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997).

[77] Ibid., art. 1. In the same passage he also states that "those who deny purgatory speak against the justice of God."

[78] For a similar argument, see McGuire, "Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and Medieval Change."

As a concept, purgatory was ‘popular’ in the most basic sense of the word, in that it translated theological ideas into a language that the Christian masses could conceptualise with great ease. Purgatory became a space (if not a place in itself) between the two locations of heaven and hell where the laity trusted that the spiritual complexities of their lives would eventually be resolved for them. Purgatory offered peace of mind, or what Eamon Duffy memorably terms, “post-mortem fire-insurance.”[79] Where the uncertainty of the dichotomy of heaven and hell left some Christians unsure as to their destination in the afterlife, purgatory instated a formal teleology for the soul that could be understood, measured, and changed.[80] Fundamentally, purgatory acted as a bridge between the corporeal and the incorporeal through increasingly sophisticated systems of conceptualisation, memorialisation, and commercialisation, and sought to remove doubts about spiritual fates that might engender melancholia in the living. In the final section I will demonstrate how purgatory affected the lives of the laity in practice and will explore the contradictions and discontents that attended the cultures of mourning that it encouraged. It is these contradictions and discontents that would eventually prompt literary experimentations with textual forms of mourning, as well as a resistance to the consolatory ideology that dominated the period, as seen in *Pearl* and the *Book of the Duchess*.

The Purgatorial Mindset of the Late-Medieval Liturgy

The theological underpinning of purgatory sketched out in the previous section suggests a tendency towards collective identity, but the reality is that in the late Middle Ages the liturgy was a varied and often individualised experience. Indeed, while purgatory prompted a kind of psychologization of death, what we conceptualise as the psychological process of mourning

---

[79] Eamon Duffy, *Stripping the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 302.
[80] Shaffern argues that there was a common belief in the continuity between the penitential programme of this life and the purgatorial agenda of the next: “For the typical Christian, the Medieval penitential regime prepared believers for the afterlife.” Shaffern, “Death and the Afterlife,” 178.

was sublimated into the performance of the liturgy in the Middle Ages. The lay experience of mourning is fundamentally liturgical, whether through the sacraments of penance and the eucharist, or through participation in the various forms of the liturgy that affected purgatorial souls.[81] The real work of death and dying in the Middle Ages consisted of the day-to-day liturgical practices carried out in domestic settings such as homes and churches. The final part of this chapter, then, will offer a broad sketch of contemporary spiritual practices in this period, informed as they were by the doctrine of purgatory, to demonstrate the ubiquity of a religious, consolatory approach to mourning.

Properly speaking, purgatory, when discussed in historical terms, is a product of lay religious enthusiasm and, as a result, we should assume that its popular understanding was as varied as the liturgy itself. Although only loosely defined in Church doctrine, the concept of post-mortem purgation was impressed upon the laity in sermons and vernacular writings, and the spiritual implications it raised were addressed by the changing form of the liturgy in the centuries subsequent to its inception.[82] Le Goff goes as far as to say that, "broadly speaking, purgatory made even more impressive headway with the populace than it did with the theologians and clergy."[83] In theory, purgatory was a pure expression of the unification of the living and the dead enacted in the Mass.[84] In this vein, historians of the late twentieth century such as John Bossy and Eamon Duffy wrote about the social variety of the liturgy as an expression of the common good.[85] In recent years, however, the variety of the liturgy has

[81] For a similar argument, see Chase E. Machen, "The Concept of Purgatory in England," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Texas, 2010).
[82] Le Goff writes that "purgatory would become one of the favourite themes of the *exempla*" for thirteenth-century sermon-writers, arguing that it was a popular topic among the laity. *The Birth of Purgatory*, 230.
[83] Ibid., 289.
[84] "Prayer and good works done on behalf of the dead – whether they took the more juridical form of an indulgence, or the more informal aspect of private prayer – translated the bond between living and dead into an activity of loving service." Shaffern, "Death and the Afterlife," 183.
[85] See John Bossy, "Mass as a Social Institution 1200-1700," *Past & Present* 100 (1983): 29–61; and Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 91–154. Catherine Pickstock stresses the communal character of the Medieval liturgy as a communal religious experience that is contingent on the negation of the individual. Cf. Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Malden: Blackwell, 1998).

been regarded as much less cohesive, evidenced in individual and idiosyncratic acts that defy practices of standardisation and documentation.[86] In practice, the liturgy was often an individual devotional and penitential activity, subjected to the same hierarchies that affected the general organisation of feudal society.[87] The competing views of the individual and communal aspects of the liturgy are indicative of a complex and changing social form that largely defies generalisation.[88] Even if particular trends can be established about the lay experience of the liturgy, there is no way of measuring its success in terms of the regular attendance of Mass or the administering of sacraments.[89]

The popularity of purgatory among the laity is not in question in the fourteenth century, but the extent to which it could be said to be understood by the laity as a theological concept is unclear.[90] In his long didactic poem *Handlyng Synne*, Robert Mannyng writes that

> For al þat yn peyne ys
> Abydeþ þe sucour of þe messe.
> For eury messe makþ memorye
> Of soules þat are yn purgatorye.[91]

---

[86] Nicholas Bell views this picture of the liturgy as a communal event as unnecessarily limiting: "All of these cases of private devotion invite a blurring of the boundaries of what constitutes liturgy." Bell, "Liturgy," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Christianity, 1050-1500*, 130.

[87] Jennifer Garrison makes a strong argument against the communal understanding of the liturgy put forward by Bossy and Duffy, writing that "such recent scholarship has tended to assume wrongly that, because the Mass is social, it must therefore necessarily be egalitarian." See Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject," *The Chaucer Review*, 44.3 (2010), 299-300. See also Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[88] Recent work on textual legacy of the liturgy stresses this fact. See Helen Gittos and Sarah Hamilton, ed., *Understanding Medieval Liturgy: Essays in Interpretation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015); Teresa Berger, *Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History: Lifting a Veil on Liturgy's Past*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Richard William Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England: A History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009); Cheslyn Jones and Geoffrey Wainwright, ed., *The Study of Liturgy*, rev. ed. (London: SPCK, 2008); and Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter, ed., *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church* (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001). For an older, but still insightful study of the sources, see Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, trans. by William George Storey, Niels Krogh Rasmussen, and John Brooks-Leonard (Washington, D.C: Pastoral Press, 1986).

[89] See Daniel Bornstein, "Administering the Sacraments," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Christianity, 1050-1500*, 139 ff.

[90] Though the most complete systematisation of the afterlife was, in Le Goff's view, Aquinas'. He also argues that it was "the farthest removed from the common mental outlook of the era." Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 271.

[91] Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. by Idelle Sullens (New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1983), lines 10315-19.

Mannyng's explication of the benefits of mass for souls in purgatory is revealing for two reasons. First, his employment of the noun form of purgatory demonstrates its common use and understanding in lay vernacular parlance.[92] Second, the conceit that "messe makþ memorye" recognises the rich spiritual connection between the celebration of Mass and the embodiment of a community comprised of the living and the dead. The "purgatorye"/ "memorye" rhyme emphasises the crucial connection between the theological concept and the act of commemoration: "making memory" meant extending the bonds of community to the dead. The medieval liturgy is a memorial form, in that it survived primarily in the collective memory of those who participated in it, and in that its performance is a re-enactment of the historical memory of Christ.[93]

However, the "purgatorye"/"memorye" rhyme also occurs in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* as part of a misogynist argument in favour of marriage as a spiritually beneficial state of penitence:

> Dispeire yow noght, but have in youre memorie,
> Paraunter she may be youre purgatorie!
> She may be Goddes meene and Goddes whippe;
> Thanne shal youre soule up to hevene skippe
> Swifter than dooth an arwe out of a bowe.[94]

The usage here clearly indicates a popular and even idiomatic grasp of purgatory as a mode of penitence. However, Chaucer refers here and in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* to a kind of purgation on earth, a theological position that was branded untenable by Thomas Aquinas.[95]

---

[92] Mannyng's translation of the French *Manuel de Pechiez* is explicitly aimed at "lewed men" who might otherwise "lestene trotouale" (foolish or deceitful tales) and "falle ofte to velanye." Ibid., 48-49.

[93] For this reason, liturgical drama has often interpreted as the most overt representation of the social aspect of the liturgy. See Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Beckwith, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town," *Past and Present* 98 (1983): 3–29.

[94] The *Merchant's Tale* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, IV, 1669-1673.

[95] See the discussion of *Wife of Bath's Prologue* below, 67-8. For Aquinas' refutation and the systemisation of the four-fold abodes of the afterlife, see Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 270-71.

This repeated usage with regards to the representation of marriage as earthly purgation would suggest that Chaucer either seriously regarded purgatory as a continuation of earthly penance, or that he simply used purgatory as a figure for the process of spiritual repentance more generally. Tending towards the latter of these two options, it seems to me that Chaucer's characterisation of marriage as purgatory, though comical, indicates the popular reception of purgatory as a penitential mentality rather than a strictly theological concept. Purgatory is less a fixed concept in these secular texts than it is a shorthand for memorialisation and penance, a reflection of its common apprehension. There is a distinct difference between Mannyng's representation of the common good of purgatory and Chaucer's cynical and individuated view of purgatory as an accountancy of penance.

In one sense, as Mannyng's work shows, collective commemoration was integrated into the performance of the Mass in a fundamental way. As it became widely accepted that the most efficacious way of hurrying souls through the fires of purgatory was through prayers for the dead, both individually and at large, the incorporation of more frequent and individualised prayers for the dead into the liturgy became a necessity.[96] The most obvious development in liturgical practice was that of the increased popularity of votive Masses and, later, the widespread establishment of private perpetual chantries across all of Western Europe.[97] Once the laity had fully accepted the necessity of obits, and the efficacy of other prayers for the dead, the business of praying for the dead became essentially privatised.

Although indulgences were singled out by dissenting (heretical) sects of the Christian faith as the rich buying their way into heaven from corrupted church officials, in reality the memorialisation that induced prayers for one's soul was only achievable for most on a local

---

[96] "The debt of sin virtually demanded a more corporate approach to thinking about atonement, since the satisfaction of the debt of sin was sure to be beyond the means of very many Christians." Shaffern, "Death and the Afterlife," 183.
[97] Duffy, *Stripping the Altars*, 131-154.

scale through more modest donations.[98] The provision of candles, houseling cloths, pyxes, communion chalices, screens, and even architectural improvements to the church building itself all represented the possibility for parishioners to confirm their place in the parish community, both formally and informally.[99] Items used in the Mass itself such as chalices and houseling cloths would be beneficial to the donor's soul in a formal sense, perhaps even securing their place on the parish's bederoll and ensuring their inclusion by name in the Sunday Mass. Informally, inclusion in the community of the church through donation and participation would have been almost as valuable in the prompting of prayers for one's soul from friends and family. To speak of purgatory in a liturgical sense is to speak of how integrated it was into church-going life and the concept of community at large.

Insofar as it is possible to conceive how the doctrine of purgatory affected the lives of the people of England in the late Middle Ages, the work of purgatory (and therefore of death and dying) was the work of the liturgy. This is to say that mourning was the spiritual work of the community. The doctrine of purgatory is in many ways an extension and a cognitive affirmation of the sacrificial language of the liturgy, as it more explicitly conceptualises this central sacrificial communion. One might go as far as to say that purgatory was loosely conceived of as the space of liturgical "all-time," as Margot Fassler terms it: a space where the effects of this liturgical work are quantifiable and, more importantly, equivalent.[100] The mystical meeting of the somatic and the divine in the performance of the liturgy is an event

---

[98] On indulgences and their subsequent scandalisation, see Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 278-280; R. W. Shaffern, *The Penitents' Treasury* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2007); R. N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and R. N. Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006).

[99] See Clive Burgess, "'An Afterlife in Memory': Commemoration and Its Effects in a Late Medieval Parish," *Studies in Church History* 45 (2009): 196–217.

[100] Margot Fassler argues that this mystical convergence of past, present, and future is a sort of "all time". The liturgy was a framework for both the ritual seasonal calendar, and the re-enactment of history. Time passes day-to-day, but the eschatology of the divine recognises that certain eschatological events transcend the bounds of natural time, being accessible through the liturgy on a repeatable basis. Margot Fassler, "Representations of Time in *Ordo representacionis Ade*," *Yale French Studies*, Special issue: *Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature*, ed. Daniel Poirion (1991): 100.

that could be easily grasped by the medieval worshipper through the concept of purgatory. This means that mourning was subject to the same social and cultural diversity as the liturgy, while being governed by a dominant moral ideology.

What Chaucer's use of purgatory demonstrates, then, is that the tendency towards individualised experiences of the liturgy allowed for radically diverse practices for the benefit of individual souls – both for one's deceased acquaintances and oneself. Within the cult of the dead, secular memorial practices, while not explicitly selfish, signalled the enduring need for a sense of the individual (in the world of the living at least). Indulgences, memorial tombs, and even paraliturgical literature would bear the burden of the angst surrounding individualised memory, which, while still an integral part of the performance of the liturgy, contrasts with its incorporeal and communal spirit. Though, as Panofsky writes, the culture of death in the Middle Ages is marked by the "feeling for the collective, as opposed to the individual, relevance of the life lived on earth," there was urgency to promote one's individual good works in order to ensure one's recognition within that collective.[101] The interaction between an individual's legacy and a liturgical, communal memory will recur throughout this study as a defining characteristic of the late-medieval work of mourning, serving as one of the key ways we can expose the melancholic impetus to commemorate suffering that lies beneath certain acts of material commemoration.

The emphasis on memorial practices that the doctrine of purgatory places on the individual subject as a beneficiary of charitable acts complicates the abnegation of the self highlighted in Dante's conception of purgatory, however. Evidently specific acts of charity would be performed in a certain person's name for purgative purposes, but these acts can

[101] Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 65.

only have meaning within the context of duty to the wider community. As Eamon Duffy puts it,

> such gifts were designed to aid the individual by speeding his or her soul through purgatory. But they were not in any straightforward sense individualistic gestures, for they were designed to contribute to the dignity and beauty of parochial worship, and in return for his or her bequest the testator expected to be held in perpetual memory within the parish.[102]

In theological terms the performance of good works for one's own benefit and their performance for the benefit of the spiritual community are one and the same thing but, in reality, they bred social and cultural tensions.[103]

This individuality was a form of communal identity by virtue of its essential charitability. However, the memorial practices of the later Middle Ages would place pressure on the individual to become distinct from the community given the practical importance of prayers for the dead. We can see this in the appropriation and recycling of brass monuments, for example, which were routinely effaced and reattributed.[104] The belief in the benefits of the proximity of one's burial to the church altar, or other holy places, was a similar point of contention, challenging the incorporeal ideal of purgatorial commemoration with the material and corporeal practicalities of parochial church life.[105] The fear of being forgotten, or the loss of subjectivity was a very real one for secular worshippers, who relied on the strength of their earthly legacy to achieve satisfaction in purgatory. It is fair to see here an adumbration of the self-reflexive humanism of the Early-Modern era, though the individualism of the Middle Ages was still received as a communal activity.[106] Distinguishing the pious (and lavish)

[102] Duffy, *Stripping the Altars*, 134.
[103] "The Divine Essence Itself is charity, even as It is wisdom and goodness." Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 23, article 2.
[104] See Sally Badham, *Seeking Salvation: Commemorating the Dead in the Late-Medieval English Parish* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2015).
[105] See Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066-1550* (London: Routledge, 1998), 150.
[106] A key discussion of the renaissance mentality of 'self-fashioning' is Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), though much work has been done to demonstrate the pre-existence of many of the concepts that Greenblatt identifies in the Early-Modern period. The work of James Simpson and Brian Cummings has effectively dismantled this perceived

individualism of Abbot Suger, for example, from the self-fashioning identities of the Early-Modern era, Erwin Panofsky writes that

> there is a fundamental difference between the Renaissance man's thirst for fame and Suger's colossal but, in a sense, humble vanity. The great man of the Renaissance asserted his personality centripetally, so to speak: he swallowed up the world that surrounded him until his whole environment had been absorbed by his own self. Suger asserted his personality centrifugally: he projected his ego into the world that surrounded him until his whole self had been absorbed by his environment.[107]

The individualism of Abbot Suger is an extraordinary example of the conspicuous generosity cultivated by medieval worshippers, a project that was properly munificent rather than possessive. However, gift-giving and local reputation became a sort of extra-liturgical concern, encouraging a supplemental individuality within the communal religious economy that was material and worldly.

The increasingly lavish tomb monuments and vast amounts of time and money spent on funeral ceremonies and subsequent obits for the dead convey the individual practicalities of death that developed by late Medieval Christians. The *transi* tombs of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are a fascinating example of the simultaneously humble and egotistical dead. They depict the rotting corpse of the deceased as a detailed *memento mori*, while themselves being grand and expensive spectacles that draw attention to the piety of the individual they depict.[108] These tombs, which are of particular interest to my interpretation of the historical context of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, are described by Panofsky as "the 'liturgical' type of funerary monument, perhaps the most important innovation of the High as

---

periodical division and posited a contiguity between the individualism of the Middle Ages and the humanism of the post-reformation era. For an overview of the issues at stake, see James Simpson and Brian Cummings, "Introduction," in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. Simpson and Cummings, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1-9.

[107] *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and its Art Treasures*, ed. and trans. by Erwin Panofsky (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1946), 29. Panofsky cites this passage in his discussion of the difficulties of interpreting funerary sculpture of the Northern Middle Ages in *Tomb Sculpture*, 63.

[108] See Kathleen Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 1973).

opposed to the Early Middle Ages."[109] Once the doctrine of purgatory began to demystify and normalise the work of death, the reverent respect for the dead was met with a practical need to remember them.[110] The expectation of corporeal pains in purgatory drew the work of death into this life, offering representational strategies that bridged the gap between the incorporeal dead and the tangible world of the living.

To turn again to Chaucer, the Wife of Bath offers a telling example of the link between individual materialism and the purgatorial depiction of anagogical process. Describing the cruelty with which she treated her philandering husband, the Wife dryly comments that "[b]y God, in erthe I was his purgatorie! | For which I hope his soule be in glorie."[111] The satirical comparison of marriage to purgatory again demonstrates the figurative overlap between the earthly state of just suffering and the state of the soul in purgatory in the minds of the laity of the late Middle Ages. Describing his extravagant tomb "under the roode beem" (a monument tomb of the variety discussed above), the Wife claims that "it nys but wast to burye him preciously," due both to his adulterous ways as a husband, but also the saint-like patience he displayed in enduring his wife.[112] As Christopher Daniell shows, close proximity to the "roode beem" (a beam upon which a cross was fixed in a church) was considered to be greatly beneficial to the souls buried there.[113] Chaucer's cynical treatment of purgatory captures the duality of the material rituals surrounding it: the husband is simultaneously saint and sinner, and the extravagant tomb marks his piety whilst also betraying a desperate need for prayers in the afterlife. Embedded in the ironic misogyny of the Wife of Bath is the self-negating duality of purgatory as a place for saintly sinners. The

---

[109] Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture*, 60. See chapter two for a discussion of the relationship between Chaucer's poem and John of Gaunt's commission of a monument tomb for himself and his wife.
[110] Christina Welch draws a direct link between the popularisation of purgatory and the proliferation of *transi* tombs in the late Middle Ages. Welch, "Prayers and Pedagogy: Contextualising English Carved Cadaver Monuments of the Late-Medieval Social and Religious Elite," *Fieldwork in Religion* 8, no. 2 (2013): 133-155.
[111] Geoffrey Chaucer, the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, in *The Riverside Chaucer* III, 489-90.
[112] *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, III, 496, 500.
[113] Daniell, *Death and Burial*, 150.

spiritual significance of the tomb as anagogical symbol is lost to the figurative process that it is caught up in. Although the memorial function of it is clear, it points only to the anagogical process itself, not to a stage on the beatific scale.

Within the schema of penitential mourning, individual, material commemoration seemed to some extent to displace an incorporeal conception of the soul. As Le Goff puts it, "mankind had taken up residence on earth. Previously it had not been worth the bother to devote too much attention to the brief moment that was supposed to separate death from resurrection."[114] Formerly a worldly, secular fixation, purgatory (ironically) turned spiritual attention back towards the corporeal, material world and our attachments to it. The pressures that purgatory placed on liturgical practices in the service of specific individuals, especially in the need for votive masses, necessitated the increased reliance on documentary and material culture, and therefore the earthly legacy of the deceased.[115] The trace of the individual was made present by the documentary culture at the heart of the cult of the dead, even if it remained secondary to the communal operation of the liturgy. The elegiac duality of the artefactual and the ritual was present in the fourteenth-century cult of the dead, though the melancholic endurance of these forms was repressed. Purgatorial mourning persisted in the materiality of memory-work, but it purports not to share the melancholia of the work of mourning given the belief in eventual deliverance; prolonged sadness was discouraged by the recognition of *acedia* as a barrier to participation. The end of mourning is authorised by a belief in satisfaction, and the deceased is made present not through textual evocation but

[114] Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 231.

[115] Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory* (130-32) argues that the reshaping of feudal society in the twelfth century gave rise to a documentary and legal culture that demanded a parallel sharpening of penitential forms. Le Goff's claims are supported by the considerable scholarship on the development of documentary and legal forms: see Anthony Musson and W. M. Ormrod, *The Evolution of English Justice: Law, Politics, and Society in the Fourteenth Century* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998); M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993; Walter Ullmann, *The Individual and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966););); and Rosemary Horrox and W. M. Ormrod, ed., *A Social History of England, 1200-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

through the mystical presence of the liturgy. The act of intercession at the heart of penitential mourning, emphasised and explicitly enabled by the doctrine of purgatory, sublimated the individual act of mourning into a religious, anagogical process. This process was not universally understood or standardised, but it dispelled the ineffability of death in such a way that elegiac expression, which spells out an opposing fundamental inability to address loss, was rendered facile or surplus to the artefactual ritualisation of purgatorial mourning. Rather than an interminable work of mourning necessitated by the absence of the lost object who would authorise its end, the calculating and hopeful mourning associated with the anagogical process of purgatory gave mourning a discrete and pragmatic function. While death was to be mourned, the consolations were not only faith-based but materially evidenced, represented in the spiritual communion with the dead themselves.

Conclusion

The typical expression of anagogical progress in the later Middle Ages was purgatory. The material culture that attended the cult of the dead in this period served as a sacramental economy through which mundane time could quantify and affect purgatorial time. In this sense, we can broadly align mourning with penance in the period as a work of satisfaction and symbolic compensation that has a teleological (eschatological) trajectory. This aligns with the aims of consolation as a textual form, whereas the elegy is marked by its concern for the work of mourning as a less definite, prolonged process of mourning that was discouraged by the moral rationale that underpinned mourning in the period.

Newly solidified in the communion of saints, the Church Penitent marched on to their eternal fates, supported by boons from their previous world. Compared to their earthly and heavenly counterparts, the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant, the Church Penitent were in a constant state of anagogical motion. Purgatory was a realm of *process*, an economy

of exchange between the sins of this world and the providence of the divine. As Le Goff writes, the formation of purgatory was at the same time the reformation of the cosmos: “space and time were broken down and reassembled in new ways; the boundaries between life and death, the world and eternity, heaven and earth all shifted their positions.”[116] This is perhaps another way of saying that purgatory was a product of the reconfiguration of the divine world that began in the twelfth century.

For this reason, contemporary developments in the scholastic theology of *acedia* offer a moral rationale for mourning as a pious rejection of grief. If purgatory bridged the divide between the living and the dead, *acedia* and its counter-virtue, patience, assimilated the grief of mourning into this anagogical religious programme. The recognition of *acedia* treats grief as an effect of human suffering while purgatory allows for the sublimation of this ‘corrective’ mourning into an anagogical process. For this reason, the sense of process evidenced in Dante’s textual depiction of satisfaction and melancholia is fundamental to the literary texts to which I will turn in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Nonetheless, the sense of anagogical progress that is implied by penitential mourning as a curative process is at odds with the material legacies of individuality bred by the memorial culture of the cult of the dead. As we have seen, purgatory was by no means a stable category, but the anagogical processes that it stood for predominated the discourse of mourning. The tension identifiable between the obsessive care for one’s artefactual and memorial legacy, and the communal erasure of personhood and sin that is the fundamental end of the sacrifice of the Mass demonstrate something of the difficulty of the work of mourning that remained despite mourning’s religious systematisation. This is the work of mourning that Chaucer treats in the *Book of the Duchess* when he proposes to explore the

[116] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 209.

ambivalence of material and corporeal forms of grief that remained an indelible mark of mourning in this new spiritual enterprise. Similarly, while *Pearl* adheres to the moral rationale for mourning in opposition to a melancholic *acedia*, the *Pearl*-poet clearly demonstrates a scepticism towards the equivalence between this life and the next in purgatorial mourning. What I will argue in the next two chapters is that these elegiac expressions of grief are a result of a resistance to the ideological simplification or demystification of death in this period, drawing on the material and moral discourses outlined above to explore alternate modes of mourning that reassert the indivisible kernel of melancholic grief at its heart. These tensions between the individual and the community, knowledge and mystery, corporeality and incorporeality are central to the elegiac conceits of both the *Book of the Duchess* and *Pearl*. These self-reflexive and experimental poems are expressions of a scepticism towards the ubiquity of this consolatory ideology, resisting non-contradictory or simplified processes of mourning and reinstating the perplexing and ambiguous engagement with the work of mourning that loss demands.

II: The *Book of the Duchess*: Beyond Consolation

The *Book of the Duchess* (hereafter *BD*) is obviously lacking a Christian consolation. Written in response to the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster and first wife of John of Gaunt, *BD* is an elegy with a curiously oblique structure and an explicitly worldly purview. Though the dream of the poem resembles a consolation, staged as a meeting between a mourner and the man who would console him, the poem is less a process of consolation than an exploration of the nature of his grief. The mourning knight, "clothed al in blak," has lost his wife, but it is not until very near the end of the poem that the loss is explicitly recognised as a death.[1] In a fleeting and anticlimactic exchange, he reveals that the woman he has lost is in fact dead and that his presumed lovesickness is in fact a form of disconsolate grief:

> ''Thow wost ful litel what thou menest;
> I have lost more than thow wenest.'
> God woot, allas! Right that was she!'
> 'Allas! sir, how? What may that be?'
> 'She is deed!' 'Nay!' 'Yis, by my trouthe!'
> 'Is that your los? By god, hyt ys routhe!'
> (1305-1310)

These lines, much studied for their unusual conversational rhythm and lack of pathos, are emblematic of the difficulties of reading *BD* as a consolation poem. The extremely late recognition of the death in question, just as the poem ends, offers little opportunity for a full philosophical consolation and the reaction of the narrator is very understated, even comically so, for such a tragic subject. In an unusual contradiction to the picture painted in the first chapter, the poem is removed from a discourse that would recognise death as a spiritual event, one that would offer an obvious reassurance and solace to the disconsolate mourner.

---

[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), line 457. All citations of Chaucer's work will be in reference to this edition unless otherwise stated and will be made in parentheses in the text.

Despite the ubiquity of the Christian, purgatorial mindset in the fourteenth century (outlined in chapter one), Christian consolation in *BD* is "inexplicit at best, absent at worst."[2] Exegetical readers attempted to locate the superficially absent Christian types in *BD*, seeking to satisfy the connections between biblical imagery and the predominantly pagan classical focus of the poem's references.[3] These attempts to explain the poem's implicit religiosity highlight the interpretative activity demanded of the reader, expressing a concern for the lack of consolation while recognising the subtle craft of Chaucer's poem.[4] Robertsonian readings, perhaps because of their contrarian critical stance, reveal the complexity of figurative modes within the poem, but it is clear that these Christian meanings are an effect of interpretation, even if the poem hints at a consolatory structure.

This obscurity of consolation culminates in a melancholic persistence of grief at the end of the poem. The circumspect discussion of death in the terms of the love-lament forestalls any meaningful attempt at consolation until the very late moment of the death's revelation. Even if the narrator's ignorance is feigned up to this point, the sudden ending of the dream is indicative of a melancholic resignation to the inexpressibility of death. Departing before the narrator can act further, the distraught Man in Black withdraws to a private, symbolically charged castle and the dream ends:

> With that me thoghte that this kyng
> Gan homward for to ryde
> Unto a place, was there besyde,
> Which was from us but a lyte –

[2] Jamie C. Fumo, *Making Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess*: Textuality and Reception* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), 57.

[3] The most notable exegetical interpretation of the poem is that of D.W. Robertson and Bernard F. Huppé Bernard Felix Huppé and D. W. Robertson, *Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

[4] More recently, Jane Gilbert offers a way to read a Christian anagogical teleology in the poem: "Although the Man does not appear to grasp them fully, the logical implications are clear: because even in her earthly life she made manifest the existence of God, White is the Man's means of redemption, his path to faith when he is in danger of despair because of her bodily death." Jane Gilbert, *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 196.

A long castel with walles white,
Be Seynt Johan, on a ryche hil,
As me mette; but thus hyt fil.
(1314-1320)

The castle is an uncanny image, as it is the means by which we can identify John of Gaunt as the mourning subject, but it is also an image that suggests the continuation of his mourning in an isolating, privatising mode.[5] The encoding of a patron in an anagrammatic signature is common practice in the French *dits* that Chaucer translates and adapts in this poem.[6] However the cryptic image suggests a distance rather than an intimacy between poet and supposed patron, a distance mirrored in the lack of consolation.[7] The enigmatic, isolated castle offers the reader an image of frustration and ambivalence rather than solace or recuperation, reflecting the melancholic course of mourning in the poem at large.

The Man in Black is caught between an intense, private grief and a public performance of the noble mourning role. The retreat into the castle represents a melancholic withdrawal into a private realm, but one that is heavily symbolic, encrypted with the public identities of the mourner, and even the motif of 'white' that represents his deceased wife.[8] The figurative incorporation of Blanche into the castle as "walles white" is suggestive of a melancholic incorporation of her death into a seigneurial legacy, a legacy that chimes more with the secular aspects of material commemoration outlined at the end of the previous

[5] Gaunt's given name is identifiable by the reference to "Seynt Johan," and his dukedom and earldom are represented by the "long castel" (Lancaster) and the "ryche hil" (Richmond). For a full biography of Gaunt, see Sydney Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt: King of Castile and Leon, Duke of Aquitaine and Lancaster, Earl of Derby, Lincoln, and Leicester, Seneschal of England* (London: A. Constable, 1904).
[6] Butterfield discusses the similarities and differences between Chaucer's circumspect identification of Gaunt and the anagrammatically signatures of the French *dits*. See Ardis Butterfield, "Lyric and Elegy in *The Book of the Duchess*," *Medium Aevum*, 60, no. 1 (1991), 33–60; and Butterfield, "Pastoral and the Politics of Plague in Machaut and Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 16 (1994), 3–27.
[7] For a comparison to Machaut's anagrammatic signatures, see Elizaveta Strakhov, "'Counterfeit' Imitatio: Understanding the Poet-Patron Relationship in Machaut's *Fonteinne Amoreuse* and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess.*" in *Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess: *Contexts and Interpretations,* ed. Jamie C. Fumo (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018), 157–75.
[8] For an interrogation of these lines' ambiguity, see Richard Rambuss, "'Processe of Tyme': History, Consolation, and the Apocalypse in the *Book of the Duchess*," *Exemplaria* 2, no. 2 (1990): 659–683.

chapter than it does with the ideal purgatorial relationship with the dead. Thus, the dream leaves us with a melancholic enigma in the form of the castle, an emblem for the complex interactions of sentiment and symbolism in the mourning of such a well-known figure. The castle represents a negotiation of private desires and public responsibilities, hinting at the rich public commemorations for Blanche that Gaunt held and asking how they might relate to his own personal affections. In the retreat to the castle, Chaucer proposes a textual mourning that is more reflective of the complex and prolonged processes that attend the human reality of grief than the blanket solace offered by Christian belief in post-mortem purgation.

This raises the issue of the dubious propriety of this elegy, eliding the commemoration of a real, loved person into a literary exercise. For Chaucer, Blanche is an appealing subject for elegy given the material grandeur of her commemoration and the extent of her worldly attachments. In other words, her secular legacy was a lot to contend with, certainly surpassing a straightforwardly religious, penitential discourse of mourning. As a public figure, often written about and written for, Blanche is a woman whose memory can be traced in the material and hereditary legacy that survived her, and it is my argument that it is precisely the difficulty of encapsulating this legacy in a discourse of mourning, spiritual or otherwise, that the poem addresses.[9] In this chapter, then, I want to explore the idea that Chaucer is interested not in a consolation for Blanche's death as much as he is interested in the thorny and tangled attachments that survive her death. *BD* is an exploration of how these entanglements are negotiated, enshrining mourning as a vexing experience, and navigating

[9] Blanche was a well-known and well-loved figure, and her historical life has been read as an important backdrop for the poem by scholars. In particular, see Jamie C. Fumo, "The 'Alderbeste Yifte': Objects and the Poetics of Munificence in Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*," *Exemplaria*, 28, no. 4 (2016), 277–96; Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); and Phillipa Hardman, "The *Book of the Duchess* as a Memorial Monument," *The Chaucer Review* 28, no. 3 (1994), 205–15. Blanche was situated in the middle of an international culture of courtly writing, a patron and friend of many writers. She was commemorated along with Phillipa of Hainault in *Le Joli Buisson de Jonece* by Froissart, a poem that has been read alongside *BD* by some scholars. See Ardis Butterfield, "Lyric and Elegy"; and J. J. Anderson, "The Man in Black, Machaut's Knight, and Their Ladies," *English Studies* 73, no. 5 (1992): 417–30.

the legacy of a woman at the heart of a cultural matrix of lavish courtly life and burgeoning vernacular literary traditions.

In exploring the resistance to this consolation, then, my elegiac interpretation is in line with critics who describe the poem as "disconsolate" or "anti-consolatory," but with a view for the ways in which these qualities might be perceived as productive rather than strictly negative.[10] Instead of reading mourning in the poem as either a nihilistic torpor or a transcendent consolation, I delineate the 'melancholic mourning' of the poem in the context of the elegy as an "open work," in which the work of mourning is codified as self-negating and continuous.[11] Steve Ellis articulates something of this inoperative work of mourning in the poem by positing that "the act of consolation itself may not be any 'solution' but precisely the problem."[12] Here, Ellis captures the self-negating circularity of the elegiac form in which an attempted consolation only serves to renew the Man in Black's sorrows rather than resolve them. Rather than seeking a rationale for the course of 'successful mourning,' *BD* engages with the pathology of mourning as a way of acknowledging and validating that experience. It is along these lines that Helen Phillips argues that Chaucer avoids the "hard remedy" of a Boethian consolation because "Boethian philosophy, which he obviously found intellectually very satisfying, offers an escape from human grief, but at the cost of denying the reality of the intensity of human, individual consciousness."[13] The problem that I would like to explore in this chapter, then, is how Chaucer seeks to write meaningfully about mourning without

[10] For readings of the poem as disconsolate, see Myra Seaman, "Disconsolate Art," in *Dark Chaucer: An Assortment*, ed. Myra Seaman, Eileen A. Joy, and Nicola Masciandaro (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2012), 139–49; and Steve Ellis, "The Death of the *Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review* 29, no. 3 (1995): 249-258; John Norton-Smith, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).
[11] See my discussion in the introduction.
[12] Ellis, 253.
[13] Helen Phillips, "Structure and Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review* 16, no. 2 (1981): 107–18. 115. This is a view that Phillips recently restated, arguing that Chaucer, like Machaut, offers a form of consolation that accepts, rather than remedies, expressions of lamentation, because "pain is itself inextricably at the core of desire; artistic expression of this, preserving the suffering in art, produces an art that refuses to discount the importance of physical, individual experience in this world." Helen Phillips, "The Shock of the Old? The Unsettling Art of Chaucer's Antique Citations," in *Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess*: Contexts and Interpretations*, 177–97.

relying on the 'hard remedy' of the Boethian consolation.[14] In doing so, I will examine the ways in which Chaucer frames the fraught experience of mourning as a protracted and worldly issue, removed from the stable truths of the consolation that reflected the ideology of the time.

I will begin by exploring the forms of consolation available to Chaucer in writing *BD*. Chaucer places great emphasis on how the processes of reading and writing align with the creative processes of the imagination, and his framing of literary activity and sleep suggests the alternative sources of solace available to the narrator. The scope of this project extends to the language of the poem, written in English, but largely translated from several French *dits*. Creating a textual space for a non-Latinate expression of human sentiment, these poems engage with what Alastair Minnis has termed "secularity": the development of a vernacular discourse parallel to the Latin tradition that carves out a new space for the exploration of literary and philosophical modes as alternatives to the form of the consolation.[15] Demonstrating the secularity of the poem, I explore the arguments of critics who have sought an alternate consolation in the poem's pleasurable literary form, and examine the primacy of the bodily and textual forms in the poem over religious or moral obligations. By highlighting the ways in which expressions of well-being and human nature displace a traditionally Christian concern for spiritual well-being, I argue that the resistance to consolation is grounded in the poem's discursive exploration of worldly concerns through the idle activities of reading and dreaming. Reading, dreaming, and poetry replace the 'hard remedy' of the spiritual consolation, offering a series of cryptic episodes whose connections are opaque and diffuse. Focused on deriving self-knowledge from non-religious activity, this category of

[14] See my discussion of Boethius' "hard" and "soft" remedies in the introduction.
[15] Alastair Minnis, "'I Speke of Folk in Seculer Estaat': Vernacularity and Secularity in the Age of Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27, no. 1 (2005): 25–58.

idling work can be extended to the work of mourning, which has as its locus the corporeal and textual inscription of sentiment beyond the spiritual truths of the consolation.

Moving on to the second half of the chapter, I focus more particularly on the consequences of the poem's fascination with the body as an inscriptional form. In my interpretation the body is the nexus of the processes of mourning in the poem, forming the affective bridge between the inexpressibility of individual mourning and the communal and perdurable form of the written text. On the one hand, it is the experience of suffering that connects the disparate bodies of the poem, offering a shared recognition of mutual affliction for the mourning figures. On the other, the abject nature of the dead body haunts the poem and threatens to collapse the work of mourning into an abyssal and asymbolic melancholia.

In the final section of this chapter, I examine the ways in which Blanche is incorporated into the poem as the idealised "White," drawing on the semantic range and significations of 'whiteness.' It is through the processes of incorporation and encryption that Chaucer proposes to resolve this dialectic between abject melancholia and nonreligious mourning conjured by his 'secular' turn. By enfolding White into the processes of the elegiac textual subject, Chaucer suggests that Blanche survives as a product of the depiction of the Man in Black's inconsolable mourning, kept alive by the generative melancholia of the elegiac text. Following the work of Phillipa Hardman, I compare the tomb-like structure of the poem to the monument tomb erected in memory of Blanche and John, exploring the tensions therein between the material and spiritual forms of remembrance. In doing so, I propose that the material excess of this memory-work is reflected in the poem's encryption of the historical death of Blanche in the artefactual form of the text. Incorporated into Gaunt's legacy through marriage and through their shared monument tomb, Blanche is cast as a self-sacrificial figure who authorises the interminable mourning of the poem. The resistance to a spiritual consolation acts as a testament to the eternal gratitude of the husband for his wife,

and as a way of probing the supposedly spiritual ends of material commemoration in the period.

By avoiding the inertia of abject despair while resisting a consolatory discourse that would transcend the textual form, the poem poses the enduring, habitual nature of mourning as a discursive, even bookish mode. The *Book of the Duchess* is a contrarian poem, epitomising the obstinacy of melancholia and opening up a realm of secularising and philosophically engaged poetry in English that extends from the vernacular development of literature as seen in France and Italy. More than anything else, *BD* is a poem about entanglement and ambiguity, spelling out these international and literary concerns with the obstinate and capitulative form of the elegy, always raising more questions than it answers.

The Refusal of Consolation

As with many poems of the period, *BD* has at its heart a Boethian dialogue, in which one figure laments their loss and another attempts to console them.[16] The complaint-and-dialogue structure is a valid form for conveying the extent and reasoning for the Man in Black's suffering, even if he is in the end inconsolable. In effect, the Boethian structure of the poem justifies the long and melancholic ruminations on loss, as it maintains the pretence that these misgivings will be righted with a rational consolation. And yet, although the generic expectations of the consolation shape the poem, a traditional consolation never materialises, as the final exchange shows. This section will demonstrate how Chaucer both sets up and subverts the expectations of the consolation.

[16] Kittredge's was the first study to take seriously the idea that the Narrator is attempting a kind of 'talking cure' and subsequent critics would identify a specifically Boethian strain of consolation in the poem. See G. L. Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1915); John Lawlor, "The Pattern of Consolation in *The Book of the Duchess*," *Speculum* 31, no. 4 (1956): 626–48.

The poem possesses an unmistakably Boethian vocabulary, even if the poem never truly fulfils its promise to "make… hool" (553) the Man in Black. The dialogue between the narrator and the Man in Black relies on the narrative premise of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, in which a man rails against the injustice that Fortune has committed against him, only to be consoled by Lady Philosophy herself, who explains to him the transience of his worldly suffering.[17] The Man in Black's extended metaphor of his loss as a game of chess with Lady Fortune is modelled as a typically Boethian complaint:

> 'For fals Fortune hath pleyd a game
> Atte ches with me, allas the while!
> The trayteresse fals and ful of gyle,
> That al behoteth and nothynge halt'.
> (618-621)

While these lines bear resemblance to particular passages in French literature, this lament against Fortune is largely generic, drawing on the conventional depictions of 'fals Fortune' that recur in consolatory literature and ultimately derive from Boethius.[18] Chaucer was certainly familiar with the *Consolation* later in his career, translating the poem around 1380, and presumably having studied it earlier. However, it seems unlikely that he was directly familiar with the work when he wrote *BD* in the late 1360s or early 1370s.[19] It is more probable that Chaucer, while aware of Boethius, had only second-hand contact with the

[17] For the most complete Boethian interpretation of the poem, see Michael D. Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry* (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1987).
[18] The full lament against Fortune (ll. 618-684) borrows directly from Machaut's *Remede de Fortune* and the *Roman de la Rose*, and indirectly from the *Consolation* itself, but the commonplace images found in this passage occur often in Medieval literature in general, including other Chaucerian works. Notably, "Fortune" and *Troilus and Creseyde*, I, 835-53 offer close parallels, though both these laments against Fortune are accompanied by responses that correct the misguided accusations. For discussions of the poem's Boethian sources, see Guillaume de Machaut, *Remede de Fortune*, in *Le Jugement du roy de Behaigne and Remede de Fortune*, ed. James I. Wimsatt and William Kibler (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), lines 1051-56; B. A. Windeatt, ed., *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues* (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1982); P. Courcelle, *La* Consolation de Philosophie *dans la tradition littéraire antécédents et postérité* (Paris: 1967), 103-158; and H. R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 55-7.
[19] See James Dean, "Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*: A Non-Boethian Interpretation," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 46, no. 3 (1985): 235–49.

Consolation through the French sources from which a large portion of his text is translated.[20] The Boethian influences on *BD* are more usefully thought of as concepts and traditions filtered through a body of Boethian-styled "complaint-and-comfort" French poetry.[21]

The narrator, upon overhearing the Man in Black's initial lay, casts himself in the role of the interlocutor so that, through conversation, the Man can be consoled. The narrator prompts the Man:

> '…telleth me of your sorwes smerte;
> Paraunter hyt may ese youre herte,
> That semeth ful sek under your syde.'
>
> (555-57)

The conversation between the Man in Black and the narrator mirrors the broad structure of Boethius' *Consolation*, in which an infallible instructor enlightens the dispossessed person through a therapeutic dialogue. Appealing to a Boethian sense of reason, the narrator reminds the Man in Black that if "ye for sorwe mordred yourselve, | Ye sholde be dampned" (724-25).[22] Yet, rather than being infallible or superior, the narrator suffers from the same afflictions as the Man in Black in the waking frame of the poem.[23] The Man in Black's experience of suffering is afforded authority over the narrator's reasoned position, and the recurrent usage of the couplet "'Thou wost ful lytel what thou menest; | I have lost more than thow wenest'" (743-44) exemplifies the Man in Black's dissatisfaction with the narrator's

[20] "It is perhaps more fruitful to approach the poem as an original reworking of the form of the *dits amoreux* than as a direct descendant of the *Consolation of Philosophy*," owing to the poem's multiple potentials for non-Boethian consolations and its distinctly un-Boethian sympathetic treatment of the experience of earthly suffering. See Phillips, introduction to *The Book of the Duchess*, ed. Phillips (Durham: Durham and St Andrews Medieval Texts, 1982), 54.

[21] This phrase is used by James Wimsatt to characterise the Boethian-influenced style of consolation offered by these poems, in which the theodicy of courtly love replaces that of monotheistic religion in the *Consolation*. See James I. Wimsatt, "'Anelida and Arcite': A Narrative of Complaint and Comfort," *The Chaucer Review* 5, no. 1 (1970): 1–8.

[22] Means, *Consolatio Genre* (17-31) characterises this as one of the defining features of a Boethian text.

[23] "There seems to be, then, no Boethian pattern of consolation within the 'frame' of the poem. Within the vision itself we do find such a pattern, but it is an almost complete reversal of the kind found in the *Consolation of Philosophy*: a 'superior' figure is consoled by an apparently fumbling, obtuse Narrator." Means, 103.

attempts to offer a consolation.[24] The potential for consolation is diminished by the narrator's lack of authority: he stands to learn from the Man, rather than the other way around.

The inexpressibility of death is repeatedly evidenced in these words as the only sentiment that can cut through the dissimulation of language. Recurring three times throughout the consolatory dialogue, the elegiac recognition of a distance between personal sentiment and common understanding wins out over the pseudo-Boethian interjections of the narrator, whose logical interventions are a source of confusion and even comedy throughout the poem. As an elegy, Chaucer's poem values the discursive nature of mourning as a melancholic process over the incisive rationalism of a spiritual consolation. For Chaucer mourning is a process which is as ambiguous as the dream itself and equally subject to interpretation.

Chaucer's divergence from key Boethian concepts in *BD* suggests a conscious subversion of traditional consolatory strategies through the implicit offer and subsequent rejection of consolation.[25] In doing so he aligns himself openly with the more worldly philosophy of the French poets whose work he translates often in *BD*.[26] Giving prominence to the lament rather than the consolation, *BD* resembles the pseudo-Boethian *dits amoureux* of Machaut and Froissart, rooted in a sense of presence and comfort rather than the apocalyptic discourse of Boethius' original.[27] These authors developed

---

[24] Cf. *BD*, lines 1137-38, 1305-06.

[25] "Consolationist critics have confused and over-simplified our understanding of this double offer and rejection by their implicit, and often unrecognised, adoption of the model of Freudian psychoanalysis to describe how the poem works." Denis Walker, "Narrative Inclusiveness and Consolatory Dialectic in *The Book of the Duchess*," *Chaucer Review* 18, no. 1 (1983): 2.

[26] For studies that argue against the consolatory structure of the poem, see Reid Hardaway, "A Fallen Language and the Consolation of Art in the *Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review* 50, no. 1 (2015), 159-177; Joerg O. Fichte, "*The Book of the Duchess* - a Consolation?", *Studia Neophilologica* 45 (1995): 53–67; James Dean, "Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*"; Phillip C. Boardman, "Courtly Language and the Strategy of Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*," *ELH* 44, no. 4 (1977): 567–79; and Friedman, "The Dreamer, the Whelp, and Consolation."

[27] This alternative consolation is theorised as an "erotic consolation" in Leglu and Milner's edited collection. See Catherine E. Leglu and Stephen J. Milner, ed., *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Palgrave, 2008).

> a consolation that was more consoling, more physical, which made more concessions to the here and now of the embodied individual, allowed him his particular circumstances and his perspective.[28]

In this context the individualising self-pity of the Man makes more sense, as his "circumstances and his perspective" are articulated through his resistance to spiritual sublimation. The melancholia of this process is captured through intimacy and enigma, asking questions of mournful experience rather than posing transcendent answers. These texts offer the possibility of a human connection, rather than a spiritual affirmation, by recognising suffering as a meaningful and valuable human experience.

The narrator fails to persuade the Man to see reason, foreclosing the possibility of a traditional consolation. However, the intimacy of their dialogue opens the potential for alternative forms of solace, as is the case in many of the sources for *BD*. The shared sentiment of suffering indicates a connection between the two figures that nuances the recuperative effects of the dream on the narrator, a connection that suggests the particular benefits of dreaming and reading if the two characters can be reconciled in some capacity. The intersubjective play of the dream form is a process of selfhood that involves both complainant and consoler, seeking affective links between the two rather than establishing a transcendent cause.[29] In one sense, this is a characteristically Chaucerian move of authorial deconstruction, making his audience complicit in the making of meaning.[30] Yet in another sense, while a measure of plausible deniability is perhaps one benefit of such oblique hermeneutics for Chaucer, the ambiguity of the relationship between the Man and the narrator

---

[28] Sarah Kay, "Consolation, Philosophy, Poetry in the *Dit*," in *The Erotics of Consolation*, 21.
[29] For an example of such an interpretation, see Judith Ferster, "Intention and Interpretation in the *Book of the Duchess*," *Criticism* 22, no. 1 (1980): 1–24.
[30] Chaucer's awareness of his audience's complicity in the meaning of the text allows him, in Babara Nolan's words, to subvert "the pretensions of literary endeavour." Barbara Nolan, "The Art of Expropriation: Chaucer's Narrator in *The Book of the Duchess*," in *New Perspectives in Chaucer Criticism*, ed. Donald M. Rose (Norman, Okla.: Pilgrim Books, 1981), 213. For comprehensive analyses of Chaucerian authorial subjectivity, see David A. Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators* (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1985); and A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984).

also emphasises the aesthetic quality of the elegy as a resistance to consolation.[31] Instead of the generalised dictum of Lady Philosophy's prose consolation, *BD* identifies more strongly with the disconsolate elegiac meters of Boethius the prisoner, whose poetic expression of personal circumstance and misfortune stands in resistance to consolation.[32]

As Alastair Minnis has set out, Chaucer and his French contemporaries were engaged in the "laicizing of consolation," in which we can read "the challenging presence of laicizing tendencies in vernacular literature" as a kind of "secularity."[33] Minnis defines secularity not in contrast to religiosity, but as allowing for "its own space and special valence, even as its relationship with (or disjunction from) religious interests is brought into sharp focus."[34] Poetry was an important meeting point for the personal, public, and cultural as a form of art that was reorienting philosophical approaches to these forces around an emergent literary secularity. The emergence of an English vernacular, in close relation to continental trends, is marked by just this resistance to consolation, and is an important context for Chaucer's poem. These texts are marked by their concern for terrestrial activity, not necessarily in contrast to religious concerns, but certainly without regard for overt anagogical meanings.[35] These poems, through the secularised explorations of desire, love, and consciousness, seek the enrichment of life for the living, rather than obsessing over the status of the dead.

---

[31] "Even if we suppose this is to be a strategy of self-insulation, by which Chaucer negotiates his delicate social position vis-a-vis Gaunt though a creative elaboration of the humility topos, the poem seems too diffuse to function chiefly as a public tribute, too idiosyncratic to be explicable entirely in terms of a historical (as opposed to imagined or self-projected) audience." Fumo, *Making Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess, 22.

[32] "Philosophy's prose may console the Boethius figure in the sense of eliminating him as an independent entity, but the poetry remains as a bodily pulse that is not recuperable to her overwhelming prose." Ibid., 27.

[33] Alastair Minnis, "Vernacularity and Secularity in the Age of Chaucer," 44, 58.

[34] Ibid., 58.

[35] Summarizing Machaut's *Le Jugement de Roi de Behaigne*, Minnis writes, "the human body in all its beauty, and the love that it inspires, may be ephemeral, but it is the poem's central concern. Dead is dead; the living are left to love as best they can while they can." Minnis, "Vernacularity and Secularity," 47.

The Vernacular Secularity of *BD*

The ongoing vernacular innovation in the fourteenth century offers a pertinent backdrop for the unfamiliar look of consolation in *BD*. This vernacular tendency away from spiritual consolation offers a way to frame the modern genre of elegy in Chaucer's time as a broad resistance to consolation. In this section, then, I will place Chaucer's poem in a literary, vernacular context through the recognition of its elegiac traits.

In Chaucer's lifetime English became an appropriate medium for government, philosophy, and literature, increasingly used in conjunction with both Latin and French.[36] As a result, the changing linguistic landscape of England provided the opportunity for experimentation with English as a literary language concurrent with other vernaculars.[37] Though the government statute of 1362 declared that English, instead of French, should be the language of the courts in England, there was not simply a "great linguistic shift among the secular elites (whether gentle or bourgeois) that provided the market and audience for Middle English literature."[38] The audience for Middle English literature was equally a Francophile, French-speaking one, so the flourishing of an English literature takes place alongside a pervading interest in all vernacular expression. If Italian was already established as a literary language, the later fourteenth century was witness to a particular flourishing of English and French as *tandem* vernaculars in courtly circles:

> Linguistic confidence in England emerges in tandem with confidence in the vernacular particularly in France. Over the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, both languages simultaneously enlarge their vernacular lexicons of

[36] For studies of multilingualism in late medieval literature in England, see Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); William Rothwell, "Henry of Lancaster and Geoffrey Chaucer: Anglo-French and Middle English in Fourteenth-Century England," *Modern Language Review* 99 (2004): 313–327; *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Ian R. Johnson (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); and M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).
[37] See Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (1995): 822–864.
[38] W. M. Ormrod, "The use of English: Language, law, and political culture in fourteenth-century England," *Speculum* 78, no. 3 (2003): 750-787.

> political and ethical discourse and they also theorise this development in remarkably similar terms.[39]

The linguistic translations and transferences necessitated by an integrated and international court culture were collaborative rather than competitive, marking an interest in divesting intellectual discourse of its Latin vocabulary. Ardis Butterfield writes that Chaucer is "working *with* the grain of a larger vernacular poetic enterprise" that already exists within the multilingual English court.[40] This new mode of vernacular intellectualism offered a space for English (as well as French) modes of philosophical expression that were somewhat removed from Latin, which remained the language of the liturgy.[41]

In *BD* in particular, the use of English as a vernacular language compounds the subversion of consolatory rhetorical strategies.[42] The ironic over-usage of the simple phrase "hit ys doon" (1334) at moments of heightened expectation and rhetorical uncertainty is a mark of the particularly vernacular sensibility of the poem. This translation of the scriptural "consummatum est" (John 19:30) into English demonstrates Chaucer's vernacular reconfiguration of religious discourse. The final words uttered by Christ on the cross in the Book of John, the phrase emphasises that Christ's death is an act of completion, redeeming humankind and substantiating Christian theology through his sacrifice.[43] The bathos of the moments in Chaucer's poem marked by this phrase is in stark contrast to the spiritual resolutions of theological and exegetical discourse suggested by its scriptural origins. The finality of the phrase indicates the perfection of Christological philosophy in its original

[39] Carolyn Collette, "Aristotle, Translation and the Mean: Shaping the Vernacular in Late Medieval Anglo-French Culture," in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, ed. Maryanne Kowaleski et al. (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2009), 373–85.
[40] Ardis Butterfield, "Chaucer's French Inheritance," 275.
[41] This is the subject of a recent dissertation. See Emily Dalton, "Improper Translations: Naming and Vernacular Poetics in Medieval England" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2017).
[42] A. J. Minnis discusses the range of rhetorical devices Chaucer uses in the poem. See Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 82-84.
[43] The *Glossa Ordinaria* glosses the phrases as "Consummatum est opus redemptionis humanae," making plain the implicit meaning of Christ's words.

context. Chaucer's "hit ys doon" carries an ironic suggestion of rhetorical completion, but in effect forecloses the possibility of a clarity of meaning that would substantiate the sense of a 'completed' work evoked by this phrase. Apart from its occurrence at the ambiguous ending of the poem, the phrase is employed at one point to prematurely end a passage about the nature of the narrator's "siknesse | That I have suffred this eight yeer" (36-37), as he hints that "there is phisicien but oon | That may me hele; but that is don" (39-40). The suggestion that the "phisicien" is Christ himself, and that the "siknesse" is a kind of *acedia* or spiritual torpor, energises an interpretative tension in the poem between the shadow of the traditional consolatory structure, and the searching ambiguities that its repression generates.[44] The evocation of Christ is implied by the suggestive translation of "consummatum est," but it is this phrase itself that ends the passage before the identity is revealed. Subtly playing with religious discourse while maintaining a pretence of ignorance, Chaucer's vernacular language knowingly avoids a specifically theological intellectual discourse and encourages an exploration of the signs and images rather than offering a prescriptive guide.

Phrases such as "hit ys doon" and, of course, "by God, that is routhe" give the text its indirect and irresolute form, always proposing a clear understanding that is never fulfilled. As Fradenburg writes of Chaucer's poetry,

> Chaucer's dream visions foreground ongoing attempts at (mutual) understanding (e.g., narratorial chitchat, varieties of diction), despite confusions and inconclusions. We leave his poems without tidings, but with the feeling that we have participated, intimately, in a search for meaning.[45]

These pithy, conversational phrases redirect the narrative and rhetorical momentum of the poem away from the answers to these philosophical questions and towards the discursive tendency of the vernacular, delaying definitive statements and consistently opening up new realms of discourse in the "search for meaning." Much has been made of Chaucer's witty,

[44] Huppé and Robertson, *Fruyt and Chaf* was the first study to propose this interpretation.
[45] L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, "Living Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 (2011): 49.

conversational style in juxtaposition to the more lyrical French style, but it seems more appropriate in this context to view this as an emphatically vernacular move, rather than a *specifically* anti-French one.[46] The novelty of Chaucer's poem lies not only in its Englishness, but in its vernacularity, continuing a process that was already underway on the continent. Written in a language which was not typically used for this kind of philosophical poetry, the *Book of the Duchess* marks a greater interest in vernacular expressions of secular responses to intellectual quandaries, challenging the religious significations of the Latin consolation tradition.[47] In Chaucer's poem, English becomes the language of mystery and confusion, of questioning and miscommunication – all processes of meaning that Chaucer uses to reflect the obliquity of the work of mourning.[48] Like the Man in Black's castle, English is both familiar and ambiguous, searching for meaning in transient discourses of worldly life rather than in the stable truths of spirituality.

By challenging the received wisdom of the consolation through vernacular forms, Chaucer follows Machaut as a writer who "continually reinvents and recasts the Boethian model, constructing his own vision of the relationships linking love, desire, memory, and art."[49] The superficial simplicity of the narrator's rhetorical strategies is undercut by the cryptic nature of the vision, a duality captured in the knowing use of the vernacular. When the Man in Black says that he "lakketh both Englyssh and wit" (898) to describe his wife, he tacitly aligns the vernacular with the elegiac, marking English as the language of non-expression. Chaucer's vernacularity highlights the difficulty of expression in discourses of

---

[46] For studies that argue for Chaucer's nationalist exceptionalism, see Wolfgang H. Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1963), 35; John M. Bowers, *Chaucer and Langland: The Antagonistic Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).
[47] See Eric Weiskott, "Early English Meter as a Way of Thinking," *Studia Metrica et Poetica* 4 (2017): 41-65.
[48] "Chaucer hit on a novel and daring strategy: to write not an expression of sympathy but a demonstration of the hopelessness of such an expression, a poem that enacts the hollowness of language and its inextricable entanglement in paradoxes of expression, intention, effect, and entailment." J. Stephen Russell, *English Dream Visions: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), 144.
[49] Sylvia Huot, "Guillaume de Machaut and the Consolation of Poetry," *Modern Philology* 100, no. 2 (2002): 170-71.

mourning, and the ironic subversion of a Boethian vocabulary in the vernacular mode of English distances the poem from the traditional rationalism of the Boethian remedy and reorients it around the familiar uncertainty of common expression. In Chaucer's English, the reassurances of the consoler are less authoritative and more conversational, open to the discursive negotiations of alternative sources of comfort.

A "Kinde" Consolation

Discursive vernacularity resists consolation and opens up a space for non-expression, for the irresolution of intellectual and philosophical enquiry. What Fradenburg describes as "narrational chitchat" and "varieties of diction" point to the willingness to talk about imponderables, to circumlocute final truths and to engage in a non-productive mode of inquiry. The anxiety over communication, the changes in tenor, and the dreamlike narrative are discursive approaches to mourning that displace the stable truths of a Boethian remedy. To recognise a mourning that exists beyond rational intellectualism and moral precepts, we must interpret the melancholic behaviour of the characters as a work of mourning divorced from consolation.

In this vein, many critics have sought to identify an "aesthetic consolation," or a "consolation of art" that refocuses mourning around literary, leisurely, and oneiric discourses in the poem.[50] The poem sets up its own space for a melancholic mourning not governed by a moral rationale but by a "lawe of kinde" (56). The narrator's early reference to the "lawe of kinde" that he encounters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* aligns his suffering with a literary

[50] For these interpretations, see: B. S. W. Barootes, "Idleness, Chess, and Tables: Recuperating Fables in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," in *Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess, ed. Jamie C. Fumo, 29–50; Reid Hardaway, "A Fallen Language"; Deborah Horowitz, "An Aesthetic of Permeability: Three Transcapes of the *Book of the Duchess*," *Chaucer Review* 39, no. 3 (2005): 259–79; Diane M. Ross "The Play of Genres in the *Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review* 19, no. 1 (1984): 1–13; and Denis Walker, "Narrative Inclusiveness and Consolatory Dialectic."

subjectivity, rather than a penitential one.[51] He opts to read rather than engage in other pastimes

> For me thoughte it better play
> Then playe either at ches or tables.
> And in this boke were written fables
> That clerkes had in olde tyme,
> And other poetes, put in rime
> To rede and for to be in minde,
> While men loved the lawe of kinde.
>
> (50-56)

The contrast between tables and fables has been taken by many critics to signify a moral justification for reading, highlighted by the renewed spirits of the narrator/poet at the end of the poem. Opting to read about Ceyx and Alcyone rather than "playe either at ches or tables" in the frame narrative of the poem, the narrator implicitly brackets reading and games in the same order of pastimes, while suggesting that the productivity of reading "fables" sets it apart from the traditionally sinful idleness of gaming.[52] Reading has a curative potential, stimulating the creative capacities of the mind and acting as a source of pleasure.

The "lawe of kinde" might be expressed, in Glending Olson's words, as the "hygienic justification of fiction" because the textual healing of the narrator corresponds with medieval teachings on the prophylactic and restorative potential of texts that order the imagination and settle the mind.[53] Indeed, studies that centralise issues of sickness and wellbeing have argued that this concern with "kinde" may even reflect anxieties over the spread of the plague that

---

[51] Most critics believe that even if he did use the *Moralisé* as his source, "the one thing that emerges unequivocally from such source studies is Chaucer's distance from the whole moralising tradition." Helen Cooper, "Chaucer and Ovid," 75.

[52] "The repetitive, cyclical, and unproductive forms of idleness exhibited by the Narrator and the Knight are counteracted by story (fable)." B. S. W. Barootes, "Idleness, Chess, and Tables," 45.

[53] For discussions of the hygienic and moral benefits of reading in the Middle Ages, see B. S. W. Barootes, "Idleness, Chess, and Tables"; Louise M. Bishop, *Words, Stones, & Herbs: The Healing Word in Medieval and Early Modern England* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007); and Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).

killed Blanche, denoted especially by the oblique references to his eight-year sickness.[54] However, whatever the cause of the narrator's diminished constitution, it seems to be cured by reading and sleeping.[55] It follows that the dialectic of sickness and health in the poem is indicative of a non-religious axis of wellbeing and the curative framework is dependent on the creative capacities of the dream-vision form.[56]

The vocabulary of "kinde" ties together the inscriptional and the empathetic processes of the poem, reflecting the resistance to the resolution of consolation that typifies elegy. The suffering figures of the poem – the narrator, the Man in Black, and also Alcyone – are connected along the lines of their imaginative capacity: through dreams, mourning, and writing. In each case, the suffering of these figures is embodied by textual practice and, rather than being a moral defect, their melancholia opens a creative space for the recuperative powers of art. In as much as the narrator's condition is "agaynes kynde" (16), it is the "lawe of kinde" that acts as a governing recuperative principle. For example, rather than Christ, the narrator (half-joking, half-serious) prays to "Morpheus, ... dame Juno, | Or som wight elles" (242-44) to bring him sleep. Again, he later explains that not Christ, but Pan, "god of kynde, | Were for hys sorwes never so wroth" (512-13) upon seeing the Man in Black's excessive grief. The "lawe of kinde" is a bodily rather than moral rationale whose frame of reference lies in the wisdom and iterability of literature. Importantly, it is a rationale that welcomes

[54] The conspicuous absence of the Black Death in both BD and Middle English literature at large is curious. On this general absence, Siegfried Wenzel says there is little evidence as to why the plague is hardly mentioned outside of chronicles and medical texts. He ventures that "the English, more than their Continental neighbours realised that cheerfulness in the face of death is not only an excellent psychological defence but may actually have medicinal value." Wenzel, "Pestilence and Middle English Literature: Friar John Grimestones' Poems on Death," in *The Black Death: The Impact of the Fourteenth-Century Plague: Papers of the Eleventh Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies*, ed. Daniel Williman, (Binghamton: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), 150.

[55] In a reading that can also extend to the depiction of the immaculate Maiden of *Pearl*, Fumo argues that the idealised body of Blanche betrays a "wishful evacuation and displacement of the black maculate spectre of the plague that claimed her life." Fumo, *Making Chaucer's Book of the Duchess*, 66.

[56] For discussions the Black Death and *BD*, see Ardis Butterfield, "Pastoral and the Politics of Plague in Machaut and Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 (1994): 3–27; and Norman Hinton, "The Black Death and the *Book of the Duchess*," in *His Firm Estate: Essays in Honor of Franklin James Eikenberry*, ed. Donald E. Hayden (Tulsa: Univeristy of Tulsa, 1967), 72–78.

idleness and sleep rather than prohibiting these activities as potentially morally compromising. The textual imagination becomes "a source of restorative value" and the narrator goes from dreamer to poet proper, energised by "the image-making power of the mind."[57] In this sense, the course of mourning is interpolated into a frame narrative about a sleepless poet who finds solace in literature, producing a literary work of mourning as a function of imaginative creation.

As Lears has demonstrated, more than the religious dangers of inactivity, this creative idling signals for Chaucer the presence of an imaginative realm beyond the theodicy of the traditional consolation.[58] While their idling is certainly not part of a religious or moral programme, the two melancholic men explore a parallel mourning on a secularising axis. In other words, in the idle conversation of the Man in Black and the narrator, and also in the reading, lamentation, and dreaming of the poem, we can discern a kind of 'inoperative' work parallel to the course of a traditional consolation, offering a non-religious solace, or at least a different tenor of expression.[59]

In contrast with the moral lassitude denoted by *acedia*, here sleep and other forms of idling are a natural form of rest, one that demonstrates a universal, human need for recuperation. Rather than the "fether-bed… And many a pilowe" (251-54) that he fantasises about, the narrator falls asleep "ryght upon my book" (274).[60] Knowingly mistaking a book for a pillow, the narrator's engagement with the book suggests the curative power of his reading, which grants him sleep and imaginative material for his dreams and draws him away

[57] Robert B. Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 68-69.
[58] Adin Esther Lears, "Something from Nothing: Melancholy, Gossip, and Chaucer's Poetics of Idling in the *Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review* 48, no. 2 (2013): 205–21.
[59] As Lears argues, *acedia* as a religious sin is present in the Man in Black's suicidal suggestions but is traced in the poem more generally as a resistance to activity. For Lears this tension prompts the act of poetic writing: not strictly productive, but not an inert or nihilistic pose either.
[60] This moment is mirrored, according to Robert Edwards, when the narrator wakes up in a book in his dream. See Robert R. Edwards, *The Dream of Chaucer: Representation and Reflection in the Early Narratives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 1-2.

from his despairing torpor without the absolution of consolation. Reid Hardaway argues that "from Ovid, Chaucer finds a precedent to form an important correspondence between art, sleep, and the sublimation of pain."[61] The moral compunction to be healthy is referred to in terms of a natural law of human wellbeing rather than a spiritual obligation. It is telling that the book of stories about old kings and wisdom that the narrator picks up is not in fact the bible, but a collection of Ovidian stories, setting up a textual moral authority rather than a religious one. The narrator's melancholia establishes a moral framework around a psychological and somatic purview of sadness and wellbeing in the poem. Melancholia is validated in the text then as a kind of inoperative work, an idle form of recuperative activity that expresses the 'kindness' of human experience. By not erasing melancholia as a potentially sinful form of torpor, the poem validates the persistence of grief as a kind of idle activity akin to creative processes such as sleep or leisurely reading. This work is continuous, having no fixed goal, and producing works that beget further idle creative endeavour: dreams, poems, and songs of lament. Evidently, this work is connected to the material form of the body, rather than the absolute and eternal form of the soul.

Melancholic mourning becomes part of the vocabulary of creative expression through the sublimation of the work of mourning into a framework of reading and dreaming. At the heart of this process, then, is the recognition of the body itself as a source of knowledge, and even wisdom, separate from the incorporeal form of the soul. Rather than turning away from earthly attachments and a sense of one's transient corporeal existence, the poem considers the inscriptional quality of the body and posits a parallel, idling work in which these corporeal forms can be explored. Neither inert nor strictly productive, the work of mourning is aligned with the reconciliation of the body with non-consolatory forms of wisdom, coming to know the self, irrespective of one's spiritual status. In *BD*, the body can tell us things about our

[61] Hardaway, "A Fallen Language," 164.

condition that are otherwise obscured by the transcendence of earthly forms in the traditional consolation, and a recognition of the mutual anxieties and pleasures of the body becomes an axis for the expression of deeper human sentiments.

In this first half of the chapter, I have proposed a kind of inoperative work that is parallel to consolation in the poem, but resistant to its spiritual absolution. Forms of traditionally private, secular activity—leisure, sleep, melancholia, reading—make up an axis of recuperative idling that is not directly opposed but certainly resistant to the spiritual rationalism of the consolation. I have identified a space for the creative expression of mourning in the vernacular mode that is aligned with a representation of a private life, worldly and non-religious. This activity does not disavow the tenets of a good Christian life, but it opens up a parallel space for exploring the self beyond one's spiritual obligations. It is a space in which the ambivalence of mourning is evident, not driven by moral rationale but by the creative excess that the expression of loss inculcates. For Chaucer, this creative excess is a source of intellectual stimulation and poetic inspiration, grounded in the transient but shared knowledge of a worldly existence.

In the second half of this chapter I will elucidate how Chaucer expresses this mortal confrontation with death as neither a completely despairing submission to the finitude of the body, nor a contrasting resolution of mourning as an overcoming of our corporeal natures through a dismissive intellectual rationalism. I will argue that Chaucer finds in the form of the dream-vision a materialistic mode that transfers the melancholic circuits of idle activity to the inscriptional realm of the text, continuing through ambivalence and ambiguity the work of mourning as a persistent attachment to a lost object. Through the recognition of non-religious discourses of mourning, Chaucer posits a kind of secularising commemoration of Blanche that centres on her as an idealised and iconic object, one whose loss is interpolated into a narrative of seigneurial power and succession. Beyond spiritual concerns for her soul,

Gaunt's loss is a moment when private mourning is juxtaposed with public performance, and it is the elegiac incorporation of Blanche into these secular discourses that enables this exploration of mourning as a vexing and unresolved process.

Writing the Body: "Rowthe" and "Trowthe"

The circuits of idle discourse and secular life are worthy of intellectual pursuit in Chaucer's poem, marking out an arena for a difficult discussion about grief. To talk about elegy in the context of *BD* is to recognise how Chaucer uses these idle forms of reading and dreaming to energise a discussion about the similarly ambiguous trajectories of mourning. Elegy, then, for Chaucer is an embodied mode, consolidating mourning as a circuitous, ambiguous process appropriate to vernacular poetry. However, the public and perdurable form of the text offers Chaucer a way to monumentalise this process, to translate loss into a shared, universal recognition of the difficulty of that loss. The encryptions and ambiguities of *BD* reflect the persistent nature of the work of mourning while codifying it in an intersubjective form, keeping open the wound of loss so that others might experience or understand one's pain. In the second half of the chapter, I intend first to explore the elegiac strategies used by Chaucer to codify the work of mourning along a shared corporeal and textual axis, and then to think through how the confrontation between history and mourning is negotiated in the dissemination of elegiac discourse. To begin with, then, this section will examine the bodily nature of suffering in BD and demonstrate how Chaucer leverages the continuity between textual representation and corporeality to establish a mutuality of suffering that makes elegiac expression possible.

Writing about the body means writing about suffering in *BD*, a fact that is enshrined in the recurrence of the "rowthe"/"trowthe" rhyme, As the rhyme suggests, there is a truth to suffering that allows for empathy. Empathy is a great tool for the elegist, as it offers the

written text a way to enter the private discourse of loss as a demonstration of mutual exposure, facilitating an empathetic identification where words fail. Suffering exceeds textual representation, but beyond the inexpressibility of pain, lyric expression serves as an invitation to consider the pain of others as though it were our own. This is a point made clear in the first occurrence of the "rowthe"/"trowthe" rhyme when the narrator describes his reaction to the Ceyx and Alcyone story:

> Such sorowe this lady to her tok
> That trewly I, that made this book,
> Had such pittee and such rowthe
> To rede hir sorwe that, by my trowthe,
> I ferde the worse al the morwe
> Aftir to thenken on hir sorwe.
> (95-100)

The response elicited by the textual embodiment of suffering is one of introspection. The intersubjectivity of this recognition of another's suffering through textual forms is encapsulated by the ambiguity of the uncanny description of the self as "I, that made this book." The ironic suggestion that Chaucer wrote the Ceyx and Alcyone story (and might be considered a poet like Ovid himself) serves as a meditation on fame and authorship, ideas that he will explore in more depth in the *House of Fame*.[62] More immediately, the elision of Chaucer and Ovid's work into the ambiguous "this book" also demonstrates the permeability of subjectivity in moments of textual embodiment. This is to say that more than just an act of mimesis, elegy invites empathy by figuring the profundity of suffering.[63] For this reason, the recurrent "rowthe"/"trowthe" rhyme prefigures the ending of the dream, as discussed above, where "trowthe" (1309) is rhymed with "rowthe" (1310) for the final time as evidence of the

[62] Isabel Davis and Catherine Nall's edited collection offers a wide-ranging exploration of the subject. See Davis and Nall, ed., *Chaucer and Fame: Reputation and Reception* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015).
[63] On the inexpressibility topos in elegy, see Ann Chalmers Watts, "*Pearl*, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss," *PMLA* 99 (1984).

ultimate failure of words to do justice to suffering. Though this signals the persistence of the Man in Black's mourning, the elegiac recognition of inexpressibility confirms the insipid truth of this suffering and thus validates it.[64] This kind of poetry allows for the sharing of sentiment by means of recognising in another something of your own afflictions. Although elegy does not seek a remedy for suffering, it does demonstrate the fundamental humanity of suffering.

Pity undergirds this alternative consolation as an identification with another that confirms a kind of metaphysical truth.[65] The narrator's identification with the suffering bodies of the poem ensures that the work of mourning continues as a textual work of reading and writing. As an elegy, *BD* capitulates to grief through its discursive form and utilises that suffering as an opening for human connection. The body in pain is central to the operation of elegy for Chaucer as it is the inscription of the body that enables elegiac expression.

If in the pseudo-Boethian poems of the later Middle Ages "the knowledge and enlightenment that are promised have their foundation in the body," in Chaucer's poem this promise is fulfilled by the recurrent patterns of bodily suffering.[66] The close association of the body with the inscriptional and productive form of the text emphasises the perdurable and exemplary nature of suffering. Indeed, the inscriptional function of the body as a written object is reminiscent of the wisdom of Job's lamentations, in which he asks "who mai graunte me þat my wordis be writun?"[67] Job, who asks for his pains to be recorded "wiþ an yrun

[64] "Instead of being an explicit memorial, the poem is a meditation on the problems of language of sentiment on such occasions, a subtle examination of one of the crucial spheres in which language fails to represent the motives and the will behind its articulation." J. Stephen Russell, *English Dream Visions: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), 142-43.
[65] Fradenburg argues that pity, related to the religious implications of Latin *pietas*, is the essential mechanism for identification in the poem: "Crossing the line between subject and other, pity—*pite* in Middle English—is an important term in the specular construction of goodness and identity, the linking of identity to the gift: to open oneself up or pour oneself out is to show what one is and that one is." Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2002), 86.
[66] Kay, "Touching Singularity," 27.
[67] Henry Littlehales, *The Prymer; or Lay Folks' Prayer Book*, Early English Text Society, o.s. 105, 109 (London, 1895), 68-69, Lesson viii. See my discussion in chapter one above.

poyntel" shows that the bodily experience of suffering persists in textual forms and is in itself a valuable kind of embodied wisdom.[68] The prevalence of lay asceticism in the fourteenth century gives a sense of the prominent role the bodily experience of suffering had come to play in the production of knowledge.[69] The mutuality of suffering bodies as outlined above establishes mourning in *BD* as a knowable and valuable experience. In the same way that the liminal modes of the text and the dream are closely aligned with their somatic rather than spiritual causes, mourning is explored through the body rather than the spirit. Through the suffering body, Chaucer contemplates the changeable but continuous work of mourning across the text, giving a sense of how discrete subjectivities become part of a lasting and collective textual tradition.

The most prominent example of suffering in the text is the Man in Black, whose overheard elegiac song is accompanied by the obvious physical distress of his body. The Man's pain is written on his body as a sickly pallor and a melancholic physiology:

> Hys sorwful hert gan faste faynte
> And his spirites wexen ded;
> The blood was fled for pure drede
> Doun to hys herte, to make hym warm –
> […]
> And that made al
> Hys hewe chaunge and wexe grene
> And pale, for ther noo blood ys sene
> In no maner lym of hys.
>
> (488-499)

His bodily suffering confirms his feelings as though they were words etched on his face. Grief strips away dissimulations of language and presents the naked truth: "Y wrecche, that

[68] Ibid.
[69] For a discussion on the rise of lay asceticism, see Amy Appleford, *Learning to Die in London, 1380-1540* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

deth hath mad al naked | Of al the blysse that ever was maked" (577-78).[70] The Man's suffering body can be read, much like his song, to indicate his melancholic humour and his emotional depth.[71] The body is aligned with the text as a source of embodied wisdom, confirming the Man in Black's affliction and, therefore, the nobility of his sentiment. Not only does his embodied suffering make his pain legible and knowable, but it invites the empathy of the narrator. The pale, cold complexion of the Man in Black recalls the melancholic "hevynesse" (25) of the narrator, as well as the disconsolate Alcyone, fainting and "as cold as ston" (123). Denuded of his worldly pleasures, the Man in Black's suffering indicates to the narrator their likeness through the semiotics of the exposed, grieving body. The experience of suffering resonates across scenes of grief and the similarities between each figure are codified by the inscriptional nature of the body. The repeatable textual representation of suffering becomes the foundation for the melancholic persistence of the work of mourning.

The figures of the poem become knowable and identifiable through their shared exposure to death, codified in the legible form of the body. In this sense, the discourse of mourning in the poem meditates on the finitude of our mortal existence but poses creative ways that finitude may be overcome or at least prolonged in the elegiac text. In resisting consolation, the poem conveys the primacy of the body in the search for meaning. However, this mode is tempered by the finitude of the body. The living body is the conduit for the elegiac discourse of mourning, but as the evocation of the dead in that discourse shows, death

---

[70] For a discussion of grief coded as nudity in the poem, see Elizabeth Liendo, "'In Hir Bed al Naked': Nakedness and Male Grief in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," *Philological Quarterly* 96, no. 4 (2017): 405–24.
[71] "Indeed, Chaucer insists on the 'true feeling' of the Black Knight by using a medicalised discourse to describe the Black Knight's death wish." Rebecca F. McNamara, "Wearing Your Heart on Your Face: Reading Lovesickness and the Suicidal Impulse in Chaucer," *Literature and Medicine* 33, no. 2 (2015): 261. Cf. M. C. Bodden, "Disordered Grief and Fashionable Afflictions in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* and the *Clerk's Tale*," in *Grief and Gender: 700-1700*, ed. Jennifer C. Vaught and Lynne Dickson Bruckner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 51–63.

is a limit that defies textual sublimation. The body is both the foundation of knowledge and the finite object that threatens the meaning therein.

In the next section I will examine how the body of the lost object functions in this process. Central to mourning, but fundamentally abject, the dead body is incorporated by elegy as familiar but uncanny. The elegy works to ensure that the disclosure of death does not throw mourning into inert despair and therefore keeps alive the deceased's memory. Comparing the Man in Black's incorporation of Blanche to Alcyone's abject failure in mourning Ceyx, I will demonstrate how the *Book of the Duchess* walks the line between nihilistic despair and textual solace.

Presenting Blanche as "White": The Fantasy of Incorporation

The body, like the text, produces meaning but is also subject to its own material limitations. The elegy works to express that meaning through language as a continuous process, regardless of its formal boundaries. For the *Book of the Duchess* this means that the poem is reliant on the body as the site of meaning, but that the expression of grief must be slanted or circumspect lest it be voided by the explicit recognition of death as truly abject. If thus far I have leveraged my definition of elegy to demosntrate how we might distinguish it from the 'successful' mourning that consolation proposes, in this section I will show the work of mourning is differentiated from melancholia as an abyssal failure of mourning. The example that Chaucer provides of this failure is the horrifying revelation of Ceyx's body, which collapses the work of mourning into a void of meaning. We can contrast this with the later presentation of Blanche as "White," a figure who is incorporated into the text through the circumspection of elegiac language. Here, I will contrast the disconsolate grief of Alcyone with the strategies of incorporation and encryption deployed by the Man in Black, to emphasise the acute difference between the work of mourning and melancholia.

As Diane Ross puts it, "essentially, the story of Ceyx and Alcione provides a bad example of handling grief."[72] In a poem all about shifting discursive modes and encrypted meanings, the revelation of Ceyx's body is a contrary example of the danger of a direct exposure of death in elegy. We are told Alcyone "saw noght" (213) when she receives Ceyx's message, spoken by Morpheus through Ceyx's body, though the description of his resurrection and presentation is disarmingly visceral. The implication is that she experiences the encounter in her dreams, though the body is "ryght at hyr beddes fet" (199). The immediacy of Ceyx's "dreynte body" (195) is juxtaposed with the imagistic nature of this retelling. Ceyx's body is both horrifyingly intimate and altogether absent. Mediated by translation and transmission both narratively and intertextually, its meaning is supremely ambiguous.[73] The lack of an ending to the retelling highlights the failure of consolation, and instead of a transformation, the episode is prematurely ended with the curt explanation that Alcyone "deyede within the thridde morwe" (214).[74] Stripped of its potential to ease the pain of Alcyone's suffering, the macabre body signifies the uncomfortable ambivalence of mourning, and the horrifying disclosure of the corpse does not give rise to an apocalyptic revelation akin to spiritual knowledge, but instead highlights the profundity of death as a human crisis.

As Fradenburg describes it, "this corpse-image that images the insensibility of the image gives no more clearly the gift of life than the gift of death."[75] Ceyx's corpse is a

---

[72] Diane M. Ross, "The Play of Genres in the *Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review* 19, no. 1 (1984): 1–13.
[73] Wimsatt posited that Machaut's *Fonteinne Amoreuse* is the main source for the retelling, but he and other critics have argued that he would have had access to the *Ovide Moralisé* and the original Latin as well. For studies on sources for the Ceyx and Alcyone story, see James Wimsatt, "The Sources of Chaucer's 'Seys and Alcyone'," *Medium Aevum* 36 (1967): 231–241; Götz Schmitz, "Gower, Chaucer, and the Classics: Back to the Textual Evidence," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), 95–111; A. J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982); John M. Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven, CN.: Yale University Press, 1979).
[74] The bathos of these lines is discussed at length by Jeff Espie. See Espie, "Alcyone's Grave."
[75] Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love,* 95.

gruesome reminder of the contradictory nature of the elegy, a mode which attempts to evoke the lost object, but that can never faithfully disclose death lest the text reveal its truly asymbolic nature. If an alternative consolation shows the productive nature of the physical body beyond our intellectual capacity for spirituality, it also contends with the problem of death as a moment of total abjection, prompting the non-productive and non-symbolic inertia of melancholia. Grief is embodied and legible in the poem, but the wraith of Ceyx serves as a reminder of the mortality that limits bodily knowledge.[76]

Unlike the reanimation of Ceyx, the meaning of elegy is sustained by the non-disclosure of death, by circumlocuting a final pronouncement of death as either a totally despairing event or a distraction from greater truths. Though the poem, through its ambiguous oneiric form and idling literary discourse "avoids direct confrontation with the fact of death," Ceyx is a reminder that, "*BD* offers no easy way out of the impasse of grief."[77] Following on from this negative exemplum, Chaucer shows that the proper aim of the elegy is to 'incorporate' the lost object into an *ongoing* discourse of mourning, in effect retaining something of the lost object by evoking its presence without ever succumbing to its true abjection. To incorporate is to hold the lost object within oneself without allowing it to be recognised in its true, abject guise, and it is the process that the Man in Black uses to elegise Blanche.

The process of incorporation is often recognised as a part of mourning, though is for most theorists a feature of pathological rather than 'healthy' mourning. It requires the reconciliation of the abject corpse with symbolic systems of meaning, taking the lost object 'inside' oneself and belatedly protecting it from harm. Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok

[76] Fradenburg argues that the disclosure of death can serve to nullify the vicissitudes of mourning as an unbearable engagement with the Real: "The signifier, image, and incorporated/projected object defend against life by preparing me, by putting me in the position of having already been through death." Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, 83.
[77] Fumo, *Making Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess, 35.

define incorporation as a fantasy of possessing the lost object sustained by the rejection of its abject reality. For Abraham and Torok, the fantasies associated with the imagined possession of the love object are attributed to "the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognised as such, would effectively transform us."[78] Abraham and Torok argue that incorporation underlies the operation of melancholia by sustaining the imaginary survival of the lost object.[79] In this way, incorporation is a pathological process of avoiding the transformative effect of loss on the psyche, and is not to be conflated with introjection, which is the transformation of the psyche to accommodate the corresponding vicissitudes of reality. Incorporation is a defensive mechanism that attempts to stave off the ego-transformation of mourning by subverting the process of what Freud calls "reality-testing."[80] Abraham and Torok emphasise the extremely literal operation of melancholic fantasies, which rely on internalisations of essentially symbolic psychic situations. Introjection requires the ability to put "the original oral void into words," and is thus foreclosed by elegy through the rhetorical convention of inexpressibility.[81] Mourning is the ability to come to terms with a loss by accepting that incorporation is a symbolic response to the "basic intrapsychic situation... created by the reality of a loss sustained by the psyche."[82] The melancholic, by contrast, seeks to satisfy the desire to fill or replace this symbolic void by investing in the fantasy over the reality. Incorporation is melancholic for Abraham and Torok because it entails a retreat into a

---

[78] Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, "Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation," in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 126.
[79] I follow the definition in Abraham and Torok, "Introjection versus Incorporation," which modifies Freud's use of the term in "Mourning and Melancholia" and contrasts it with "introjection". For alternative definitions of the two terms, cf. Melanie Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," in *Love, Guilt, and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945 (The Writings of Melanie Klein: Volume 1)* (New York: Free Press, 1975), 344-69.
[80] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. And ed. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth, 1957), 247.
[81] Abraham and Torok, 132.
[82] Ibid., 126.

psychic work of sustaining the fantasy of possession, and thus protects the ego from the change that the acceptance of loss would bring.

In the most basic sense, Blanche is incorporated into the poem as White, a benign textual copy. Incorporation is a process grounded in the perversion and misrecognition of the love object to fake its survival.[83] Rather than a self-consistent entity, the object becomes something that must be reconciled with the mourner's fantasy. Translated from realm of the dead into the realm of the dream, White is the figure that sustains the fantasy that the mourning Man in Black might somehow retain possession of his lost object. The rich symbolism of 'Whiteness' allows for the incorporation of Blanche into a semiotic realm of textual symbolism as a symbolic figure rather than an abject corpse. Where Ceyx is presented *as* Ceyx, Blanche is incorporated as White.

At the heart of the poem is the absent presence of White, an incorporated and disembodied Blanche. It is her incorporation into the mnemonic architecture of the poem that allows for the elegiac expression of grief as the protracted work of mourning, denying the reality of her death. In her symbolic guise, Blanche becomes a cryptic, generative, and ultimately unknowable figure. Peter Travis shows that the name "White" is key to the "uninterpretability" of the absent figure at the centre of the poem.[84] The construction of the elegiac subject around this absence necessitates a negation of Blanche as an historical figure and her reinscription in the poem as an indeterminate locus of desire:

> A more proper sign would surely be too determinate, too final: to utter that rigid designator would be like naming death itself. Thus, both for Chaucer's immediate audience and for his modern readers, part of 'white''s perfection as a name is that it names so imperfectly.[85]

[83] "Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested... than lost." Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 12.
[84] Peter W. Travis, "White," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000): 5.
[85] Ibid., 65.

Travis highlights the need for a certain obfuscation of the object that allows for the work of mourning to play out as a linguistic game, because it is the distance between the sign and the true object that allows for the indeterminacy that sustains the work of mourning. Blanche is positioned not only as the lost object, but more pervasively as the absence that authorises the continued desire of the subject. Like the dream itself, then, "much of the meaning of Chaucer's poem resides in the uninterpretability of the absence, negation, and lack at its centre."[86] The 'whiteness' of White displaces Blanche's abject body by allowing for her incorporation as a blank symbol at the heart of the poem. The generic quality of the paronym "White" rejects a specific nomenclature that would situate her in an historical context and in doing so authorises the desire of the subject as a perennially incomplete process.[87] The meaning of "White" is predicated on the repression of Blanche as an abject source of despair, and this is achieved through the process of incorporation. Crucially, this is a process that relies on the slipperiness of meaning afforded by the imaginative ambiguity of the dream-vision form, and the uninterpretability of the Man in Black's lay is the most prominent mark of the poem's investment in a fantasy of incorporation.

Though melancholic, the Man's mourning is mediated and ambivalent, avoiding a disclosure of death that would upset elegiac rhetoric. In contrast to the failure of mourning discourse in the Ovidian story, the Man's mourning avoids the real body of Blanche as a way of deferring this calamitous disclosure of death. In the next section, I will show how Chaucer draws on the circumspect and ambiguous rhetoric of elegy to emphasise the ambivalence with which the lost object is treated in mourning and, most importantly, how that object is warped and appropriated to be accommodated into a discourse of mourning.

---

[86] Ibid., 5.

[87] "A paronym signifying not a substantive but an accident, 'white' gestures toward some *aliquid* somewhere in space and in time with an imprecision that is in fact consoling its indeterminacy." Travis, "White," 65 (emphasis in original).

The Unseen Blanche: Disclosing the Truth about White

The Man's lay is one of the most puzzling and critically contested scenes of the poem, owing mostly to the narrator's apparent ignorance of its clear pronouncement of White's death.[88] Until as late as line 1139, the narrator acts as though this has been a love lament rather than an elegy.[89] However, the song itself is rather plain in its meaning:

> 'I have of sorwe so gret won
> That joye gete I never non,
> Now that I see my lady bryght,
> Which I have loved with al my myght,
> Is fro me ded and ys agoon.'
>
> (477-79)

Perhaps given the generic simplicity of the song, the narrator seems to misinterpret the elegy as a love-lament, an interpretation that precipitates further analysis of the Man's condition, rather than a straightforward expression of sympathy.[90] The song declares the death, but the narrator's ambiguous response to the overheard lay indulges the fantasy that the death is not yet revealed, allowing him to ask the Man, apparently innocently, to "telleth me of your sorwes smerte" (555). Described as "a lay, a maner song, | withoute noote, without song" (471-72), though it has no music, it embodies the form of a song.[91] The lay is typical of the embodied absence of the elegiac mode, as the non-presence of song is suggestive of the non-

---

[88] For recent surveys of literature on the lay, see Philip Knox, "'Hyt Am I:' Voicing Selves in the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Roman de La Rose*, and the *Foteinne Amoureuse*," in *Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess, ed. Fumo, 135–56; and Fumo, *Making Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess, 45-47, 50-55.

[89] Cf *BD* line 1139: "'What los ys that?' quod I thoo."

[90] For studies that treat the lay as conventional rather than elegiac, see Steven Davis, "Guillaume de Machaut, Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, and the Chaucer Tradition," *The Chaucer Review* 36, no. 4 (2002): 391–405; Arthur W. Bahr, "The Rhetorical Construction of Narrator and Narrative in Chaucer's the *Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review*, 35, no. 1 (2000): 50; W. A. Davenport, *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative* (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1988), 65; W. H. French, "The Man in Black's Lyric," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 56 (1957): 231–241; Donald C. Baker, "The Dreamer Again in *The Book of the Duchess*," *PMLA* 70, no. 1 (1955): 279–82; and Lawlor, "The Pattern of Consolation."

[91] For studies on presence and inscription in the poem, see Alan J. Fletcher, *The Presence of Medieval English Literature: Studies at the Interface of History, Author, and Text in a Selection of Middle English Literary Landmarks* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012); and Seeta Chaganti, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription, Performance* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

disclosure of its content. The dreamer's apparent confusion epitomises the "méconnaisance" which is at "the heart of the elegy."[92] The performative balance of "adequately representing an absent or lost object" without disclosing its true nature requires a knowing dismissal of a reality beyond the symbolic realm of the text.[93] The apparent non-disclosure of the song precipitates an analytic dialogue that displaces the death with the fantasy that "White" may in fact survive. For the narrator overhearing the song, this moment pre-empts the ending of the poem in which the fact of the wife's death is re-revealed.

In one sense, then, the Man in Black's song "ruptures the surface of the narrative" by disclosing the fact of death prematurely.[94] By pre-empting the final climactic exclamation of death, the song belies the therapeutic dialogue and ensures that the 'secret' of the Man in Black's grief is already known. It is only because of the obliqueness of the form of the overheard song that the pretence of the dialogue can be sustained, a consolatory pretence that is denied in the Ceyx and Alcyone story by the explicit revelation of death.[95] Though the song is quite clearly about the death of his wife, the permeability of the lyric "I" allows for the fact of death to be displaced on to the realm of interpretation and therapeutic analysis.[96] The lay expresses grief, but the sentiment is obscured by the combinatory effect of the intercalated form. The "song... without song" is a traumatic expression clothed in the disarming form of blank verse and is typical of the poem's strategy of displacing the object of grief while perpetuating the work of mourning. Much like the non-specificity suggested by the paronym "White," the song entertains the fantasy that the meaning of the song is not already known by the participants. In this sense, the performance of the song enables a kind

[92] Travis, "White," 5
[93] Ibid., 35.
[94] Philip Knox, "Voicing Selves," 153.
[95] "Chaucer borrows these niceties, but by allowing them, in translation, to seem inappropriate, even gauche, shows himself more concerned with the social embarrassment of death than with the social appropriateness of elegy." Ardis Butterfield, "Lyric and Elegy in *The Book of the Duchess*," *Medium Aevum* 60, no. 1 (1991): 54.
[96] For discussions of the combinatory nature of the intercalated song, see Knox, "Voicing Selves"; Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 82-84; and Butterfield, "Lyric and Elegy."

of literary game in which the elegy is not an elegy, and mourner and audience share a discursive, intersubjective ignorance about the private meaning of the song.[97]

This non-articulacy of the song is highlighted by the parallels between the first meeting of the two men and Ceyx's visitation of Alcyone. The Man in Black is so absorbed in his grief that he admits to the narrator that "I herde the not, to seyn the soth, | Ne I sawgh the not, syr, trewely" (520-21), despite the fact that the narrator "went and stood ryght at his fet" (502). The interaction echoes Ceyx's apparition, unseen but right at the foot of Alcyone's bed. Much like Alcyone visited by the corpse-image of Ceyx, the song is a superficially lucid revelation of death but, unlike Ceyx's presence, its lyric form dissembles this subjective meaning and implicates the work of mourning in the interpretation of the text as aesthetic object. Intriguingly, the fact that the narrator is initially invisible to the Man in Black suggests a reversal of Ceyx and Alcyone's meeting, as it is this time the audience rather than the communicator that is unseen. The recurrence of this motif of 'unseeing' suggests the displacement of subjectivity that the song enables, though the reversal indicates a difference in the ends of mourning. This second attempt to articulate grief as a response to the contradictory and asymbolic reality of loss differs from Ceyx's because, far from labelling and delimiting mourning, the song textualises the work of mourning as a continuous and intersubjective process. The subsequent dialogue and the Man's extended 'non-eulogy' can thus be treated as a symptom of this 'unseeing,' a partial repression of the obvious fact of death as a way of sustaining the fantasy of incorporation. In contrast, Ceyx dispels the illusion of the unseen reanimation and simply says 'I am dead.'

---

[97] In some ways this reading aligns with the interpretation of the Man in Black's ignorance as a kind of tactful 'playing dumb' that forces the Man in Black to be explicit about his loss. I do not find this interpretation wholly convincing given the ambiguity of the poem's ending. Establishing the feigned ignorance of the narrator is a lot of interpretative work for little consolation in the end. For interpretations along these lines, see B. S. W. Barootes, "Idleness, Chess, and Tables"; A. J. Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 129 ff.; Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 106 ff.; Bertrand H. Bronson, '*The Book of the Duchess* Re-Opened', *PMLA* 67, no. 5 (1952): 863–81.

It is the rhetorical convention of inexpressibility that enables the melancholic pretence that the song and the dialogue entertain. The longer one works at mourning, the longer one can sustain the fantasy that the love object is ours to mourn. It follows that in the Man's description of White we see an encryption of the subject, seeking to defer the apocalyptic realisation of an *absolute* inability to voice this loss. Instead, Blanche is veiled by symbolic allusions enabled by her association with White, a statuesque copy of Blanche without the threat of abjection.[98] We can observe this process throughout the description of White, the most formal and least naturalistic section of the poem.

The description makes up over two hundred lines of the poem, though it rarely draws significant critical attention.[99] While formal, the blazon does not depict a real person, but an idealised one, a literary idolisation of the object of the text's gaze common to medieval *effictio*.[100] In the logic of elegy, Blanche is seen-but-unseen by the male conversationalists, reified as an ideal instantiation of virtue. Here, then, I think that the incorporation of Blanche is at its most legible. In a particularly conspicuous passage, the Man claims that her neck "semed a round tour of yvoyre, | Of good gretnese, and noght to gret" (946-47). As is often the case with Chaucer's use of repetition, the repetition of "gret" with conflicting meanings suggests the ironic tone of the lines. The description of the lover's neck as a tower of ivory is a reference to Song of Songs 7:7, denoting the purity of the virgin wife. Allegorically interpreted as a poem in praise of the Virgin Mary, the Song of Songs is often cited with a

---

[98] "The rhetorical stylisation of this section, together with the derivative nature of many of its images of love and beauty and its idealization of passion contribute to the sense of hieratic stiffness – an icon-like quality – in the portrait of the woman." Phillips, introduction to *The Book of the Duchess*, 39.

[99] For prominent exceptions that discuss the description at length, see Jamie C. Fumo, "The 'Alderbeste Yifte:' Objects and the Poetics of Munificence in Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*," *Exemplaria* 28, no. 4 (2016): 277–96; and James Miller, "How to See Through Women."

[100] Undoubtedly, this is the least significant part of the poem for modern readers, as description "may have been the ostensible social function of the blazon, but beneath its blaze of rhetorical colors it served to expose the bare nature of the feminine before the critical eye of the male rhetor and his male readers." James Miller, "How to See Through Women: Medieval Blazons and the Male Gaze," in *The Centre and Its Compass: Studies in Honor of John Leyerle*, ed. Robert A. Taylor and others (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1993), 374.

knowing irony by Chaucer for its contrast between sacred allegorical meaning and profane sexual content.[101] The reference to the Song of Songs is generic, but the belaboured description of her neck casts doubt on the validity of its allegorical interpretation. For Blanche, we are told that

> ... swich a fairnesse of a nekke
> Had that swete that boon nor brekke
> Nas ther non sene that myssat.
> Hyt was whit, smothe, streght, and pure flat,
> Wythouten hole or canel-boon,
> As be semynge had she noon.
> Her throte, as I have now memoyre,
> Semed a round tour of yvoyre,
> Of good gretnesse, and noght to gret.
>
> (939-47)

Chaucer exploits the allegorical form of the female body as *given*, which is to say that the *amplificatio* of Blanche's neck is unusually corporeal.[102] The curious emphasis on her bone-structure is indicative of an overeager denial of Blanche's corporeal form. The self-negating syntax of the description highlights the contradictions at play: no bones or imperfections "nas ther non sene that myssat"; "without hole"; "of good gretnesse, and noght to gret." The other features of Blanche's apparently boneless neck are also fetishistically overwrought – imperfections pared off, bared to the reader like a stretch of vellum, though affirmatively allegorical. The 'whiteness' of her neck leads the Man in Black to reveal her name – "goode

[101] The sexual imagery of the Song of Songs is central to the ironic interpretation of the *Merchant's Tale* as well. Cf. Douglas Wurtele, "Ironical Resonances in the *Merchant's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 31, no. 1 (1978): 66-79.

[102] For a similar discussion of Chaucer's use of allegory for feminine figures, see David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy*, Figurae (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997), 288 ff.

faire White she het" (948) – as though restoring faith in her allegorical form after such a fleshy diversion.

The corporeal focus of this allegorical description hints at the repression of the real, dead body of Blanche, replaced by the statue-like White. On the one hand, White is the source of munificence and virtue that gives the poem its moralistic framework.[103] On the other, the substitution is a reminder of the inexpressibility of loss and the fantasy that belies this recuperation of the lost object. The "unmitigated materialism" of the poem highlights the tension between the symbolic and real meanings of the body.[104] If White's body is incorporeal and allegorical, then Ceyx's body presents the horrifying corporeal reality of death that collapses the fantasy of a symbolic survival. White's icon-like presentation represses the gruesome mortality of the dead body, displaced on to the fictionalised, mythical figure of Ceyx. Though the knowledge of Blanche's death is implicit to the narrative, death as an overemplotted event is located outside the text, beyond the immediate semiotic process of the imagination. The dream-vision form, with its complex narrative play and permeable diegetic levels, positions the inexpressible reality of death as a thing beyond words, and therefore beyond textual subjectivity.

Through her overdetermination as an originary object, Blanche is incorporated and encrypted in the poem as White, a symbolic imitation that sustains the process of the imagination. As Margherita puts it, "the poem mourns the lost body of Lady White (identified with Blanche of Lancaster), while simultaneously establishing a filial relationship to the classical past."[105] The presence of Blanche is for the poem, a "hereditary right to a literary tradition" of elegy, though it is through the emphasis on her symbolic meanings, rather than

[103] See Gilbert, 196 ff.
[104] Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 93. Minnis uses this phrase in reference to the presentation of Ceyx's corpse.
[105] Gayle Margherita, "Originary Fantasies and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Sarah Stanbury and Linda Lomperis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 119-120.

the abject reality of her death, that this work of mourning can be performed by Chaucer as elegist.[106] Critics such as Margherita, Fumo, and Ellman have recognised that it is the interpolation of Blanche into a hereditary, patriarchal discourse that enables the elegiac performance of the work of mourning in the poem.[107] The text reveals a "confrontation between history and gender" that is engendered by the commemoration of Blanche as an aristocratic figure through grand anniversary ceremonies, marital lineages, and, in material terms, the provision of a monument tomb to be shared with Gaunt.[108] In the final section of this chapter I will discuss the implications of this incorporation of Blanche in the context of her more literal encryption in the tomb. Drawing together the poem's generic resistance to consolation as outlined earlier in the chapter with the negotiation of the corporeal and material afterlives of mourning, I will argue that in the crypt itself Chaucer finds a means of marshalling the discursive course of melancholic mourning into a material form, designed to survive the death of the subject and by "processe of tyme" (1331) monumentalise the ongoing and complex iterations of grief.

Encrypting Blanche

What the incorporation of Blanche as White demonstrates is the repression and fantasy at the heart of elegy. To resist consolation is not just to submit to despair, but to keep mourning alive, to show how it bleeds into human life, and to tacitly refuse to give up the lost object. If elegy is a textual mimesis of the melancholic work of mourning, for Chaucer, the elegy is analogous to the crypt, a work that monumentalises grief and refuses to transcend material form by virtue of its powerful combination of artefactual and symbolic presence. As a contemporary commemorative object, the production of Blanche and Gaunt's monument

[106] Ibid.
[107] See Margherita, Ellman, Fumo.
[108] Margherita, 119.

tomb places Blanche's death in the context of the cultural and familial narratives that survive her, but of which she was an integral part. I argue that, in the same way, Chaucer's poem explores this tension between private mourning and public commemoration, showing how private grief is legible in public narrative, and how the melancholia of mourning evidences itself in the material and cultural legacies that survive a discrete death. In this final section, I will explore how the figurative encryption and literal crypt of Blanche allows for the transfer of her historical memory from a system of pious commemoration to an enduring but equivocal textual tradition by exploiting the material nature of that commemoration. It is my argument that the foundation of Chaucer's elegiac depiction of Blanche is the patriarchal symbolism of the monument tomb that the poem adopts, enabling the incorporation of an introspective mourning into the hereditary, public narrative of Gaunt's seigneurial legacy.

The surviving roll of expenses for the anniversary celebration of Blanche's death in 1374 offers us a cultural context in which we might locate the materiality of Chaucer's poem.[109] The expenses for the ceremony demonstrate that the fifth anniversary of the death was a significant occasion compared to other years.[110] In addition to a larger and more generous ceremony than usual, other records show that Henry Yevele was commissioned to produce a monument tomb in this year for Blanche and Gaunt.[111] It seems that 1374 was a particularly important anniversary of Blanche's death, occasioning a grand material ceremony in the fashion of the penitential culture of the period.[112]

Phillipa Hardman draws links between the mnemonic architecture of the poem and the records of the monument tomb commissioned on the fifth anniversary of Blanche's death,

---

[109] N. B. Lewis, "The Anniversary Service for Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, 12th September 1374," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 21, no. 1 (1937): 176–92.
[110] Ibid., 177-79.
[111] See Sydney Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt's Register II*, Camden Society 3rd series, 21 (1911), nos. 1394 and 1659 for records of the commission. See also John H. Harvey, *Henry Yevele: The Life of an English Architect* (London, 1944), 30.
[112] See my discussion of the material culture of penitential mourning in chapter one.

suggesting that the poem may have been commissioned for, or at least involved with this ceremony.[113] For Hardman, “the poet animates a funerary monument and makes it ‘speke’.”[114] The patterned repetition of the phrase “I have lost more than thow wenest” corresponds to the sculptural patterning of the monument, while “like the weepers round the tomb, then, the different episodes of the poem... all are juxtaposed in varied, but complementary images of grief.”[115] In other words, Chaucer’s depiction of Blanche as a static and silent icon and Gaunt as a loyal mourner correlates with the aesthetic aims of the funerary sculpture that attended this mourning.

Hardman’s analogy highlights the materialism and the self-publication of mourning in the late Middle Ages as a context for the poem. The proposition that the poem was written for the occasion of the anniversary is appealing, especially given the fullness of Hardman’s analogical reading of the poem as a kind of monument tomb.[116] To place the poem within the context of the cult of the dead, then, is to read it as a reflection upon the secular implications of contemporary commemorative culture. In sacred terms, the monument tomb serves as a *memento mori* for on-lookers and prompts spiritual action.[117] The hope of the people who

---

[113] Phillipa Hardman, “The *Book of the Duchess* as a Memorial Monument”, *The Chaucer Review* 28, no. 3 (1994): 205–15.
[114] Ibid., 212-13.
[115] Ibid., 210-11.
[116] The dating of the poem has long been a point of contention in scholarship, and no one date is definitive. Many agree with Hardman’s suggestion of the poem’s composition for the occasion of the anniversary in 1374, though given the poem’s oblique relationship to the Duke’s mourning, nothing can be said for certain. For the benefit of my argument, the correlation between the Anniversary and the composition is appealing in that it offers the clearest indication of Chaucer’s historical intention to juxtapose the elegy with the lavish memorial services. There are two mitigating factors for this dating: 1) the fact that it is so long after the death and 2) the fact that the encrypted signature refers to John as the Earl of Richmond, a title he gave up in 1372. I do not think that an earlier or later composition affects the historical basis for my argument that the poem is in part a response to the cultural ideology of religious mourning, but the 1374 date offers a clear instantiation of that culture. For studies on dating, see Howard Schless, “A Dating for the *Book of the Duchess*: Line 1314,” *The Chaucer Review* 19, no. 4 (1985): 273–76; Sumner Ferris, “John Stow and the Tomb of Blanche the Duchess,” *The Chaucer Review* 18, no. 1 (1983): 92–93; J. J. N. Palmer, “The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*: A Revision,” *The Chaucer Review* 8, no. 4 (1974): 253–61; and John M. Hill, “*The Book of the Duchess*, Melancholy, and That Eight-Year Sickness,” *Chaucer Review* 9, no. 1 (1974): 35–50.
[117] For discussions of the material spirituality of the late-medieval monument tombs, see my discussion in chapter one, as well as Sally Badham, *Seeking Salvation: Commemorating the Dead in the Late-Medieval English Parish* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2015); Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992); and Kathleen Cohen,

commissioned these tombs is that they will reflect the piety of those they commemorate after their deaths by embodying their penitence in life. The tombs, though lavish and expensive, signal a willingness to expend livelihoods on these religious concerns, and in this way demonstrate a tenuous asceticism. As Appleford argues, worldly goods were a burden in themselves in the minds of pious men and they derived a perverse sense of ascetic virtue from the tribulations of their worldly urban lives.[118] The monumental form of the effigy tomb is one that bears witness to a contrarian conception of worldly tribulation.

If we are to discuss the poem in the context of Blanche's tomb, we should remind ourselves that it was equally John of Gaunt's tomb, commissioned for them both.[119] It recasts John as not only a mourner, but also as a penitent to imagine his provision for his wife's death as a kind of self-mortification. The effigies of Gaunt and Blanche that topped the monument (as seen in the surviving sketches of the tomb in Old St Paul's cathedral) signify the couple's piety through ascetic self-mortification, an embodiment of their pious suffering in life.[120] In effect, the devotion of time and money to the construction of a monument tomb is an act of piety by virtue of this self-mortification, alleviating the burden of worldly goods by investing in the hereafter. Of course, the conspicuous display of wealth and power that the commission of the tomb involves paradoxically codifies the incumbent as rich and important *as well as* pious and humble. The contradictory encryptions of elegy are obvious in the monument tomb: the deceased is both self-important and humble, charitable and selfish, lavishly rich and ascetically impoverished. The tension between worldly fame and pious

---

Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol; the Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

[118] See Amy Appleford, *Learning to Die in London, 1380-1540* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); and my discussion of ascetic lay piety in chapter one.

[119] It was not unusual to commission one's tomb in life and this fact in itself signals to us the preoccupation with preparations for the afterlife that wealthy Christians had. Hardman uses the example of Richard II's double effigy tomb, commissioned in 1394 on the occasion of Anne of Bohemia's death and completed in 1397. See Hardman, "Memorial Monument," 214, n. 6; and Arnold Walter Stone, *Sculpture in Britain - the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1992), 114, 193.

[120] These illustrations are reproduced in Hardman, "Memorial Monument," 216-18.

mortification is legible as a literal encryption of Blanche that props up the seigneurial legacy of Gaunt in the monument tomb, and this is a tension that also underpins the figurative encryptions of the poem.

Although the commission of the tomb serves other religious and cultural purposes, the literal nature of this analogy of encryption in *BD* is a mark of the melancholic register of the work of mourning in the poem. Our analysis so far has confirmed Freud's premise that in melancholia the love object is preserved through the resistance to the real change that is evident in the external world, a process typified in *BD* by the avoidance of death as an historical or spiritual event. Appropriately, Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok describe this process of encryption through the image of the "crypt" itself, highlighting the way that melancholia relies on this fusion of the ego and the image of the lost object:

> This is why melancholics cherish the memory as their most precious possession, even though it must be concealed by a crypt built with the bricks of hate and aggression… Faced with the danger of seeing the crypt crumble, the whole ego becomes one with the crypt, showing the concealed object of love in its own guise. Threatened with the imminent loss of its internal support – the kernal of its being – the ego will fuse with the included object, imagining that the object is bereft of its partner. Consequently, the ego begins the public display of an interminable process of mourning.[121]

Abraham and Torok's "interminable process of mourning" resonates with the conception of the work of mourning as a process of textual analysis and overdetermined symbolic acts. The analogous relationship between the monument tomb and the poem is highlighted by the figurative internment of Blanche within the presentation of the Man in Black in the poem, fused to the mourning subject as a presentation of the lost object "in its own guise."

The castle stands out as a crypt-like structure that performs this work of encryption, enfolding Blanche-as-White into a symbol for Gaunt's interminable mourning writ large.

[121] Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, "Introjection versus Incorporation," 136.

Indeed, it is only in relation to Gaunt's cryptic signature in the castle that Blanche can be properly identified. If the form and location of the "long castel" (1318) atop the "ryche hil" (1319) reveals Gaunt's outward, public identities, then it is the material fabric of the castle that reveals the interiorised and repressed figure of Blanche. The "walles white" (1318) of the castle signify the Man in Black's incorporation of White as an internalised image of the lost object, but they also reflect the economic and social interpolation of Blanche into Gaunt's dynastic legacy. The castle, the tomb, and the icon-like White are all encryptions of Blanche in Gaunt's guise, an incorporation of an unspeakable loss into his public identity. The inclusion of Blanche within Gaunt's aristocratic lineage through the patriarchal system of marriage underpins this encryption. The whiteness of the castle that represents Gaunt's seigneurial identity intimates the function of women as wives that propagate a male lineage, and whose identities and agencies were erased in so doing.[122]

Jamie Fumo shows that Blanche's historical life as an aristocratic wife prefigures her textual incorporation as White, in that her role as "bride-as-gift" was primarily to enrich male relations.[123] Blanche is held up as a generous, sacrificial figure, whose "superlative gift" of the ring asserts her extraordinary munificence and retrospectively validates Gaunt's inheritance of her memory.[124] The gift of the ring epitomises the nobility and mercifulness of Blanche, implicitly representing her marriage promise as a sacrifice of the self in service of a system of patriarchal control:

> My lady yaf me al hooly
> The noble yifte of hir mercy,
> Savynge hir worship by al weyes—
> Dredles, I mene noon other weyes.

---

[122] Lynn Staley's reads the poem in light of the marriage as a political rather strictly amorous affair. See Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).
[123] Fumo, "The 'Alderbeste Yifte'," 283.
[124] Ibid., 284.

And therwith she yaf me a ryng;
I trowe hyt was the firste thyng;
(1269-1274)

The noble gift of "mercy," putting an end to the suffering of the suitor, is a promise to give oneself "al hooly." Coupled with her powerful "nay" (1243) that initially rejects the Man, White is set up as the one who authorises the suffering of the Man in Black, and her sacrifice of female identity in marriage represents a transcendental incorporation of the object of desire for the Man in Black.[125] The notion of "savynge" refers to the romantic gesture of saving one's name for marriage and, in the context of the fact that Blanche remains functionally nameless throughout the text, the irony of this gesture points to the fantasy of possession that it props up. The promise made here, then, serves to retroactively condone Blanche's incorporation into the mourning text. The sacrificial nature of the gift given demonstrates the necessity of the erasure of the object as a subject itself, divesting Blanche of the agency implied by her earlier "nay" (1243).[126] Marriage thus serves as a patriarchal tool for establishing the Man in Black's possession of White, erasing the identity of Blanche as woman and emphasising her reified role in the production of an historical legacy.

The remembrance of the initial marriage promise imagines the mournful possession of Blanche through patriarchal structures. "The firste thyng," White's gift is retroactively established as an originary moment, displacing the reality of Blanche's body with the patriarchal symbolism of her marriage. The fantasy that she survives within the patriarchal system into which she was first incorporated is sustained only by the repression of her corporeality. The same process is discernible in the commission of the monument tomb,

[125] Gilbert, *Living Death* (196) interprets this eulogy as the catalyst for the transformation of White from the source of despair to a spiritual benefactor.
[126] White's "nay" signals the point of disruption in the chain of signifiers that reveals the radical agency of the Other that is obscured by the act of incorporation. Travis compares this feminine "Nay" to "*le non du Pere*" of Lacanian psycholinguistics, arguing that "it dramatises the power of feminine negativity as a radical counterpoetics, saying 'no' to *le 'non' du Pere*." Travis, "White," 58.

which places Blanche quite literally in the patriarchal lineage of Gaunt's own monument. The romantic relationship that fixes White as the Man in Black's love object and subsequent object of mourning is also a relationship that casts her as a functional extension of male power relations. The poem retrospectively validates the incorporation of Blanche as the figure who authorises the work of mourning by gesturing to her previous acquiescence to a similar symbolic patriarchal possession.

Indeed, the incorporation of Blanche is foreshadowed earlier in the poem in the description of subjectivity as a process of textual "making."[127] The Man in Black conceives of his subjectivity as a "whit wal… redy to cacche and take | Al that men wil theryn *make*" (780-82, emphasis my own), the process of "making" is an intersubjective process of identification. As Travis writes, "well before he [the Man in Black] meets White and learns her name, 'white' had pre-existed in his mind."[128] Though black in dress and demeanour, the mourning subject is constructed like White herself, a blank canvas on to which the makings of men can be imprinted. An effect of the incorporation of White is this configuration of the self as a White-like figure, subject to the making of art as a process of textual reception and copying. At a fundamentally symbolic level, Ellman likens Blanche to the whiteness of the blank page and the Man in Black to the black ink, picturing the elegy as a rewriting of Blanche.[129] By setting up Blanche as the incorporated image of White, Chaucer preserves the lost object by infusing the subjectivity of the text with "whiteness", a mark of Gaunt's devotion to her, and a survival of her in himself. Blanche's erasure abets the Man's melancholic mourning by displacing her death with an interminable process of textual

---

[127] Stephen Bradford Partridge argues that in Chaucer's work "'making' is inextricable from book-making," understanding the creative process to be inextricable from the physical production of the book. Bradford Partridge, "'The Makere of This Boke': Chaucer's Retraction and the Author as Scribe and Compiler," in *Author, Reader, Book: Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice*, ed. Erik Kwakkel and Stephen Bradford Partridge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 129.
[128] Travis, "White," 34.
[129] Maud Ellman, "Blanche," in *Criticism and Critical Theory*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), 106-107.

copying and citation. Blanche's simulated, incorporated persona authorises the process of textual copying, of becoming part of a literary tradition.[130]

Chaucer's refusal of consolation forces a reflection on the fraught legacy of Blanche, disclosing the appropriation of her feminine identity in the public and seigneurial identity of Gaunt that survives her. Margherita argues that the gendered dialectic of mourning in the poem favours Gaunt's hereditary legacy over Blanche's true character, retracing these symbols of patriarchal power in the elegy's sublimation of grief into a literary discourse: "the father's 'olde stories' supplant the mother's body, and a literary tradition is born."[131] The instability of the relationship between subject and object, typified by the inexpressibility of grief and the abjection of the lost object demands a kind of repatriation in the absence of the stabilising force of consolation. In *BD*, this repatriation is a patriarchal mode of mourning, which centres the male mourning husband as master not only of the estate but also of the memory of the deceased.

More than just highlighting the misogyny that underwrites the central relationship of the poem, Chaucer's elegy emphasises the ambivalence with which the object is treated in mourning, remembered not for itself, but as the facsimile that holds together the symbolic constructions of selfhood. It is the aestheticization of her life and identity as the lost wife of an aristocratic figure that enables the representation of the work of mourning. As Ellman puts it, Blanche's true death is a traumatic site, "another scene" which cannot be directly addressed, but only discreetly accessed through strategies of transference and

[130] For discussions of textuality and writing in *BD*, see Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, "Codicology, Text, and the Book of the Duchess," in *Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess*,* 11–28; Jamie C. Fumo, *Making Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess; Martha Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 25; and Paula Neuss, "Images of Writing and the Book in Chaucer's Poetry," *Review of English Studies* 32, no. 128 (1981): 385–97.
[131] Margherita, 123.

incorporation.[132] Thus, the poem enshrines her memory as a monumental work, much like the monument tomb, designed to elicit the sympathies and attentions of onlookers, and to perpetuate their mourning of her. Proposing that the tomb survives the religious obligations of those who are interned within by virtue of its monumental design, Chaucer asks whether this standing invitation to mourn is not evidence for the fraught and vexing melancholia that attends mourning, and that survives the religious purposes for which it was erected. The *Book of the Duchess*, then, stands as a secular monument to the ongoing work of mourning, a grief without consolation that persists in the material and linguistic forms of memory.

Conclusion

In the absence of Christian consolation, the elegy offers a kind of memorialisation to Blanche in the form of a poetic monument to Gaunt's grief, interpolating her into a literary tradition of mourning. The transaction between the living and the dead, rather than being spiritual, is founded on the presentation of Blanche in Gaunt's performance of his mourning, taking for granted the fact that Blanche's spiritual wellbeing had been assured by the generous provision for her religious remembrance. The poem explores the ways in which Blanche endures beyond her death through Gaunt's mourning, both as a public performance of seigneurial identity and as a private melancholia. I have shown that these two poses are reconciled in the incorporation of Blanche into the mnemonic structure of the text, turning attention away from a spiritual bond to the protracted and transformative transactions of the work of mourning. The poem recognises the material and secularised afterlives of the object, marking out through a corporeal vocabulary of grief a poetic space for acknowledging and validating melancholic mourning. The virtual refractions of the dream-form and the subversion of the consolation serve to uphold a "lawe of kinde," centred on the creation of an

[132] "No 'event' occurs in *The Book of the Duchess*: the whole text tells the story of the mournful reconstruction of 'another scene'." Ellman, 104.

elegiac subjectivity. The elegiac subject exerts a gravitational force that assimilates the lost object as part of the self, ensuring the dissemination of the work of mourning into the specifically secular discourses that intersect with the performance of selfhood.

Reading the poem as elegy has allowed us to examine the melancholia of the poem as a resistance to consolation which refocuses the discourse of mourning on the corporeal and the sentimental. To reverse the relationship between genre and text, then, in this conclusion I will argue that *BD* tells us three important things about dream-vision-elegy as a generic form. First, the resistance to consolation is facilitated by the literary inventiveness of the elegiac subject. Second, the dream-vision-elegy is, for Chaucer, the mode that typifies the secularity of emergent vernacular forms. Third, elegy foregrounds the uncomfortable ambivalence of mourning, manifested in the incorporation of the object as a reified copy.

First, then, it is Chaucer's narrator and digressive narrative structure that enable the circumlocutions that defer consolation and protract mourning. The neuroticism of the writer who defers and obscures his "first mater" (43; cf. 218) establishes the melancholic contemplation of death as an aesthetic rendering of the work of mourning.[133] If the recognition of Blanche threatens to resolve mourning as an effect of consolation, then the pose of the melancholic poet serves to encrypt and preserve her as an object of mourning. The continuity of the work of mourning ensures that the mimetic representation of suffering survives its historical moment, which becomes an untraceable originary event. Even when the death is incontrovertibly announced, the transformations of the textual form once again repress and delay the recognition of the death as a death: the dream ends suddenly, and the

---

[133] On Chaucer's narrative indirection, see Elizabeth Scala, *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 16-36; Larry Sklute, *Virtue of Necessity: Inconclusiveness and Narrative Form in Chaucer's Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984); Robert M. Jordan, "The Compositional Structure of *The Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review* 9, no. 2 (1974): 99–117; T. Smallwood, "Chaucer's Distinctive Digressions," *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 4 (1985): 437-449; and Stephen A. Barney, "Suddenness and Process in Chaucer," *The Chaucer Review* 16, no. 1 (1981): 18–37.

narrator awakes having dismissed this tragic scene. Though awed by his dream, his promise to "be processe of tyme, | Fonde to put this sweven in ryme" (1331-32) gestures back towards the role of the poet as interlocuter, mediator between experience and artefact. The passage of time invoked here between the end of the dream and the beginning of the poem (which has already begun and now ended in the course of our reading), sublimates the dream into a textual process, again and again deferring the "first mater" as 'another scene.'

Poetic invention increasingly displaced subject matter in these dream-vision poems, as their authors sought new variations on old themes.[134] The word "fonden" has the implicit meaning "to discover... by experiment or inquiry," or to invent, similar to the French "trouver" (from which "trouvère" is derived), a mark of the inventions of the poet.[135] To avoid "the boredom of repetition," fourteenth-century writing "relied on the melancholy reverie of delayed departures and on an exploration – joyous or sad – of the question of point of view."[136] The narrator seems captivated by the ambivalent, generative function of literature rather than its capacity to offer consolation. By incorporating the Man in Black's song into the dream-vision alongside retellings of the *Romance of the Rose*, the Troy story, and Ceyx and Alcyone, Chaucer enfolds Gaunt's mourning into a literary landscape that invites constant reinterpretation and reproduction.[137] These late-medieval poems treat reading and writing as introspective activities that emphasise the continuity of the subject with the semiotic systems of our written cultures. The literary act of interpretation becomes an interpolation of the self into rich and ambiguous textual traditions, sustaining a literary

[134] For a discussion of "invention" in the context of *BD*, see Watson, Robert A., "Dialogue and Invention in the *Book of the Duchess*," *Modern Philology* 98, no. 4 (2001), 543–576.
[135] *Middle English Dictionary,* ed. Robert E. Lewis et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001), s.v. "fōnden, -ien."
[136] Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, *The Color of Melancholy: The Uses of Books in the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1997), 91, 92.
[137] For a discussion of Chaucer's interpolation of history into literature in *BD*, see Helen Phillips, "The Shock of the Old?".

subjectivity that is inextricable from the making of the text.[138] This inoperative, cyclical work is manifested in the elegy as the textual work of mourning, sustaining the profound sentiment of loss as a fraught and compromising experience, but one that underwrites the rich complexities of our earthly lives.

Given its worldly purview, the dream-vision-elegy is also the mode that exemplifies the secularity of emergent vernacular forms. At its heart, the vernacular elegy promotes a resistance to spiritual consolation as a totalising ideological mode. The linguistic shifts in Europe in the fourteenth century opened a new space for intellectual pursuits within literary traditions, one that Chaucer was keen to explore. In addition, the generative nature of elegy's conventions of inexpressibility and the discursive poetic subjectivity of the dream vision highlight the iterative, transformative nature of mourning, posing the potential for a work of mourning that does not refute the religious resolutions of a Christian, Latinate worldview, but recentres the human narrative of loss as a devastating and permanent feature of mortal life. In so doing, Chaucer carves out in English an intellectual space approximate to the vernacular modes of French and Italian. This is a space for an English secularity that resists dominant religious ideologies and validates the expression of human experience as corporeal and complex.

Perhaps most significantly, then, Chaucer's poem foregrounds the uncomfortable ambivalence of mourning ahead of the moral resolutions of consolation. If Chaucer intended to explore the potential for a more physical, embodied mourning in the form of the elegy, he finds that "while it does offer (rhetorical) reparation for the lost (material) object, the elegy

[138] Joyce Coleman suggests that despite the hygienic function of reading posited by the narrator, solipsistic reading is beneficial only in as much as it occasions the production of further texts within a community. Taking the unfinished *House of Fame* as an example, she warns that individual reading "clearly has the potential to disrupt or harm that community; just as the poet who becomes too involved with his own involvement with letters ends up with a text too open-ended to be comprehensible." Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 178.

also acknowledges the unstable situation of the subject in language, or, more specifically, of the desiring subject of elegiac discourse."[139] Chaucer suffuses his elegy with the embodied discourse of image-making across textual and oneiric forms, but these images point only to further diffusion, to the ways that mourning affects every facet of lived experience. The traces of Blanche that we see in the poem speak not only to the unspeakable nature of grief, but to its diffuse implications for the mourning subject. Gaunt, though he is presented as appropriating Blanche's memory, is effectively transformed by this incorporation, turned from black to white.

It is in this sense that we might talk of an interminable mourning in elegy, a process typified by the ambivalent behaviour of the Man in Black/Gaunt. Rather than letting his love object be, he takes her inside himself, warps and protects her memory, makes it part of a literary tradition that will renew the object perpetually, even if it is a hollow cipher of who she once was. The *Book of the Duchess* is a prominent example of how elegy resists consolation by demonstrating the wide-ranging and ambiguous implications of the work of mourning. A key example of this is the moment when the narrator suggests that the Man in Black may have gained "shryfte wythoute repentaunce" (1114), envisaging a non-religious therapy for the Man in Black through their dialogue.[140] The Man in Black replies with a philosophical quandary that reflects the obstinacy of elegiac subjectivity:

> 'Repentaunce? Nay, fy!' quod he,
> 'Shulde y now repente me
> To love?
> […]
> Nay, while I am alive her,

[139] Margherita, 118.
[140] For a discussion of this enigmatic phrase, see Stephen Knight, 'Classicizing Christianity in Chaucer's Dream Poems: The *Book of the Duchess*, *Book of Fame*, and *Parliament of Fowls*," in *Chaucer and Religion*, ed. Helen Phillips (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), 143–55; Winthrop Wetherbee, "Theme, Prosody, and Mimesis in the *Book of the Duchess*," *Essays on the Art of Chaucer's Verse*, ed. Alan T. Gaylord (London: Routledge, 2001), 283–95.

I nyl foryete hir never moo.'

(1115-1124)

The phrase "shryfte wythoute repentaunce" carries the implication of moral obligation that consolation impresses upon the mourner, as if no mourning is complete without absolution. The Man's reply typifies the resistance to the consolation as a way of refusing to allow the negation of a love beyond spiritual beliefs. The obligation of remembrance as an act of enduring love casts the elegy as an embodiment of this unwavering loyalty to the lost love, in comparison to which, the consolation would be an implicit act of betrayal, as though this love itself were something to be expunged rather than celebrated. The elegy offers Chaucer a way of exploring the alternative afterlives of his subjects, codifying the intense and unpredictable human experience of mourning in the material and secular forms that survive it.

As we will see in the next chapter, this recognition of the *difficulty* of mourning challenged the purgatorial mindset of the time, in which many sought a systematised and streamlined religious commemoration to dispel the melancholia of mourning. Chaucer's adaptation of French pseudo-consolatory forms speaks to the recognition of mourning as a complex, rich, and even imponderable undertaking. His English translations of the poems of Machaut, Froissart and other French poets evidence the philosophical, affective and creative approaches to mourning in his time, which rejected a stable and non-contradictory contemplation of death and highlighted some of the key tenets of elegy in so doing.

III: The Language of Christian Mourning: *Pearl* and the End of the Poem

Pearl is a dream-vision elegy written in the mid-to-late fourteenth century that dismantles the fast distinction between the absolution of consolation and a prolonged melancholia within Christian mourning. It is a poem that, to my mind, embodies elegy as a mode which is neither despairing nor triumphant and stands as the most complete examination of the particular pressure that the work of mourning places on poetic language and poetic subject alike. A poem that is deeply invested in both the expression of grief and the representation of divinity, *Pearl*'s formal innovation and depth of sentiment set it apart from most elegies, medieval or otherwise. It is a poem that dramatises the loss of faith engendered by grief in a dreamed meeting with the deceased, acting out the process of mourning as an unconventional wish-fulfilment that at the same time is a confrontation with the unfathomable form of divinity. This journey through spiritual torpor and scepticism ends with a reluctant acceptance of loss reached through the patterned transformations of the poem's mourned object. However, it is also a poem in which human sentiment ultimately acts as a barrier to divine participation and, accordingly, the poem oscillates between the melancholic isolation of failed expression that is common to elegy and the opposing potential for a consoling transcendence of grief inherent in spiritual imagery. The end of the poem, which I will highlight as the crux of these tensions, is the sublime example of elegy, enveloping an intractable human grief into an encompassing, but infinite divine work. *Pearl* confronts the consequences of grief as a kind of spiritual inappetence that ultimately resists consolation without denying the power of a repatriating belief in eventual salvation.

Although the poem's consolation is not a complete one, it begins as most consolation texts do with an expression of grief that overwhelms the subject and denies rational

(Christian) judgement. Lines 51-60 display the confusion, depression, torpor, and somnolence that grief has caused the Mourner: [1]

> A deuely dele in my hert denned,
> Þaȝ resoun sette myseluen saȝt.
> I playned my perle þat þer watȝ spenned
> Wyth fyrce skylleȝ þat faste faȝt;
> Þaȝ kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned,
> My wreched wylle in wo ay wraȝte.
> I felle vpon þat floury flaȝt,
> Suche odour to my herneȝ schot;
> I slode vpon a slepyng-slaȝte
> On þat precios perle wythouten spot.[2]
>
> (51-60)

His reason is limited by the "deuely dele" of the heart, as grief clouds proper Christian judgement.[3] The Mourner's inappetence for spiritual good is represented by the "wreched wylle in wo ay waȝte" that denies the comforting power of the "kynde of Kryst." The melancholic quality of this mourning is shown by the hinderance of Christian desire: the Mourner obsesses over his pearl and cannot accept the solace offered by religious doctrine. The motivation for consolation is much clearer in *Pearl* than it is in *BD*, even if it is still subject to the course of mourning. It is the reconciliation of this mourning of earthly attachments with the project of divine satisfaction that is the aim of the poem, depicting a kind of ongoing consolation that leaves room for the continued intensity of human loss.

---

[1] Some critics of the poem prefer to refer to the central narrator-figure as the "Jeweller," or the "Dreamer." I have chosen the term 'Mourner', in line with a select group of critics, to reflect my interpretation of the poem as an elegy.

[2] E. V. Gordon, ed., *Pearl* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), lines 51-60. All citations hereafter will refer to this edition unless otherwise stated and be made in parentheses in the text.

[3] For a discussion of the Mourner's spiritual frustrations in these lines, see Cecilia A. Hatt, *God and the* Gawain-*Poet: Theology and Genre in* Pearl*,* Cleanness*,* Patience *and* Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), 20; and Lawrence Beaston, "The *Pearl*-Poet and the Pelagians," *Religion & Literature* 36 (2004): 23-24.

The transfigured pearl within the dream is a figure that sublimates these earthly and heavenly desires and, through the visionary form, proposes their similarly ineffable natures. The key to the poem's juxtaposition of these two forms of impossible work—one of mourning and one of satisfaction—is the careful balance of mundane and divine representation. Mundane grief bleeds into deeper epistemological doubts about the nature of our relationship with divinity, as individual loss is transformed into a divine mystery, both of which defy conventional expression. The continuity of mourning across the text is marked by the transformation of the pearl throughout the vision from an object of mourning to an object of an impossible spiritual desire. In this introduction I will compare the poem's opening and closing scenes of lament to establish the continuity of mourning across the poem and emphasise the issue that this continuity poses for the interpretation of the end of the poem.

In the opening of the poem, then, the Mourner composes a lament while standing over the grave of his loved one, metaphorically styled as a "perle."[4] The structure of the poem shows that the opening and closing frames of the poem are products of a continuous subject relating the dream-event in retrospect, narratively linked by the persistence of grief.[5] In the opening stanzas, the word "spot" is repeated variously suggesting the location of the grave, the unblemished pearl, and the Mourner's terrestrial (as opposed to heavenly) stead:[6]

Syþen in þat spote hit fro me sprange,

---

[4] I agree with most critics in identifying the Pearl-Maiden as the Mourner's transfigured daughter. See my note on the subject in the introduction, as well as A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 125; Norman Davis, "A Note on *Pearl*," in *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays*, ed. John Conley (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 325–34; and Gordon, introduction to *Pearl*, xi-xix.

[5] A.C. Spearing gives a fuller discussion of the complex narratological construction of the Mourner as a poetic subject within the dream framework. See Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 137-173; and Spearing, *Medieval Autographies: The 'I' of the Text* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

[6] Some have suggested that the obsession with spots is a repressed indication of the cause of death of the poem's mourned figure: the black death, which left skin pocked and marked by just the kind of spot that is denied here. This reading is compelling and raises further questions about the repression of the black death in Middle English writing more generally. See Andrew Breeze, "*Pearl* and the Plague of 1390-93," *Neophilologus* 98 (2014): 337–41; and David K. Coley, "*Pearl* and the Narrative of Pestilence," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013): 209–62. Cf. my discussion of the Black Death and the *Book of the Duchess* in chapter two.

Ofte haf I wayted, wyschande þat wele,
Þat wont watʒ whyle deuoyde my wrange
And heuen my happe and al my hele.
Þat dotʒ bot þrych my hert þrange,
My breste in bale bot bolne and bele;
ʒet þoʒt me neuer so swete a sange
As stylle stounde let to me stele.
For soþe þer fleten to me fele,
To þenke hir color so clad in clot.
O moul, þou marreʒ a myry iuele.
My priuy perle wythouten spotte.

(13-24)

The expression of lament draws on a specific lexicon of secular, courtly grief.[7] The courtly conceit of the poem forms the basis for the later exchange with the Pearl-Maiden, who appears in the dream "in hir araye ryalle" (191).[8] The formal and aural aspect of this lament, with its lyric-apostrophic style, situates it within a performative, courtly context.[9] The neologism "luf-daungere" (11) is linked to the power of the mistress' hold over the suitor in courtship, foreshadowing the anagogical distance between the Mourner and the Maiden in the dream itself.[10] The lament emphasises the act of elegy as a lyric performance, while the

---

[7] On the influence of court poetry on the first part of the poem, see María Bullón-Fernández, "'Byʒonde þe Water': Courtly and Religious Desire in *Pearl*," *Studies in Philology* 91, no. 1 (1994), 35–49; David Aers, "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl,*" *Speculum* 68, no. 1 (1993): 54-73; W.A. Davenport, *The Art of the* Gawain-*Poet* (New York: Athlone, 1985); Theodore Bogdanos, Pearl*: The Image of the Ineffable* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), 64-99; Edward Wilson, *The Gawain-Poet* (London: Brill Publishing, 1976); H. Pilch, "The Middle English *Pearl*: Its relationship to the *Roman de la Rose*," in *The Middle-English Pearl: Critical Essays*: 163-84; and A. C. Spearing, *The* Gawain-*Poet: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 152-59.

[8] Ian Doyle offers a dating of the manuscript based in part on the descriptions of the Maiden's attire and in the illustrations of the Maiden (among other figures), placing the illustrations in the first two decades of the fifteenth century, heavily implying their separate and later production to the texts themselves. See A. I. Doyle, "The Manuscripts," in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background: Seven Essays*, ed. David Lawton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 92.

[9] Sarah McNamer argues that the formal features of ornamented poetry in *Pearl* give it a unique performative character that makes suited for courtly consumption, in that "it invites repeated hearings, repeated use; through its sensuous, soothing sounds, it seeks to persuade the listener to return to it again and again as a script for feeling." McNamer, "The Literariness of Literature and the History of Emotion," *PMLA* 130, no. 5 (2015): 1438.

[10] This compound is unique to the *Pearl*-poet in late-medieval literature, primarily conveying the sadness caused by the distance of a loved one. "Daungere" is often found in the late-medieval *dits* to convey the suffering of a

ornamentation of the verse displays the richness of its subject.[11] The Mourner admits that many songs have come to him while mourning, reflecting on the creative drive to express loss that gives beautiful form to such despairing subject matter.[12] In particular, the use of apostrophe, addressing the earth itself as it despoils the purity of the pearl, amplifies the self-reflexive performance of grief that solicits further elaboration.[13] For example, the image of the pearl "clad in clot" adumbrates the Maiden's later description of the first, physical death that is required to enter the kingdom of heaven: "Þy corse in clot mot calder keue" (320). The first elegiac address, for all its meditation on what has been lost, generates many of the poem's most fruitful themes and images that will later be subject to the cryptic transformations of the poem's mourning process. These transformations are anagogical in nature, but their genesis lies in the creative urge to express loss as a singularly terrestrial phenomenon.

It is the stated purpose of the vision that follows, in a Boethian fashion, to transform this earthly attachment to a spiritual desire. Exhausted by his despair, the Mourner falls

---

suitor whose mistress wields power over him through the withholding of love. The word is personified in the *Roman de la Rose* as a brutish villain with a club, representing the cruel power of a lady to snub her suitor. The root of the late-Medieval usage is the Old Frencg *dangier*, from which "two trunks of semantic development seem to grow according as we consider the lord's power to act (and therefore hurt) or his power to give (and therefore to withhold)." W. R. J. Barron, "Luf-Daungere," in *Medieval Miscellany Presented to Eugène Vinaver by Pupils Colleagues and Friends* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), 2.

[11] Seeta Chaganti has argued that the relationship between the decorative ornamentation of the poetry and the ineffable divine quality of the pearl mirrors that of the reliquary and the relic. The textural and oral quality of the poem creates, for Chaganti, a parabolic transference between mediums that is evocative of a liturgical performance, and therefore gives the poem an innate artefactual presence. Chaganti, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription, Performance*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). See also Alan J. Fletcher, "*Pearl*: The Limits of History," in *The Presence of Medieval English Literature* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 89-114.

[12] The punctuation of lines 19-22 has divided editors, resulting in variant readings of the lines. Taking "ȝet" to mean "however," as most editors have, I follow Gordon's reading of lines 19-20 as adversative to the previous two lines, meaning that the pains of grief counterintuitively produced the exquisite poetry on the page. I favour Gordon's reading, which interprets the lines as describing "the genesis of the poem from verses that came to him by the grave." Gordon, ed., *Pearl*, 47, n. 19-22. This reading supports the interpretation of the poem as elegy, creating a causal link between the grief of the Mourner and the production of elegiac verse. Cf. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, ed., *Pearl*, in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* 5th ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 54, n. 19-22; and W.A. Davenport, "Desolation, not Consolation: *Pearl* 19-22," *English Studies* 55 (1974): 421-3.

[13] For a full discussion of *Pearl*'s apostrophe, see B. S. W. Barootes, "'O Perle': Apostrophe in *Pearl*," *Studies in Philology*, 113.4 (2016): 739–64.

suddenly asleep, entering a dream-state.[14] Coming upon the transfigured person of the pearl lost in the poem's opening, the Mourner finds himself in a crisis of language akin to his attempts at elegy. The two figures (one aloof and infallible, the other fawning and doubtful) engage in a formal debate over the nature of the Pearl-Maiden and the conditions of her deliverance. Their dialogue cascades through a dizzying array of "metaphorical registers."[15] This continual transformation of sense reveals the capacity and limitations for human language to encompass that which defies comprehension: the infinite gift of God's grace.[16] The Mourner struggles to find the terms and registers that satisfy this ecstatic reunion with the deceased Maiden, and in his description we see many variations of typical elegiac formulations used to describe the ineffability of the Maiden, and the dream more generally: "For vrþly herte myȝt not suffyse" (135); "I hope no tong moȝt endure | No sauerly saghe say of þat syȝt" (225-26); "No fleschly hert ne myȝt endeure" (1082). The dream continues the generative impulse to express the ineffable seen in the frame, but finds its object transformed by the oneiric form. The elegiac register is translated into the dream realm and the dread of a loss too dear to accept is supplanted by a divine awe, represented on both counts by the pearl.

By the end of the poem, the vision's superabundant meanings are a renewed source of grief for the Mourner. In his misapprehension of the dream's final images, he attempts to join the Maiden in the heavenly city and causes his dream to end suddenly when he begins to ford the river that separates them. The loss of the dream before he can fully experience or

---

[14] As a *visio*, the poem lacks a framing intertext like the *Metamorphoses* in *BD*, but it shares the somnolent torpor associated with *acedia*. Somnolence is one of the primary symptoms of *acedia*, the source of the Mourner's affliction. It is common for somnolence, deriving from anxiety or illness, to be the plot device that triggers the dream portion of the narrative in dream-vision literature. For an explanation of this link, see J. Stephen Russell, *English Dream Visions: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), 79; Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992); and Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971).
[15] I borrow the term "metaphorical registers" from Sarah Stanbury. Stanbury, introduction to *Pearl* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001).
[16] Stanbury bases her reading of the poem's metaphorical character on Ricoeur's description of metaphor as a "planned category mistake," a concept to which I will return later in the chapter. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 197.

comprehend it colours his triumphal vision with the same mournful feeling of disinheritance he experiences in the beginning. After his vision, the Mourner awakes with the same pangs of grief he described in the proem, articulated in the same style:

> Me payed ful ille to be outfleme
> So sodenly of þat fayre regioun,
> Fro alle þo syȝteȝ so quyke and queme.
> A longeyng heuy me strok in swone,
> And rewfully þenne I con to reme:
> 'O perle,' quod I, 'of rych renoun,
> So watȝ hit me dere þat þou con deme
> In þys veray avysyoun!
> If hit be ueray and soth sermoun
> Þat þou so stykeȝ in garlande gay,
> So wel is me in þys doel-doungoun
> Þat þou art to þat Prynceȝ pay.'
>
> (1177-88)

The performance of grief is again presented through a lyric-apostrophic style, but the Mourner implies that he has been reconciled to the Lord's desire, even though he still suffers greatly. The vocabulary of the final section implicitly recalls that of the first stanza, suggesting the change in circumstance while retaining a continuity in the expression of grief. The "longeyng heuy" affects the Mourner corporeally, almost causing him to faint again, and recalling the "slepyng slaȝte" (59) caused by his grief in the first section. The "doel-doungoun" conjures an image of existential claustrophobia, evoking the "spottedness" of his mournful situation, and yet he has the rational state of mind to take comfort in the pearl's salvation.[17] The lament echoes the elegiac performance of the opening, but is quietly hopeful

[17] Ian Bishop compares the apostrophe in this passage to the first speech to the first address to the Pearl-Maiden (lines 241-52). In particular, Bishop points out phonetic and semantic echoes of "del… daunger" in "doel-doungeon." See Ian Bishop, Pearl *in Its Setting: A Critical Study of the Structure and Meaning of* Pearl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), 75-76; and Barootes, "Apostrophe in *Pearl*."

for the Mourner's eventual spiritual reconciliation, rather than despairing at his insurmountable torpor.[18] At the end, the mourner is reluctantly content with the Maiden's fate, even if it serves to highlight his own sorrowful state.

These two scenes of mourning bookend the poem, but, knowing that his pearl is saved, it seems contradictory that the Mourner still grieves.[19] The interpretation of this ending has been a point of contention for scholars who would read the poem as a consolation, hindering a simple declaration of the Mourner's spiritual recovery and necessitating more creative explanations.[20] The voluminous scholarship on the debate over the elegiac, contemplative, or consolatory structure of the poem emphasises the rich ambiguities of the poem's religious imagery which makes simple categorisation impossible.[21] In my assessment, this is a depiction of a kind of melancholic mourning that is consonant with the self-negating expression of grief found in elegy.[22] The nature of the Mourner's relationship to the object

[18] See Vantuono's notes on line 1205 for how the poet creates resonances across the poem through the repetition of certain key words and grammatical constructions. William Vantuono, ed., *Pearl*, in *The* Pearl *Poems: An Omnibus Edition*, vol. 1 (London: Garland Publishing, 1984), 285, n. 1205.

[19] For studies key studies that argued for the poem's consolatory form, see John Conley, "*Pearl* and a Lost Tradition," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 54, no. 3 (1955): 332–47; Ian Bishop, Pearl *in its setting*; Bishop, "The Significance of the 'Garlande Gay' in the Allegory of *Pearl*," *The Review of English Studies* 8, no. 29 (1957): 12–21; V. E. Watts, "*Pearl* as a 'Consolatio'," *Medium Aevum* 32 (1963): 34–36; and Patricia M. Kean, The Pearl: *An Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1967).

[20] Bishop, along with Conley, Kean and others posed a contrasting consolatory interpretation to the accepted elegiac and allegorical readings of early scholarship in the fifties and sixties that greatly expanded the perceptions of the poem's religious imagery and visionary style. I would tend to agree that consolation determines the narrative structure of the vision, but I cannot accept the claims to the unification of the argument given the evident sadness that Mourner's removal from the dream occasions alongside his fervour. In short, the irresolution of mourning in the poem prevents consolation, a mark of elegiac form by my own definition. Useful surveys of the now infamous "*contemplatio* vs *consolatio*" debate that occupied scholarship for a long stretch of the twentieth century can be found in some of the various studies that sought to find 'a third way' to resolve the debate. See, for example, J. Allan Mitchell, "The Middle English *Pearl*: Figuring the Unfigurable," *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000): 86–111; Lawrence M. Clopper, "*Pearl* and the Consolation of Scripture," *Viator* 23 (1992): 231–46; and John Gatta Jr, "Transformation Symbolism and the Liturgy of the Mass in *Pearl*," *Modern Philology* 71, no. 3 (1974): 243–56.

[21] I echo Jane Beal's assessment of the debate on form: "I no longer regard the plethora of generic elements in *Pearl* as a problem in need of solution," as "the poet's deliberate, linguistic ambiguity never allows a careful reader to assume she can know what the exact relationship between the Dreamer and the Pearl-Maiden is." Beal, *The Signifying Power of Pearl: Medieval Literary and Cultural Contexts for the Transformation of Genre* (London: Routledge, 2016), 3.

[22] For an opposing view, cf. Bishop: "It is true that an element of consolation is often present in an elegy, but in *Pearl* consolation is the fundamental purpose that unifies the argument and determines its direction." Bishop, Pearl *in its setting*, 15.

changes significantly throughout, raising questions about how earthly love might translate into divine love, and where the intersection between this world and the next might lie.[23] But, fundamentally, the renewal of grief shows the course of mourning to be unresolved or even interminable, and this ambiguity invites an elegiac reading of the poem as a resistance to the resolutions of consolation.[24]

The key to understanding the course of mourning in *Pearl*, then, is to understand how the loss of the dream connects to the loss of the pearl. Ann Chalmers Watts gives the most coherent explanation, arguing that the elegiac language of *Pearl* offers a framework through which to read the two losses of the poem.[25] She finds a significant continuity between the self-conscious limits of mournful language, and the failure of the Mourner to endure his dream.[26] Watts argues that, ultimately, the grief of the Mourner is renewed by the vision and

> thus loss is echoed by loss, even to a passionate repetition of the inexpressible in the undreamable. Such echoing holds the losses, keeping present in 'no words can say' what neither life could keep nor vision, metaphor, or poetry contain. Language protesting the failure of language apprehends the sure being of what cannot be expressed.[27]

---

[23] Vance deals with the question of the theological propriety of the continuity of earthly desire from this life into the next, arguing that the Pearl-Maiden plays a role analogous to Beatrice in Dante's works. In this sense, the terrestrial relationship between the Mourner and the pearl forms the foundation for a spiritual union which will transcend the love as we know it (*eros*) and lead us to experience a spiritual love (*agape*) through our participation. See Eugene Vance, "*Pearl*: Love and the Poetics of Participation," in *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 131–47.

[24] I align myself with broadly 'negative' readings of the poem that seek to emphasise the mournful situation of the Mourner in relation to his exultant dream and the self-defeating or at least iterative language and form of the poem. See, for example, Kerilyn Harkaway-Krieger "Mysticism and Materiality: *Pearl* and the Theology of Metaphor," *Exemplaria* 28, no. 2 (2016): 161–80; George Edmondson, "*Pearl*: The Shadow of the Object, the Shape of the Law," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 29–64; J. Allan Mitchell, "Figuring the Unfigurable"; W. David Shaw, *Elegy & Paradox: Testing the Conventions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); J. Stephen Russell, *English Dream Visions*; Ann Chalmers Watts, "*Pearl*, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss," *PMLA* 99 (1984), 26-40; and Theodore Bogdanos, Pearl*, Image of the Ineffable: A Study in Medieval Poetic Symbolism* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983).

[25] Ann Chalmers Watts, "Pearl, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss."

[26] "By using the same words and images for both failures, the *Pearl* poet joins failure of the dreamer to endure his dream to the failure of language to say what he saw and heard." Ibid., 32.

[27] Ibid., 33.

Watts' reading posits that elegy and mystical vision share a common existential crisis, one that is manifested in the knowing failure of language. The failure of the mortal body links the tandem loss of the pearl and the dream, encompassed by the elegiac language used to convey the profound sadness of both events. There are two interrelated interpretative problems posed by this renewal of grief. The first is the question of whether the work of mourning in the poem is satisfactorily completed—or indeed whether mourning is ever 'complete.' The second relates to the role of Christian belief in mourning: how does melancholic mourning, with its fixation on earthly attachments, relate to mourning as a spiritually productive process that encourages inward reflection? I will argue that both are self-reflexive, continuous works, and both remain unresolved and in contention at the poem's end.

What I will refer to as the problem of the 'end of the poem,' then, is the implicit irresolution of the consolation process despite an outward reconciliation of mourning and spiritual belief. The end of the poem is a site of fraught tensions: between endings and beginnings; secularity and sacredness; between melancholia and mourning. It is the aim of this chapter to account for these tensions as a mark of *Pearl*'s elegiac form. To do this, I will first establish the nature of the dialectic between melancholic attachment and metaphorical expression as one which offers a reflection on the work of human loss within a Christian, penitential context. I will then clarify the *Pearl*-poet's elegiac style as reflective of a kind of human tragedy through a comparison to the poetry and thought of the Italian poet Dante, a figure often discussed in relation to *Pearl*.[28]

---

[28] For studies that treat the relationship between *Pearl* and the work of Dante, see Barbara Newman, "The Artifice of Eternity," in *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter (London : Routledge, 2007), 202; Ad Putter, *Introduction to the* Gawain-*Poet* (London: Longman, 1996); R. A. Shoaf, "*Purgatorio* and *Pearl*: Transgression and Transcendence," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 32, no. 1 (1990), 152–68; Warren Ginsberg, "Place and Dialectic in *Pearl* and Dante's *Paradiso*," *ELH* 55, no. 4 (1988): 731–53; Charles Muscatine, *Poetry and Crisis in the Age of Chaucer* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), 42; A. C. Spearing, *The* Gawain-*Poet*, 17-18, 107-109; Patricia M. Kean, *The Pearl*, 222-24; and Coolidge Otis Chapman, "Numerical Symbolism in Dante and the *Pearl*," *MLN* 54, no. 4 (1939): 256–59.

The first section of this chapter establishes the poem's definition of melancholia in opposition to the work of penitence. The Pearl-Maiden's delineation of these two modes of work in the poem establishes a moral rationale for mourning in the poem as an act of devotion instead of passive melancholy. Subsequently, the Maiden's retelling of the parable of the labourers in the vineyard demonstrates the potential for the conversion of a melancholic mourning into an act of penance by reorienting the Mourner's perspective on this work. The corrective pattern of the dialogue becomes clear at this point, with the continual correction of the Mourner's explanation of his vision in accordance with the Maiden's teachings. It is this corrective motion that we can characterise as the work of mourning in the poem, a movement between melancholic torpor and penitential mourning. Consequently, the dialogue manifests the Mourner's relative poverty of experience compared to the Maiden, who speaks to him from the seat of Heaven.

The second section of the chapter seeks to define the changes of metaphorical registers within the vision as a work analogous to the Mourner's mourning. The transformations of metaphor in the poem display the multiplicity of the image of the lost object, devised to induct him into an economy of symbolic meanings. The constant changes in register, as the pearl accumulates meanings later elucidated by the Maiden, place the Mourner in a position of perpetual disinheritance that is the result of his mundane situation in the eschatological scheme of the poem. It becomes clear that just as the Mourner must mourn the earthly loss of his pearl, his mortal existence precludes his full appreciation or comprehension of her transfiguration.

In the third part of the chapter, then, I argue that the work of penitence in which the Mourner engages (through the Maiden's consolation) is consonant with a kind of constant renewal of faith. This is styled through the concatenating link-word structure as a continual development of anagogical meanings to which the Mourner (and reader) must adapt. In the

context of the poem's recursive patterning of these link-words, the Mourner's task of reconciling himself to the continually changing significance of the pearl is beyond his mortal capacity, coming to a head with the failure of the vision.

At this point, moving on to the final section of the chapter, I return to the problem of the end of the poem and resolve the disparity between the poem's metrical form as a complete circuit and its incomplete consolatory arc. To do so, I read the poem's circularity in light of Giorgio Agamben's reflections on Dante's concern with the end of the poem as a moment of hollow tragedy. If for Agamben the problem of the end of the poem is an amplification of the epistemological issue of the imperfect form of language, *Pearl* circumvents this issue by refusing to end properly. The circular form of the poem postpones the final disagreement between the poem's rational form and its inevitable failure of language, even if this means perpetuating the work of mourning through the continuation of elegiac expression.

This chapter will demonstrate how grief is reconciled with spiritual desire in the poem through a recognition of melancholic mourning. Though lacking in the face of his profound vision, I will argue that the Mourner offers a way of regarding the interminability of mourning not as a spiritual affliction, but as an opportunity for self-reflection. The Mourner's earthly desires move him to transgress the boundaries between the spiritual and the divine, not in the service of the dead, but in order to appreciate his terrestrial existence with a quietly melancholic contentment. *Pearl* exemplifies elegy as a genre about the transformations that grief inculcates and about their limitations. Its readers are invited to reflect on our enduring earthly attachments as nascent connections to a greater divine love, while resisting a permanent conversion that would suggest the stability of our epistemological perspective of anagogical issues. Above all else, *Pearl* portrays the work of mourning as a work of continual change, manifested as the interminable revolutions of spiritual belief.

Mourning and Penitence in *Pearl*

To understand the connection between failed expression and unresolved consolation at the end of the poem, we first need to calibrate our definition of mourning to the vocabulary of the *Pearl*-poet. To begin this chapter then, I will establish the distinction between a secular and spiritual sadness that is upheld by the Pearl-Maiden. This will underline the competing ideologies at play in the poem: one elegiac and one consolatory.

The Maiden offers an opportunity to overcome excessive passion through a Boethian-style discourse, adhering to a traditional distinction between a fruitless mourning for earthly attachments and a belief in the stable truths of Christian spirituality. In their respective roles as naive mourner and infallible instructor, the Mourner and the Maiden echo the figures of the plaintive Boethian narrator and Lady Philosophy.[29] Like the *Book of the Duchess*, the essential structure of the vision is Boethian, though *Pearl*'s narrative structure is less clouded by the ambiguities of the dream form. Unlike the narrator in *BD*, the Pearl-Maiden is an effective consoler and a commanding authority figure, dismissing the "luf-longyng" (1152) of the Mourner as an inappropriate desire:

> 'Thow demeȝ noȝt bot doel-dystresse,'
> Þenne sayde þat wyȝt. 'Why dotȝ þou so?
> For dyne of doel of lureȝ lesse
> Ofte mony mon forgos the mo.'
>
> (337-340)

In that this "doel-dystresse" can distract from or prevent spiritual work, the Maiden says it is dangerous, or even sinful.[30] Sadness is characterised as a "din," disruptive and unpleasant to

[29] See my discussion of Boethius' text in the introduction to the dissertation.
[30] In reading the Mourner's melancholy attachment as potentially sinful, I am in accordance with a number of critics who have stressed the penitential quality of the vision. See Corey Owen, "The Prudence of *Pearl*," *The Chaucer Review* 45, no. 4 (2011): 411–34; Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject," *The Chaucer Review* 44, no. 3 (2010): 294-322; Sarah Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Sandra

the ear. Compared to the pleasant sounds of poetry, or of the harmony of liturgical activity, the lamentations of the Mourner are dissonant, and obviously in need of correction in the Maiden's eyes.

The Maiden refuses to validate the Mourner's mourning state because it is incompatible with Christian desire. For the Maiden, this self-pitying lament is a form of *cupiditas* and represents a perversion of the desire for God, *caritas*:[31]

> Þe oȝte better þyseluen blesse,
> And loue ay God, in wele and wo,
> For anger gayneȝ þe not a cresse.
> […]
> Þou moste abyde þat he schal deme.
> (341-348)

God's judgement is not swayed by sorrow, but by divine love as expressed in participation with the spiritual good. Earthly love is only advisable when it leads to a divine sense of unity, something that eludes the Mourner in his early laments.[32] The work of repentance, and not the inaction of grieving, expresses the desire for God which makes one worthy of His gift.[33] This melancholic mourning is posited as an isolating, unproductive experience and one which does not please God, according to the Pearl-Maiden:

> Hys comforte may þy languor lyþe,
> And þy lureȝ of lyȝtly leme;
> For, marre oþer madde, morne and myþe,

Pierson Prior, *The Fayre Formez of the* Pearl *Poet* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996); Elizabeth D. Kirk, "The Anatomy of a Mourning: Reflections on the *Pearl* Dreamer," in *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina and Robert F. Yeager (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 215–26; and Gregory Roper, "*Pearl*, Penitence, and the Recovery of the Self," *The Chaucer Review* 28, no. 2 (1993): 164–86.

[31] This pertinent distinction is made by Michael H. Means. Means, *The Consolatio Genre in Medieval English Literature*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972), 52.

[32] This is the argument of Eugene Vance, who compares the Pearl-Maiden to Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova* as an earthly figure that leads the Dante-Narrator to spiritual desire. See Vance, "*Pearl*: Love and the Poetics of Participation."

[33] "The Dreamer's condition requires therapy, or, in another idiom, penance." Kirk, "The Anatomy of Mourning," 222.

Al lys in hym to dyȝt and deme.'

(357-360)

The Maiden argues that the Mourner's lament has no effect on God's mercy, recalling Philosophy's chastisement of the narrator in the *Consolation*. Prayer and confession are the only activities that move God to show mercy, and being in a state of passive misery is, in a theological sense, futile.[34] The poet draws a clear divide between the unproductive emotional response of sadness (especially as a response to death) and the active seeking of confession and offering of prayers.

The distinction between the grief of mourning as "lesse" and the spiritual reward of penance as "mo" (339-40) is thus a crucial one in distinguishing a spiritual mourning from the melancholia generated by the work of mourning. It demonstrates the difference between Middle English *mornen* and modern "mourning" as Freud defined it. The latter denotes a kind of psychic work, with a view to modifying signifying bonds with relation to the love object, while the former does not recognise this psychic work as productive in a theological sense but, rather, as merely expressive. Accompanied by the alliterated "marre oþer madde," the Maiden's usage of *mornen* is more closely aligned with *acedia* – a torpor that stems from hopelessness in the face of spiritual work – than a productive work.

The Mourner's grief is a hindrance to spiritual participation, differing from a form of theologically motivated mourning conceived of as a kind of penance. The poem captures, in its conflict between a productive penance and an enduring sadness for ephemeral things, something of Freud's foundational distinction between a 'healthy' mourning and a prolonged

[34] It is widely thought, especially following the work of John Bowers and Lynn Staley, that the poet was a clerical figure. For discussions of this possibility, see John M. Bowers, "*Pearl* in Its Royal Setting: Ricardian Poetry Revisited," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 17 (1995): 111–55; and Lynn Staley, "*Pearl* and Contingencies of Love and Piety," in *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry: Essays in Honour of Derek Pearsall*, ed. David Aers (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 83–114; and Watson, "The *Gawain*-Poet as Vernacular Theologian," in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. by Derek Brewer and J. Gibson (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 293–314.

melancholia. The presence of melancholia as an inevitable and disruptive force within mourning in *Pearl* pre-empts Freud's admission, contrary to his initial distinction between melancholia and mourning, that "although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know that we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute."[35] *Pearl*, through the urgency of the Maiden's consolation, responds to this burden of irremediable loss with a corresponding recognition of the work of penance that is paramount to spiritual reconciliation. That is to say that *Pearl* recognises the melancholic work of mourning as inevitable and envelopes it in an ongoing penitential work. To understand how these two kinds of work interact in the poem, I will turn my attention to the retelling of the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, in which this vocabulary of "lesse" and "mo" is utilised to distinguish penance from melancholic mourning.

Wanhope **and the Forms of Work**

In that the Mourner's sadness denies him the "confort of Kryst," it takes place outside of the remit of spiritual work and is not only unproductive but potentially sinful. As Garrison summarises, "the dreamer uses his rational judgment only in the service of perpetuating his grief. He fails to realise what he should logically know: that Christ raised his pearl from the dead."[36] The Mourner finds himself in the grip of an earthly logic, one of loss and equivalence that precludes the possibility of transfiguration. The work of mourning stands in for the work of penance in the poem (a work that is depicted in its sacramental form at the end of the poem). The work of mourning is therefore related to the correction of *acedia* in the poem, rather than penance. To this end, I will argue that the discourse of mourning in the poem develops around the conditioning of the Mourner's spiritual outlook, rather than a

---

[35] Sigmund Freud, *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by Ernst L. Freud, trans. by Tania Stern and James Stern (Courier Corporation, 1992), 386. See my extended discussion of Freud's work in the general introduction.
[36] Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss," 304.

penance in itself. What the poem shows is that penance is a process that begins with a reformation of the perspective on penitential work: it is here that we find the work of mourning as a correction of melancholia.

In this section I will demonstrate two key points in my argument. First, I will build on the suggestion of the Mourner's *acedia* as a resistance to spiritual work that spawns from a dreadful contemplation of divinity. If melancholia is a product of the impossible attempt to represent the lost object, the Mourner's divine vision presents an opposing and equally impossible work of representing divinity. By reconciling the two, we can see how the work of mourning lies behind the contemplation of the ineffable. Second, I will explain how the poet reconciles the Mourner's confrontation with divinity in the vision with his melancholic self-regard, offering a new, eschatological perspective on the interminable nature of that work. What is made clear by the parable of the labourers is that the perpetuity of work in this life that causes dread in the Mourner differs fundamentally from the eternity of the afterlife. I will conclude this section by showing that although the work of penance and the work of mourning are equally perpetual (in that their task is never complete), penance is rewarded with a freedom from the strictures of time in the afterlife, whereas the work of mourning is the fundamental condition of a mortal existence subject to those strictures. This distinction will form the foundation of my understanding of the poem's depiction of the work of mourning as a middle path between a dreadful melancholia and a penitential mourning.

The key facet of the depressive torpor the Mourner exhibits in the opening of the poem is a hopelessness that prevents spiritual action, often labelled *wanhope* in Middle English texts.[37] Closely related to the sin of *acedia*, the word is used in *Piers Plowman* in the

[37] "The theological error or sin of insufficient faith in God's mercy, despair that denies the promise of salvation and divine forgiveness; despair of salvation, grace, etc.; ~ of goddes merci." *Middle English Dictionary,* ed. Robert E. Lewis et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001), s.v. "Wanhope."

explanation of how the daunting task of approaching divinity can itself cause grief, in that repaying God is an impossible labour:[38]

> *Numquam dimittitur peccatum…*
> Thus it fareth by swich folk that falsly al hire lyves
> Yvele liven and leten noght til lif hem forsake.
> Drede of desperacion thane dryveth awey grace,
> That mercy in hir minde may noght thanne falle;
> Good hope, that helpe sholde, to wanhope torneth—[39]

As these lines demonstrate, the source of solace is also the source of dreadful rumination. The passage makes clear the connection between the dread of spiritual work and the daunting task of repaying God's infinite benevolence. As Wenzel puts it, "the thought that in the economy of salvation God demands restitution often causes despair."[40] Giorgio Agamben similarly confirms the fundamental role that *acedia* plays in our epistemological conception of the world:

> What afflicts the slothful is not, therefore, the awareness of an evil, but, on the contrary, the contemplation of the greatest goods: *acedia* is precisely the vertiginous and frightened withdrawal (*recessus*) when faced with the task implied by the place of man before God.[41]

In Christian thought it is, of course, only the grace of God, through Christ's sacrifice, that makes satisfaction possible, though the nature of this sacrifice is beyond the limitations of human comprehension. The work of penance turns into melancholia (associated with *acedia*)

---

[38] For a discussion of *Wanhope* in relation to *acedia*, see Siegfried Wenzel, *Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 145.
[39] William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Longman, 1995), B-Text, XVII, 307-11. This section appears largely unchanged in the C-version of the text in Passus XIX at lines 288-293. The Latin quoted in the first line is an abbreviated citation of St Augustine: "Non dimittitur peccatum donec restituatur ablatum" ["The sin is not forgiven until the stolen goods are returned"]. St Augustine, "Epistle 153," in *Patrologia Latina,* ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, no. 33, Sect. 20 (Paris: Migne, 1845), 662.
[40] Wenzel, 145.
[41] Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 5-6.

when it is self-obsessed rather than relinquishing, and this is a perspective we can identify in the Mourner's confrontation with divinity.

It is through this vacillation between hope and *wanhope* that the dialectic of mourning and melancholia is cast in *Pearl*, identifiable as the work of penance on the one hand and a dreadful despair on the other. If the work of penance is typified by the hopeful participation in the liturgy seen at the end of the poem, then the work of mourning is instead associated with the difficulty of approaching that work, a difficulty that bears the risk of a melancholic *wanhope* inculcated by the dreadful regard for divinity. For example, upon first seeing the Pearl-Maiden, the Mourner is unable to comprehend or fully explain the nature of the pearl at her breast:

> Bot a wonder perle wythouten wemme
> Inmyddeȝ hyr breste watȝ sette so sure;
> A manneȝ dom moȝt dryȝly demme,
> Er mynde moȝt malte in hit mesure.
>
> (221-224)

The mourner baulks at the pearl, saying that a man's judgement would surely fail before it could comprehend the wondrous object. The recursive form of the pearl, concentrically situated within a ring of smaller pearls, within a poem which is itself circular, represents the infinite regression of divine forms from an earthly perspective.[42] In that it is a recursive, iterative process, always incomplete in its representation, the first sight of the pearl offers a metonym for the poem's larger confrontation with divinity as an ineffable form.[43]

---

[42] In the same vein, Cary Nelson studies this roundness as a figural form: "In the dream landscape of his body, the mortal seed of timeless germination, the dreamer experiences earthly plenitude fulfilled. But earthly plenitude is only a figure for the translucent simultaneity of eternity; it is only a shadow of the apocalyptic roundness to come." Nelson, *The Incarnate Word: Literature as Verbal Space* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 46.

[43] Theodore Bogdanos regards the poem as a "dramatization of man's encounter with the divine," treating the entire poem as an allegory for the impossibility of representing divinity. Bogdanos, *Image of the Ineffable*, 1.

Rather than simply wondrous, this confrontation with divinity highlights the epistemological perspective of the Mourner and implies the melancholia that his recognition of that perspective induces. Taking the "wonder perle" as a metonym for the divine form of the vision, this language of self-negation pre-empts the Mourner's rash misapprehension of the Lamb and the Maiden, the cause of his melancholia when the dream suddenly ends. As I have already argued, the Mourner's failure to comprehend his vision is often framed in the language of the elegy, obsessing over the limitations of conventional expression.[44] Following Chalmers Watts, this linkage of the language of loss with the ineffability of divinity links the contrition of spiritual loss with the melancholia of human loss. It is this sense of epistemological doubt defined by *wanhope* that lies behind the Mourner's inarticulacy here. The elegiac expression is underwritten by the melancholic failure of language, and this culminates in the melancholic recognition of his inadequacy in the wake of the vision's premature end:

> To mo of his mysterys I hade ben dryuen;
> Bot ay wolde man of happe more hente
> Þen moȝte by ryȝt vpon hem clyuen.
> Þerfore my ioye watȝ sone toriuen.
>
> (1194-96)

The fact that "ay wolde man of happe more hente" becomes emblematic not only of his desire for things he cannot have, but also for a melancholic perspective of one's inadequacy more generally for God's love. Spiritual contrition is frustrated by an interiorisation of one's inevitable mortal failings, mirroring the melancholic's "impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale."[45] In the logic of elegy, it is this struggle to articulate and avoid melancholic *wanhope*

---

[44] Denise Despres argues that the Mourner's "exasperatingly" literal attitude frustrates the direct course of consolation in order to resist and reinvigorate the expectations of the genre. Despres, *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature* (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1989), 104.
[45] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth, 1957), 246.

that typifies the work of mourning, manifested as a passage between melancholic dread and penitential mourning when contemplating the ineffable pearl.

This self-reflection on mortal inadequacy is at the heart of the poem's melancholic outlook. The lingering dread of *wanhope* necessarily hangs over the Mourner in his terrestrial situation and it is the tension between hopeless despair and a recognition of God's forgiveness that the work of mourning explores. The poem is not properly consolatory because although it works at turning this despairing perspective on work to a hopeful perspective on God's deliverance, it admits that the persistence of that despair is something that necessarily attends all mourning. The key moment in the poem that addresses this tension is the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. The parable is an exploration of the value of work as seen first from the perspective of the Mourner, and then the Maiden. An analysis of their opposing interpretations will help us to understand the Mourner's melancholic torpor in a penitential context.

The parable, told by the Maiden, depicts a group of labourers who come to work for a lord for a full day, only to be joined by another group of labourers later that same day. When the lord comes to pay the labourers, he commands the reeve to:

> 'Set hem alle vpon a rawe
> And gyf vchon inlyche a peny.
> Bygyn at þe laste þat standeȝ lowe,
> Tyl to þe fyrste þat þou atteny.'
>
> (545-48)

The last is paid first and the first, last, but all receive the same reward despite the differing lengths of their work. The first labourers, concerned that their work has been devalued, complain

> And sayden þat þay hade trauayled sore:
> 'Þese bot on oure hem con streny;

Vus þynk vus oȝe to take more.'

(550-51)

The lord replies that their "couenaunde" (562) has not been broken, as it was agreed that the reward would be a singular penny for all.[46] The word "couenaunde" has obvious theological implications, revealing the correct interpretation of the parable in which the penny represents the reward of eternal salvation.[47] In this way, the workers cannot be paid more or less, because this measure of relativity has no bearing on the eternal nature of their reward. The correct interpretation, as the Maiden explains, lies in the understanding of the value of the penny, and not the labour: the value of the labour is relative to mortal time but the penny is infinite, so a direct equivalence is only made possible through "þe grace of God" (612).

The Mourner, however, is reluctant to accept the Maiden's interpretation of this scene, objecting that labour must be recompensed according to earthly equivalence:

Then more I meled and sayde apert:
'Me þynk þy tale vnreasonable.
Goddeȝ ryȝt is redy and euermore rert,
Oþer Holy Wryt is bot a fable.
[…]
Now he þat stod þe long day stable,
And þou to payment com hym byfore,
Þenne þe lasse in werke to take more able,
And euer þe lenger þe lesse, þe more.'

(589-600)

The physical labour of the workers has a measurable value to the Mourner. The word "meled" evokes the sense of agricultural, manual labour, implying that the issue might be

[46] For studies that explain the paradox of equal rewards within a hierarchal structure, see Josephine Bloomfield, "Stumbling toward God's Light: The *Pearl* Dreamer and the Impediments of Hierarchy," *The Chaucer Review* 45, no. 4 (2011): 390–410; and Ann Howland Schotter, "The Paradox of Equality and Hierarchy of Reward in *Pearl*," *Renascence* 33, no. 3 (1981): 172–79.
[47] Robert W. Ackerman was the first scholar to endorse the reading of the penny as the "gift of salvation." Ackerman, "The Pearl-Maiden and the Penny," *Romance Philology* 18 (1964): 621.

solved by mulling it over as one might grind wheat into flour. The practical, earthy phrase corresponds to his difficultly in conceiving a system of compensation in which work is not a quantifiable activity with a tangible product. In this way he interprets the parable incorrectly. Though he can conceive of the parable as a metaphor for the covenant with God, he understands the metaphor to be a direct substitution of meaning, a simple translation of one real-world situation on to another: like wheat into flour. His return to the quantifiable distinction between less and more betrays his limited perspective of this work and its reward and, as a result, his misapprehension of the metaphor.

The parable, beyond explaining that "Þe laste schal be þe fyrst þat strykeȝ, | And þe fyrst þe last" (570-71), explores the definition of earthly work from two perspectives that chime with the dialectic between hope and *wanhope*. In the first (the Mourner's), work is equivalent to that which is produced: work is equivalent to *a* work, the product of labour.[48] In this way, the initial labourers and the Mourner expect that work done will be paid proportionately. In other words, they expect a direct equivalence between spiritual work and its reward in heaven—a belief that the Maiden rectifies. This is a perspective that stems from *wanhope*, the inability to accept the incomprehensible nature of satisfaction. The second definition of work is that of work *as* labour in and of itself. This form of labour is associated with mourning, characterised by a hopeful perspective that stems from a faith in God to authorise its completion and to bestow His gift.

The poet shows that melancholia and mourning are differentiated by a faith in their symbolic nature. This being the case, the distinction between melancholia and mourning only becomes apparent from an eschatological perspective, in which the work of this life is meaningful only in conjunction with the life hereafter. From a divine perspective there is a

[48] See Walter Wadiak, "'There is No Date': The Middle English *Pearl* and Its Work," *Glossator* 9 (2015): 179-197.

link between the continuity of the labourers' work and the infinitude of their reward. Borroff has discussed the temporal and formal implications of the labourers lined up in a "rawe" in this light.[49] The process of work and payment is, in one sense, linear, like the life that the day of work represents. This is juxtaposed with the eschatological timeframe to which the meaning of the parable translates. By contrasting the linear arrangement of the labourers with the circular form of the penny (which is itself suggestive of the round pearl), the poet reflects on the disjunction between heavenly and earthly perspectives. From one, earthly perspective the payment of the labourers is illogical, even unfair, but from the alien perfection of heaven, the parable reaffirms the freedom from the 'problem' of time that death brings.[50] Because this work has no product, it cannot be completed by the hand of the labourer, only by the grace of God. Its work is constant, not measurable, and its purpose is not to produce, but to transform. Like the parable itself, it is the aim of this spiritual labour to transform our bodies from physical forms to spiritual vessels.

The Pearl-Maiden's rebuttal to the Mourner's complaint about the parable of the labourers, then, seeks to reframe the Mourner's perspective on this endless labour and therefore gives us a clear sense of how the poem's work of mourning fits into this dual definition of work. The Maiden's response, which constitutes the passage into the second half of the poem, is a corrective to the faithless perspective of the Mourner:

> 'Of more and lasse in Godeȝ ryche,'
> Þat gentyl sayde, 'lys no joparde,
> For þer is vch mon payed inlyche,
> Wheþer lyttel oþer much be hys rewarde;
> […]

[49] Marie Borroff writes that circular images in the poem are an "abstraction from the linear or dimensional, two-ended mode of earthly space, time, and value." Borroff, *Traditions and Renewals: Chaucer, the Gawain-Poet, & Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 117.
[50] "Eternity is not perpetual duration but… release from linear time." Ibid., 123.

For þe grace of God is gret inoghe.'

(601-12)

The chiastic nature of these lines decentres the value of the labour and instead explains the centrality of God as a benevolent and generous being to the nature of this exchange. We are translated from a realm of equivalence into a realm of superabundance. The chiasmus of the 'less/more' antithesis reframes the work of the labourers from a new perspective, offering, in its recapitulation of the Mourner's own language, a path from one side of the argument to the other.[51] To my mind, this corrective motion represents the work of mourning in the poem: a work that avoids melancholia by renewing our perspective, but that is not consolatory in that it does not envisage an end to its work. In the context of the poem's poetics of circularity, this is, on the one hand, a repetition that would seem to perpetuate the limited "more or less" vocabulary of the Mourner. On the other, this is also a structural reframing that enacts the subjective reversal of the parable, placing the Mourner under scrutiny rather than the letter of the law.

The foundation of the poem's melancholia, then, is its epistemological perspective. If at first melancholia is a product of intractable mourning, the realisation of the recessive nature of the pearl as a spiritual object redefines that melancholia as the product of an epistemological perspective. What the parable demonstrates is that the recursive work of mourning is a work of coming to terms with this epistemological perspective. This allows us to see that the melancholic, obsessive regard for the pearl as a lost object is just a symptom of the mortal condition, a fact revealed when the pearl is shown to be a part of a divine whole. The parable unveils the source of this melancholia, a dreadful contemplation of divinity that

[51] Britton J. Harwood likens the bifurcated structure of the poem to an open book, emphasising the parable's passage from one perspective to the other as though turning over a page. Britton J Harwood, "*Pearl* as Diptych," *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the* Pearl-*poet*, ed. Robert J. Blanch and Julian Wasserman (New York: Whitston Publishing, 1991), 61.

obsesses over the form of work and thus prevents the work of penance by refusing to relinquish an earthly perspective. The work of mourning, then, is the work of coming to terms with our earthly perspective, the work of correcting melancholia, but not a penitential act in itself. What the poem offers, in this sense, is not absolution, but a shift in perspective that outlines the form of absolution towards which the Christian subject must aspire. Once again, we find the work of mourning in elegy pitched between melancholia and mourning, a work of expressing and understanding one's grief without negating it.

The next section, then, traces this shift in perspectives through the use of metaphor in the poem, a kind of language that, though it is grounded in human expression, points to the immanence of meaning gestured towards by the poem's consolatory frame. In an Augustinian sense, language represents the limit of epistemological experience but, through the transposition of metaphor, we might begin to question that experience.[52] Metaphor is the means for transformation, for renewing meaning and faith within the limits of a language that cannot contain truth in itself.[53]

Metaphor as a Mimesis of Mourning

When we speak of a work of mourning in *Pearl*, then, we speak of a work of making sense of the epistemological pretensions that shape our perspectives on grief. The work of mourning is indissociable from language as both the means by which we might articulate that grief, and also as a reminder of the limits of our understanding. To this end, it is through metaphorical language that the poet explores this struggle, offering the poet the means to gesture towards higher orders of meaning within the limits of human expression.

---

[52] For a full study of how Augustine's linguistics are shaped by his epistemological and ontological thought, see Clifford Ando, "Augustine on Language," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 40 (1994), 45-78.
[53] This tension is elaborated on by Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 7.

Metaphor is the vehicle for the significant slippages of meaning that not only enable the changing registers of the poem, but also manifest the authority of the Pearl-Maiden, who stands for the infallible perspective of divinity. Since some early critics refused the strictly elegiac reading of the poem in favour of an allegorical reading, the nature of *Pearl*'s metaphorical imagery has been read variously.[54] Since the decline of these allegorical readings in favour of more dynamic interpretations of the pearl as a transformative image, most critics of the poem's metaphor fall into one of two camps.[55] The first camp argues for a metonymic structure, emphasising the relationship of the pearl to its larger structures of meaning, especially with regards to the relationship between the pearl and the heavenly city.[56] The second camp regards the poem's overall meaning as parabolic, noting especially the Augustinian view of language as incommensurable with divine meaning.[57] My reading draws from both lines of interpretation, emphasising in particular the dynamic nature of the pearl's meaning, rather than the final outcome of the poem. Though I agree that the poem's parabolic meanings are fundamental to discrete passages (namely, the retelling of the parables), my reading is more firmly metonymic, seeing the circular poetic structure of the poem as a mimesis of mourning that enacts the tension between heavenly and earthly perspectives of the work that mourning entails.

---

[54] Metaphor has been the subject of much scholarship on *Pearl* ever since the first allegorical interpretations of the poem in the early twentieth century by scholars such as Schofield, Wellek, and Greene. See William Henry Schofield, "Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in *The Pearl*," *PMLA* 24, no. 4 (1909), 585–675; Jefferson B. Fletcher, "The Allegory of the *Pearl*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 20, no.1 (1921), 1–21; René Wellek, *The* Pearl*: An Interpretation of the Middle-English Poem* (Prague: Státní tiskárna, 1933); and W. K. Greene, "The *Pearl*--a New Interpretation," *PMLA* 40 (1925): 814–27.
[55] For a refutation of the strictly allegorical readings of *Pearl*, see A. C. Spearing, "Symbolic and Dramatic Development in *Pearl*," *Modern Philology* 60, no. 1 (1962): 1–12.
[56] For metonymic studies of the poem, see Kerilyn Harkaway-Krieger, "Mysticism and Materiality"; Alan J. Fletcher, "Reading Radical Metonymy in *Pearl*," in *Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures: New Essays*, ed. Lawrence Besserman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 47–61; George Edmondson, "*Pearl*: The Shadow of the Object"; Teresa P. Reed, "Mary, the Maiden, and Metonymy in *Pearl*," *South Atlantic Review* 65, no. 2 (2000): 134–62; and Sarah Stanbury, "The Body and the City in *Pearl*," Representations 48, (1994): 30–47.
[57] For parabolic studies of the poem, see Seeta Chaganti, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary*; J. Allan Mitchell, "Figuring the Unfigurable"; Douglas Thorpe, *A New Earth: The Labor of Language in Pearl, Herbert's Temple, and Blake's Jerusalem* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1991); Barbara Nolan, *The Gothic Visionary Perspective* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1977).

The authority of the Pearl-Maiden as an infallible instructor stems largely from her power to correct the Mourner's use of language, constantly redefining the terms of their discourse.[58] The purpose of this repetitive patterning of redefinition is to introduce novel meanings for an already-established word as though they were prior to this literal meaning.[59] A word like "cortaysye" (432), used in the context of queenship, suggests a certain, literal conception of social hierarchies. However, according to the Pearl-Maiden, "cortaysye" pertains to a divine virtue of which terrestrial nobility is but one instantiation. The Mourner is able to grasp the literal sense of heaven being a 'court' and, having accepted this analogy, is then introduced to its anagogical sense, which rewrites the former instances of "cortaysye" as an anagogical rather than analogical figure *all along*.[60] It is as though the ground moves beneath the Mourner's feet, revealing that a figure he thought belonged to one semantic realm has already been translated to another, radically different realm. In the logic of metaphor, by exchanging one metonymical *tenor* for another within a single *vehicle*, the poet creates a disorienting sense of revolution in which the Mourner finds himself continually alienated from familiar structures of discourse. The continual readjustment to new significances trains the reader to remain alive to not only the rhetorical potential of language, but the capacity for language to represent a shift in ontological perspective.[61] Although change is constantly effected, the Mourner is always back where he started, attempting to grasp some new resonance or meaning that escapes him as a mortal subject.

---

[58] For studies of the deconstructive power of *Pearl*'s language, see Arthur Bahr, "The Manifold Singularity of *Pearl*," *ELH* 82, no. 3 (2015): 729–58; David N. Devries, "*Unde Dicitur*: Observations on the Poetic *Distinctiones* of the *Pearl* -Poet," *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000): 115–132; J. Allan Mitchell, "Figuring the Unfigurable"; Russell, *English Dream Visions*; and Thorpe, *A New Earth*.

[59] "This repetition of a single word, over the time and space of section, signals the inscriptional character as always already there. It is a constitutive, anterior, and exterior force, shaping the spectacle itself." Chaganti, 125.

[60] It is in this sense that Changanti argues that *Pearl* "transcends analogy," pointing to the dynamic movement of signifiers as an example of the inscriptional form of the poem, which she compares to a reliquary. Chaganti, 117.

[61] "One figure points to another, *is* in a sense that other (metaphorically), until we realise all the figures, like all objects (and all words), are manifestations of the one word and figure that is who we ultimately are." Thorpe, 50.

Metaphor offers a mimesis of the transcendence of earthly forms, then, by destabilising that which we take to be concrete. If mourning requires that one escape the strictures of a literal, melancholic recognition of the object (in this case a pearl), metaphor is the linguistic process that transgresses the boundaries of rhetorical logic and thus leads us away from these fixed associations. As Paul Ricoeur puts it,

> If metaphor always involves a kind of mistake, if it involves taking one thing for another by a sort of calculated error, then metaphor is essentially a discursive phenomenon. To affect just one word, the metaphor has to disturb a whole network by means of an aberrant attribution.[62]

If we take metaphor to be a "planned category mistake," then it is at its heart a device for destabilizing the literal meanings of language.[63] Metaphor is typically defined by medieval thinkers as a kind of "other speech" (to borrow a term from Harkaway-Krieger), pointing to the way that metaphor alienates a word from 'ordinary' language.[64] The transgressive play of metaphor entails a misrecognition that upsets language as a static or dulled form of communication, and suggests the rich possibilities of new creative links. In the example of the parable of the labourers, the metaphor of the penny does not just reveal the grace of God but reorients the Mourner's literal perspective of the world by "disturb[ing] a whole network" of associations of work and satisfaction.

With regards to the central image of the pearl, then, metaphor is not only the means by which the symbolic mode of the dream is realised, but it also enacts the work of mourning as a proliferation of the pearl's meaning. In that metaphor generates new meanings, Julia Kristeva argues that mourning is associated with freely "concatenating signifiers."[65] For

[62] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 21.
[63] Ibid., 197.
[64] Harkaway-Krieger notes that Isidore of Seville and Bede define metaphor as a transference of meaning, or a replacement of one word with another creating paradox or at identifying "disparate elements within a single linguistic formulation." See Harkaway-Krieger, 176.
[65] "The possibility of concatenating signifiers (words or actions) appears to depend upon going though mourning for an archaic and indispensable object… such a possibility comes out of transposing, beyond loss and on an imaginary or symbolic level, the imprints of an interchange with the other articulated to a certain order." Julia

Kristeva, grief is characterised by a failure to transpose one meaning for another, something that we can see in the melancholia produced by the Mourner's inability to understand the transfiguration of his pearl. Mourning is a fundamentally metaphorical act, and here we can see that the work of mourning in *Pearl* is founded on a similar regard for metaphor as a means for the correction of a singular, obsessive regard for the lost object.[66] Metaphor displays the richness of the vision, then, by giving a sense of the depth of anagogical figures.[67] Metaphor is a medium for the work of mourning in the poem, demonstrating the meanings of the pearl beyond the Mourner's initial melancholic analogy for a lost object.

The religious overtones of this process of 'metaphorisation' are manifested in *Pearl* by the consolatory structure of the dialogue, which would see the Mourner's divestment of earthly attachment in favour of God's promise of satisfaction. Simply put, the Mourner must give up his earthly "perle" to invest in the "pearl of price," which represents the heavenly kingdom of New Jerusalem and, therefore, the life eternal. In a crucial moment, the Pearl-Maiden elucidates this exchange through the parable of the pearl of price:

> 'This makelleȝ perle, þat boȝt is dere,
> Þe joueler gef fore alle hys god,
> Is lyke þe reme of heuenesse clere:
> So sayde þe Fader of folde and flode;
>
> (733-36)

Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 40.

[66] "To transpose corresponds to the Greek *metaphorein*, to transport; language is, from the start, a translation, but on a level that is heterogeneous to the one where affective loss, renunciation, or the break takes place." Ibid., 41.

[67] Sarah Stanbury has written extensively on the importance of the poet's visual register in this regard, showing how the richness of the material descriptions of the dream indicate the deeper visionary meanings while placing the reader in the subjective position of the Mourner *seeing* his dream. See Sarah Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet*; Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); and Sarah Stanbury, "Feminist Masterplots: The Gaze on the Body of *Pearl*'s Dead Girl," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Sarah Stanbury and Linda Lomperis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 96-115.

In a telling revision, the Maiden swaps the parable's scriptural subject, a merchant, for a jeweller, making the invitation to action very clear to the "joyleȝ juelere" (252).[68] The merchant's investment in the pearl despite its "dere" price on earth has a double effect. First, it demonstrates that the pearl has more value than all things terrestrial (a sign of its implicit spiritual worth). Second, it reveals the circular logic of parable, in which belief in this invaluable quality is the only thing that gives it this transcendent value. In this way, parabolic logic defies pragmatic reason, as it is not the purpose of the parable to demonstrate the equity of faith, but to instantiate the authority of the laws that govern faith.

The logic of the parable is self-authorising and can only be understood if one relinquishes the strictures of terrestrial exchange. For Kristeva this belief in a higher order of meaning (religious, cultural, or social) that can authorise your relinquishment of the lost object is the condition of mourning, whereas the melancholic sceptic denies this authority and attempts to refute the symbolic nature of their object.[69] Returning to the dialectic between hope and *wanhope* inherent in the endlessly round shape of the pearl, the solution to the parable is ever-receding to the subject who cannot relinquish an earthly perspective, but all-encompassing for a subject who allows themselves to be shaped by its meaning. There is a duality to the pearl that is reflected in the seemingly contradictory nature of the "Fader of flode and folde", the authority that both punishes and rewards. The slight lexical difference between "flode and folde" represents the eschatological movement of the poem in miniature: the alternation between mournful dread and benevolent acceptance.[70] It is only by

[68] Most critics take this reference to demonstrate the Mourner's preoccupation with earthly attachments. For further insight into the lapidary meanings of the pearl and the Mourner's designation as a 'Jeweller', see Tony Davenport, "Jewells and Jewellers in *Pearl*," *The Review of English Studies* 59, no. 241 (2008): 508–520; Helen Barr, "*Pearl* - or 'The Jeweller's Tale'," *Medium Aevum*, 69 (2000): 59–79; and Felicity Riddy, "Jewells in *Pearl*," in *A Companion to the* Gawain-*Poet*, 143–55.
[69] See my discussion of Kristeva's connections between language and faith in chapter one.
[70] Bahr, "Manifold Singularity" reads this lexical play as a deconstruction of meaning designed to challenge and reformulate the Mourner's perspective of his vision.

relinquishing authority over meaning to this paradoxical father that the Mourner can begin to mourn his pearl, as it is only God who has the authority to grant satisfaction.[71]

It should be clear, then, that the Maiden's exhortation to "forsake þe worlde wode | And porchace þy perle maskelles" (743-44) is an invitation to convert, the effectiveness of which hinges on the radical transformation of the pearl as metaphor. In other words, the Mourner is invited to transgress the logic of his fixation on of the image dead girl as "perle" and consider the multiple meanings of the pearl. The Mourner is asked to accept not only the essentially symbolic value of his incorporated object, but also to internalise the greater laws that govern its meaning. In an exegetical sense, metaphor is an indicator of the multiplicity of signs, signalling the deeper spiritual resonances of this world.[72] The misrecognition of the dead girl as a pearl highlights the virtues of the deceased as pure, round, and beautiful, but metaphor as an act of categorical transgression precipitates further misrecognitions. The pearl stands not just for a single pure, round, and beautiful object, but shows those values to be present throughout the poem, and suggests substantive, generative links between them: the pearl, the penny of price, new Jerusalem, the Lamb, the moon, and the circular structure of the poem itself.[73] Because the pearl is not simply replacing the girl in a one-for-one linguistic trade, the metaphor provokes a chain of significations that demand a new perspective on the world, one that is hopeful rather than despairing. The dream works to expound these further

[71] George Edmondson emphasises this fact as evidence of the poem's construction of a Lacanian sense of authority located in the radical alterity of God and the symbolic systems in place to interpret his will. See Edmondson, "Shadow of the Law," 40-48.
[72] "While it is easy to read this as a replacement — the reader comes to recognise that the speaker has substituted the pearl for his dead daughter — for the reader it actually constitutes a multiplication." Krieger-Harkaway, 164.
[73] Gilbert frames this accumulation of meanings through the marguerite genre, in which the daisies (semantically connected to the pearl through its French name, *marguerite*), when compared to a pearl "assume some of the pearl's emblematic associations without being limited to those. They acquire instant gravitas, symbolic weight and polyvalent, even ambivalent density while remaining relatively undetermined, thus becoming highly flexible figures." Jane Gilbert, *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 167.

meanings rather than restrict their significance to a human loss, but this is only possible if the Mourner relinquishes his capacity to authorise those meanings.

The pearl, rather than representing the immanence of *all* meaning suggested by the consolation, demonstrates the changeability of meaning, avoiding the atheistic mutism of melancholia by submitting to divine mysteries of a higher order of power. The revolutions of metaphoric register in the shifting meanings of the pearl lift the Mourner out of his torpor and begin a work of understanding its further significance. If, as Stanbury writes, "the return to the first line at the poem's end... suggests that we can never escape its language and its central metaphor," the revolution of meanings therein is indicative of the potential for transcendence outside the text.[74] The compromise that the work of mourning brings is a conversion of the hopeless work of protecting one's singular symbol of loss into a work of understanding the fullness of that symbol within an infinitely complex divine system. In this sense, metaphor in the poem is the means of mourning. Yet, the process, once begun, does not offer complete absolution but an invitation to participate in a universal, repatriating system.

The parable reveals the links between metaphor, faith, and symbolic reparation in the poem. Kristeva's formula of mournful recompense and the parable of the pearl of price share a metaphorical logic in that they designate a universal law of signification that authorises the relinquishment of the love object.[75] In opposition to melancholia, Kristeva reflects on the mourning as a psychic transposition beyond loss, accepting the authority of a higher order to grant satisfaction for that which has been lost. In short, the ability to 'metaphorise' is dependent upon a willingness to internalise the symbolic conditions of culture, society, belief

---

[74] Harkaway-Krieger, 175.
[75] For significant readings of mechanics of desire of the poem in this vein, see Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss"; Edmondson, "*Pearl*: The Shadow of the Object"; Stanbury, "The Body and the City in *Pearl*"; and David Aers, "The Self Mourning."

or language in exchange for the incorporated image of the object, a process we recognise as mourning.[76] If mourning is a relinquishing of the incorporated vestiges of a lost object in exchange for membership in a symbolic economy, it is a system of conversion. In as much as conversion typifies a kind of psychic work – in Freud's foundational formulation mourning is quite literally a 'conversion' of cathectic energy from one object to a new love – mourning is parallel to the spiritual work of conversion.[77] In a Freudian sense, the Maiden demands a conversion of affection from the lost child to God through the change of tenor in the vehicle of the metaphorical pearl.

However, this conversion is incomplete at the end of the poem, as evidenced in the Mourner's continued melancholia and the poem's recursive pearl-like structure. Through metaphor, then, the poem offers an *ongoing* conversion. The work of mourning is involves confession instead of conversion, repeatedly instigating a change in perspective, but not offering a final truth. The Mourner is subject to constant renewal in the face of the dialectic of hope and *wanhope*, but the essential motion of his conversion mirrors the jeweller of the parable: giving up his stake in the mundane order so as to satisfy his debt to God.

Confession and Structures of Continuity/Division

If for Dante grief is its own form of damnation, in *Pearl* it is merely a condition of mundane existence.[78] Both the *Commedia* and *Pearl* share a sense that mourning proper is a penitent activity, though *Pearl* proposes the limits of language as the limits of earthly detachment. In

[76] "According to Kristeva, the task of mourning involves a *negation* of the fundamental loss of the other and an acceptance of the arbitrary linguistic totality as an adequate compensation. In Kristeva's discussion, mourning functions as an economy of losses and compensations, an economy which underlies every order of representation." Ewa Ziarek, "Kristeva and Levinas: Mourning, Ethics, and the Feminine," in *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writings*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Routledge, 1993), 72.
[77] Freud's sense that mourning involved the "withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one" casts the transformation of "signifying bonds" as conversion from one object of desire to another. See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 249.
[78] See my discussion of Dante's discourse of mourning in chapter one, as well as Jennifer Rushworth, *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

this vein, the recognition of *acedia* (in the form of *wanhope*) in *Pearl* offers us a moralising teleology as readers, while the perdurance of the pearl as the defining metonym for the poem establishes our fundamental reliance on symbolic mediation to comprehend the divine. Here, then, the line is blurred between the work of mourning as a continuous, impossible process and mourning as a complete transformation of one's attachment to a lost object. The continual and self-conscious failure of expression in the poem proposes that a full consolation (which would be a completed course of mourning in this scenario) is impossible in this life, but the fullness of God's eternal gift will be offered to the penitent in the life to come. *Pearl* reveals the limits of eschatological language while proposing that the continual failure of that language reflects a consistent renewal of meaning. One way of framing this tension between failure and transcendence is through the structure of a confession.

Inasmuch as confessional writing categorises the past self as distinct from this one, the unfolding event of literature is a necessary reflection on the progress through a text: measuring what is to come by what has gone before. The self-reflexive work of mourning that I identify in *Pearl* is not centred around the renunciation of a past self, but rather the reconciliation of the past self with a newly discovered aspect of the self. *Pearl* as elegy traces a conversion in which a conscious acceptance of the division between the former and current selves enables self-knowledge. As W. David Shaw writes,

> In any confessional elegy the self that was, the self as the joyless jeweller or the bereft father, must be integrated into the new self, the self that is, just as the movement forward in time must integrate the end of the elegy into its new beginning.[79]

The bereaved self of the opening has undergone a conversion of sorts through writing, in which the literary production of a new self, styled as poet rather than griever, demonstrates a

[79] W. David Shaw, *Elegy & Paradox*, 52.

productive work of mourning.[80] Some have argued that *Pearl* represents or depicts the sacrament of confession, but to my mind this is a view which takes the argument too far.[81] The poem is confessional in its introspective conditioning of the self, rather than sacramental.[82]

Much like the runners on the cornice of sloth, the production of the self in *Pearl* is structured around the need to make it new: a movement away from the melancholic past and towards the positive future.[83] A certain amount of continuity is crucial, however, to the coherent project of the text, just as one's sins must be atoned for, and not merely forgotten. The Maiden's citation of Christ's words is key in this respect:

> 'Iesus con calle to hym hys mylde,
> And sayde hys ryche no wyȝ myȝt wynne
> Bot he com þyder ryȝt as a chylde,
> Oþer elleȝ neuermore com þerinne.'
>
> (721-24)

These lines, much discussed by critics for their aberrance in the concatenation of link-words, place emphasis on the innocence of those that will be allowed through Heaven's gates. Only they that "com þyder ryȝt as a chylde" may pass through, envisaging a selfhood uncorrupted by the taint of the terrestrial world. The innocence of childhood is the ideal form of the soul

[80] "The poem is a confession… in the broader sense in which Augustine used it as the title of his autobiography." Elizabeth D. Kirk, "The Anatomy of a Mourning," 222.
[81] For the argument that *Pearl* figures a kind of sacramental confession, cf. Gregory Roper, "*Pearl*, Penitence, and the Recovery of the Self."
[82] Mary J. Carruthers captures this memorial function of elegy eloquently: "The elegiac poem is like a confession only because both activities are dependent on memory-work. Each involves a sustained, deliberate act of remembering, though their goals are different. Both also begin in grief, mourning (for one's self, for another) as the matrix of remembering." Carruthers, "'The Mystery of the Bed Chamber': Mnemotechnique and Vision in Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*," in *The Rhetorical Poetics of the Middle Ages: Reconstructive Polyphony*, ed. John M. Hill and Deborah M. Sinnreich-Levi (London: Associated University Press, 2000), 79.
[83] The idea of 'revolution' and poetic innovation is surprisingly under-discussed in *Pearl*. The roundness of the poem's form and the need to begin again once the reader has finished reflects this sense of continual renewal. As one might turn a pearl to reveal a new facet (all the while obscuring another), the sections of the poem each prioritise a specific link-word that reinvigorates the terms of the poem. For relevant studies on roundness, innovation, and epistemological perspectives, see Barootes, "Poetics of the Elegiac Dream Vision"; Cary Nelson, *The Incarnate Word,* 25-52; and Barbara Nolan, *The Gothic Visionary Perspective*.

and, consequently, men do not accrue their riches through work but must work to erase their earthly stain.[84] The need to become "ryȝt as a chylde" seems to refer to a continued renewal of the self, casting off the trappings of the old and embracing the potential of the new, while always returning to a nascent state of innocence.[85]

Thus, the break in concatenation at this point in the text perhaps gestures towards an attempt at renewal in itself. The occurrence of "Ihc̄" in the manuscript instead of the expected "Ryȝt" at line 721 has prompted a variety of critical responses.[86] Some, such as Gordon, argue that this is simply a scribal substitution, with "Iesus" replacing "He ryȝt."[87] Waldron and Andrew emend to "Ryȝt," arguing that "the poet wrote *Ryȝt con calle*, personifying Jesus (the unimpeachable authority for the salvation of the innocent by right) as 'Justice', and that MS *Jesus* is a scribal substitution for the sake of greater explicitness."[88] The scribe may have felt the need to clarify the implied subject of the substantive adjective "Ryȝt" with the manuscript's "Ihc̄" in accordance with the occurrence of "Jesus" (717) as the subject of the previous lines.[89]

The *Pearl*-Manuscript's numerous scribal errors and obscure provenance preclude any degree of certainty on the matter.[90] However, the authorial readings of the manuscript

---

[84] For a similar argument, see D. W. Robertson's interpretation of the poem in two related articles. Robertson, "The 'Heresy' of the *Pearl*," *Modern Language Notes* 65, no. 3 (1950): 152–55; and 'The *Pearl* as Symbol', *Modern Language Notes*, 65.3 (1950): 155–61.

[85] "When anyone is united to Christ, he is a new creature; his old life is over; a new life has already begun." 2 Corinthians 5:17.

[86] *London, British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x. (art. 3): A Digital Facsimile and Commented Transcription*, Publications of the Cotton Nero A.x. Project 3 (Calgary: Cotton Nero A.x. Project, 2012), <http://gawain.ucalgary.ca> accessed 24th September 2019.

[87] Gordon, appendix 1 to *Pearl*, 88-89, n. 1.

[88] For a detailed explanation, see Waldron and Andrew, 87-88, n. 721-3.

[89] Given the large quantity of scribal errors found in the surviving manuscript, it is generally believed there is a considerable distance between author and scribe in the copying of MS Cotton Nero A.x. Edwards writes that 'we have no way of determining how many stages of copying precede the manuscript.' A. S. G. Edwards, "The Manuscript: British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x," *A Companion to the* Gawain-*Poet*, 199.

[90] All evidence points to a considerable gap between composition and copying that poses significant interpretative problems for readers that seek to locate authority in specific orthographic details, especially with regards to line 721. For discussions of this distance between authoritative text and manuscript, see Arthur Bahr, "The Manifold Singularity"; Joel Fredell, "The *Pearl*-Poet Manuscript in York," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*

cannot be discounted, nor should the occurrence of scribal errors in other link-words prevent our interpretation of "Jesus" or "Ihc̄" as part of the original text.[91] Some critics argue that the manuscript reading should be treated as an authorial gesture of humility, in that it falls short of the perfection that it is imitating.[92] Similarly, Barootes has recently argued the case for an authorial reading of the manuscript, highlighting the resonance that the line has in the context of medieval number theory.[93] In a note pertaining to line 721, Arthur Bahr suggests that "one interpretation is more persuasive than the other only to the extent that one pledges greater allegiance to the concept of 'literal-minded scribe' than to that of 'sophisticated author' (and that is without even contemplating the possibility of a 'sophisticated scribe')."[94] In recent scholarship it has become more common to consider the importance of this irregularity as a conscious break, rather than a loss of continuity, but it is a moment that emphasises the underlying structural tensions of the text if nothing else.

Intentional or not, this break in the text's form draws attention to this interstanzaic moment as a threshold. The aesthetic form of the stanza, that which is both particular and universal within the structure of the text, mediates the tension between the homogenous continuity of a text, and the special attention paid to the particular meanings of the text as shaped by the ways they are imparted to the reader. As a syntactical unit, the stanza is not just a container of a distinct set of information, but a signal for the reader to reflect on the

36, no. 1 (2014): 1–39; and Morton Donner, "Word Play and Word Form in *Pearl*," *The Chaucer Review* 24, no. 2 (1989): 166–82.

[91] O.D. Macrae-Gibson and David Carlson have identified the points at which the thematic structure of the poem falters or fails as: line 472, where an omission of an entire line upsets the numerical design; line 721; section XV of the poem, where the number of stanzas is six rather than the expected five; and line 997, where omission of *John* through scribal error breaks the concatenation. See David Carlson, "*Pearl*'s imperfections," *Studia Neophilologica* 63, no. 1 (1991): 57–67; and O. D. Macrae-Gibson, "*Pearl*: The Link-Words and the Thematic Structure," *Neophilologus* 52 (1968): 54–64.

[92] See David Carlson, "*Pearl*'s imperfections"; and Dennis Casling and V. J. Scattergood, "One Aspect of Stanza-Linking," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 75 (1974): 87-88.

[93] Benjamin Barootes posits that the MS occurrence of *Ihc̄* is not coincidental and reflects the poem's wider concern with the division between mundane and celestial forms. B. S. W. Barootes, "Number Symbolism in *Pearl*: Lines 720–721," *Studia Neophilologica* 89, no. 1 (2017): 34–40.

[94] See Arthur Bahr, "Manifold Singularity," 754-5; and Bahr, "Compulsory Figures," *ELH* 84, no. 2 (2017): 295–314.

aesthetic qualities of the text.[95] The stanza forces a recognition of the divisions in the text according to some ruling order. In one sense, it is the order the author imposes upon the text—a sort of deixis. In another sense, it is a numerical or rational order embodying the wisdom inherent in the divine creation of this world: line 721 marks the end of the twelfth section of the poem (relating to the numerology of Revelations), and the sum of its integers is 10, a number used notably to represent perfection in Dante's numerical design of the *Commedia*.[96] Inasmuch as poetic metre reflects the ratios and harmonies of divinity, the *Pearl*-poet imposes an eschatological perspective upon his text, indicating the supernatural rhythms of ends and beginnings with which the Mourner is forced to come to terms.[97]

Indeed, it is not unreasonable to suppose an anagogical weight to the ritual divisions of the poem's stanzaic form. As Røstvig has argued, because the last eight stanza-groups deal with the eternal bliss of those in heaven (as opposed to those that have yet to attain it), the break here would seem significant in dividing the earthly and heavenly portions of the poem.[98] This interpretation can be nuanced through a close examination of the depiction of the gates of heaven in this stanza, quite literally dividing the Church Penitent from the Church Triumphant. In this stanza, the Maiden discusses the ultimate threshold through which penitents must pass, as these "mylde" come knocking on heaven's door:

> Harmleȝ, trwe, and vndefylde,
> Wythouten mote oþer mascle of sulpande synne,
> Quen such þer cnoken on þe bylde,

[95] "Since, as I have said, a *canzone* is a connected series of stanzas, those who do not know what a stanza is must also fail to understand a *canzone*." Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, trans. Steven Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Bk. II, IX, 1.
[96] Marem-Sofie Røstvig sees the break between the first twelve and proceeding eight stanza-groups to reflect the numerical symbolism of the poem. The 'twelveness' of the poem is evidently influenced by the numerology of Revelations and, as this break occurs at the start of the thirteenth stanza group, there is reasonable basis to suppose that this is part of a numerical design. Røstvig, "Numerical Composition in *Pearl*," *English Studies*, 48 (1967): 326–32.
[97] See Edward I. Condren, *The Numerical Universe of the Gawain-Pearl Poet: Beyond Phi* (Gainesvillle: University Press of Florida, 2002), 49-73; and Kevin Marti, *Body, Heart, and Text in the Pearl-Poet* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1991).
[98] Røstvig, "Numerical Composition." See note 98 above.

Tyt schal hem men þe ȝate vnpynne.
Þer is þe blys þat con not blynne
(725-729)

There is a precariousness to this moment, hinged on the possibility that the door might not be opened. The social implication of knocking on the door of a house and waiting for a response is brought to bear on the question of judgment. The adverb "tyt" refers to the speed with which the door is unbolted but implies the possibility that it may remain tightly fastened—the verb form "titten."[99] The threshold through which we must pass as readers to get to this point figures a similar uncertainty: is "Iesus" a sign that the text is corrupted? Does the break in concatenation affect our judgment of the text's value? The joy of the text, "þe blys þat con not blynne," is underwritten by a formal self-reflexivity. Though the bliss that is unlocked is ceaseless, the text itself draws attention to its divisions, as though reminding its audience of the mediation of the text's message through its imperfect form. The "Iesus"/"Ryȝt" irregularity highlights the importance of these textual thresholds, reminding us that each beginning is also an end. Emblematic of the poem at large, the simultaneity of the poem's forwards and backwards motion demonstrates the need to return to the beginning in order to make sense of the end. The aspiration to return to a state of childish innocence, "mylde" like the Maidens in the procession, is also a return to a state of ignorance, an 'unworldly' state in which one is asked to see all anew.

To consider mourning as a confessional act is to reflect on the penitential Christian subject as continually reconciling themselves with the acts of the past and renewing themselves accordingly. The precarity of the image of the door foreshadows the Mourner's visionary access to the kingdom of heaven, as well as his eventual denial of entry. This image of humble supplication represents the confrontation with the divine as a continual renewal of

[99] *Middle English Dictionary,* s.v. "tīt(e" and "titten."

the bond with God, a work of renewal that is underwritten by its inevitable failure. Only through the grace of God, the sublime Other, can the door be opened, but only through our faithful work can we approach it. The work of mourning, then, embodies this confessional acceptance of one's past as a foundation for an immaterial future. The forward and backward motion of the text reflects this recognition of the work of mourning as a continual process, perpetually incomplete by virtue of its terrestrial nature, and it is this sense of perpetuity that is reflected in the end of the poem.

By condensing the movement through levels of discourse into this concatenating structure, the poet imbues the rhetorical progression of the poem with a sense of *ontological* change.[100] The continuity established across stanzaic divisions by the link-words enacts the poem's narratological transgressions of ontological boundaries. By way of an example, the passage from the end of section I of the poem into section II transgresses rhetorical and ontological boundaries through the punning use of the word "spot." The Mourner falls asleep on the grave of the "perle wythouten spot" (60) and "Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space; | My body on balke þer bod in sweuen" (61). In the preceding line, "spot" refers to the lack of blemishes on the pearl, both in a material and spiritual sense. In the following line, the spot refers to the terrestrial location upon which the Mourner fell asleep and which his spirit leaves behind. The stanza-break here figures a narratological passage into the dreamed portion of the poem. The paronomasia of the repeated "spot" creates a parallel rhetorical movement, in which the sonic effect of the word creates a correspondence between the "spot" as a spiritual blemish and the "spot" as the earthly site of the Mourner's grieving.[101] The verb

[100] For Cox, gender difference fuels that capacity for transgression in *Pearl*'s language, animating a non-comparative binary between the Maiden and the Mourner that produces lexical *différance*. "As the two characters progress through a sequence of rhetorical registers, their dialogue is framed by the gender-specific implications of the figurative language used to invoke and to annotate specific points of debate within the series of discursive engagements." Cox, "*Pearl*'s 'Precios Pere': Gender, Language, and Difference," *The Chaucer Review* 32, no. 4 (1998): 377.
[101] For studies on the meaning and usage of the word, "spot" in the poem, see: Andrew Breeze, "*Pearl* and the Plague; David K. Coley, "*Pearl* and the Narrative of Pestilence"; Marie Borroff, "*Pearl*s 'Maynful Mone':

"springen" refers here to an ascension of the spirit, whereas in line 13 (the first stanzaic movement) it refers to the downward movement of the pearl's body into the earth. Again, the repetition effects a rhetorical *and* ontological shift in the poem, redefining the death implied in both cases by "sprange" as a spiritual rather than biological event. *Pearl*'s punning repetition effects an upheaval at the rhetorical level that follows (or supports) the ontological change that is represented at the level of the narrative. The poetic structure performs the work of mourning, enacting a turn from terrestrial forms to spiritual concerns.

The Mourner is not a fool or an irredeemable sinner, but he must work to avoid the pitfalls of his fallible nature. For this reason, he is consistently and necessarily out of step with the incipit truth of his dream, which represents the ideal state to which he attains. Through the linkage of the poem's end to its beginning, *Pearl*'s complex concatenating form serves to highlight the 'problem' of its human protagonist through the failure of language, rather than through his individual foibles. In the final section of this chapter, I will show how the end of *Pearl* avoids the simplicity of a complete consolation, or the banality of complete disillusionment. It is through the constant rhetorical revolutions of the poem that the pearl's ineffable form remains beyond the grasp of language, and by continuing this revolution of meaning through the poem's circular structure, the poet refuses to let the work of mourning end, while intimating the perfection of a completed work. The key to this recessive transformational motion is the concatenating link-word structure, of which I will give a detailed description before turning to the final part of my analysis.

Crux, Simile, and Structure," in *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in Its Contexts, 700-1600: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature in Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson*, ed. E. Talbot Donaldson, Mary J. Carruthers, and Elizabeth D. Kirk (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1982), 169; and Douglas Thorpe, *A New Earth*, 40.

Pearl's Stanzaic Form

The introspective pressure that the poem's recursive form places on the Mourner—to renew one's faith continually—is reflected in the multidirectional motion of the poem's concatenating structure. *Pearl* places a special emphasis on its thresholds, as seen above, which must look both forwards and back. However, the symbolic development of the poem is fundamentally recursive, continually changing as the vision progresses. The poem is structured as a metonymic circle, reflecting the duality of its pearl in that it is both a complete circle (a complete *work*), but in continual motion, a constant ongoing labour. The poem's structure manifests this work from both the perspective of the saved Maiden and also from that of the Mourner who is yet to be delivered from his work. A formal analysis of the poem's structure will elucidate this tension and help to clarify the elegiac shape of the poem.

An explanation of the poem's stanzaic form, then, will prepare us for a detailed discussion of the poem's ending. The concatenating link-words at the first and last line of each stanza act as passages through which we pass, as though leaving one room to enter another.[102] Though the movement is continuous, the rooms themselves are discrete. The poem is structured of twenty stanza groups, each made up of five stanzas. The stanzas of each group share a concatenating link-word that repeats at the beginning and end of each stanza, the exception being the first line of each stanza group, which repeats the link-word from the previous group. This has the effect of creating a certain continuity between the discrete parts of the text, while marking the change in topic or register in each new stanza group.[103] Variations on the homophonic or morphological qualities of a word stand out as meaningful

---

[102] I refer to the analogy inherent in the derivation of *stanza*, or "room" in Italian. See Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
[103] Marie Borroff describes the effect as something "like a series of shifts to the next higher musical key in successive choruses of a popular song." Borroff, *Pearl: A Verse Translation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 35.

recursions or transformations, especially if that word is a link-word. The pattern forms a complete circle in the final stanza group, whose link-word “paye” occurs in the very first line of the poem.[104]

This stanzaic and metrical composition is unique in Middle English poetry.[105] The most complete analysis of *Pearl*’s stanzaic form is Susanna Greer Fein’s.[106] Greer Fein situates the poem within a Middle English alliterative corpus and finds only two poems that share some elements of *Pearl*’s metre and structure. She concludes that, “viewed as a late Ricardian poem, *Pearl* seems less to stem from a healthy tradition of innovation in English stanza form, and more to represent the creation of a singular form with virtually no antecedents or successors.”[107] Greer Fein conservatively describes Pearl’s stanzas as “pseudoballades,” though admits that even this fails to completely capture the unique metrical form of the poem.[108] The conclusion is well-considered given the evidence available, but it proposes that the text stands as the work of a unique literary talent without influences or imitations—a conclusion that may strike some as unsatisfactory.

Made up of twelve lines, each stanza follows the following rhyme scheme: ABABABABBCBC. No rhyme-sounds are repeated in stanzas of the same group except for the C-rhyme, which is dictated by the fact that the link-word always falls at the end of the final line of the stanza.[109] This end rhyme gives each stanza group a distinct feel, while the

---

[104] For a discussion of the retrospective dramatic development of *Pearl*’s symbolism, see A. C. Spearing, “Symbolic and Dramatic Development,” 3.
[105] For studies of *Pearl*’s unique stanza-form, see Susanna Greer Fein, “Twelve-Line Stanza Forms in Middle English and the Date of *Pearl*,” Speculum 72, no. 2 (1997): 367–98; Richard Osberg, “The Prosody of Middle English *Pearl* and the Alliterative Lyric Tradition,” in *English Historical Metrics*, ed. C. B. McCully and J. J. Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 150–75; Dennis Casling and V. J. Scattergood, “One Aspect of Stanza-Linking,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 75 (1974): 79–91; and Arthur C. L. Brown, “On the Origin of Stanza-Linking in English Alliterative Verse,” *Romantic Review* 7 (1916): 271–83.
[106] Fein, “Twelve-Line Stanza Forms.”
[107] Ibid., 392.
[108] Cf. Gordon, appendix 1 to *Pearl*, 87.
[109] *Pearl* shares this with the non-repetition of rhymes in the Cantos of the *Divine Comedy*. See Michael D. Hurley, “Interpreting Dante’s Terza Rima” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 41, no. 3 (2005): 320–31; and J. S. P. Tatlock, “Dante’s Terza Rima,” *PMLA* 51, no. 4 (1936): 895–903.

refusal to repeat A- or B-rhymes maintains the aural diversity of each part. The shape of the stanza is heavily weighted towards the final C-rhyme, foreshadowed by its occurrence in the first line of the stanza. Thus, the final link-word of the stanza acts as a threshold, a moment of both continuity and change. Typically, in the final line of a stanza, the alliteration does not occur on every stressed syllable on the line, diverting focus to the end rhyme and, therefore, the final word.[110] The natural stress on the link-word gives a pause for contemplation and often the word will be used in a new context, or punningly to achieve a new meaning.[111] The tension between stasis and transformation gives the poem a rich poetic texture, marshalling the elegiac address of the mourner through the fluid tropological landscape while maintaining the poem's primary elegiac conceit. Though the pearl remains the central poetic object throughout, the capacity for change within this concatenation of link-words offers a coherent passage through the variety of the poem.

Pearl has much in common with the *canzone* form and the troubadour forms from which the *canzone* derives. Its stanza-linking resembles the top-tail link-word concatenation of the troubadour metrical form *coblas capfinidas*.[112] As Dante indicates in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, this stanzaic organisation is a mark of high quality: "they achieve what is clearly none other than a beautiful linking together of the stanza as a whole."[113] Rather than claiming

[110] Dante makes specific reference to the fact that interweaving rhymes within stanzas "will be particularly beautiful if the endings of the last line cause the stanza to fall silent on a rhyme." Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, 2, XIII, 8.
[111] See Sylvia Tomasch, "A *Pearl* Punnology," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 88, no. 1 (1989): 1–20.
[112] István Frank defines *coblas capfinidas* as follows: "On appelle de ce nom les strophes dont le dernier vers est lié au premier de la strophe suivante par un des artifices que voici: le dernier mot est repris sous sous une identique ou plus ou moins changée; il peut être place au début, à l'intérieur ou à la fin du premier vers de la strophe suivante ; le mot ainsi répété peut figurer à la fin, à l'intérieur ou au début du dernier vers. Sans signaller toutes ces variétés, nous avons indiqué par *Capfin*. les pieces dont les strophes sont enchaînées de cette manière, si l'enchaînement est employé d'une façon systématique." ["We call by this name a stanza whose last line is linked to the first of the following stanza by one of these devices: the first word is reprised in an identical form or slightly altered; it can be placed at the beginning, within, or at the end of the first line of the following stanza; the word thus repeated can occur at the end, within, or at the beginning of the last line. Without pointing out all the varieties, we can indicate by *Capfin*. the works whose stanzas are linked together in this manner, as long as the linkage is employed in a systematic fashion."] Frank, *Répetoire Métrique de la Poésie des Troubadours*, vol. 1 (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, 1952), xxxviii.
[113] Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia,* 2, XIII, 7.

a causal link between these poetic forms, I propose a comparative reading of Dante's meditations on metre and line-endings, via Agamben's work, with *Pearl* so as to address the problem of the end of the poem. Dante's discussion of the *canzone* illuminates the aesthetic of *Pearl*'s structural poetics, especially with regards to the way that the concatenating link-words highlight the relationship between the stanza as a syntactical unit and the poem as a whole. I do not have space here to explore the further implications of this claim of resemblance, but will acknowledge that there is a strong enough resemblance between the *Pearl*'s stanza forms and the troubadour stylings of the *canzone* to merit a comparative study of the two. For this reason, it is my contention that the problem of the 'end of the poem' that *Pearl* poses can be resolved through such a comparative analysis.

The End of the Poem

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the crisis that ends the poem is the same crisis that begins the poem, recast in a new light. If in grief the Mourner struggles to find the words to satisfy his sentiments, then in religious fervour he struggles to find the words to convey his spiritual longing. In a fundamental sense, then, the beauty of the poem is at odds with the self-reflexive poverty of elegiac expression, mediated by the imperfect Mourner. It is for this reason that I consider *Pearl* to be the quintessential elegiac text, performing the work of mourning as an unresolvable tension between a perfect consolation and a recognition of the depth and intensity of the human experience of loss. The end of the poem is where this tension comes to a head, demanding to resolve the course of mourning as either a disconsolate melancholia or a transcendence of mourning. I will argue that the recursive structure of the poem offers the *Pearl*-poet a space for the human crisis of mourning within an enveloping sacred form, for the work of mourning as a protracted experience.

In this section I will show how the mourning process, in which the infallible Maiden repeatedly corrects the faltering Mourner, is enabled by the asymmetry between the "sense" of the poem's language and the "sound" of its rational form. If the grammatical sense of the poem is dictated by elegiac language's inevitable inarticulacy, the sound of the poem (its metre, alliteration, rhythm and concatenating link word structure) indicates the contrasting perfection of the pearl, "so rounde, so smoþ, so reken in ryche array" (5).[114] This disjunction between what I will call the "sense" and "sound" of the poem (after Agamben) underpins the discourse of mourning in *Pearl*, and is at the heart of its unique approach to the issue of representing the interminability of elegiac expression.

The crisis engendered by the disagreement between sense and sound is suggested early on by the Maiden's description of mourning as a "dyne of doel" (339). The dinful quality refers not to the poem, which remains aurally pleasing, but to his expression, which falls short of the rational harmony of her realm. Poetic form, then, provides the engine for the repetition of this crisis as an ongoing work. The perfection of divinity continually evades the grasp of language by nature of the poetic expression of that which cannot be expressed. By examining the dialectic of sense and sound as it pertains to the concatenation of the link words in particular (the quality of the metre that gives the poem its circular form), we can see how the poem represents the interminable work of mourning as a condition of human expression. If we consider the link words themselves as performing the repeated "planned category mistake" that energises the metaphorical representations of divinity in the poem, we can identify the ongoing tension between a perfect form and the continued efforts to conceptualise that form in elegiac language.[115]

---

[114] On the aural quality of the poem, see: Graham Williams, "Glossing over the Lamb: Phonaesthetic Gl- in Middle English and Aural Scepticism in *Pearl*," *The Review of English Studies* 65, no. 271 (2014): 596–618; and James I. Wimsatt, "Rhyme, the Icons of Sound, and the Middle English *Pearl*," *Style* 30, no. 2 (1996), 189–219.

[115] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 197.

As intimated in the previous section, then, it is at the turn of the verse that this disruption of grammatical sense by poetic form is most keenly felt. Where the poetic line ends and creates aural or visual resonances across the syntactical units, is where the rational form of the poem is most pronounced. Giorgio Agamben's essay "The End of the Poem" uses Dante's definition of the stanza in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* to explore the rhetorical and philosophical implications of the stanza form. Remarking on the difference between medieval and modern concepts of verse, he writes,

> the verse is, in every case, a unit that finds its *principium individuationis* only at the end, that defines itself only at the point at which it ends. I have elsewhere suggested that the word *versure*, from the Latin term indicating the point at which the plough turns around at the end of the furrow, be given to this essential trait of the verse, which – perhaps on account of its obviousness – has remained nameless among the moderns.[116]

The "turn" of the verse, at which point one metrical unit ends and another begins, is constitutive of poetry for Agamben. Poetry relies on "a tension and difference (and hence also in the virtual interference) between sound and sense, between the semiotic sphere and the semantic sphere."[117] Inasmuch as modern writers might take the lineation of verse for granted, medieval writers (and scribes) seemed to be hyper-conscious of it.[118] Agamben evidences the numerous medieval treatises that draw attention to this quality of verse, giving a sense of their cognisance of this tension between "sense and sound" inherent in the end of the line.[119] This poetic tension is clearest in the use of *enjambement*, disrupting the syntactical

[116] Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999), 111.
[117] Ibid., 109.
[118] By way of an example of modern conception of poetic form as centred on the idea of the 'line' over the metrical 'verse', James Longenbach's *The Art of the Line* opens with the following assertion: "Poetry is the sound of language organised in lines. More than meter, more than rhyme, more than images or alliteration or figurative language, line is what distinguishes our experience of poetry as poetry, rather than some other kind of writing.". Certainly, there is a difference between Longenbach's conception of the line as a product of formatting and the *versus* of which Dante speaks, which is often indistinguishable from prose in the layout of medieval manuscripts unless the reader recognises the metre. The modern 'line' is a product of the uniformity afforded by the mechanical nature of the printing press, whereas 'verse' maintains the notion that the arrangement of poetry on the page, while important, was second to its metrical organisation for medieval poets. Longenbach, *The Art of the Line* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2008), xi.
[119] Agamben, *End of the Poem*, 111.

logic of language to create metrical units that challenge or create new aesthetic systems of meaning.[120]

Crucially, then, Agamben asks the question, “what happens at the point at which the poem ends?”

> Clearly, here there can be no opposition between a metrical limit and a semantic limit. This much follows simply from the trivial fact that there can be no enjambement in the final verse of a poem. This fact is certainly trivial; yet it implies consequences that are as perplexing as they are necessary. For if poetry is defined precisely by the possibility of enjambement, it follows that the last verse of a poem is not a verse.[121]

The end of the poem poses a crisis, because the verse-form relies on a tension that cannot be sustained without the possibility of a “turn.” The end of the poem suggests a bathetic coincidence of the syntactic and semiotic spheres that have been in conflict at the end of each prior verse. It is “as if the poem as a formal structure would not end and could not end, as if the possibility of the end were radically withdrawn from it, since the end would simply imply a poetic impossibility: the exact coincidence of sound and sense.”[122] The very form of poetry holds that the non-correspondence between “sound and sense” inherent in the turn of the line creates aesthetic significance and, thus, the confluence of the two that the ending allows is, by this logic, impossible. Without the ability to *disrupt* syntax, poetry becomes prose: formally homogeneous. Dante asserts that the “effect will be particularly beautiful if the endings of the last lines cause the stanza to fall silent on a rhyme” [“Pulcherrime tamen se habent ultimorum carminum desinentiae, si cum rithmo in silentum cadunt”].[123] For this reason, Agamben characterises the end of the poem as a kind of falling, positing that “the double intensity animating language does not die away in a final comprehension; instead it collapses into

[120] “The poem tenaciously lingers and sustains itself in the tension and difference between sound and sense, between the metrical series and the syntactical series.” Ibid., 112.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 113.
[123] Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, II, XIII, 7-8.

silence, so to speak, in an endless falling."[124] The 'cadence' of the verse becomes a self-denial at the end of the poem, an abyssal act of falling, the primary sense of "cadere" (to fall) from which the poetic line derives its aesthetic force.

As Agamben would ask, then, 'what happens when *Pearl* ends?' To start, we should ask 'what happens when the line ends?' In general, *Pearl*'s verse endings tend to reinforce the impression of the line as a syntactical unit:

> 'In Jerusalem watȝ my lemman slayn
> And rent on rode with boyeȝ bolde.
> Al oure baleȝ to bere ful bayne,
> He toke on himself oure careȝ colde.'
>
> (805-808)

As demonstrated by these lines, each poetic verse usually has a measure of independent syntactic logic. Rhyme, alliteration, and metre dictate the syntactical divisions of the poem and this creates the formal correspondences that shape the stanza's lyric form. In this way, the focus on the end of the verse creates a sense of the division and continuity that shape the stanzas (and stanza groups) of the poem. The end of the line in *Pearl* generates a corrective form, shaping the sense of language through the ordered turns of the verse. The way that metrical forms shape the syntax and semantics of the poem is most prominent in the concatenation of the link-words across stanzas. The continuation of a link-word emphasises the aurality of the verse while governing the semantic framework of the stanza group. Excluding the aberrant link words, the circularity of the poem's concatenating structures implies through an aural frame the perfect forms that it represents. Though this is enabled by the flexibility of Middle English as a language, the failure of sense is inevitable for the

[124] Agamben, "The End of the Poem," 115.

Mourner, who is left behind by the perfect forms of the poem.[125] The crisis of verse, then is the 'unpoetic' coincidence of sound and sense, dramatised by the discourse between the metonymic pearl and the fallible Mourner.

The passage from stanza group XIII to XIV offers a notable example of how this dynamic between metrical order and semantic restrictions reflects an implicit awareness of what Agamben would later term the "crisis of verse." Following on from the aberrant "Iesus," stanza group XIII takes as its link word "mascelleȝ," (732) meaning "spotless."[126] In these verses, the word is exchanged twice by the Pearl-Maiden for "makelleȝ" at lines 733 and 757, a near-homophone meaning "matchless" or "peerless."[127] Some editors have felt the need to standardise these spellings in order to restore the exactitude of the concatenation.[128] However, this lexical play falls within the remit of the *coblas capfinidas* form. The aural and lexical similarity of the words maintains the links between stanzas, but the semantic tenor of the stanza group is thrown into jeopardy by the Mourner's usage of the words in the final stanza of the group:

> 'And fro þat maryag al oþer depres,
> Al only þyself so stout and styf,
> A makeleȝ may and maskelleȝ.'
>
> (778-80)

The Mourner uses both words to describe the Pearl-Maiden as 'spotless' and 'peerless', creating through "orthographic similarity," the possibility of a "more substantive correspondence."[129] As is often the case, the passage across stanza groups occasions a change in speaker, and the Maiden replies:

[125] Arthur J. Bahr, "Manifold Singularity" shows how the flexibility of spelling and syntax in Middle English enables this lexical and grammatical play. See also Edward Wilson, "Word Play and the Interpretation of *Pearl,*" *Medium Aevum* 40, no. 2 (1971): 116–34.
[126] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "maskellēs."
[127] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "mākelēs."
[128] See, for example, Gollancz, Osgood, Gordon, and Andrew and Waldron.
[129] Bahr, "Manifold Singularity," 739.

'Maskelles,' quod þat myry quene,
'Vnblemyst I am, wythouten blot,
And þat may I wyth mensk menteene;
Bot "makeleȝ quene" þenne sade I not.'
(781-84)

The Maiden rebukes the Mourner for suggesting that she was peerless among the other virgin brides of Christ, who all hold equal regard in heaven.[130] The tension between systems of sense and sound are especially evident here. The semantic range of language – specifically Middle English – is overextended. In attempting to reconcile Middle English with the linking structure of the poem, the Mourner exposes the failure of sense, reflecting a kind of Augustinian belief that language is incommensurate with the ineffable divine.[131] The concatenation is intact despite (or because of) the disruption of sense. The break between stanzas accentuates the disruption that occurs at the 'turn' of the verse: the metrical form that reflects the rational proportions of divinity is sustained, while the morphological play of language portrays the counteractive and creative confusion that the disruption of syntax engenders.

There is, then, a theological as well as poetic crisis inherent in the end of the verse for the poet. Patricia M. Kean was the first to see the perfect form of the poem as a reflection of the unblemished form of divinity.[132] Accepting this interpretation of the poem's numerical schema, the language that fails to represent its object (characterised as the language of elegy in the opening section of this chapter), expresses an opposing human problem. The

[130] See note 46 above.
[131] Some critics have discussed *Pearl* with reference to Lollard attitudes towards iconography. See Seeta Chaganti, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary*, 100; Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 23-25; and Elizabeth Schirmer, "Genre Trouble: Spiritual Reading in the Vernacular and the Literary Project of the *Pearl*-Poet" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, 2002), 97.
[132] P. M. Kean, "Numerical Composition in *Pearl*," *Notes & Queries* 12, no. 2 (1965): 49-51. An elaborated version of this argument can be found in Condren, *The Numerical* Universe, 49-73.

Mourner's assertion that "No tong moȝt endure | No sauerly saghe say of þat syȝt" (225-26) encapsulates the asymmetrical tension between divine and terrestrial forms in the poem: a kind of eschatological crisis of incommensurability that is encapsulated within the 'turn' of the verse. Indeed, we can go further with the "makelez"/"maskelez" error if we regard it not simply as a moment of Derridean *différance*, suggesting through the slippages of language a deconstruction of the vocabulary of divinity, but as a kind of metaphor in itself.[133] Ricoeur's definition of metaphor as a "planned category mistake" suggests that this moment of semantic disruption is occasioned by a categorical transgression.[134] The Mourner's miscategorisation creates an alienating correspondence across semantic categories that causes a shift in metaphorical register. As the Maiden's rebuttal indicates, by overextending the lexical categories of Middle-English, the metrical regulations of the poem force a change in register (manifested as a change in the link-word for the next stanza group) in the name of correction.[135]

Given the consolatory trajectory of the vision, it would seem natural to assume that when the poem ends, the rational form would definitively correct the fallible elegiac expression of the Mourner by giving perfect form to imperfect expression. The risk of banality rears its head at the end of the poem, then, as the human expression of loss would seem to be finally put to rest by the finality of the poem's aesthetic correspondence across its poetic form, offering an imitation of divine perfection as a final (and obviously limited) solace for the Mourner's loss. The poem solves the problem of the end of the poem artificially, then, by refusing to end. By gesturing back to the beginning the poet asks us to recognise the poem's structure as a hermetic whole from a superficially 'enlightened'

---

[133] Bakr also discusses this stanza group within the "exquisitely tuned economy of *Pearl*'s word- and image-play." Bahr, "Manifold Singularity," 731.
[134] See my discussion of metaphor in the poem above.
[135] For a study of *Pearl*'s linguistic and figurative variation of words, see David N. Devries, "*Unde Dicitur*."

perspective, while returning to the scene of mourning so as to recognise that "we also know that we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute."[136] The suggestive linkage of the end of the poem back to the beginning with the newly significant "Prynce" in the final and first lines emphasises the sense that there is always a meaning prior to our own understanding, but the poem makes clear that this is a condition of our debt to God rather than a grief that can be consoled. The end of the poem creates a superficial sense of the fullness of an eschatological perspective of the pearl, mimicking its beauty and its roundness, but the Mourner's lament is still ongoing, indicating his incomplete consolation as he returns to his "spot" in the earthly garden.

The 'open' quality of the poem, confusing the narrative and interpretative qualities of the text, makes it an object like the pearl itself: comprehensive but beyond complete comprehension.[137] The rational form of the poem displays a reconciliation of human design with divine form that is indicative of a consolation, and yet the Mourner's consolation is always in a state of development and recapitulation, as suggested by the return to the beginning. The performativity of this structure, which figures its object through metonymic correspondence between form and image, does seem to solve the generic problem of poetry, albeit in a superficial manner: there is no problem with the end of the poem if the poem does not end.

Fearing that his Mourner's melancholia would ring out in the silence, the *Pearl*-poet offers an analogy of transcendence, translating the existential crisis of the poem's end into a paraliturgical moment. The Lamb that the Mourner fails to recognise is the figure that links the benighted beginning and the enlightened end, reflecting Christ's corporeal sacrifice that is

---

[136] Freud, *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, 386.
[137] See my discussion in the general introduction of Eco's conception of an 'open work' as a piece of art whose semiotic qualities preclude definitive interpretation. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

referenced in "þe forme of bred and wyn | Þe preste vus scheweȝ vch a daye" (1209-1210). The 'showing' of the Lamb in the dream prefigures the liturgical participation that the Mourner mentions, even if the image in the dream is one that cannot yet be fulfilled.[138] The image of the Lamb is sacrificed when the vision fails in order to gesture towards a work beyond the poem.[139] The linear, material form of the poem must be sacrificed in order to appreciate the wholeness of its being, a wholeness that of course implies a spiritual life beyond the poem itself.[140] For its readers, the poem creates through its circular form an analogy for the perfect form of the pearl, but this is perhaps also suggestive of the round, white eucharistic disk.[141] As a kind of visual analogy, the roundness of the poem activates the performativity inherent in the devotional event, thus 'showing' us the ineffable form of the eucharistic body of Christ that marks the end of the poem, and the beginning of the work of penance.

The return to the beginning, however, inevitably substantiates the melancholia of the Mourner, whose work begins anew with the turn of the verse. The relationship between the singular pearl and the lost child comes to stand now for the metonymic relationship between the subject and the divine, a source of both hope and *wanhope*. Mourning does not end because the poem does not end. In place of an end is the realisation that this work of

[138] The showing of the Eucharist was of course the climax of most masses in medieval liturgical performance, and thus the emphasis on the "showing" of the Lamb and the Eucharist in turn in *Pearl* signifies an important liturgical moment. See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991).
[139] Some critics have argued for Pearl's sacramental form in this fashion, arguing that the poem fulfils a paraliturgical function. For studies in this line of interpretation, see Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss"; Marti, *Body, Heart, and Text*; Heather Phillips, "The Eucharistic Allusions of *Pearl*," *Mediaeval Studies* 47 (1985): 474–86; John Gatta Jr, "Transformation Symbolism," 243–56; Louis Blenkner, "The Theological Structure of *Pearl*," *Traditio* 24 (1968): 43; and Robert Max Garrett, *The Pearl: An Interpretation* (Seattle: The University of Washington Publications in English, 1918).
[140] This is the essential argument of Thorpe, *A New Earth* though he does not share my negative sense of the poem's persistent melancholia.
[141] R. M. Garrett and Heather Phillips' essays regard the pearl as an allegory for the Eucharist, while Kevin Marti claims that "to say that *Pearl* is a poem 'about' the eucharist is only as accurate as saying that all of medieval theology and architecture is 'about' the eucharist, or that French culture is 'about' stars. What must be clarified is the difference between a ubiquitous cultural matrix and the idiosyncrasies of its application to a particular work of art." Marti, 84.

mourning only stands for a greater work. Part of an infinite whole, the revolution of the poem demonstrates that the original loss of the pearl is constitutive of the disinheritance of mundane life.

I do not propose, then, that *Pearl* entirely diminishes the banality discussed by Agamben, but it certainly posits a dazzlingly creative response to the crisis posed by the end of the poem. It is as though the reader has broken free from the mundane orbit of poetic language and is afforded a kind of textual *kataskopos* in which the problems of the text are relative to the importance of the sacraments proper. And yet, this is of course also a recursive move that gestures back to the grievous start of the poem: to a work not yet complete, and to the reconstruction of "another scene" of the originary death beyond the text. In one sense, this is the perfect whole, encompassing all creation, but for the Mourner this is just another turn of the wheel, without the clarity of Boethian rationalism. Through this duality we come to understand the connection between the two losses: to mourn is to be human, and to be human is to mourn the human condition.

Conclusion

Characterising *Pearl* as elegy does not mean discerning a teleology of successful mourning, but rather recognising the linguistic, semantic, and metrical patterns that energise a particular symbolic exchange. I have argued that mourning is primarily a function of metaphor in *Pearl* and the poem's urgent experimentation with Middle English language and poetics serves as a response to the spiritual crisis of mourning. *Pearl* epitomises my definition of elegy as a text that resists consolation without collapsing into despair: it is a textual work that speaks to the constant and ambivalent work of mourning.

The poem's innovation is like that of a parable but not as definitive in its deliverance of sense. Rather than strictly inculcating a new spiritual moment, *Pearl* seeks to alienate the

reader from a familiar relationship with death and restates it as a radical ontological disruption in this life. The poet encourages the reader to experience their grief, and to take seriously the process of overcoming it. As though mourning had become mechanical in their time, the poet revitalises the radical differences between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant, reinstating their absolute incommensurability. Reading the poem gives a sense of what it *means* to mourn in a spiritual context: loss *should* test faith and *should* demonstrate that the gift of God is hard-won rather than easily bought.

There is a textual space opened up by *Pearl*'s enigmatic non-disclosure and irresolution that is proximate to Chaucer's sphere of vernacular secularity established in *BD*. It is a space that recognises that loss is a private phenomenon as well as a shared mourning. The shared spiritual significances of and private grief for the pearl are continuously displacing one another, with the veiled reference to the dead child occupying the same position as the revealed but unfulfilled kingdom of heaven. The unspeakability of both forms authorises a discourse of mourning, while the refusal to allow one to finally displace the other forecloses an end to mourning, and thus captures the trace of melancholia that persists in the mourning subject unable to fully reconcile the two.

Compared to the penitential and numerical systematisation of mourning prompted by the recognition of purgatory, *Pearl* instead envisages a less computational, more mystical work of mourning. Public and private mourning are not resolved by the power of participation; only God may finally resolve this difference. Individual sentiment and shared belief exist in urgent contention rather than easy collaboration, stressing the vigilance required of the penitent by virtue of the poem's refusal to diminish the profundity of grief. This tension is inherent even in the final lines of the poem. First brought to the attention of

readers by Norman Davis, the final stanza contains a phrase reminiscent of the standard valediction used in letters from parents to their children:[142]

> Ouer þis hyul þis lote I laȝte,
> For pyty of my perle enclyin,
> And syþen to God I hit bytaȝte
> In *Krysteȝ dere blessyng and myn*
>
> (1205-1208; emphasis my own)

The final valediction of the poem is still highly ambiguous, intimating both a spiritual peace and an adumbration of a relapse into melancholic mourning. On the one hand, the reconciliation of Christ's blessing and the Mourner's own signifies a consolidation of the consolatory effect of the vision. The Mourner "enclyin," if the line is read as such, has bowed his head in humble submission to God, and given his pearl over to Him.[143] On the other, the echo of the standard valediction strikes an obviously personal tone, as though addressing the lost child in particular, probably a daughter. Some critics choose to read the word "enclyin" as an indication that the Mourner is prostrate with sorrow across the grave when he receives the vision, a reminder of his enduring sorrow that quite literally emphasises his earthly attachment.[144]

In recognising *Pearl* as elegy, we must keep open the private meaning of the pearl as a lost loved one, not only as a coherent link to the assumed historical occasion of the poem (about which we may only speculate), but also because the process of divine transfromation gains its symbolic power from the limited epistemological perspective of the poem. Though *Pearl* recognises the logic of the parable of the pearl of price, in the final instance it is

---

[142] See for discussions of the parental valediction in the final stanza, see Norman Davis, "A Note on *Pearl*"; and A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 125.
[143] This is Vantuono's preferred reading of the line. Vantuono, ed., *Pearl*, 285, n. 1206.
[144] For opposing views that read the line as "lying prostrate for sorrow for my pearl," see Andrew and Waldron, ed., *Pearl*, 110, n. 1205-10; and Stanton Hoffman, "*Pearl*: Notes for an Interpretation," in *The Middle English* Pearl: *Critical Essays*, 86-102.

impossible to divest oneself of earthly attachments and, thus, the work of mourning becomes the interminable work of satisfying this recognition. "Þis lote I laȝte" might be read as either 'this chance I received' or, more confusingly, 'this speech I laughed.'[145] The linguistic play when describing the dream's provenance casts doubt on its authority, hence the allusion to the dream's laughable nature.[146] This seems an unlikely reflection for the emotionally wrought Mourner who seems so affected by his dream, and yet the suggestion persists.[147] In the vein of Dante's naming of the *Comedy*, there is something laughable about our imperfect nature – something that is at the same time tragic and familiar.[148]

In *Pearl*, there is an urgency to renew and redefine the subjective experience of loss, not only in the interest of mourning, but as an act of Christian devotion. In this way, the experimentation with form and language represents an attempt at modernisation: at turning melancholia into a productive mourning. The purview of modernisation encompasses the poetic, religious, and psychic work of the poem as a renewal of the self: a remaking of the subject through language. Though there is a lack of evidence upon which to base any significant hypothesis of the poem's origins, I will venture that the innovation of the poem is driven by an impetus to cut through the computational logic of death that I have discussed in my first chapter. The poem, in creating dazzling formal and linguistic analogies for the infinite form of the eternal afterlife and the infinite recesses of grief, forecloses a generic or reasoned encounter with death, either our own or another's. *Pearl* embodies the perpetuity of

---

[145] "Lote" carries the sense of "what is allotted to someone by casting lots," as well as "a gesture, expression." "Laȝte" carries the sense of "to obtain (sth.), acquire, gain, get," as well as "to laugh." *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "lŏ̄t," "lōt(e," and "lacchen."
[146] "Recognizing that 'this lote I laghte' can mean not only 'this chance I received' but also 'this *speech* or *word* I received' accurately sums up the verbal wordplay the message of the Maiden has delivered to us as well, by way of the narrator-poet." Thorpe, 61.
[147] C.f. lines 1184-88 in which the Mourner uses the conditional tense to muse upon the circumstances of the Pearl-Maiden: "*If* hit be a *ueray* and soth sermoun" (emphasis my own).
[148] For a discussion of the naming of the *Commedia*, see Giorgio Agamben, "Comedy," in *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, 1-22; and Rachel Fulton Brown and Bruce Holsinger, ed., *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

mourning in the face of the repatriating social, historical, and ideological discourses that seek to erase the singularity of loss as a human experience.

The recursive motion of the poem points to the failure of eschatological language to prepare us for loss.[149] Though not complex in its doctrinal content, *Pearl*'s hermeneutical transgressions perform mourning in the most basic sense of elegy: they express a loss for words. The crisis of death is substantiated by the poem's dialectic between terrestrial and heavenly forms and is finally expressed in the interminably mourning subject. The Mourner is a man who perpetually strives to go beyond the melancholic realisation of his earthbound situation (typified by the grievous effects of loss) in hope of a complete transcendence of these concerns in the life to come. *Pearl* shows us that we can never truly come to terms with loss, but we can take solace in the fact that it is not our Christian duty to do so.

[149] This is the essential argument of Russell, *English Dream Visions* (159-173).

Conclusion: Elegy, Melancholia, and Dreaming

Elegy is a genre of paradoxes, shaped by the fact that grief exerts a particular pressure on language. Grief leaves a mourner at a loss for words, but at the same time, it would be impossible to say nothing.[1] Derrida argues that "the possibility of the impossible commands here the whole rhetoric of mourning," encapsulating the double bind that the fidelity to the dead person imposes upon the mourner.[2] If the survivor were able to articulate the experience of mourning, it would follow that the loss did not have a profound effect on them.[3] Equally, loyalty to the deceased demands that something be said in order to honour and mark their loss.[4] Therefore, the aporia of mourning dictates "that it would have to fail in order to succeed. In order to succeed, it would have to *fail,* to fail *well*… And while it is always promised, it will never be assured."[5] The aporia of mournful language constitutes a promise that one cannot keep but is binding nonetheless.[6] In the prior chapters I have explored this implicit promise through two late Middle English elegies and the mourning culture of their time. Both *Pearl* and the *Book of the Duchess* illustrate the strain that this promise places on both the limits of our faith and the limits of our language. In this Conclusion I will end the dissertation by reflecting on the disjunction between elegy as an embodiment of the melancholic work of mourning and consolation as a recuperating, repatriating process of textual mourning. My readings of *Pearl* and *BD* have demonstrated that the key to defining

---

[1] This paradox forms the crux of funerary speech for Derrida: "Speaking is impossible, but so too would be silence or absence or refusal to share one's sadness." Jacques Derrida, *Memoires: for Paul de Man*, rev. ed. trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), xvi.
[2] Derrida, *Memoires*, 34.
[3] The work of mourning begins before death for Derrida, with this promise of survival, and shapes the incorporation of the other. Mourning speech is in this way a product of a survival pact, promising fulfilment, but never satisfying the terms of the implicit agreement. "From the first moment, friends become, as a result of their situation, virtual survivors… These possible survivors thus see themselves held to the untenable. Held to the impossible as possible impossible survivors." Jacques Derrida, "By Force of Mourning," trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 2 (1996): 171.
[4] For a detailed discussion of this 'promise' and its effect on writing, see Jennifer Rushworth, "Derrida, Proust, and the Promise of Writing," *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 69, no. 2 (2015): 205-219.
[5] Derrida, "By Force of Mourning," 173.
[6] Derrida goes as far as to say that "there is no friendship without this knowledge of finitude." *Memoires*, 28-29.

these poems as elegy lies in their resistance to consolation and, in this final part of the dissertation, I would like to explore the further implications of that claim. If the fourteenth century was a time when death and dying was dominated by penitential and liturgical activity, the uneasy refusals of consolation in these two poems return to a discourse of mourning that emphasises the ethical and linguistic pressure that loss placed on mourners.

Ellen E. Martin in her discussion of *BD* highlights the "critical discomfort" with elegies that "do not reintegrate their mourners into the mainstream of society."[7] Similarly, George Edmondson has discussed the difficulty of rehabilitating *Pearl* into an historical context because "its work of mourning, whether understood as personal or impersonal, factual or allegorical, exceeds its immediate object."[8] Both Martin and Edmondson highlight the fact that these poems articulate a resistance to the sublimation of loss into a spiritual ideology and, in my interpretation, this is the key to their elegiac form. The solace of purgatory became a ubiquitous spiritual truth in these authors' time, but the dogmatic move of bringing the spiritual world into the earthly saw an increasing reliance on material, worldly commemoration. *BD* experiments with the corporeal and material legacies of mourning as a sophistication of secular interests in these philosophical issues, posing the uncomfortable and ambivalent questions that attend loss as a resistance to the easy solutions of spiritual consolation. *Pearl*, in a different vein, evidences a scepticism towards a correspondence between the earthly and heavenly, conspicuously avoiding purgatory and reinstating the incommensurability of this world and the next. In *Pearl* we are forced to confront the awareness of our helplessness in the face of loss, echoed by our realisation of how that helplessness stands for the poverty of this life in relation to the superabundance of an

[7] Ellen E. Martin, "Spenser, Chaucer, and the Rhetoric of Elegy," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 17, no. 1 (1987): 83.
[8] George Edmondson, "*Pearl*: The Shadow of the Object, the Shape of the Law," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 30.

incompatible divine. Each poem in its own way is emblematic of a resistance to the prevailing ideology of the time, and that resistance is embodied by the knowing failure of language to do justice to loss. In other words, these poems exemplify elegy as extreme examples of a resistance to consolation staged in language.

To conclude this study, I will return to my initial research questions: what prompted this experimentation with elegiac form in England in the late fourteenth century, and how does our interpretation of these poems as elegy clarify our definition of the mode more generally? The answer to the first question can be addressed through a more direct comparison between the two poems, something that has been done in passing in the previous chapters and will be more explicit here. The answer to the second question will highlight the extent to which these poetic experiments in elegy sharpen what exactly it means to mourn textually and will suggest further avenues for the interpretation of other literary texts about loss.

The initial point of intersection in both these poems is their language, Middle English. Though different in dialect, form, and metre, these poems share in a burgeoning literary moment for English as a literary language.[9] The impetus to explore a vernacular mode of expression is most obvious in Chaucer's poem, a melancholic reiteration of a patchwork of poetic sources and influences brought together in the voice of an English poet. Chaucer's poem represents a continuation of a vernacular mode pioneered by a community of late medieval poets, whose alternative reading of the *Consolation of Philosophy* "became a

---

[9] Lynn Staley goes as far as to argue that the poems might share a courtly literary context and that "we might also begin to think about *Pearl* as responding to Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, especially if we wish to locate the poet within a Lancastrian affinity." The suggestion is speculative, but it highlights the similarity of the poetic project in these poems, potentially located at the heart of a vernacular shift in court poetry. Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 254. See also Ann R. Meyer, "The Despensers and the *Gawain* Poet: A Gloucestershire Link to the Alliterative Master of the Northwest Midlands," *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 4 (2001): 413–429.

justification of the right to personal affliction."[10] The poets believed "such affliction was an essential part of being a poet, with the result that poetry becomes a privileged mode of thinking, where a new kind of philosophy is inscribed."[11] Expressions of empathy and physical connection are cast in English by Chaucer, centred on the experience of suffering and the incorporation of lost loves into textual forms. Enfolded in *BD* are multiple textual traditions and discursive tenors that entangle in the understated, naturalistic, and sometimes conversational English verse, prompting an engagement with the text as an enigmatic, intriguing display of mourning that invites consolation but resists its forthright resolutions. *Pearl* finds the same traction with English as a language whose form is changeable, manipulable, and largely unburdened by intellectual pretensions. Much more structurally complex and ornate than *BD*, *Pearl* uses the morphological variance of English to represent the strain that mourning puts on language, refracting words and sounds, and creatively misusing semantic associations. In both poems English is the language of an everyman narrator coming to terms with grander schemes of thought and it is a language that acutely captures the pressure that these incalculable ideas and traditions exert on conventional expression. For these poets, the rise of English as a vernacular literary language chimed with the elegiac mode's pressure to innovate expression, to show through a loss for words how loss always demands further articulation.

Another shared attribute of these poems is their dream-vision form, a sign of willingness to experiment with forms of imagination, literary allusion, and ambiguity. It would be simplistic to say that these poets wrote dream-vision poems simply because it was fashionable. While the dream-vision was an increasingly oft-used literary mode, it was by no

---

[10] Sarah Kay, "Touching Singularity: Consolation, Philosophy, and Poetry in the French *Dit*," in *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Catherine E. Leglu and Stephen J. Milner (London: Palgrave, 2008), 27.
[11] Ibid.

means popular in the sense of garnering a wide readership. In the vernacular it was still a mode restricted to elite circles of learned audiences, courtly, or at least well-educated. In that it allowed an author to treat Christian, classical and vernacular traditions alike, while testing the boundaries of authority and allusion in a diffuse oneiric arena, I see the decision on the part of each poet to embrace the dream-vision as a natural consequence of the experimentation in literary form that elegy necessitates.

For Chaucer, the liminality of sleep enables the free reconstitution of intellectual and bodily forms. Typified by the long-winded process of reimaging Ceyx in the cave of sleep in his retelling of Ovid's story, Chaucer's dream realm embodies the text in flux: a various, sprawling collection of allusions that signify not a deeper truth, but the capacity of the mind to process and make sense of the myriad facets of lived experience. The irresolution of the *insomnium* is a reflection on the course of the work of mourning for Chaucer, a protracted and indirect project necessitated by the implicit promise of mourning. Of course, Chaucer's poem primarily explores the ways in which our loyalty to the lost love object warps and fragments that object. In being incorporated into the text, Blanche is displaced by other literary traditions, obscured by miscommunication, and ultimately morphed into the icon-like White. It is the dream-vision form that enables this representation of the painful ambivalence of mourning, validated by the diffuse logic of the dream and rendered socially acceptable (presumably) by the distance between oneiric imagery and historical fact.

For *Pearl,* the dream vision grants access to a similar realm of indistinction. The vision enables the wishful reconstruction of the relationship between mourner and mourned, but it also shows the instability of symbolic forms that are prone to change and proliferation. The *visio* form allows for the articulation of the sublime confrontation with loss as a religious episode, a kind of mystical conversion circumscribed by the innate limits of language. The transformative procession of imagery draws on the 'middleness' of the dream state, staging

the transience of worldly meaning while gesturing to the fulfilment of that meaning in the life to come. For *Pearl* especially, the dream-vision is a reflection on epistemological perspectives: the dream situates us in a space between what can be said, what can be imagined, and what is beyond comprehension.

Dreams, as a liminal medium, offer medieval poets a cipher for the scene of writing "as sites that facilitate the transformation of old images into new configurations."[12] Dreams observe a primal scene of imaginative reconstitution, epitomising the cognitive processes of incorporation and creation. Since the interpretation of dreams involves an ambiguous process of forgetting and reconstruction, dreams, like the work of mourning, operate as a kind of continuous transformation. The matrix between dream, text, and mourning is held up by their continuous and transgressive natures. The indifference to closure in each of these modes of work, as well as their bodily origins, makes them slippery categories, prone to overlapping and combining. The dream-vision elegy would seem to be an experimental literary mode predicated on the free dismantling and recombination of these forms. Through elegy the work of mourning becomes the work of reading, which is in turn shaped and reshaped by the text's oneiric form.

In this way dreams are the epitome of the process of image-making that is central to all these forms of inoperative 'work,' and perhaps this gets to the heart of why these melancholic mourning poems exist in a time of overt religious solace. The recursive structures of each poem are a meditation on the nature of imaginative process, an implicit psychologisation of mourning as a pattern of obsessive memory-work. *BD*, with its endless beginnings (even the end is a new beginning for the poet-narrator) and discursively open

[12] Michael Raby argues that an Aristotelian theory of the sensory stimulation of dreams drives a portrayal of art as an oneiric, semi-conscious realm of affect: "for poets concerned with the nature of their ability to form and reform images, the allure of waking sleep is the promise of observing a corollary process of image-making." Raby, "Sleep and the Transformation of Sense in Late Medieval Literature," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 39 (2017): 224.

structure, shows the refractions of mourning into other forms of work while remaining unable to either fully forget or explicitly confront the loss at its heart. The repetitions of the couplet "Thow wost ful lytel what thow menest | I have lost more than thow wenest" signal the recursive motion of the text, caught in a melancholic cycle of unresolved expression.[13] The recursive patterning is more pronounced and deliberate in *Pearl*, which has at its heart an obsession with a perfect object which continually eludes the grasps of earthly meaning. A recursive, circular structure is balanced with a recessive contemplation of the pearl, whose transformations of meaning take the dream vision to its human limits, at which point the two waking frames of the poem are bridged by the rational poetic structure of the work. *Pearl*'s ingenious design leaves the reader with an object whose perfection inevitably leads back to the beginning of the poem, signalling a perpetual imaginative work of mourning that juxtaposes the true form of the pearl with the limited faculties we possess to image it. What the recursive and recessive qualities of both poems show is the epistemological structure of meaning in the texts, aligning the continuous processes of the textual imagination with a melancholia that stems from the fundamental inability to embody the object of memory.

Giorgio Agamben explores the mechanics of the phantasm in medieval literature in his book *Stanzas*, discussing the creativity of the imagination as a melancholic faculty.[14] He defines the Aristotelian 'phantasm' at the heart of medieval theories of the imagination in terms of *acedia*, the medieval sin of sloth that is typified by an inappetence for God, and which I have identified as central to the moral rationale for both poems. Inasmuch as "*acedia* is precisely the vertiginous and frightened withdrawal (*recessus*) when faced with the task implied by the place of man before God," it is an antithetical recognition of God as the object

---

[13] Geoffrey Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), lines 1305-06.
[14] Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

of truth, as well as a denial of that object for fear of the labour of faith itself.[15] This paradoxical recursion of *acedia* is, for Agamben, a form of melancholia, which is the obstacle to work. The imagination is put to work in melancholia as a denial of reality in which the object appears as though lost:

> from this point of view, melancholy would be not so much the regressive reaction to the loss of the love object as the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost.[16]

Agamben aligns the phantasmagorical realm of the melancholic imagination with the creative drive, as it is the function of the imagination to perpetuate the fantasy that the object remains lost.[17] The phantasm is an expression of the perverse desire of melancholia, a drive to negate the recognition of the object for what it truly is. Dreamwork, as the supreme product of the imagination, is inherently melancholic, typified by the capitulation of a yearning for the truth as though it were a lost object.[18] The desire for an originary 'truth' is recast as a loss of reality in dreamwork, a relationship between subjectivity and objective truth that is staged as the work of mourning. For this reason, implicit in dreamwork is a refusal of the "reality-testing" that Freud describes as central to mourning.[19] In the dream-vision, truth is gestured to, hinted at, but always held to be unobtainable, just as in melancholia the lost object dominates the symbolic register of mourning, but is always beyond representation by virtue of its unreality. There is no insipid truth to the dream-vision, but the dream organises frameworks of knowledge as though that truth is always just out of reach. In this sense, dreams enable a fantasy of possession, a fantasy that the correct reinterpretation or reconstruction of images

---

[15] Agamben, *Stanzas*, 5-6. See my discussion of *acedia* in chapter one.
[16] Ibid., 20.
[17] For similar approaches to the creative drive of the melancholic subject see Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989).
[18] "The object of love is in fact a phantasm, but this phantasm is a 'spirit', inserted, as such, in a pneumatic circle in which the limits separating internal and external, corporeal and incorporeal, desire and its object, are abolished." Agamben, *Stanzas*, 108.
[19] Freud first outlines "reality testing" in relation to mourning in "Mourning and Melancholia" as the psychic process that precipitates the 'demand' for mourning, a demand that when vehemently opposed causes melancholia. See Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth, 1957), 244 ff.

will provide an inherent meaning. In other words, it is the self-awareness of an epistemology of imagination that produces this melancholia, and this is fundamental to the elegiac forms of *Pearl* and *BD* as dream-visions.

The unreality of dreams makes them an excellent testing-ground for elegiac sentiments, in which we attempt to figure the unfigurable of a discrete historical mourning. Fradenburg's work contemplates similarities between Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and medieval dream theory (especially in Chaucer's work) as a way of exploring these continuities of human psychology.[20] For her, "sleep, dream, enchantment, and memory work all hold out the lure of indifference, of a state in which one will not suffer from one's aliveness."[21] Fradenburg attests to the melancholic operations of these forms, which offer an imaginative retreat from the experience of reality. Sublimating worldly experience, often characterised by suffering, into indistinct intellectual forms offers a creative mode for processing the inchoate and disordered desires and feelings in such a way that protects the subject from the incomprehensible and the unacceptable truths of existence. Much like the work of mourning, then, dreamwork is a process of encryption and transformation, constituting a creative and continuous mode of processing the vicissitudes of reality. The Freudian interpretation of the dream as a displacement and condensation of 'another scene' attests to the sense in which dreamwork is a creative distortion of reality.[22] The imaginative work suggested by the dreamed form of the two elegies studied in this dissertation further

---

[20] For a direct discussion of Freud and Chaucer, see L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, "(Dis)Continuity: A History of Dreaming," in *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, ed. Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 87–115; and Fradenburg, "'Voice Memorial': Loss and Reparation in Chaucer's Poetry," *Exemplaria* 2, no. 1 (1990): 169–202.
[21] L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, "'My Worldes Blisse': Courtly Interiority in *The Book of the Duchess*," in *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 91.
[22] Discussing the proliferation of interpretations of Freud's analysis of the butcher's wife's dream, Diane Fuss argues that the process of analysis in Freud's dream interpretation is itself interminable: "In this regard, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* might read as a dream of what interpretation can or might be--a prolongation of reading through the acts of condensation and displacement, metaphor and metonymy, identification and desire." Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 31-32.

confirms the central place that potential for continuous reinterpretation holds in elegiac forms. The dream-vision elegy in particular is self-reflexively artistic since it draws attention to the symbolic systems through which mourning is traversed. The oneiric form of these elegies suggests the inherent ambivalence of mourning, and Agamben's work pre-empts my own exploration of how the dialectic of mourning and melancholia is sublimated into processes of oneiric imagination and the moralising discourse of *acedia*.

As a final reflection, then, on how the term 'elegy' relates to the category of Middle English dream-vision elegy, I argue that the elegiac interpretation of these poems affects our conception of elegy in two crucial ways. First, the process of interpretation that these poems demand of their reader is a fundamentally melancholic one, based in the operation of a recursive framing of truth as the encrypted object of imagination. Rather than embracing the solace of a stable truth that would end mourning, these poems resist consolation by keeping alive the recessive concatenation of meanings. Second, and following on from this claim, these poems demand a slight redefinition of elegy as a text that resists the consolations of mourning and instead engages with the ambivalence and ambiguity of the work of mourning. The reconstructive work of elegy is a continuation of the relationship between subject and object in the mourning process: a mimesis of the work of mourning, rather than a mimesis of mourning itself. As opposed to representing the successful severance from the love object or the completed transformation of the mourning subject, elegy seeks to keep alive the experience of loss through the continuous and contiguous form of the aesthetic work.

Bibliography of Works Cited

Primary Sources

Albertus Magnus. *Opera omnia.* Edited by Auguste and Emil Borgnet. 38 volumes. Paris, 1890-1899.

Aquinas, St Thomas. *On Evil* (*Quaestiones disputatae De Malo*). Translated by Richard Regan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

——— *Summa Theologiæ*. Edited by Thomas Gilby and T. C. O'Brien. 61 Vols. London: Blackfriars, 1966.

——— *Summa Theologica.* Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1911.

——— *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Three: Providence: Part II*. Translated by Vernon J. Bourke. Rev. ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.

Augustine. *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*. Translated by Henry Bettenson. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 2003.

——— 'The Care to Be Taken for the Dead.' In *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*. Edited by Roy J. Deferrari. Translated by John A. Lacy. Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955.

Boethius. *De Consolatione Philosophiae; Opuscula Theologia*. Edited by Claudio Moreschini. 2nd ed. Munich: K. G. Saur, 2005.

Cassian, John. *John Cassian, The Institutes*. Translated by Boniface Ramsey. Ancient Christian Writers 58. New York: Newman Press, 2000.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*. Edited by F. N. Robinson. 3rd ed. Revised by Larry D. Benson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

——— *The Book of the Duchess*. Edited by Helen Phillips. Durham: Durham and St Andrews Medieval Texts, 1982.

Dante. *Convivio: A Dual-Language Critical Edition.* Translated by Andrew Frisardi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

——— *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. Translated by Steven Botterill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

——— *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Edited and translated by Robert M. Durling. 3 Vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997-2011.

Easting, Robert, ed. *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. Early English Text Society. Original Series 298. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Foster, Edward E., ed. *Three Purgatory Poems*. Middle English Texts Series. Kalamazoo: Published for TEAMS by Medieval Institute Publications, 2004.

Gregory the Great. *Morals on the Book of Job*. Translated by James Bliss. 3 Vols. Oxford, 1844.

Langland, William. *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-text Based on Trinity College Cambridge, MS B.15.17*. Edited by A. V. C. Schmidt. 2nd ed. London: Dent, 2011.

Littlehales, Henry, ed. *The Prymer or Lay Folks' Prayer Book*. Early English Text Society. Original Series 105, 109. London, 1895.

London, British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x. (art. 3): A Digital Facsimile and Commented Transcription, Publications of the Cotton Nero A.x. Project 3. Calgary: Cotton Nero A.x. Project, 2012. <http://gawain.ucalgary.ca> accessed 24th September 2019.

de Machaut, Guillaume. *Le Jugement du roy de Behaigne and Remede de Fortune*. Edited by James I. Wimsatt and William Kibler. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988.

Mannyng, Robert, *Handlyng Synne*. Edited by Idelle Sullens. Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1983.

McNeill, J., and H. Gamer, ed. *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*. New York: Octagon Books, 1965.

Migne, Jacques-Paul, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, 221 vols (Paris, 1844-65), in *Patrologia Latina: The Full Text Database*, http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk [accessed 24th September 2019]

Morris, Richard, ed. *Early English Alliterative Poems in the West-Midland Dialect of the Fourteenth Century*, Early English Text Society. Original Series 1. London, 1864.

Ovid, *Ovid, Amores: Text, Prolegomena, and Commentary.* Edited by J. C. McKeown. Liverpool: F. Cairns, 1987.

——— Ovid, *The Love Poems*. Translated by A. D. Melville. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Pearl-Poet. *Pearl.* Edited by E. V. Gordon. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

——— *The Pearl: A Middle English Poem*. Edited by Charles G. Osgood. Boston: Heath, 1906.

——— *Pearl*, *an English Poem of the XIV Century, Edited, with Modern Rendering, together with Boccaccio's Olympia*. Edited by Israel Gollancz. London: Chatto & Windus, 1921.

——— *The 'Pearl' Poems: An Omnibus Edition*. Edited by William Vantuono. 2 vols. London: Garland, 1984.

——— *Pearl: A Verse Translation.* Edited by and translated by Marie Borroff. New York: W. W. Norton, 1977.

——— *Pearl*. Edited by Sarah Stanbury. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2001.

——— *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Edited by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron. 4th ed. Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies. Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002.

Abbot Suger. *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and Its Art Treasures*. Edited and translated by Erwin Panofsky. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946.

Secondary Sources

Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok, "Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation." In *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, translated by Nicholas T. Rand, 125–38. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Ackerman, Robert W. "The *Pearl*-Maiden and the Penny." *Romance Philology* 18 (1964): 615–623.

Adams, Gwenfair Walters. *Visions in Late Medieval England Lay Spirituality and Sacred Glimpses of the Hidden Worlds of Faith*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Aers, David. "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*." *Speculum* 68, no. 1 (1993): 54–73.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Translated by Ronald L. Martinez. Theory and History of Literature 69. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

——— *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Althusser, Louis, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, translated by G. M. Goshgarian. London: Verso, 2014.

Anderson, J. J. "The Man in Black, Machaut's Knight, and Their Ladies," *English Studies* 73.5 (1992): 417–30.

Appleford, Amy. *Learning to Die in London, 1380-1540.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

Armitage-Smith, Sydney. *John of Gaunt: King of Castile and Leon, Duke of Aquitaine and Lancaster, Earl of Derby, Lincoln, and Leicester, Seneschal of England*. Westminster, London: Constable, 1904.

Badham, Sally. *Seeking Salvation: Commemorating the Dead in the Late-Medieval English Parish*. Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2015.

Bahr, Arthur. "Compulsory Figures." *ELH* 84, no. 2 (2017): 295–314.

——— "The Manifold Singularity of *Pearl*." *ELH* 82, no. 3 (2015): 729–58.

——— “The Rhetorical Construction of Narrator and Narrative in Chaucer’s the *Book of the Duchess*.” *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000): 43–59.

Baker, Donald C. “The Dreamer Again in The *Book of the Duchess.*” *PMLA* 70, no. 1 (1955): 279–82.

Barney, Stephen A. “Suddenness and Process in Chaucer.” *The Chaucer Review* 16, no. 1 (1981): 18–37.

Barootes, B. S. W. “Idleness, Chess, and Tables: Recuperating Fables in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*.” In *Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, edited by Jamie C. Fumo, 29–50. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018.

——— “Number Symbolism in *Pearl*: Lines 720–721.” *Studia Neophilologica* 89, no. 1 (2017): 34–40.

——— “‘O Perle’: Apostrophe in *Pearl.*” *Studies in Philology* 113, no. 4 (2016): 739–64.

——— “The Poetics of the Elegiac Dream Vision in Middle English Literature.” PhD diss,, McGill University, 2014.

Barr, Helen. “*Pearl* - or ‘The Jeweller’s Tale’.” *Medium Aevum* 69 (2000): 59–79.

Barr, Jessica. *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010.

Barron, W. R. J. “‘Luf-Daungere’.” In *Medieval Miscellany Presented to Eugène Vinaver by Pupils Colleagues and Friends*, edited by Frederick Whitehead, 1–18. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965.

Beal, Jane. *The Signifying Power of Pearl: Medieval Literary and Cultural Contexts for the Transformation of Genre.* New York: Routledge, 2016.

Beaston, Lawrence. “The Pearl-Poet and the Pelagians.” *Religion & Literature* 36 (2004): 15–38.

Beckwith, Sarah. *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
——— “Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town.” *Past and Present* 98 (1983): 3–29.

Bell, Nicholas. “Liturgy.” In *The Routledge History of Medieval Christianity, 1050-1500*, edited by R. N. Swanson and Alixe Bovey, 121–32. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.

Benveniste, Emile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek. Coral Gables: University of Florida, 1971.

Berger, Teresa. *Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History: Lifting a Veil on Liturgy’s Past*. Liturgy, Worship and Society. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011.

Bishop, Ian. *Pearl in Its Setting: A Critical Study of the Structure and Meaning of Pearl*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1968.

——— "Relatives at the Court of Heaven: Contrasted Treatments of an Idea in *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*." In *Medieval Literature and Antiquities: Studies in Honour of Basil Cottle*, edited by Myra Stokes and T. L. Burton, 111-18. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987.

Bishop, Louise M. *Words, Stones, & Herbs: The Healing Word in Medieval and Early Modern England*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007.

Blenkner, Louis. "The Theological Structure of *Pearl*." *Traditio* 24 (1968): 43–75.

Bloomfield, Josephine. "Stumbling toward God's Light: The *Pearl* Dreamer and the Impediments of Hierarchy." *The Chaucer Review* 45, no. 4 (2011): 390–410.

Boardman, Phillip C. "Courtly Language and the Strategy of Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*." *ELH* 44, no. 4 (1977): 567–79.

Bodden, M. C. "Disordered Grief and Fashionable Afflicitons in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* and the *Clerk's Tale*." In *Grief and Gender: 700-1700*, edited by Jennifer C. Vaught and Lynne Dickson Bruckner, 51–63. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Boffey, Julia, and A. S. G. Edwards. "Codicology, Text, and the *Book of the Duchess*." In *Chaucer's Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, 11–28. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018.

Bogdanos, Theodore. *Pearl, Image of the Ineffable: A Study in Medieval Poetic Symbolism*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983.

Bornstein, Daniel, "Administering the Sacraments." In *The Routledge History of Medieval Christianity, 1050-1500*, 133–146.

Borroff, Marie, "Narrative Artistry in *St. Erkenwald* and the *Gawain*-Group: The Case for Common Authorship Reconsidered." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 28 (2006): 41–77.

——— "*Pearl*'s 'Maynful Mone': Crux, Simile, and Structure." In *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in Its Contexts, 700-1600: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature in Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson*, edited by E. Talbot Donaldson, Mary J. Carruthers, and Elizabeth D. Kirk, 159–169. Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1982.

——— *Traditions and Renewals: Chaucer, the Gawain-Poet, & Beyond*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2003.

Bossy, John. *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

——— "Mass as a Social Institution 1200-1700." *Past & Present* 100 (1983): 29–61.

Bowers, John M. *Chaucer and Langland: The Antagonistic Tradition*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

——— “*Pearl* in Its Royal Setting: Ricardian Poetry Revisited,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 17 (1995): 111–55

——— “The Politics of *Pearl*.” *Exemplaria* 7, no. 2 (1995): 419–441.

——— *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II.* Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001.

Bowlby, John. *Attachment and Loss.* 3 vols. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1971.

Breeze, Andrew. “*Pearl* and the Plague of 1390-93.” *Neophilologus* 98 (2014): 337–41.

Brewer, Derek, and Jonathan Gibson, eds. *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet.* Arthurian Studies 38. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997.

Bronson, Bertrand H. “The *Book of the Duchess* Re-Opened.” *PMLA* 67, no. 5 (1952): 863–81.

Brown, Arthur C. L. “On the Origin of Stanza-Linking in English Alliterative Verse.” *Romantic Review* 7 (1916), 271–83.

Brown, Peter, ed. *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Brown, Rachel Fulton, and Bruce Holsinger, eds. *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Perso.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Bullón-Fernández, María. “‘Byȝonde þe Water”: Courtly and Religious Desire in *Pearl.*” *Studies in Philology* 91, no. 1 (1994): 35–49.

Burgess, Clive. “‘An Afterlife in Memory’: Commemoration and Its Effects in a Late Medieval Parish.” *Studies in Church History* 45 (2009): 196–217.

Burlin, Robert B. *Chaucerian Fiction.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Butterfield, Ardis. “Chaucer’s French Inheritance.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, edited by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, 65–75. Cambridge Companions to Literature. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

——— “France.” In *Chaucer: Contemporary Approaches*, edited by Susanna Greer Fein and David Raybin, 25–46. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.

——— “Lyric and Elegy in *The Book of the Duchess*.” *Medium Aevum* 60, no. 1 (1991): 33–60.

——— “Pastoral and the Politics of Plague in Machaut and Chaucer.” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 (1994): 3–27.

——— “Response: The *Book of the Duchess*, Guillaume de Machaut, and the Image of the Archive.” In *Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations,* 199–212.

——— *The Familiar Enemy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Byrne, Aisling. *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Caciola, Nancy. "Wraiths, Revenants, and Rituals in Medieval Culture." *Past and Present* 152 (1996): 3–45.

Calin, William. *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

Carlson, David. "*Pearl*'s imperfections." *Studia Neophilologica* 63, no. 1 (1991): 57–67.

Carruthers, Mary J. "Invention, Mnemonics, and Stylistic Ornament in Psychomachia and *Pearl*." In *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honour of Marie Borroff*, edited by M. Teresa Tavormina and Robert F. Yeager, 201–14. Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1995.

——— "'The Mystery of the Bed Chamber': Mnemotechnique and Vision in Chaucer's The *Book of the Duchess.*" In *The Rhetorical Poetics of the Middle Ages: Reconstructive Polyphony*, edited by John M. Hill and Deborah M. Sinnreich-Levi, 67–87. London: Associated University Press, 2000.

Casling, Dennis, and V. J. Scattergood. "One Aspect of Stanza-Linking." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 75 (1974): 79–91.

Cerquiglini-Toulet, Jacqueline. *The Color of Melancholy: The Uses of Books in the Fourteenth Century.* Translated by Lydia G. Cochrane. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1997.

Chaganti, Seeta. *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription, Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Chapman, Coolidge Otis. "Numerical Symbolism in Dante and the *Pearl*." *Modern Language Notes* 54, no. 4 (1939): 256–59.

Cherniss, Michael D. *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry*. Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1987.

Clanchy, M. T. *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

Clemen, Wolfgang H. *Chaucer's Early Poetry*. London: Methuen, 1963.

Clopper, Lawrence M. *Pearl* and the Consolation of Scripture. *Viator* 23 (1992): 231–46.

Cohen, Kathleen. *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol and the Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.

Coleman, Joyce. *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Coley, David K. “*Pearl* and the Narrative of Pestilence.” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013): 209–62.

Collette, Carolyn. “Aristotle, Translation and the Mean: Shaping the Vernacular in Late Medieval Anglo-French Culture.” In *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, edited by Maryanne Kowaleski et al., 373–85. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2009.

Condren, Edward I. *The Numerical Universe of the Gawain-Pearl Poet: Beyond Phi*. Gainesvillle: University Press of Florida, 2002.

Conley, John. “*Pearl* and a Lost Tradition.” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 54, no. 3 (1955), 332–47.

——— ed., *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970.

Cooper, Helen, “Chaucer and Ovid: A Question of Authority,” In *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*. Edited by Charles Martindale, 71–81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Cox, Catherine S. ‘“*Pearl*’s” Precios Pere: Gender, Language, and Difference. *The Chaucer Review* 32, no. 4 (1998): 377–90.

Courcelle, P. *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la Tradition Littéraire antécédents et postérité.* Paris: 1967.

Dalton, Emily. “Improper Translations: Naming and Vernacular Poetics in Medieval England.” PhD. diss., Princeton University, 2017.

Daniell, Christopher. *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066-1550.* London: Routledge, 1998.

Davenport, Tony. “Jewels and Jewellers in *Pearl*.” *The Review of English Studies* 59, no. 241 (2008): 508–520.

Davenport, W.A. “Desolation, not Consolation: *Pearl* 19-22.” *English Studies* 55 (1974): 421-3.

——— *Art of the* Gawain-*Poet.* Rev. ed. London: A. & C. Black, 2001.

——— *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative*. Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1988.

Davis, Isabel, and Catherine Nall, eds. *Chaucer and Fame: Reputation and Reception*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015.

Davis, Norman. “A Note on *Pearl.*” In *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays,* 325–34.

Davis, Rebecca. “‘Noon Other Werke’: The Work of Sleep in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*.” In *Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, 51–69.

Davis, Steven. “Guillaume de Machaut, Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, and the Chaucer Tradition.” *The Chaucer Review* 36, no. 4 (2002): 391–405.

Dean, James. “Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* a Non-Boethian Interpretation.” *Modern Language Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1985): 235–49.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Work of Mourning*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

——— “By Force of Mourning.” Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. *Critical Enquiry* 22, no. 2 (1996): 171–92.

——— *Memoires: For Paul de Man.* Translated by Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan D. Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

——— *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 1978.

——— *Positions*. translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Despres, Denise. *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature*. Norman, OK.: Pilgrim Books, 1989.

Devries, David N. “*Unde Dicitur*: Observations on the Poetic *Distinctiones* of the *Pearl*-Poet.” *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000): 115–132.

Donner, Morton. “Word Play and Word Form in *Pearl*.” *The Chaucer Review* 24, no. 2 (1989): 166–82.

Doyle, A. I. “The Manuscripts.” In *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background: Seven Essays*, ed. by David Lawton, 88–100 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England and c. 1400 - c. 1580.* 2nd ed. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2005.

Duggan, Hoyt N. “Meter, Stanza, Vocabulary, Dialect.” In *A Companion to the* Gawain-*Poet*, 221–42.

Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Edmondson, George, “*Pearl*: The Shadow of the Object, the Shape of the Law.” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 29–64.

Edwards, Graham Robert. “Purgatory: ‘Birth’ or Evolution?”. *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36, no. 4 (1985): 634–46.

Edwards, Robert. *The Dream of Chaucer: Representation and Reflection in the Early Narratives.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989.

Elliott, Elizabeth. *Remembering Boethius: Writing Aristocratic Identity in Late Medieval French and English Literatures*. London: Routledge, 2012.

Ellis, Steve. "The Death of the *Book of the Duchess*." *The Chaucer Review* 29, no. 3 (1995): 249–58.

Ellman, Maud. "Blanche." In *Criticism and Critical Theory*, edited by Jeremy Hawthorn, 99–110 (London: Edward Arnold, 1984).

Espie, Jeff. "Alcyone's Grave: Inscription and Intertextuality in Chaucer, Spenser, and Ovid." In *Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess: *Contexts and Interpretations*, 97–118.

Evans, Ruth. "A Dark Stain and a Non-Encounter." In *Dark Chaucer: An Assortment*, edited by Myra Seaman, Eileen A. Joy, and Nicola Masciandaro, 29–41. Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2012.

Fassler, Margot. "Representations of Time in *Ordo representacionis Ade*." *Yale French Studies*, Special issue: *Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature*, ed. Daniel Poirion (1991): 149–171.

Fein, Susanna Greer. "Twelve-Line Stanza Forms in Middle English and the Date of *Pearl*." *Speculum* 72, no. 2 (1997): 367–98.

Ferris, Sumner. "John Stow and the Tomb of Blanche the Duchess." *The Chaucer Review* 18, no. 1 (1983): 92–93.

Ferster, Judith. "Intention and Interpretation in the *Book of the Duchess*." *Criticism* 22, no. 1 (1980): 1–24.

Fichte, Joerg O. "The *Book of the Duchess* - a Consolation?". *Studia Neophilologica* 45 (1995): 53–67.

Fletcher, Alan J. "Reading Radical Metonymy in *Pearl*." In *Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures: New Essays*, edited by Lawrence Besserman, 47–61. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

——— *The Presence of Medieval English Literature: Studies at the Interface of History, Author, and Text in a Selection of Middle English Literary Landmarks.* Turnhout: Brepols, 2012.

Fletcher, Jefferson B. "The Allegory of the *Pearl*." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 20, no. 1 (1921): 1–21.

Fradenburg, L. O. Aranye. "(Dis)Continuity: A History of Dreaming." In *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, ed. by Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico, 87–115. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

——— "Living Chaucer." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 (2011): 41–64.

——— *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

——— "'Voice Memorial': Loss and Reparation in Chaucer's Poetry," *Exemplaria* 2, no. 1 (1990): 169–202.

Frank, István. *Répetoire Métrique de la Poésie des Troubadours.* Paris: Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, 1952.

Fredell, Joel. "The *Pearl*-Poet Manuscript in York. *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 36, no. 1 (2014): 1–39.

French, W. H. "The Man in Black's Lyric." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 56 (1957): 231–241.

Freud, Sigmund. *Letters of Sigmund Freud*. Edited by Ernst L. Freud. Translated by Tania Stern and James Stern. London: Courier Corporation, 1992.

——— *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Edited and translated by James Strachey. 24 vols. London: Hogarth, 1953-74.

Friedman, J.B. "The Dreamer, the Whelp, and Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*." *Chaucer Review* 3 (1966): 145-162.

Fumo, Jamie C., ed. *Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess*: Contexts and Interpretations.* Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018.

——— *Making Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess*: Textuality and Reception*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015.

——— "The 'Alderbeste Yifte': Objects and the Poetics of Munificence in Chaucer's The *Book of the Duchess*." *Exemplaria* 28, no. 4 (2016): 277–96.

——— "The Consolations of Philosophy: Later Medieval Elegy." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy,* edited by Karen A. Weisman, 118–34. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Fuss, Diana. *Identification Papers.* New York: Routledge, 1995.

Fyler, John M. *Chaucer and Ovid*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1979.

Gardiner, Eileen. *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante.* New York: Italica Press, 1989.

Garrison, Jennifer. "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject." *The Chaucer Review*. 44, no. 3 (2010): 294–322.

Gasper, Giles E. M. *Anselm of Canterbury and His Theological Inheritance.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Gatta Jr, John. "Transformation Symbolism and the Liturgy of the Mass in *Pearl*." *Modern Philology* 71, no. 3 (1974): 243–56.

Gerould, Gordon Hall, 'The *Gawain* Poet and Dante: A Conjecture', *PMLA*, 51.1 (1936), 31–36

Gilbert, Jane. *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Ginsberg, Warren. "Place and Dialectic in *Pearl* and Dante's *Paradiso.*" *ELH* 55, no. 4 (1988): 731–53.

Gittos, Helen, and Sarah Hamilton, eds., *Understanding Medieval Liturgy: Essays in Interpretation.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Greene, W. K. "The *Pearl*--a New Interpretation." *PMLA* 40 (1925): 814–27.

Gross, Charlotte. "Twelfth-Century Concepts of Time: Three Reinterpretations of Augustine's Doctrine of Creation Simul." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 23, no. 3 (1985): 325–338.

Hardaway, Reid. "A Fallen Language and the Consolation of Art in the *Book of the Duchess*." *The Chaucer Review* 50, no. 1 (2015): 159–77.

Hardman, Phillipa. "The *Book of the Duchess* as a Memorial Monument." *The Chaucer Review* 28, no. 3 (1994): 205–15.

Harkaway-Krieger, Kerilyn, "Mysticism and Materiality: *Pearl* and the Theology of Metaphor." *Exemplaria* 28, no. 2 (2016): 161–80.

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Hatt, Cecilia A. *God and the Gawain-Poet: Theology and Genre in Pearl, Cleanness, Patience and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015.

Hawkins, Peter S. *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Hawthorn, Jeremy. *Criticism and Critical Theory*. London: E. Arnold, 1984.

Heffernan, Thomas J., and E. Ann Matter, eds. *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001.

Hill, John M. "*The Book of the Duchess*, Melancholy, and That Eight-Year Sickness." *The Chaucer Review* 9, no. 1 (1974): 35–50.

Hinton, Norman. "The Black Death and the *Book of the Duchess*." In *His Firm Estate: Essays in Honor of Franklin James Eikenberry*, edited by Donald E. Hayden, 72–78. Tulsa, OK: University of Tulsa, 1967.

Horowitz, Deborah. "An Aesthetic of Permeability: Three Transcapes of the *Book of the Duchess*." *The Chaucer Review* 39, no. 3 (2005): 259–79.

Horrox, Rosemary, and W. M. Ormrod, eds. *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Hošek, Chaviva, and Patricia A. Parker, eds. *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Huber, Emily. "'For Y Am Sorwe, and Sorwe Ys Y': Melancholy, Despair, and Pathology in Middle English Literature." PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2008.

Huot, Sylvia. "Guillaume de Machaut and the Consolation of Poetry." *Modern Philology* 100, no. 2 (2002): 169–95.

Huppé, Bernard Felix, and D. W. Robertson. *Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.

Hurley, Michael D. "Interpreting Dante's *Terza Rima*." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 41, no. 3 (2005): 320–31.

Johnson, Eleanor. *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

Johnson, Ian. "Making the Consolatio in Middle English." In *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, edited by Noel Harold Kaylor Jr. and Philip Edward Phillips, 413–46. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Jones, Cheslyn, and Geoffrey Wainwright, eds. *The Study of Liturgy*. London: SPCK, 2008.

Jordan, Mark D. *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Jordan, Robert M. "The Compositional Structure of The *Book of the Duchess*." *The Chaucer Review* 9, no. 2 (1974): 99–117.

Kay, Dennis. *Melodious Tears: The English Funeral Elegy from Spenser to Milton.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Kay, Sarah. "Touching Singularity: Consolation, Philosophy, and Poetry in the French Dit." In *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Catherine E. Leglu and Stephen J. Milner, 21–38. London: Palgrave, 2008.

Kay, Sarah, and Miri Rubin, eds. *Framing Medieval Bodies.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994.

Kean, Patricia M. "Numerical Composition in *Pearl.*" *Notes and Queries* 12 (1965): 49–51.

——— The Pearl*: An Interpretation*. London: Routledge, 1967.

Kennedy, David. *Elegy*. The New Critical Idiom. London: Routledge, 2007.

Kirk, Elizabeth D. "The Anatomy of a Mourning: Reflections on the *Pearl* Dreamer" In *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, edited by M. Teresa Tavormina and Robert F. Yeager, 215-226. Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995.

Kiser, Lisa J. "Sleep, Dreams, and Poetry in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess.*" *Papers on Language and Literature* 19 (1983): 3–12.

Kittredge, G. L. *Chaucer and His Poetry.* Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1915.

Klein, Melanie. "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States." In *Love, Guilt, and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945: The Writings of Melanie Klein: Volume 1*, 344-69. New York: Free Press, 1975.

Knight, Stephen. "Classicizing Christianity in Chaucer's Dream Poems: *The Book of the Duchess*, *Book of Fame*, and *Parliament of Fowls.*" In *Chaucer and Religion*, edited by Helen Phillips, 143–55. Cambridge: Brewer, 2010.

Knox, Philip. "'Hyt Am I': Voicing Selves in the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Roman de la Rose*, and the *Foteinne Amoureuse*." In *Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess*: Contexts and Interpretations*, 135–56.

Kristeva, Julia, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. by Leon Roudiez, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1989)

Kruger, Steven F. *Dreaming in the Middle Ages.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

——— "Medical and Moral Authority in the Medieval Dream." In *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, edited by Peter Brown, 51–83. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book III* Translated by Russell Grigg. Hove: Routledge, 1993.

——— *The Seminar. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. London: Hogarth Press, 1977.

——— *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse: Le Séminaire livre XI*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Paris: Seuil, 1973.

Lawlor, John. "The Pattern of Consolation in The *Book of the Duchess*." *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*. 31, no. 4 (1956): 626–48.

Lawton, David A. *Chaucer's Narrators*. Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985.

——— ed. *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background: Seven Essays*. Woodbridge and Totowa: D. S. Brewer and Biblio, 1982.

Le Goff, Jacques. *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*. Translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

——— *The Birth of Purgatory*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. London: Scolar Press, 1984.

Lears, Adin Esther. "Something from Nothing: Melancholy, Gossip, and Chaucer's Poetics of Idling in the *Book of the Duchess*." *The Chaucer Review* 48, no. 2 (2013): 205–21.

Léglu, Catherine, and Stephen J. Milner, eds.*The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Leitch, Megan G. "'Grete Luste to Slepe': Somatic Ethics and the Sleep of Romance from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight to Shakespeare." *Parergon* 32, no. 1 (2015): 103-128.

Lerer, Seth. *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in The Consolation of Philosophy.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Lewis, N. B. "The Anniversary Service for Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, 12th September 1374." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 21, no. 1 (1937): 176–92.

Liendo, Elizabeth. "'In Hir Bed al Naked': Nakedness and Male Grief in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*." *Philological Quarterly* 96, no. 4 (2017): 405–24.

Lomperis, Linda, and Sarah Stanbury. *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

Lynch, Kathryn. *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.

Machen, Chase E. "The Concept of Purgatory in England." PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2010.

Macrae-Gibson, O. D. "*Pearl*: The Link-Words and the Thematic Structure." *Neophilologus* 52 (1968): 54–64.

de Man, Paul. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1983.

Marenbon, John. *Boethius.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

——— *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

——— "Philosophy and Theology." In *European Transformations: The Long Twelfth Century*. edited by Thomas F. X. Noble and John Van Engen, 403–25. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.

Margherita, Gayle. "Originary Fantasies and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*." In *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, 116–41. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

Marshall, Peter. *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Marti, Kevin. *Body, Heart, and Text in the* Pearl-*Poet*. Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1991.

Martin, Ellen E. “Spenser, Chaucer, and the Rhetoric of Elegy.” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 17, no. 1 (1987): 83–109.

Martindale, Charles. *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Martinez, Ronald L. “‘L’amoroso Canto’: Liturgy and Vernacular Lyric in Dante’s *Purgatorio*.” *Dante Studies* 127 (2009): 93–127.

Matsuda, Takami. *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry*. Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1997).

McGerr, Rosemarie. *Chaucer’s Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998.

McGuire, Brian Patrick. “Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and Medieval Change.” *Viator* 20 (1989): 61–84.

McMullan, Gordon, and David Matthews, eds. *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

McNamara, Rebecca F. “Wearing Your Heart on Your Face: Reading Lovesickness and the Suicidal Impulse in Chaucer.” *Literature and Medicine* 33, no. 2 (2015): 258–78.

McNamer, Sarah. “The Literariness of Literature and the History of Emotion.” *PMLA* 130, no. 5 (2015): 1433–42.

Means, Michael H. *The Consolatio Genre in Medieval English Literature*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972.

Meyer, Ann R. “The Despensers and the *Gawain* Poet: A Gloucestershire Link to the Alliterative Master of the Northwest Midlands.” *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 4 (2001): 413–429.

Miller, James. “How to See Through Women: Medieval Blazons and the Male Gaze.” In *The Centre and Its Compass: Studies in Honor of John Leyerle*, edited by Robert A. Taylor, James F. Burke, Patricia J. Erberle, Ian Lancashire, and Brian S. Merrilees, 367–88. Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1993.

Minnis, A. J. “A Note on Chaucer and the *Ovide Moralise*.” *Medium Aevum* 48 (1979): 254–57.

——— *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982.

——— *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. London: Scolar Press, 1984.

——— ed., *The Medieval Boethius. Studies in the Vernacular Translations of* De Consolatione *Philosophiae*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987.

——— *The Shorter Poems*. Oxford Guides to Chaucer. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

——— "'I Speke of Folk in Seculer Estaat': Vernacularity and Secularity in the Age of Chaucer." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27, no. 1 (2005): 25–58.

——— "'Langland's Ymaginatyf' and Late-Medieval Theories of Imagination." *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook* 3 (1981): 71–103.

Mitchell, J. Allan. "The Middle English *Pearl*: Figuring the Unfigurable." *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000): 86–111.

Muessig, Carolyn and Ad Putter, eds. *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Muscatine, Charles. *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning*. Rev. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

——— *Poetry and Crisis in the Age of Chaucer*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972.

Musson, Anthony, and W. M. Ormrod. *The Evolution of English Justice: Law, Politics, and Society in the Fourteenth Century.* British Studies Series. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998.

Nelson, Cary. *The Incarnate Word*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973.

Neuss, Paula. "Images of Writing and the Book in Chaucer's Poetry." *Review of English Studies* 32, no. 128 (1981): 385–97.

Newman, Barbara. "The Artifice of Eternity: Speaking of Heaven in Three Medieval Poems." In *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, edited by Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter, 185–206. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Nolan, Barbara. "The Art of Expropriation: Chaucer's Narrator in The *Book of the Duchess*." In *New Perspectives in Chaucer Criticism*, edited by Donald M. Rose, 203–21. Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1981.

——— *The Gothic Visionary Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Norton-Smith, John. *Geoffrey Chaucer.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974.

O'Daly, Gerard. *The Poetry of Boethius.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Oliver, Kelly, ed. *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writings*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Olson, Glending. *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Osberg, Richard. “The Prosody of Middle English *Pearl* and the Alliterative Lyric Tradition.” In *English Historical Metrics*, edited by C. B. McCully and J. J. Anderson, 150–75. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Owen, Corey. “The Prudence of *Pearl*.” *The Chaucer Review* 45, no. 4 (2011): 411–34.

Palmer, J. J. N. “The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*: A Revision.” *The Chaucer Review* 8, no. 4 (1974): 253–61.

Panofsky, Erwin. *Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992.

Partridge, Stephen Bradford. “‘The Makere of This Boke’: Chaucer’s Retraction and the Author as Scribe and Compiler.” In *Author, Reader, Book: Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice*, edited by Erik Kwakkel and Stephen Bradford Partridge, 106–53. Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

Patch, Howard Rollin, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927.

——— *The Tradition of Boethius: A Study of His Importance in Medieval Culture.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935.

Pelen, Marc M. “Machaut’s Court of Love Narratives and Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*.” *The Chaucer Review* 11, no. 2 (1976): 128–55.

Pfaff, Richard W. *The Liturgy in Medieval England: A History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Phillips, Heather. “The Eucharistic Allusions of *Pearl*.” *Mediaeval Studies* 47 (1985): 474–86.

Phillips, Helen. “Structure and Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*.” *The Chaucer Review* 16, no. 2 (1981): 107–18.

——— “The Shock of the Old? The Unsettling Art of Chaucer’s Antique Citations.” In *Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, 177–97.

Pickstock, Catherine. *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.

Piehler, Paul. *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory*. London: Edward Arnold, 1971.

Pigman, G. W. *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Pilch, Herbert. “Das Mittelenglische Perlengedicht: Sein Verhältnis Zum Rosenroman.” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 65 (1964): 427–46. Reprinted as “The Middle English *Pearl*: Its Relation to the Roman de La Rose.” In *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays*, edited

by John Conley, 163–84. Translated by Heide Hyprath (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970).

Potts, Abbie Findlay. *The Elegiac Mode: Poetic Form in Wordsworth and Other Elegists*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967.

Prior, Sandra Pierson. *The Fayre Formez of the Pearl Poet*. Medieval Texts and Studies, no. 18. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996.

Putter, Ad. *An Introduction to The* Gawain-*Poet*. London: Longman, 1994.

Putter, Ad, Judith Jefferson, and Myra Stokes. *Studies in the Metre of Alliterative Verse.* Medium Aevum Monographs, New Series 25. Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2007.

Raby, Michael. "Sleep and the Transformation of Sense in Late Medieval Literature." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 39 (2017): 191–224.

Ramazani, Jahan. *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Rambuss, Richard. "'Processe of Tyme': History, Consolation, and the Apocalypse in the *Book of the Duchess.*" *Exemplaria* 2, no. 2 (1990): 659–683.

Rebillard, Éric. *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*. Translated by Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings and Jeanine Routier-Pucci. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.

Reed, Teresa P. "Mary, the Maiden, and Metonymy in *Pearl*." *South Atlantic Review* 65, no. 2 (2000): 134–62.

Reichardt, Paul F. "Sir Israel Gollancz and the Editorial History of the *Pearl* Manuscript." *Papers on Language and Literature* 31, no. 2 (1995): 145–63.

Ricoeur, Paul, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*. Translated by Robert Czerny, Kathleen MacLaughlin, and John Costello. London: Routledge & Kegan, 1978.

Riddy, Felicity. "Jewells in *Pearl*." In *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, 143–55.

Robertson Jr., D.W. "The 'Heresy' of the *Pearl." Modern Language Notes* 65, no. 3 (1950): 152–55.

——— "The *Pearl* as Symbol." *Modern Language Notes* 65, no. 3 (1950): 155–61.

Roper, Gregory. "*Pearl*, Penitence, and the Recovery of the Self." *The Chaucer Review* 28, no. 2 (1993): 164–86.

Rosmarin, Adena. *The Power of Genre.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

Ross, Arthur G. “The Day of Judgment Is Now: A Johannine Pattern in the Middle English *Pearl*.” *American Benedictine Review* 38 (1987): 227–42.

Ross, Diane M. “The Play of Genres in the *Book of the Duchess*.” *The Chaucer Review* 19, no. 1 (1984): 1–13.

Rostvig, Marem-Sofie. “Numerical Composition in *Pearl*.” *English Studies* 48 (1967): 326–32.

Rubin, Miri. *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Rushworth, Jennifer. “Derrida, Proust, and the Promise of Writing.” *French Studies: A Quarterly Review*. 69, no. 2 (2015): 205–19.

——— *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Russell, J. Stephen. *English Dream Visions: Anatomy of a Form*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988.

Rust, Martha. *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Sacks, Peter M. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985.

Salisbury, Matthew Cheung. *The Secular Liturgical Office in Late Medieval England*. Medieval Church Studies 36. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015.

Scala, Elizabeth. *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England*. The New Middle Ages. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Schell, Sarah. “The Office of the Dead in England: Image and Music in the Book of Hours and Related Texts, c. 1250-c. 1500.” PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 2011.

Schenck, Celeste M. *Mourning and Panegyric: The Poetics of Pastoral Ceremony*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988.

Schibanoff, Susan. *Chaucer’s Queer Poetics: Rereading the Dream Trio*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

Schirmer, Elizabeth. “Genre Trouble: Spiritual Reading in the Vernacular and the Literary Project of the *Pearl*-Poet.” PhD diss., University of California, 2002.

Schless, Howard. “A Dating for the *Book of the Duchess*: Line 1314.” *The Chaucer Review* 19, no. 4 (1985): 273–76.

Schmitz, Götz. “Gower, Chaucer, and the Classics: Back to the Textual Evidence.” In *John Gower: Recent Readings*, edited by Robert F. Yeager, 95–111. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1989.

Schofield, William Henry. “Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in The *Pearl*.” *PMLA* 24, no. 4 (1909): 585–675.

——— “The Nature and Fabric of The *Pearl.*” *PMLA* 19, no. 1 (1904): 154–215.

Schotter, Ann Howland. “The Paradox of Equality and Hierarchy of Reward in *Pearl*.” *Renascence* 33, no. 3 (1981): 172–79.

Scott-Macnab, David. ‘A Re-Examination of Octovyen’s Hunt in *The Book of the Duchess*.” *Medium Aevum* 56 (1987): 183.

Seaman, Myra. “Disconsolate Art.” In *Dark Chaucer: An Assortment*, edited by Myra Seaman, Eileen A. Joy, and Nicola Masciandaro, 139–49. Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2012.

Shaffern, Robert W. “Death and the Afterlife in the Middle Ages.” In *The Routledge History of Medieval Christianity, 1050-1500*, edited by R. N. Swanson and Alixe Bovey, 173-184. Routledge Histories. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.

——— *The Penitents' Treasury*. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2007.

Shaw, W. David. *Elegy & Paradox: Testing the Conventions.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Shoaf, R. A. “*Purgatorio* and *Pearl*: Transgression and Transcendence.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 32, no. 1 (1990): 152–68.

Simpson, James. “Breaking the Vacuum: Ricardian and Henrician Ovidianism.” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29 (1999): 325–55.

——— “Chaucer as a European Writer.” In *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, edited by Seth Lerer, 55–86. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

Simpson, James, and Brian Cummings, eds. *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Sklute, Larry. *Virtue of Necessity: Inconclusiveness and Narrative Form in Chaucer's Poetry.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984.

Smallwood, T. “Chaucer’s Distinctive Digressions.” *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 4 (1985): 437-449.

Smith, Eric, *By Mourning Tongues: Studies in English Elegy* (Ipswich: Boydell Press, 1977)

Smith, Nicole D. “Love, Peraldus, and the *Parson's Tale*.” *Notes and Queries* 60, no. 4 (2013), 498–502.

Spargo, R. Clifton. *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004.

Spearing, A. C. *Medieval Autographies: The 'I' of the Text*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.

——— *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

——— *Medieval Dream-Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

——— *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

——— "Symbolic and Dramatic Development in *Pearl*." *Modern Philology* 60, no. 1 (1962): 1–12.

Staley, Lynn. *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.

——— "*Pearl* and Contingencies of Love and Piety. In *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry: Essays in Honour of Derek Pearsall*, edited by David Aers, 83–114. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000.

Stanbury, Sarah. *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

——— "The Body and the City in *Pearl*." *Representations* 48 (1994): 30–47.

——— "Feminist Masterplots: The Gaze on the Body of *Pearl*'s Dead Girl." In *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, edited by Stanbury and Linda Lomperis, 96-115. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

——— *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception*. Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

Staten, Henry. *Eros in Mourning: Homer to Lacan*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Stone, Arnold Walter. *Sculpture in Britain - the Middle Ages*. 2nd ed. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1992.

Storr, Anthony. *The Dynamics of Creation.* Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1986.

Strakhov, Elizaveta. "'Counterfeit' Imitatio: Understanding the Poet-Patron Relationship in Machaut's *Fonteinne Amoreuse* and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*." In *Chaucer's* Book of the Duchess*: Contexts and Interpretations*, 157–75.

Tambling, Jeremy. *Dante in Purgatory: States of Affect.* Turnhout, Brepols, 2010.

——— "Dreaming the Siren: Dante and Melancholy." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 40, no. 1 (2004): 56–69.

Tatlock, J. S. P. "Dante's *Terza Rima*." *PMLA* 51, no. 4 (1936): 895–903.

Thomson, Rodney M. *England and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998.

Thorpe, Douglas. *A New Earth: The Labor of Language in Pearl, Herbert's Temple, and Blake's Jerusalem*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991.

Tomasch, Sylvia. "A *Pearl* Punnology." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 88, no. 1 (1989): 1–20.

Travis, Peter W. "White." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000): 1–66.

Ullmann, Walter. *The Individual and Society in the Later Middle Ages*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1966.

Vance, Eugene. "*Pearl*: Love and the Poetics of Participation." In *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature*, edited by Piero Boitani and Anna Torti, 131–47. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991.

Vaught, Jennifer C., and Lynne Dickson Bruckner. *Grief and Gender, 700-1700*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Vogel, Cyrille. *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*. Translated by William George Storey, Niels Krogh Rasmussen, and John Brooks-Leonard. NPM Studies in Church Music and Liturgy. Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1986.

Wakelin, Daniel. *Designing English: Early Literature on the Page*. Oxford: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2018.

——— "When Scribes Won't Write: Gaps in Middle English Books." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 36, no. 1 (2014): 249–78.

Walker, Denis. "Narrative Inclusiveness and Consolatory Dialectic in The *Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review* 18, no. 1 (1983): 1–17.

Wallace, David. C*haucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy*. Figurae. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Watkin, William. *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

Watkins, C. S. "Sin, Penance and Purgatory in the Anglo-Norman Realm: The Evidence of Visions and Ghost Stories." *Past & Present* 175 (2002): 3–33

Watson, Nicholas. "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409." *Speculum*, 70, no. 4 (1995): 822–864.

——— "The Gawain-Poet as Vernacular Theologian." In *A Companion to the* Gawain-*Poet*, 293–314.

Watson, Robert A. “Dialogue and Invention in the *Book of the Duchess*.” *Modern Philology* 98, no. 4 (2001): 543–576.

Watts, Ann Chalmers. “*Pearl*, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss.” *PMLA* 99 (1984), 26-40.

Watts, V. E. “*Pearl* as a ‘Consolatio’.” *Medium Aevum* 32 (1963): 34–36.

Wei, Ian P. *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University, c.1100-1330*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. Translated by Emma Craufurd. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972.

Weiskott, Eric. “Early English Meter as a Way of Thinking.” *Studia Metrica et Poetica* 4 (2017): 41-65.

Weisman, Karen A., ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Wenzel, Siegfried. “Pestilence and Middle English Literature: Friar John Grimestones’ Poems on Death.” In *The Black Death: The Impact of the Fourteenth-Century Plague: Papers of the Eleventh Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies*, edited by Daniel Williman, 131-59. Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 13. Binghamton: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1982.

——— “The Source of Chaucer’s Seven Deadly Sins.” Traditio 30 (1974): 351 – 378.

——— *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

Wetherbee, Winthrop. “Theme, Prosody, and Mimesis in the *Book of the Duchess*.” In *Essays on the Art of Chaucer's Verse*, edited by Alan T. Gaylord, 283–95. London: Routledge, 2001.

White, Hugh. “Blood in *Pearl*.” *The Review of English Studies* 38, no. 149 (1987): 1–13.

Willan, Claude. “*Pearl* and the Flawed Mediation of Grace.” *Modern Philology* 112, no. 1 (2014): 56–75.

Williams, Graham. “Glossing over the Lamb: Phonaesthetic Gl- in Middle English and Aural Scepticism in *Pearl*.” *The Review of English Studies* 65, no. 271 (2014): 596–618.

Wilson, Edward. *The Gawain-Poet*. Leiden: Brill, 1976.

——— “Word Play and the Interpretation of *Pearl*.” *Medium Aevum* 40, no. 2 (1971): 116–34.

Wimsatt, James. “Rhyme, the Icons of Sound, and the Middle English *Pearl*.” *Style* 30, no. 2 (1996), 189–219.

——— "'Anelida and Arcite': A Narrative of Complaint and Comfort." *The Chaucer Review* 5, no. 1 (1970): 1–8.

——— *Chaucer and the French Love Poets*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968.

——— "The Sources of Chaucer's 'Seys and Alcyone'." *Medium Aevum* 36 (1967): 231–241.

Windeatt, B. A., ed. *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues*. Chaucer Studies, 7. Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1982.

Winnicott, D. W. *Playing and Reality*. Rev. ed. London: Routledge, 1997.

Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn, and Ian R. Johnson, eds. *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520.* Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

Zeeman, Nicolette "Imaginative Theory". In *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, edited by Paul Strohm, 222–240. Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.